

# **The role of Faith Communities in creating a One Planet Region**

## **Conversations for a One Planet Region, 14 June 2018**

The Anthropocene, its causes and consequences, is perhaps the greatest societal challenge we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But as the debate about climate change - and the generally weak policy responses we have seen - shows, it is not a matter of simply presenting the evidence and expecting change to result. We need to reach people emotionally and spiritually if we want to respond effectively to this looming crisis. So what can different faiths bring to this challenge, individually or collectively, both within and beyond their own faith communities?

Our four presenters will share their thoughts on this issue:

- Gertie Jocksch SC, Programs in Earth Literacies
- Don Brown, Bahai Community
- Shoshana Litman, Jewish Community
- Karen Verveda, United Church Minister

### **Bios**

- Don Brown has been a member of the Bahá'í Faith for 45 years. He is a retired Management Systems Consultant who worked in the public and private sectors in Canada and in development in Jamaica for 5 years. He volunteered at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel for 5 years in administrative development and served as the Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the Israeli Government. He has authored two books, one on creating Bahá'í inspired enterprises and the other, a biography of the first Bahá'í couple who served the Bahá'í Faith above the Arctic Circle. Don and his wife, Christine moved to Sooke, BC in 2000. They have a multi-cultural family of two children and 5 grandchildren living in Bolivia, Czech Republic, Scotland and Gatineau, Quebec.
- Gertie Jocksch is a Sister of Charity of Halifax. Her educational background includes medical microbiology and theology. She has worked as a hospital Chaplain, professor of theology and spirituality, and retreat and workshop facilitator on Ecology and spirituality. As a founding member of Programs in Earth Literacies she is able to focus her energies through the vision of Programs in Earth Literacies: To ignite our sense of connectedness with Earth and nurture a spirituality of Earth care through learning circles.
- Shoshana Litman is Canada's first ordained Maggidah (a female, Jewish storyteller). She has a degree in Environmental Science from The Evergreen State College in Olympia WA & tells inspirational stories to diverse audiences. She also provides tours of Congregation Emanu-El, Canada's oldest synagogue in continuous use, and recently toured Southern Ontario during Canadian Children's Book Week. Shoshana and her husband, Todd, enjoy being carless in Victoria where they raised two sons in their heritage home.
- Karen Verveda is a United Church Minister. Her faith journey began in the Christian Reformed Church and its Christian Schools, was shaped in her youth by the Pentecostal Church, underwent significant shifts in her twenties when she attended a Christian college, Catholic church, and United Church seminary. In her early 40's she appreciated spending significant time in a Quaker community and Ashram. Most recently folks like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and others in the Integral community have been stimulating conversation partners. Karen was ordained by the United Church of Canada over 20 years ago. She and her partner moved to Sidney 2 years ago. She has been settling in and enjoying ministry with St. John's United Church in North Saanich.

## **One Planet One People Please!**

*Presentation to: **The Victoria One Planet Conversations***

*The Faith community and the One Planet Region*

*Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018*

*Don Brown, Baha'i Community member*

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to address how my Faith Tradition, the Bahá'í Faith, is responding to what it would mean to be living on one planet.

**First, I have a question for you:** Please raise your hand if you are ready for, or you are already involved in the global spiritual revival necessary to bring about us all living together in peace and prosperity on one planet?

Now don't worry I am not here to get you to join in an evangelical song fest. I am here tonight to share with you my personal views based upon my professional and Bahá'í life experience, on the development, learning and challenges of this spiritual revival both globally and locally to contribute to the social changes necessary for us to live together on one planet.

To begin I have a promise and a challenge.

The promise is that in the future, all the peoples of the world living together in unity, peace and prosperity and in harmony with the natural environment is clearly revealed in the Bahá'í Sacred Writings. World peace and prosperity is not only possible, it is inevitable. It is a goal to which Bahá'ís throughout the world are dedicated to achieving.

The challenge is how and when the peoples of the world will make this happen.

The serious issues facing our world – climate change, pollution, ecological degradation, poverty, etc. are global in nature and require a global response.

The root cause of these crises is **materialism** – humanities insatiable quest to satisfy material wants and needs and to experience the transitory sensual pleasures of life. Our world is currently dominated by **fatally flawed adversarial economic and political systems** based upon the underlying premise that humanity is inherently contentious and conflict is unavoidable; that peace can be best maintained by being prepared for war; that human behaviour is driven primarily by self-interest, and prosperity must therefore be based on the competitive pursuit of personal advantage. Our **dominant competitive capitalist system** has led to the inordinate accumulation of wealth by a few, the life-threatening poverty of billions and the incredible environmental degradation of our planet. It is clearly not working.

What is needed is a fundamental change of consciousness from self-interest at all levels of society to an abiding sense of responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family and the planet we share.

This change of consciousness is an expression of a central social principle of the Bahá'í Faith, “**the Oneness of Humanity**”, that we are all interdependent members of one human family sharing one common homeland, the planet earth.

I propose that **religion** is the means to creating the necessary unity of thought and action to replace materialism with a higher purpose based upon our spiritual reality.

Oops! True to my Canadian culture I must say I am sorry – did I use the wrong term - religion? I was talking about the Bahá'í Faith to a young lady the other day and she said “I agree with everything you said but why do you have to call it a religion? There is such a stigma against religion.” Who here is uncomfortable with this term? Before you shut me off, let me explain.

Certainly the term “religion” has differing meanings and connotations to people often very negative due to the many historical and current conflicts and persecutions done in the name of religion as well as the multitude of conflicting interpretations of the Sacred Writings of these religions.

What I mean by religion is based upon one of the three central, “oneness” principles of the Bahá'í Faith – “**the Oneness of Religion**” – that all religions – the Abrahamic religions and the Eastern religions, all proclaim the same universal spiritual and moral teachings. The golden rule, “do unto others as you would have others to do unto you” found in all religions is one example of this principle. These teachings are also revealed in the many indigenous Faith traditions throughout the world. The differences among religions is due to the religious practices and the social laws addressing humanity's needs at the particular time in history in which these religions were revealed.

*The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity.*  
*Bahá'u'lláh*

Of the several Bahá'í responses to contributing to living in peace and prosperity on one planet, I am going to introduce the most recent grassroots developments both globally and in the greater Victoria region.

Beginning in the 1980s in the more than 160 countries where the Bahá'í Faith is allowed to function, the Bahá'í population had increased in size to the extent that a new thrust in achieving its goal of global unity, peace and prosperity was instituted – the widespread involvement of the Bahá'í community in social and economic development.

The purpose of Bahá'í inspired development is to promote the social and material wellbeing of the widest possible numbers of peoples of civil society whatever their beliefs or backgrounds.

Following is my understanding of three highlights of the learning we have had to date:

First, development is a complex process involving both the **spiritual and material** progress of humanity requiring the practical implementation of principles, facts and experience from two complementary knowledge systems: **Science and Religion**. The principle of “the harmony of science and religion”, another of the basic tenants of the Bahá'í Faith, teaches that religion without science degenerates into superstition and fanaticism and science without religion becomes merely the instrument of crude materialism.

Religion provides purpose, meaning and motive to development as well as the moral virtues, cooperation and self-sacrifice necessary to make lasting social and economic change. The application of scientific knowledge, methods and technology provides the essential material means for successful development. Both are required.

Second, the Bahá'í approach to development involves the practical application of the universal moral and spiritual teachings and social principles revealed by the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh. The social principles include the equality of women and men, the elimination of prejudice of all kinds, the oneness of religion, universal education, and the elimination of the

extremes of wealth and poverty. These principles are both moral and logical, and scientifically sound.

These teachings belong to humanity, not just to Bahá'ís. Every person and every group of individuals, whether or not they are Bahá'ís can take inspiration from His teachings, and benefit from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge that will aid them in addressing the particular challenges they face.

What has evolved is a process of spiritual and moral capacity building through Bahá'ís and their friends reflecting on the Bahá'í teachings in many thousands of study circles, children's classes and junior youth empowerment programs throughout the world cultivating moral and spiritual qualities along with acts of service.

This is the key motivating force for individual and societal transformation, to utilize our moral, spiritual and intellectual talents and capacities **to work for the betterment of the world.**

Third, building upon this foundation every population has the right and responsibility to determine its own path of progress rather than be passive recipients of aid from outside sources. Development therefore, is focussed on empowerment of individuals, communities and institutions to be protagonists in their own development.

Over the years Bahá'í inspired social and economic development has evolved throughout the planet including grassroots projects of a simple, fixed duration to projects of a more sustained nature. By 2017 there were some 40,000 projects of a fixed duration being accomplished annually, including such activities as cleaning up garbage cluttering neighbourhoods, parks and rivers; tree planting, and conducting seminars related to health, the environment, social principles and governance using principle centred consultation rather than adversarial debate from irreconcilable ideological perspectives.

By 2017 there were 1400 projects of a more sustained nature including schools, radio stations health services, cooperative banks and community gardens. A key learning about these projects is that although initial funds from outside sources were needed to initially sustain them, these projects ultimately needed to be self-sustaining operating within the capacity of the local communities to support them without the need of outside assistance.

A couple of quick examples of this change. In the Central African Republic, some rural communities took ownership of the education of their children and youth. They selected young adults from their communities to be trained as teachers by a Bahá'í inspired organization. The training included both spiritual and material education. The community built their own school facilities, often beginning as simple lean-to structures built from local materials. Children's classes, in some cases, began under a tree. The community supported the teachers, providing housing, food and a modest income. The government inspectors were at first very skeptical about these schools but over time they were recognized by the government. This is what one government official said about one of these schools:

*I have been able to visit this school regularly since its establishment. In the beginning the school was informal and had inadequate infrastructure but parents really saw the intellectual capacity of their children being developed... We were really impressed with the will of the parents to keep the school going. Over the years I have really seen the capacity of the children grow, and one thing that differentiates them is their moral values. What I have seen is that without morality, there is no harmony... There is a saying that goes: Every time you open a school you have closed a prison."*

The leaders at the forefront of these changes have been teenagers, young adults and junior youth ages 12 to 15 years. This has led significant changes in the lives of these youth and in the culture of the communities they serve. For example, in a rural community in Tajikistan, the normal behaviour of youth and junior youth was to form gangs doing disruptive activities in the community with many of the youth leaving to pursue education and employment elsewhere. Through the assistance of a Bahá'í inspired nongovernmental organization, youth camps to study the Bahá'í Teachings and a junior youth empowerment program was established. Youth and junior youth began carrying out various service projects, over time involving the wider community. Gradually strong prejudices between ethnic groups began to fade away as friendships were formed among the participants working together for the good of the community. One youth attending a youth training conference said:

*We saw that we can change the reality of our village. We saw clearly what aspects of our village life have to be changed completely, and we saw our role in this process. At the conference, we understood what the junior youth program stood for, and when we were planning what we would do in the village, it was the most inspiring part for us and infused us with determination.*

Another youth in another community on another continent stated:

*Development means to attain materially, but also to have a life dedicated to service and not to focus on only the things that are material. For the moment, there are two purposes of my life: one is to develop my spiritual qualities, and the other is to have a job where I may not make that much money but I will be able to help the community... I want to start a cooperative to buy and sell goods, because I saw that this was sustainable."*

In the Battambang district of Columbia, for the first time, girls were given the opportunity to be educated and over time women began to take on more prominent roles in the community.

In Uttar Pradesh, India, long standing prejudices, such as the caste system are being removed as the principles of the elimination of prejudice and others are put into practice through people learning, praying and serving together.

In the 1980s my family and I were living in Jamaica. I was working as a management systems consultant as well as serving the Bahá'í community there. I learned firsthand of the failure of traditional foreign aid. I found that foreign aid projects primarily benefited the foreign organizations implementing them and provided increased material wealth to a few local officials, leaving the country in a worse economic condition.

My wife and I and two friends, undertook a Bahá'í inspired social and economic development project by investing in developing a papaya and mango farm on the north side of the island. We were given a generous lease of prime agricultural land at a very low price from the government. We later learned that this land was located in one of the worst crime areas on the north island. They had even robbed the bread truck there.

We had many challenges, successes and failures but we worked respectfully with the people and applied a number of Bahá'í social principles such as hiring both women and men and giving them equal pay, introducing revenue sharing and creating a core team of local people to manage the farm. The word went out across the area not to steal from us and my wife who brought their pay out every week was never robbed.

The farm became operationally self-sustaining, however, in 1988 hurricane Gilbert completely wiped out the farm demolishing all of the papaya and mango trees and the buildings. We lost all of our investment.

Turning to the greater Victoria area, in my view there are 3 major challenges and opportunities:

First, there is a vibrant community of about 670 Bahá'ís living throughout the 13 communities in greater Victoria conducting study circles, devotional meetings, junior youth programs and children's classes involving approximately an equal number of friends of Bahá'ís. The challenge is that these activities involve less than 0.2% of the population and therefore, have little effect on the overall moral and spiritual development of the region. This is particularly daunting for the junior youth and the youth, who, although they recognize the value of what they are learning, they are immersed in a materialistic society with incredible social pressures pulling them in different directions without enough peers to provide the necessary social support for their continuing moral and spiritual development. We need to find some way to upscale these activities substantially and broaden the peer support for our youth and junior youth through other means in our region.

Second, in our competitive materialistic society of winners and losers, how can we apply the learning we have had to empower individuals and groups to become protagonists in their own development? Our current welfare system is demeaning and well-meaning charity unintentionally reinforces dependencies and a loser mentality. For example, how do we address homelessness using these concepts?

Third, and to me this is the most challenging: The focus and leadership in effecting change has been youth and junior youth. In my view, there is an incredible untapped resource of our generation. People from all walks of life in their 50s, 60s and beyond, can make a significant contribution working together to move our society from competition to collaboration, cooperation and justice by genuinely applying shared spiritual and moral values. Perhaps we need learning processes and service opportunities directly related to our mature generation. Is it possible that we can gather people of our generation from diverse backgrounds to come together to explore this opportunity?

In closing, let me summarize 3 key points of the spiritual revival I began with this evening:

First, it involves a twofold moral purpose, to develop all our inherent potentialities and to work together for the betterment of the world.

Second, we are involved in a vast learning process that involves not only change at the level of the individual but a fundamental transformation of the structure of society.

Third, the end result of this spiritual revival, one planet at peace, will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone, we are but one contributor in this global transformation. Bahá'ís view humanity evolving towards maturity with two simultaneous processes occurring in the world – one the disintegration of morally bankrupt institutions and ideologies and the other of integration through the efforts of individuals and organizations both secular and religious at all levels of society contributing to living in peace and prosperity on one planet.

In my view, currently the forces of disintegration are accelerating. We need to catch up. My hope is that our conversation on this subject does not end tonight. I especially ask that, building on lessons learned, we find ways and means for our generation to more effectively contribute to the betterment of the world. I look forward to our continuing conversation.

*My object is none other than the betterment of the world and the tranquility of its peoples. The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.*

*Bahá'u'lláh*

## Christianity in Context: A response to the One Planet Region concept

*Gertie Jocksch SC*

*Program Co-ordinator, Programs in Earth Literacies*

The One Planet endeavor has originated because we are facing an ecological crisis. We cannot go on as we have.

I think the place of greatest contribution toward this crisis in my faith tradition is the integration of religion and science. I will look at three people in my tradition that have influenced me over these years.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) Jesuit priest and scientist, Thomas Berry, a RC priest (1914 – 2009) and a cultural historian, and Pope Francis and his recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Care for our Earth Home, June 2015\*

The ecological crisis that we are facing is the degradation of life as we know it. Our very survival is at stake. It raises questions of meaning for us. Who are we, where did we come from and why are we here? These are questions that are central to all religious communities.

Imagine for a minute meeting someone new and asking them where they are from? The person responds, "I am from Earth, I am an Earthling, an Earth being." Some of you might find this puzzling or humorous. In a recent podcast of **On Being**, guest **Rev Angel Kyodo Williams**, a Buddhist sensei would hear this response as good news. She says, "We need to recognize our origins and stare straight at them. We are strangers here on earth our home, our origin."

Thomas Berry would also be pleased with this response. When he saw all the destruction that was happening with the Planet he would say, "We must be stark raving mad. We don't know who we are." This was a major question for Thomas Berry.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's work included understanding the evolutionary dynamics of the universe. He saw evolution as the unfolding of the universe, which he called cosmogenesis. Namely, a process of ever increasing complexity and consciousness, eventually giving rise to multi-cellular life, fish, birds, animals, and humans. Mathematical Cosmologist Brian Swimme would say, the earth was once molten lava and now sings Bach. Evolution is a movement from lesser to greater complexity and consciousness. In his observations Teilhard saw that the universe from the beginning had both a physical and psychic component, that is, matter and spirit evolved together over time. For Teilhard human consciousness is not an addendum but rather a continuity with the unfolding universe. While humans manifest a special mode of self-reflective consciousness, we are increasingly aware that other species have their own mode of awareness. For Teilhard everything has an essence, an interiority.

Thomas Berry was greatly influenced by Teilhard and set his work within the context of evolution, the universe story as told by science. He co-authored the book, *The Universe Story* with Brian Swimme a Mathematical Cosmologist. In this book they tell the story of how the universe, the earth, the living world and the human community emerged into being. Humans came out of the earth, we didn't just arrive here and everything was for our use. It is from the perspective of this larger community, the universe itself that Berry saw as a way for humans to discover their proper role.

One of the most important contributions of Berry's thought is the sense of the subjectivity of Earth. When Thomas speaks about earth he is talking about everything on our planet. He saw each creature, each ecosystem as well as the whole planet as subjects. He says "we are a



community of subjects not collection of objects". This idea of subjectivity provided a context for Berry to speak about the sacred dimension of Earth, a dimension of earth that evokes awe and wonder.

Thomas understood that our knowledge of God comes to us not only from our scriptures but from our acquaintance with the earth. He would say, "God has revealed God's self first of all in the sky and in the waters and in the wind, in the mountains and valleys, in the birds of the air and in all those living forms that flower and move over the surface of the planet." He saw humans in deep communion with universe and Earth processes. Just as life has emerged from these processes, so human spirituality emerges in relation to the Earth community. Our spirituality is a spirituality of Earth because we came out of earth we derive all that we are and all that we have from earth. At its core, our spirituality is Earth derived. The human and Earth are totally implicated, each in the other. If there is no spirituality of Earth, then there is no spirituality in us.

For this reason, he felt that what is needed is a new spiritual, even mystical, communion with Earth. We especially need to recognize the sacred qualities of Earth. He saw this lived out in the ritual expressions of indigenous peoples. Many earlier peoples saw in nature spiritual phenomena, for example in the wonders of the sun and clouds by day and the stars and planets by night, they saw a world that enfolded the human in some profound manner. This other world was guardian, teacher, healer—the source from which humans were born, nourished, protected, guided, and the destiny to which we returned. Above all, this world provided the psychic power they needed in moments of crisis. They invoked these powers and spirituality to manage the demands of life through rites of passage, losses, and suffering. This intimacy is what Berry wishes to reawaken in us. He saw the task of shifting to this perspective is a change of consciousness. He saw this task as a religious and spiritual task.

Today with the insights from science we are in a new position where we can appreciate the historical and the cosmic as a single process. This is the vision of Earth-human development that will provide the sustaining dynamic of the contemporary world. We must nourish awareness of this vision. Our language and imagery need to acknowledge both the physical and psychic dimensions of this organizing force. It needs to be named and spoken of in its integral form. Just as we see the unified functioning of particular organisms, so too Earth itself is governed by a unified principle in and through which the total complex of earthly phenomena takes its shape. When we speak of Earth, we are speaking of a sacred maternal principle out of which all life emerges.

In my religious tradition we looked for God out there somewhere, God was transcendent. Now we are saying we need to develop an earth consciousness. We need to be conscious of God in everything. It is a communion experience with nature. Only with communion can we have community. Only through an integral community can we survive. Our religious doctrine's need to assert that the human is an integral component of the earth community. While this seems obvious and even simplistic in its statement it is a principle that has within it the power of radical transformation of all basic human issues as these presently exist in the western society.

*Laudato Si, Care for our Earth Home* Pope Francis

Elaine Lasida gave a insightful overview of the *Laudato Si*:

She spoke about 3 pillars or themes that run through *Laudato Si*

1. Everything is related
2. Everything is gift

### 3. Everything is fragile

1. Everything is related - A common theme though the whole encyclical is our relationship with nature. "Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it."(138) Nature is in danger and it is not just a matter of respect for nature but he calls us to establish relationships of interdependence. What it means to be interdependent, is that our life depends on the life of other beings and other beings depend on us. The first and most important relationship that he emphasizes is our relationship with earth. Which means that what ever we do, our decisions, we need to ask the question of how this will affect the relationship, with soil, with birds, trees, air, etc. How does what I am doing build relationship. What do I need to do to build relationship.

2. The second theme that runs through the encyclical is that everything is gift. Earth does not belong to us and it is not here for our use. It is first and foremost a gift. He calls us to rediscover gratuitousness to earth. Or to engage in an "ecological conversion", touching the earth is a spiritual experience; we are in communion with all living things. It is a spiritual relationship. It is where we experience awe, beauty, wonder.

3. The third theme is that Everything is fragile. He relates The cry of the Earth and the Cry of the poor as the same thing. Of course we as humans want to fix everything. If it is broken then lets fix it, repair it, reconstruct it. We have not done well with poverty and we are not doing great with earth. Pope Frances calls to create something new – it is an invitation into creativity and into dialogue. Chapter five focuses on dialogue between different groups. Dialogue for him means to be displaced by the life of the other. We are challenged to think differently. It is only in these places of dialogue that we will learn our way forward. Another aspect that he invites us into is what he calls sobriety. Sobriety – not just living with less – an experience of liberty, freedom, freedom of things – detached from things – ideas.

In closing I would say. Our relationship with Earth involves something more than practical use, academic understanding, or aesthetic appreciation. A truly human intimacy with Earth and with the entire natural world is needed. Our children should be properly introduced to the world in which they live, to the trees and grasses and flowers, to the birds and the insects and the various animals that roam over the land, to the entire range of natural phenomena. . . . By engaging in the long view, the evolutionary story we move into a more intimate relationship with our earth. We now experience ourselves as the latest arrivals, after some 14 billion years of universe history and after some 4.6 billion years of Earth history. Here we are, born yesterday. We need to be present to the plant in a mutually enhancing relationship rather than a dominating relationship. There is need for a great courtesy toward Earth.

Many mystics and naturalists help us into this relationship through their poetry.

#### \*Resources:

Thomas Berry and Teilhard de Chardin resources were taken from Thomas Berry's Riverdale papers.

Elaine Lasida's overview of *Laudato Si* was from a talk delivered at the Canadian Religious Conference, Montreal May 2018.

## **When I Was The Stream, Meister Eckhart**

When I was the stream, when I was the forest,  
when I was still the field, when I was every hoof,  
foot, fin, and wing, when I was the sky itself;  
No one ever asked me did I have a purpose,  
no one ever wondered was there anything I might need . . .  
for there was nothing I could not love.  
It was when I left all we once were that the agony began,  
that the fear and questions came and I wept. I wept.  
And tears I had never known before.  
So I returned to the river. I returned to the mountains.  
I asked for their hand in marriage again. I begged--I begged  
to wed every object and creature.  
And when they accepted,  
God was ever present in my arms.  
~Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)

## **The Peace of Wild Things, Wendell Berry**

When despair grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's  
lives will be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the  
great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax themselves with forethought  
or grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
and I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I sit in the grace of the world, and am free.

## **My Work is Loving the World, Mary Oliver**

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird -  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are here,

Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

## **Notes on a Jewish Perspective for One Planet Region Conversation with Faith Communities on Thursday, June 14, 2018**

***By Shoshana Litman [www.maggidah.com](http://www.maggidah.com)***

### **8 Jewish Practices to Help Mitigate Humanity's Impact During the Anthropocene**

1). Who is happy that tomorrow is Friday? TGIF! For Jews, it's TGIS: Thank G-d it's Shabbos (Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, runs from just before sunset Friday to an hour after sundown on Saturday). Some say, even more than the Jews keep the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews. Just as Hashem (The Name) rested on the seventh day (*Breishis*/Genesis 2:1-3) so should we and our animals rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day (*Shemos*/Exodus 8-11 – Remember the Sabbath day...). The land rests in the 7<sup>th</sup> year (*Vayikra*/Leviticus 25:5 – "...it shall be a year of rest for the land." & 50<sup>th</sup> year (7 times 7 plus 1 – *Vayikra* 25:11 – "It shall be a Jubilee Year for you – this 50th year – you shall not sow...)). Sabbaths for the land are only practiced in a limited way in Israel. Shabbat for people continues to be practiced worldwide. Current adaptations for Sabbath observance include no driving (thus the emphasis on walkability in Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods), no shopping and turning off computers & cell phones. It's a time to eat together, celebrate time together, and remember why we are here...work 24/6, not 24/7! (NB: I see old stories, like this one about earth's creation in six days, as metaphors from which we can learn. Of course, we now know that our earth is billions, not days, old. Even so, our sages say, if you believe all these stories, you're a fool! But if you believe none of them, you're also a fool!)

2). We were put in *gan* (the garden of) eden to work (*l'avdah*) and to guard (*u-l'shamra*) it (*Breishis*/Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew word *avodah* means work and also service. We are here to serve the world, not to consume it. To conserve, protect, respect – we are stewards of the earth, not here just for our own needs, but for all species. *Adam* = Humanity, *Adamah* = Earth. The suffix "ah" when added to a word in Hebrew makes it feminine. Feminine principles encourage us to nurture & protect life. The original Adam was both male and female, later split into Adam and *Chava* (Eve). *Chava* is considered the Mother of all Life. We are here to protect life: to do so we must learn to live within the carrying capacity of the earth.

3). *Tza'ar ba'alei chayim* – ethical treatment of animals (*Shmos*/Exodus 23:5 – unburden the load of a donkey of even someone you don't like – *Mishnei Torah*, *Hilkot Rotzeah*, 13:1 it's a *mitzvah* (commandment) to do this for a friend and *Kesef Mishneh*, *Hilkot Rotzeah* 13:9 extends this even for an enemy). This law is extrapolated to not harm any species. Paraphrasing Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki – 1040-1120, Troyes, France) our main Torah commentator who said that meat should be difficult to obtain for it involves taking a life, so meat consumption, if/when it's done at all, should be carried out carefully and with the utmost respect. Of course, the best way to reduce pain to animals is not to eat them. Many local Jews who want to observe kosher laws don't eat meat because this is easier (don't have to separate meat and milk – see # 6), less expensive (kosher meat gets shipped, frozen, a great distance) and more compassionate.

4). *Ba'al Tashchit* – do not destroy (*Devarim*/Deuteronomy 20:19 – interpretation of military instructions not to destroy fruit trees when you besiege a city) becomes justification for recycling, reusing, not wasting. *Sefer Hasidim*, a medieval text, asserts that righteous people grieve when even a mustard seed is wasted. In current times, this is reflected in a movement known as *eco kashrut* – combining biblical ethics with ecological principles – moving from meat based to plant based diets to reduce our impact on the earth.

5). Sending away the mother bird (*Devarim*/Deuteronomy 22:6-7) – preserve species by not taking the breeding adult when gathering her eggs. This also teaches compassion for other species

and respect for the parent/child relationship. How much more so should we respect and care for each other?

6). Do not boil a kid (baby goat) in its mother's milk (*Devarim/Deuteronomy* 14:21 & *Shemos/Exodus* 23:19, 34:19) Though we don't know for sure why this law exists (it's known as a *chok*, a law which defies logic), there are many possible reasons for it. The ones that fit our theme best are to show compassion to other species (even though the meat you eat may have nothing to do with the milk you drink, you are taking extra care when you consume it by not cooking an offspring in the life giving milk that nurtured it) and also to respect the parent-child relationship.

7). Green belts, *Bamidbar/Numbers* 35: 2-5, designated 2000 cubits (1 cubit is 45 cm – 2000 is 135,000 cm = 1350 m = 1.4 km), in all directions around a Levite city of which the inner thousand would be left undeveloped & beautiful, the outer for agriculture (fields for animals and vineyards). Though not practiced now as far as I know, it offers a wonderful way to bring nature into our cities, making urban environments that welcome nature and provide opportunities for reflection as well as dwelling places for more species. A way to integrate green space into urban design using a continuous space that encourages movement for land based species instead of the isolated islands that individual parks create.

8). Green burial – "...you shall bury him on that day..." (*Devarim/Deuteronomy* 21:23 – If this is was originally concerning a criminal who has taken a life, how much more so for a person who gives life). All our ancestors buried their loved ones (Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the Cave of *Machpelah*, Ishmael and Yitzhak overcame sibling rivalry to bury their father, Abraham, in that same cave; Yitzhak's wife, Rebecca's, nurse, Devorah, was buried under an *Ilan* (oak tree); Joseph requested that his bones be carried up out of Egypt and buried in *Eretz* – the land of - Israel). A burial place becomes the soul's connection to the planet as well as a place for loved ones to connect. Jewish (and Muslim) burial is a non-invasive, non-aggressive method without embalming. Uses only a plain pine casket without metal in it (in Jerusalem only a shroud is used) so everything can quickly return to nourish the soil – from dust we came, to dust we return. Same as a green burial except for the gravestone. Contrast this to the fuel equivalent of a 500 mile car trip to cremate a body, 400 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> released per body burned & BC laws prohibiting crematoriums from being too close to a city due to toxic fumes (heavy metals & other toxic substances bioaccumulated over a lifetime get released during cremation). OK if it's your cultural practice, but not if you're looking for a green alternative.

To end on a less somber, more hopeful note...

*"If you believe that you can damage, then believe that you can fix..."*

*If you believe that you can harm, then believe that you can heal..."*

*~ Rebbe Nachman of Breslav (1772-1810) who also encouraged us not to despair*

Choose life! It's a *mitzvah* (commandment)! If you can choose to live more fully within the carrying capacity of our Earth, you provide a beautiful role model for the rest of us to follow!

## **One Planet Conversation**

**Rev. Karen Verveda**

*in ministry with the people of*

### **St. John's United Church, North Saanich**

How is my faith tradition (the Christian tradition) equipping myself (and others) ... to live into this vision of the Greater Victoria Region *"achieving social and ecological sustainability, with a high quality of life and a long life in good health for all its citizens, while reducing its ecological footprint to be equivalent to one planet's worth of bio-capacity"* ... of *"One Planet Living* and being a *One Planet Region"*?

First just to say I'm speaking as someone who was raised in the Christian tradition.

- My parents took me to church every Sunday...
  - I attended Sunday School ...
    - I attended a Christian School during the week...
      - And a Monday evening "young girls group" ...
        - I taught Sunday school when I was older ...
          - I attended youth group as a young teen ...
  - and offered leadership in that group as I grew older ...
    - I participated in summer "missions" opportunities as a teen ...
      - I offered leadership at camp and at Vacation Bible School ...
        - I served on a church committee as a young adult ...
          - I attending a Christian University ...
            - And finally seminary ...
  - I have been ministering with the United Church for the last 22 years.

So, you can see, I am very much formed and raised and offering my gifts within the Christian tradition.

It is also true that I speak as someone who was both nurtured and wounded by the Christian tradition.

I have early memories of spending a lot of time with my best friend's family from the time I started Kindergarten until my family moved to a different city when I was 15 and starting high school. This was a family that took me camping and nurtured a sense of awe and wonder and openness to God's presence in creation: as we breathed in mountains, streams, plants and animals. It was also a family that took me to revival meetings at their Pentecostal Church evoking huge fears about worthiness and belonging. I was a sponge soaking in everything I experienced with this family ... which led to irreconcilable experiences and understandings of God. It is the place where I learned to see myself as alien to or separate from the goodness of creation.

When I was no longer able to hold these irreconcilable differences ... I can remember the day and the conversation when the frame I had soaked in as a child just kind of fell away ... but instead of free falling out of the tradition I found myself caught by a net of support by other voices, other

understandings, other stories in the Christian tradition that gave me the building blocks for a new way to see my worth, my connection, to see myself as part of the goodness of creation.

So ... when I think about what has and is equipping me in the journey from Three World to One World Living I think about the differing voices in the Christian tradition, something that I have come to really value and appreciate. When I am faced with moments and times when I need a new frame ... when my old frame is clearly not working ... doesn't fit with the reality that I am facing ... such as the moment we are talking about today ... this moment of needing to move from three planet to one planet living ... one of the things that has continued to equip me is having access to many voices in the Christian tradition. Over and over again I have found kindred spirits, saints that are there at the right time and place to accompany me into a frame that allows me to engage in more life giving ways with whatever reality I am confronting. And this has fostered an openness to saints outside the Christian tradition as well. I have come to recognize that wisdom is not the sole possession of any one tradition ... and even this awareness is something that I have learned from others in the Christian tradition.

Most recently it has been saints like Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and Ken Wilbur and others ... who have been accompanying me and helping me both see and live into a new relationship with creation.

Another thing I would point to is the practice of weekly worship. One of the interesting new developments in the last ten or so years in the United Church has been a growing recognition that our weekly worship life needs to reflect the changes in our way of seeing our relationship with creation. So whereas when I was growing up we may have celebrated two seasons Christmas and Easter ... and then when I was older I remember we were re-introduced to more ancient practices of celebrating the seasons of Advent and Lent ... in the last twenty years a brand new season has been introduced by the Uniting Church in Australia ... the season of Creation ... and this has been very quickly adopted by the United Church and many other churches around the world as five weeks in the fall when we pay attention and celebrate God's presence in creation as having as much to teach us about God as does Scripture as do our brothers and sisters.

I also think about the most recent hymnbook in the United Church and of hymn writers who have been busy writing new loving creation affirming hymns that have been adopted by congregations so immediately and enthusiastically becoming equally beloved as the some of the old classics. There is lots that suggests that what we sing shapes us profoundly ... and so these new songs are part of the fabric of faith that is supporting me and my faith community as we move towards one world living.

I'm new to the Island and one of the things I love about the new congregation I am serving is that it is a group who very much sees their identity and mission and purpose as being an eco friendly congregation. They are thrilled to offer hospitality to the North Saanich Farm Market, they see their Thrift Shop as a way of helping to keep stuff out of the landfills, one of the very active teams at the church is the EcoVision Team who is made up of people who are very engaged with contemporary eco justice issues ... this is a group of amazing people who feel called to educate themselves about environmental issues and to share what they learn with others.

What I so admire and appreciate about this particular group is that eco justice is not a head thing for them it is a heart thing. Oil spills and climate change and loss of top soil and the effects of pesticides breaks their hearts ... and so they meet to accompany each other ... so that they are not overcome or overwhelmed by their grief ... it is a group in which the grief is heard and held and shared by others and in which they find themselves moving through the grief to being inspired to action knowing that they are not alone. They have provided hospitality for new movies like Green



Rites, they have ensured that the land which is home to the church is held as a community trust where anyone can visit and spend time, where no pesticides are used, they've been actively involved with protecting ALR land, opposing KinderMorgen, the Site C Dam, the North Saanich Gateway project to list just a few. They have partnered with others groups and opened themselves to the wisdom of other traditions.

And this too is very much part of the Christian tradition. Facing and lamenting suffering and death as the first step towards being inspired by new ideas and new ways of doing things and new ways of being is very much at the heart of the Christian tradition—both in witness of the Hebrew scriptures and the early followers of Jesus through to the saints of the present day.

The more that I grasp what One World living asks of me the more I am able to see how the sacred stories of the Christian tradition ... along with following in the way of Jesus ... and sharing life with others who seek to do the same ... while being open to the presence of God in creation and in other people and other traditions ... supports and deepens this journey.