

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

## **Ecology and Spiritual Practice**

Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, Branches Group #38, May 2022  
adapted from Environmentalism As a Spiritual Practice, Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church,  
Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, April 27, 2022

### ***OPENING WORDS***

Ethics that focus on human interactions, morals that focus on humanity's relationship to a Creator ... fail to encompass the big take-home message, so far, of a century and a half of biology and ecology: life is, more than anything else, a process; it creates, and depends on, relationships among energy, land, water, air, time and various living things. It's not just about human-to-human interaction; it's not just about spiritual interaction. It's about all interaction. We're bound with the rest of life in a network, a network including not just all living things but the energy and nonliving matter that flows through the living, making and keeping all of us alive as we make it alive. ... [U]nless we embrace the fuller reality we're in, and reality's implications, we'll face big problems. ~ Carl Safina

### ***CHECK-IN***

### ***READINGS***

The world is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong. The world is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. Until we go to the root of our image of separateness, there can be no healing. And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature. ~ Thích Nhất Hạnh

Being a planetary citizen does not need space travel. It means being conscious that we are part of the universe and of the earth. The most fundamental law is to recognize that we share the planet with other beings, and that we have a duty to care for our common home. ~ Vandana Shiva

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own - indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. ~ Wangarĩ Muta Maathai

There is a saying that "the psychotic drowns in the waters that the mystic swims in." The health and structural integrity of the ego means the difference between spiritual emergence, the unfolding of a transpersonal identity; and a spiritual emergency, a crisis brought on by the same unfolding, during which the foundations of sanity can be shaken. ~ Jason Kirkey

Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.” ~ Robin Wall Kimmerer

We were thinking that we had to get ahead as separate selves, compete, win, look out for number one, all the time imprisoned in this shrunken sense of self. ... And now, this crisis is telling us, slapping us in the face saying, “Wake up, you are life on Earth.” We are living members of a living planet. We’re like cells in the living body. That body is being traumatized. So of course we feel it. ~ Joanna Macy

The ecological crisis is only an externalization of an inner malaise and cannot be solved without a spiritual rebirth of Western man ... It is still our hope that as the crisis created by man's forgetfulness of who he really is grows and that as the idols of his own making crumble one by one before his eyes, he will begin a true reform of himself, which always means a spiritual rebirth, and through this rebirth attain a new harmony with the world of nature around him. ~ Seyyed Hossein Nasr

**QUESTIONS** Please respond to any of the questions you feel moved to answer or any of the readings that you find personally meaningful.

1. When have you experienced a connection to nature? How has it influenced what you’ve thought or said or done? Have you “heard within yourself the sounds of the earth crying?”
2. How might an understanding that the life energy flowing through us is the same life energy that flows through the rest of nature help us respond to the climate crisis?
3. Is there any way that the Buddhist perspective, that what we perceive as happening outside us is also happening inside us, is in any way true for you?
4. Some of the readings express the view that our species is destroying our world. How can we live in full presence and enjoy it in a world that is destroying itself? How would you respond?
5. Is there a sense in which you see the world, nature, or creation as sacred?

### **CLOSING WORDS**

First we have to step out of our dream of separation, the insularity with which we have imprisoned ourselves, and acknowledge that we are a part of a multidimensional living spiritual being we call the world. ... Only as a part of a living whole can we help to heal the whole. ~ Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

## ***notes on people quoted***

**Thích Nhất Hạnh** (1926–2022) was a Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk, peace activist, prolific author, poet, teacher, and founder of the Plum Village Tradition, historically recognized as the main inspiration for engaged Buddhism. Known as the "father of mindfulness", Nhất Hạnh was a major influence on Western practices of Buddhism and mindfulness. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch\\_Nh%E1%BA%A5t\\_H%E1%BA%A1nh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch_Nh%E1%BA%A5t_H%E1%BA%A1nh) Quote from: *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (2013), edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee.

**Joanna Macy** (born 1929) is an environmental activist, author, and scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joanna\\_Macy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joanna_Macy) Quote from "Climate Crisis as Spiritual Path", [https://www.kosmosjournal.org/kj\\_article/joanna-macy/](https://www.kosmosjournal.org/kj_article/joanna-macy/)

**Seyyed Hossein Nasr** (born 1933) is an Iranian philosopher and professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University. Born in Tehran, Nasr completed his education in Iran and the United States, earning a bachelor's degree in physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a master's in geology and geophysics, and a doctorate in the history of science from Harvard University. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyyed\\_Hossein\\_Nasr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyyed_Hossein_Nasr) Quote from: *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1976).

**Wangari Maathai** (1940-2011) was a Kenyan social, environmental and political activist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She earned a bachelor's degree from Mount St. Scholastica and a master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to become a Doctor of Philosophy, receiving her PhD from the University of Nairobi in Kenya. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wangari\\_Maathai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wangari_Maathai)

**Vandana Shiva** (born 1952) is an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and anti-globalization author. She has written more than 20 books and is often referred to as "Gandhi of grain" for her activism associated with the anti-GMO movement. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandana\\_Shiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandana_Shiva) Quote from: *Oneness vs The 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom* (2018).

**Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee** (born 1953) is a Sufi mystic and lineage successor in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order. He is an extensive lecturer and the author of several books about Sufism, mysticism, dreamwork and spirituality. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llewellyn\\_Vaughan-Lee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llewellyn_Vaughan-Lee) Quote from: *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (2013).

**Robin Wall Kimmerer** (born 1953) is an American Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology; and Director, Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin\\_Wall\\_Kimmerer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Wall_Kimmerer) Quote from: *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013).

**Carl Safina** (born 1955) is an American ecologist and author of books and other writings about the human relationship with the natural world. He works to show that nature and human dignity require each other. His recent works probe the ways in which our relationship with the natural world affects human relations, and how the scientific facts imply the need for moral and ethical responses. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_Safina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Safina) Quote from: *The View from Lazy Point: A Natural Year in an Unnatural World* (2011).

**Jason Kirkey** is an author, poet, and the founder of Hiraeth Press. He grew up in the Ipswich River-North Atlantic Coast watershed of Massachusetts. With a background in both environmental philosophy and conservation biology, Jason's work is focused on rewilding the human heart and mind through a combination of ecology, poetry, and story. <http://jasonkirkey.com/about/> Quote from: *The Salmon in the Spring: The Ecology of Celtic Spirituality* (2009).