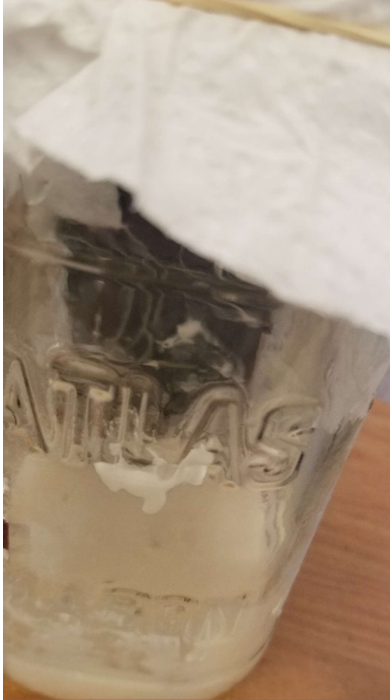


From the Ground Up

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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24 April, 2022



Sourdough Seeds © 2022 Rod E.S.Q.

When I commented on a reading from the book of Genesis a couple weeks ago, I pointed out that the name for the first human in that creation story, Adam, is related to the Hebrew word for earth *adamah* – a scriptural pun revealing the notion that humans are literally earthlings. In this way, that particular creation story echoes what many other creation stories also proclaim – that we come from the earth, and in many ways, symbolic and literal, that we are *of* the earth and that we *are* the earth.

During our Easter celebration last week, we explored the notion that “no news does not equal no news” as significant news can often be hidden underground, even as the significance of the news may still resonate and affect us in important ways, sometimes in beneficial ways that may be unbeknownst to us most of the time... unless we specifically seek out that significance.

And some of this kind of news is in fact literally underground, as we saw a couple weeks ago, when we considered that it may be helpful to think of the very soil that we stand on as a living being, even if it doesn't always look that way. Being that the soil is composed of living and dead matter, and as it absorbs and exchanges gases from our shared atmosphere – “breathing” in its own kind of way – it checks out many of the boxes of what we might consider a living organism. And above all, it sustains us and the creatures around us.

We also know that soil is especially important to many plants, including trees, although there is *another* element that is sometimes overlooked

when we consider the life cycle of trees – air (and here, I’m using *element* in the classical figurative sense, rather than in the chemical sense).

Canadian-Australian science communicator, Dr. Derek Mueller (who did his doctorate on the matter of science education on video platforms such as YouTube) invites his viewers to consider what a tree is made of. He suggests questions, such as: If a tree is made of soil, then why isn’t there a big gap on the ground around the tree as it grows?

Many of the people he asks on the street have some understanding that the soil is involved, as well as water and the original seed. There’s also a sense that the sun... does something.

Some of you might also guess that a good portion of the tree’s nutrients – it’s food, so to speak – comes from the air, particularly the carbon dioxide, which the tree... breathes (or, in a sense, “eats”) and with the energy from the sun, the tree converts it into wood as it exhales oxygen.

It turns out, in fact, that by some accounts, up to 95% percent of the tree’s mass comes from this carbon dioxide – it’s mostly made up of air! To be sure, the earth, water, and sun, all play an integral part, it’s just that, in terms of bulk, the air is what makes most of the tree.

One of the sources of this carbon dioxide is... *us!* Us, in a very literal, embodied, way, as we breathe it out. It is a virtual statistical certainty that there are trees out there which are made, at least in part, from our breath – from the spiritual cycle of our inhaling and exhaling. It is also a biological and geological certainty that, as we speak, we are infusing ourselves with the gifted oxygen from trees and plants around us (past and present).

This isn’t new news... we grew up learning about it. And it is such a basic truth, that we don’t see headlines about it on news outlets all that often. But no news does not equal no news, and sometimes it is worth remembering basic truths about the essentials of life. To honour and

celebrate the inevitable connection we have with our surrounding environment, which calls us to nurture an evermore respectful relationship with this interconnected web.

The beauty of our collective breath is shared in some way with every living being, including the soil. And it is shared by those creatures who look a lot like us, like mammals and primates, as well as those that at first glance look very different from us, like yeast and other microorganisms. These too share in that collective respiration, sometimes giving, and sometimes taking, oxygen and carbon dioxide, spiritually connecting us to our shared global breath.

Over the past couple of years, it became fashionable for many folks to take on the practice of cultivating their own sourdough starters. Part of this was a practical necessity when commercial yeast became in short supply, and part of it was an option for balance when some among us had more time at home than planned. Others among you have been taking part of this practice for several years now, and may have seen little novelty in it. And maybe you've never been into it at all, or have needed to pay attention to *other* pressing matters. I only came about it recently.

However it is that you relate to this kind of activity, it is *one* exercise in the practice of connecting with the earth and all life on it – to experience the sacred in the ordinary.

The yeast in my sourdough starter brings out that carbon dioxide, as it eats the food from plants like wheat, in turn giving that outbreath to other plants. In this way, this yeast is very much like us, *and* parts of us are very much like it, as our own bodies are made up of many other microorganisms that digest our food for us in our gut, to give us the energy we need – as we host them, in turn.

We're so similar in some ways, that the reason whole wheat flour is good for sourdough starters is the *same* reason whole wheat flour is usually better for us. The more complex carbs in whole wheat give a

better-quality source of sustenance to the yeast's life – a more balanced diet with fibre and minerals, that allow it to pace itself as it develops.

When I look at my jar of sourdough starter, I see a bit of myself in it, reflected back. And in that reflection, I am invited to reflect about the bit of myself that I share with all of us, and with everything else.

Each of you will have your own way of finding your reflection among creation. Be it simply going outside once in a while and taking in a fresher whiff of our collective global breath, or maybe getting more hands-on and interacting with some of the other vessels for participating in this shared breath, such as gardening, or growing food, which some of you do as a way of life.

My friends, every once in a while, it's worth remembering that the relationship between us and the earth is more than a casual acquaintance. We are, in fact, intrinsically connected to this earth and everything it holds, coming from the earth and what it grows, feeding off of each other, and becoming part of the earth, in both life and in death.

Moreover, my friends, we *reflect* the earth, as we ourselves mirror many of the systems and rhythms that are also used by the other parts of the planet, and what's on it, as the ground, the air, the water, and the energy from the fires of the sun, all collaborate in us, the animals, the trees, and all the small creatures, around us and inside us.

My friends, as we continue to celebrate the earth, may we also remember we are celebrating us, and all we hold dear.

So may it be,
In contemplation and celebration
Amen

*Suggested Hymns:***Opening Hymn #203 All Creatures of the Earth and Sky**

Words: Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226, alt.

Music: From *Ausserlesene Catholische Kirchengesang*, 1623, adapt. and harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, music used by perm. of Oxford University Press

LAST UNS ERFREUEN

Hymn #163 For the Earth Forever Turning

Words: Kim Oler (et al. anon.), © 1990 Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

Music: Kim Oler, © 1990 Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

~)-| arr. by Nick Page, 1952- , © Nick Page

BLUE-GREEN HILLS OF EARTH

Closing Hymn #1064 Blue Boat Home

~)-| Words: Peter Mayer, 1963- , © 2002 Peter Mayer

Music: Roland Hugh Prichard, 1811-1887, adapted by Peter Mayer, 1963 - ,
© 2002 Peter Mayer

~)-| keyboard arr. Jason Shelton, 1972 -

HYFRYDOL