



Chrysalis

Volume 11 Fall 2014

*Journal of
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World*

*In the beginning was the dream. Through the dream all things were made,
and without the dream nothing was made that has been made.¹*

~ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*

Dear Reader,

With this issue of *Chrysalis* we mark the 15th anniversary of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Berry here in Greensboro, NC.

On October 12, 2000, the Center initiated its first program at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary in the foothills of North Carolina with Carolyn Toben, Thomas Berry and Richard Lewis, Founder of the Touchstone Center for Children in New York City. Called “The Biological Imperative: Nature, Education and Imagination,” this was the beginning of a work for educators and children situated in a deep participation in the universe rather than in factuality about the natural world.

Thomas’ opening remarks were illuminating that day and gave us a way forward:

“The capacity of presence is so important. When I was eleven, we moved from one side of town to the borders of the other side of the town when Greensboro was 18,000 people. The destiny of the children and planet is going to depend on us to respond to their deeper mode of being. In 1926, just a few years before the Depression, we were building the new house and I went there and there was an incline down to the creek. I was a wanderer and a brooder. I was a solitary in a sense. I knew I couldn’t make it in a commercial world and survive. It was too unacceptable. I would have died in some sense...A meadow was there. The grass was growing and the crickets were chirping...an extraordinary view of a meadow and the white lilies. It remained in my mind and it developed into a referent, like this place (gesturing at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary) could be to children. It became normative. Whether the woodland, the meadow, the creek, it was something very sublime. I think when a child sees a butterfly, there’s some kind of ecstasy. The natural world is there to present the numinous aspect of existence.

¹ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 198.



The Center for Education, Imagination
and the Natural World

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Once I was in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine where there was a meeting of people: Lame Deer, a Sioux Indian was there; Zen master Roshi, Edgar Mitchell and myself. We had a meeting on technology. The zen master and Edgar Mitchell argued that technology is indifferent, it is just how we use it. Lame Deer and I argued no. Lame Deer mentioned the Cathedral. As beautiful as all of this was, the Sioux needed the sky above to draw in everything from the four directions, above and below. *You establish yourself with the universe before you do anything.* Black Elk is a patron saint of mine. His vision was profound. He was ill as a child in a coma and a vision occurred. He came out of the coma and it was six years before he would speak to the medicine man of his vision. The culmination of the vision can be read to establish a community of what we are all about. Loren Eiseley is my next patron saint...

My childhood dream is what has guided my life...of what it should be...what I should strive for... what I should do. Particularly in relation to children. That's why I've been dedicated to children. Imagination has to be activated by the natural world. I would push things back from the biological imperative to the primordial imperative; to the universe itself and within the universe, *the human participation at the deepest level of the universe is our gift of imagination, but our imagination has to be activated by the natural world.* So this goes with the fact that it's one thing – a self-activating process. The universe gives us the imagination and it imprints the imagination.”²

So began our work for educators and children at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, guided particularly by these words that Thomas Berry spoke that day:

² Thomas Berry, in transcript of “The Biological Imperative: Nature, Education and Imagination,” a program sponsored by the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, October 12, 2000.

The capacity of presence is so important.

The destiny of the children and planet is going to depend on us to respond to their deeper mode of being.

You establish yourself with the universe before you do anything.

My childhood dream is what has guided my life...of what it should be...what I should strive for...what I should do. Particularly in relation to children. That's why I've been dedicated to children.

...the human participation at the deepest level of the universe is our gift of imagination, but our imagination has to be activated by the natural world.

Being and becoming, cosmos and cosmogenesis, meet in Thomas' account of "The Meadow Across the Creek." A moment of cosmic consciousness became the reverberating touchstone for Thomas Berry's life and work. The image of a "communion of subjects" was born in that moment; that place of reciprocity, mutual presence and intimate rapport between the imagination of the universe and the imagination of a child.

On this our 15th anniversary and the 100th anniversary of Thomas Berry's birth, we celebrate Thomas Berry's guiding presence and rejoice in the programs that we have been able to bring forth into the world, graced by his vision.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peggy Whalen-Levitt". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a mix of capital and lowercase letters.

Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

Programs for Children and Families



Awakening to Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades K-5, maximum 24 children

Cost: \$250 (bring a bag lunch)

The Center’s “Awakening to Nature” programs are intended to foster reverence for the natural world, develop the inner capacity to attend to the world around you, and create a deep, personal connection with nature. The programs bring the inner lives of children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world.

“Awakening to Nature” programs begin in a circle where children are invited to slow down and make themselves at home in nature. Guided earth walks follow, led by experienced Earth Guides, with groups of 8 children. The small size of the group and the “beholding” practices of the Center enable the children to enter into a living and loving relationship with the natural world. Throughout the changing seasons, children are invited to enter into silence and experience the fullness of each moment – to take in the sounds, the smells, the feel of the air, the colors and movements of the world around them.

Children then return to the circle where they enjoy a bag lunch together. The day ends with a heartwarming circle of reflection. The rhythm of the day enables the children to assimilate their experiences and to enter into community together as they share what touched them about the day.

We are happy to adapt this program to the differing developmental needs of children in grades Kindergarten-5.

We especially like to work with schools year after year so that the children can have sustained and meaningful connections with the natural world over time. From the returning children who have experienced our program over the course of several years, we have learned how one day spent in our program has lived in their memories and in their hearts for a whole year in between visits. They remember the peaceful sounds of the Native American Flute, the relationships with various creatures that they have encountered, the beauty of nature, and our practices, especially our Behold practice. We have also learned how much the children appreciate being in an atmosphere of peace and quiet.

The Poetry of Nature

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Grades 6 – 12 (maximum 24 children)

Cost: \$250

(bring a bag lunch)

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

~ Mary Oliver

Poetry is a language of deep seeing that reveals dimensions of the world inaccessible to discursive thought, and so it is to poetry that we turn for our programs for middle school and high school students. Our Poetry of Nature program is a passage through three landscapes in the natural world where students listen to a poem, are asked to be fully present to the place, the moment and the feelings and images that arise within them. At each site, students are invited to find a solo spot, enter into a practice of presence, and record their inner experiences through guided writing practices. The poems and landscapes are carefully chosen to resonate with one another. The day culminates in a poetry reading after lunch where each contribution is deeply connected to the student's experience in nature and to his/her inner life. The students read poems, ask questions, and share reflections on the day and on their sense of belonging to the natural world. This program taps a deep wellspring within young adults that rarely is accessed at school.



Families of the Forest

November 4, 2014 and April 12, 2015

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Group size: maximum 24

Cost: \$15 per person

The ever-accelerating pace of change is leading families to a hurried existence that separates them from their connection to the Earth. Join us for this family day at the earth sanctuary where we will gather around the fire circle, go on a guided earth walk and share our experiences from the day.

Thomas Berry Summer Programs for Children

June 15-18, 2015: Ages 8-10

June 22-25, 2015: Ages 11-13

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Group size: 12

Cost: \$250 per child

Inspired by the vision of Thomas Berry, our summer programs for children provide a unique opportunity for a small group of 12 children to make a deep personal connection to the natural world within the meadows, creeks, gardens and forests of a 165-acre earth sanctuary. Earth walks and creek walking are daily sources of joy and inspiration. Within the peace and beauty of Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, new eyes and ears awaken as the children create expressions out of their experiences with the earth. Clay, papermaking, nature journaling and Native American flute are some of the eco-contemplative arts that enliven the rhythm of our days.



“We are touched by what we touch, shaped by what we shape,
enhanced by what we enhance.”

~Thomas Berry

Led by:

Director of Children’s Programs, **Sandy Bisdee**, completed her Association Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate in 1979. An avid gardener, naturalist, storyteller and musician, Sandy has engaged in a deep study of Native American perspectives. She completed her certification in the NC Environmental Education Certification Program in 2009. Sandy brings to her work a lifetime of loving children and of loving the earth and of finding ways to bring the two together!

Marnie Weigel has worked for the Center for 4 years since completing the Center’s Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program. Marnie is an eco-contemplative artist and enjoys making pottery, journals, and jewelry. Her creations are inspired by her reflections in silence and beholding in the natural world and she joyfully shares her creativity with the children in the Center’s summer programs.

Programs for Adults

Being, Beholding, Belonging: Eco-contemplative Practices for Children and Young Adults

Part One: February 21, 2015

Part Two: March 14, 2015

Part Three: Shadowing a children's program (date to be arranged)

9:30 am – 3:30 pm

Place: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary

1501 Rock Creek Dairy Road, Whitsett, NC

Group size: 12

Cost: \$180 (organic lunch included)

Center programs are based in a threefold practice of Being, Beholding and Belonging:

Being: bringing ourselves into stillness, quieting the chatter of our own minds

Beholding: engaging in practices that bring us into relationship with the natural world

Belonging: feeling a sense of oneness with the source of our own being

Through these practices, a feeling of connection to all living things arises within the children. New eyes and ears awaken. The selfhood of the child comes into being within the creative heart of the universe. Words of peace make themselves heard. Seeds of service to the world are sown.

In this three-part series, you will be introduced to the Center's practices and will be given an opportunity to "shadow" one of the Center's programs to experience the practices firsthand.

In Part One, we provide a context for this way of working with children based on Thomas Berry's call for a new courtesy toward the earth. In this session, you will be introduced to the Center's eco-contemplative practices. In Part Two, we explore the contemplative arts and nature: nature poetry, contemplative music and contemplative visual arts that deepen a living bond of intimacy between children and the earth. In Part Three, we provide an opportunity, on an individual basis, for you to "shadow" one of the Center's programs to experience the practices firsthand.

Faculty:

Sandy Bisdee is the Director of Children's Programs at the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. She holds a Montessori International (AMI) Teaching Certificate and brings over thirty years of experience as an educator of children to her work at the Center.

Mel DeJesus teaches writing at Durham Tech Community College and serves as a Center Earth Guide. He holds an MA in American Ethnic Literature with an interest in exploring ways in which we can deepen our sense of community and identity in relationship to the natural world.

Marnie Weigel is an eco-contemplative artist who serves as a Center Earth Guide and Summer Program staff member. She received a BA in Environmental Studies from Warren Wilson College and an AAS in Professional Crafts from Haywood Community College.

Peggy Whalen-Levitt is the Director of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World. She holds a PhD in Language in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, where she co-created a graduate program in Childhood Imagination.

The Inner Life of the Child in Nature

A Two-Year Program

Receiving Applications for 2015-2017 in December 2014



In our programs for adults at the Center, we are preparing for a deep change of heart, a deep psychic shift in the culture at large – one educator at a time. We believe that the change that is needed in our time cannot be achieved through sweeping movements, curriculum change, or further exchange of information. Rather, we focus our adult programs on the development of the capacity for inner presence to the natural world.

This is a new social form for working with educators based on the assumption that a shift in consciousness within the educational realm will come only through an inner transformation of the educator, through an honoring of the soul/spirit of the educator as a core value, and through the creation of a community of educators who support and inspire one another on the threshold of a new consciousness for our time – a consciousness that moves us beyond a view of the natural world as a collection of objects into an experience of the natural world as a communion of subjects.

The program is open to teachers, parents, child psychologists, guidance counselors, religious educators, child care providers, naturalists, college professors, and others who are entrusted with the care of children or young adults and who indicate a deep interest in developing capacities for nurturing a relationship between the inner life of the child/young adult and the natural world.

Designed as a co-research among participants, the program unfolds over the course of two years. During the first year, participants come together for Saturday retreats in the Fall, Winter and Spring, as well as a two-day retreat in the summer. In the second year, participants develop a practice in consultation with Center staff and reunite for a retreat in the Summer during which practices are shared. The program is intended to be a meaningful sequence of experiences that build one upon the other. Therefore, we request that participants make a commitment to attend every session and complete readings and assignments prior to each retreat.

In the first year, we focus on “Presence” - the development of inner capacities, both in ourselves and in children and young adults that enable us to form a bond of intimacy with the natural world. In the second year, we focus on “Practice” – on new ways of being and working in the world.

At the Center, we try to create a meaningful context for our programs by paying close attention to the rhythm of the day. Retreats begin with a moment of silence intended to quiet the mind and create a field of receptivity for the group. Every retreat includes solo time in the natural world, time for reflection and sharing, the fellowship of shared meals at lunch, and presentations related to the theme at hand.

Earth Parenting: Living Soulfully Through the Seasons with Your Child

October 18, 2014 (Fall family rhythms)

February 7, 2015 (Winter family rhythms)

April 18, 2015 (Spring family rhythms)

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

625 Fulton St., Suite 8, Greensboro, NC 27401

Group size: 12

Cost: \$40 per session

We are all born out of and into the rhythms of the universe. We begin our journey with the rhythm of our mother's heartbeat resonating and permeating every multiplying and specifying cell of our body as we grow in the womb. Our first breath as an earthly being is the drawing in of our earthly environment, and the beginnings of a breathing rhythm that will carry us through all our days on the planet. We are born into the rhythm of the rising and setting sun, the seasons of the year and movement of the planets and stars.

These rhythms are not mechanistic schedules or unconscious routines but life giving rhythms, strength building rhythms, rhythms that bring a sense of security and promise.

What are the soul satisfying rhythms we can offer to nurture a young child? Do our daily, weekly and seasonal home rhythms offer a sense of breathing in and breathing out? Is there a rhythm to our play and work, movement and rest, speaking and listening, sound and silence, eating and digesting? Or have we created a panting, breathless pace of activity, stimulation and engagement with little time to pause, reflect, digest, process and just be?

Please join us for this Earth Parenting series with Marie Nordgren, master early childhood teacher, as we explore ways of living soulfully through the cycle of the seasons with young children.



Marie Nordgren is the founder, director and a teacher at The Children's Garden Preschool, a nature and play based early childhood program in Durham, NC. She received her training in Waldorf early childhood education from Sunbridge College in Spring Valley, New York. Marie serves on the Educator Council of the Center and graduated from the Center's Inner Life of the Child in Nature program in 2008.

Contemplative Living with Earth



The Center is deeply pleased to be offering the first two modules of “Contemplative Living With Earth” this year, a course of contemplative practice created by Robert Sardello and Cheryl Sanders-Sardello at The School of Spiritual Psychology. “Contemplative Living with Earth” will be taught by Dr. Mary Hartsell, who is certified by the School of Spiritual Psychology as a “Master Teacher” of the course.

The course consists of four modules and sets out the path of living a conscious presence with soul/spirit in the world, noticing with deep awareness that everything, everything – is soul presence.

We will begin with the first two modules, each comprised of 7 sessions:

Dying Awake, Coming Alive

Sunday afternoons from 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

September 28, October 12, October 26, November 9, November 23, December 7, December 21

Place: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

625 Fulton Street, Suite 8, Greensboro, NC, 27401

Cost: \$375

Limited to 12 participants

(book provided)

Heart Initiation

Sunday afternoons from 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

January 11, January 25, February 8, February 22, March 8, March 22, April 12

Place: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

625 Fulton Street, Suite 8, Greensboro, NC, 27401

Cost: \$375

Limited to 12 participants

(book provided)

Each module calls for a commitment to regular, almost daily, contemplative practices and reflections between sessions that are outlined in the books you will be given. Those taking the course are asked to make an inner commitment to engage this process.

Module Descriptions:

Dying Awake, Coming Alive:

Every spiritual tradition has always known that in order to develop genuine ways in the inner life, there are certain unavoidable prerequisites. One of the most important of these is the subject of this module – facing and finding joy in being a vulnerable human being of earth and being able to hold in living awareness that we are in the process, every moment, of dying, which can also be the moment of becoming spiritually alive, discovering ourselves as Spiritual Earth beings. As long as we imagine that we “possess” our lives, the open receptivity needed for true spiritual experience is not possible.

Heart Initiation:

This module stands at the very center of developing capacities of awareness for living contemplatively and actively with Earth, spiritually. Heart-Presence is something far more than being present to our “feelings.” It is the primary mode of intimate sensing and perceiving the soul and spirit of anything of the world, being open to those presences, affected and changed by them, and in turn making it possible for their good influence in the world. Developing the capacities of the heart leads to a non-causal way of action in the world.

Course Facilitator:

Mary Hartsell, DNP, is both a Family Nurse Practitioner and a Family Psychiatric and Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. She received her Bachelorette in Nursing from UNCG in 1981. She returned to graduate school and received her Master in Science of Nursing with a concentration in Administration of Systems at Duke University in 1996. Committed to the health of individuals, Dr. Hartsell returned to school and achieved a Post-Masters at Duke University in 1999 as a FNP. In 2004, she attended Rush University in Chicago and received another Post-Masters as a PMHNP-F in 2006. She holds a Doctorate of Nursing Practice from Duke University and has worked in many capacities of nursing including Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Home Care, Internal Medicine, and Family Health. She currently provides care within a private practice in Durham, NC, where she practices as a nurse practitioner and therapist, specializing in providing holistic care to individuals with complex chronic medical and psychiatric illnesses. Dr. Hartsell has extensively studied the art of contemplative meditation and has incorporated these practices as the foundation of her clinical work.

Course Creators:

Robert Sardello, PhD, is the Co-Founder of The School of Spiritual Psychology, which began in 1992, and co-editor of Goldenstone Press. His published books include, *Money and the Soul of the World* (with Randolph Severson), *Facing the World with Soul*, *Love and the Soul*, *Love and the World*, *Freeing the Soul from Fear*, *The Power of Soul: Living the Twelve Virtues*, *Silence: The Mystery of Wholeness*, *Steps on the Stone Path*, and *Acts of the Heart*. Robert’s main emphasis has been to develop theoretical and practical approaches to perceiving and being in right relation with the Soul of the World, showing that humans are pulled from the time stream from the future rather than pushed from the past, and developing the interior presence of heart with Earth, others, and the world.

Cheryl Sanders-Sardello, PhD, is the Co-Founder of the The School of Spiritual Psychology. Prior to founding the school in 1992, Cheryl worked as a teacher of mentally handicapped children, and as an addictions counselor. She is currently writing a book on the healing of the twelve senses in the young and the development of the spiritual senses as we age. She creates healing mandalas in the context of the classes within The School of Spiritual Psychology and is involved in the teaching of all classes in Spiritual Psychology. She is also the administrative director of The School, coordinating and scheduling all of its activities. She is a Fellow of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

The Thomas Berry Centennial Series



Sunday afternoons from 2:00 pm – 4:30 pm
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
625 Fulton Street, Suite 8, Greensboro, NC 27401
Cost: \$30 per program
Group size: 12

Please join us for a series of talks and conversations on Sunday afternoons in the intimate setting of our new meeting space in Greensboro, NC. In a small group setting, we invite dialogue, deep listening and loving speech as we consider different dimensions of Thomas Berry's work.

Format: Presentation, Tea break, Circle of Conversation

October 19, 2014

**Thomas Berry: Harbinger of a Communal Spirituality, Rooted in Earth and Cosmos as Revelatory
A talk and conversation with John Sullivan**

In this presentation, John will reflect on Thomas Berry's contributions to an emerging spirituality – or perhaps better, an emerging inter-spirituality – that is multi-lingual and able to recognize that Great Mystery has many names and no adequate name. First, John will clarify the notion of spirituality itself, drawing on the wisdom traditions, East, West and beyond. Second, he will show how such a spirituality is central to the Great Work as exemplified in his mantra:

I do not do the Great Work for myself alone.

I do not do the Great Work by myself alone.

I do not do the Great Work by my own powers alone.

Third, John will close with a teaching story from Rilke. Throughout his presentation, John will suggest that what we are seeking is a spirituality that is communal throughout, rooted in Earth and cosmos as revelatory, and, ever in progress and ever to be reformed.

Dr. John G. Sullivan, a native of Newport, Rhode Island, holds two earned doctorates: a JCD from the Lateran University, Rome, Italy, and a PhD in Philosophy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has a triple focus for his work. First, he is Powell Professor Emeritus at Elon University and also Elon's first Distinguished University Professor. He retired in August 2006 after 36 years at Elon. Second, he has a long-time relationship to Tai Sophia Institute in Laurel, Maryland (now the Maryland University of Integrative Health). Third, he has been involved with Second Journey, a nonprofit organization in Chapel Hill that focuses on the possibilities of later life. He is author of five books: *To Come to Life More Fully* (1991); *Living Large: Transformative Work at the Intersection of Ethics and Spirituality* (2004); *The Spiral of the Seasons* (2009); *The Fourfold Path to Wholeness* (2010); and *Integral Living: Embracing the Four Seasons of Life as Daily Practice* (2014). His abiding interest is the place where philosophy, psychology, and spirituality –East, West and beyond – intersect and mutually enhance one another.

November 2, 2014

Rudolf Steiner and Thomas Berry: Anthroposophy and the Ecozoic

A talk and conversation with Eve Olive

In this presentation, Eve will consider the correspondences between the work of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) and Thomas Berry (1914-2009).

Eve Olive has been a student of the work of Rudolf Steiner for over 50 years. She has a degree in Architecture from the University of Natal in Durban South Africa where she grew up. Her second profession is eurythmy, which she studied in Dornach, Switzerland and New York. Eurythmy is an art of movement that makes visible the gestures inherent in the sounds of language and music. Poems can be performed. Eve taught for many years at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC that she helped to found and to design. She is editor of *Cosmic Child: Inspired Writings from the Threshold of Birth*, which also includes several of her own poems.

November 16, 2014

Body, Being, and the Emerging Ecozoic: Thomas Berry's Relevance to Modern Medicine

A talk and conversation with Renée Eli

Invariant to all living organisms is the tacit organismic knowing how to *be* – to sustain life – and how to *become* – to produce and to actualize. Every living being is enminded with an innateness toward flourishing. Renée suggests Thomas Berry was referring to this enminded nature of *being* and *becoming* when he referred to all living systems, the biosphere, and the whole of the cosmos as ensouled. In his 1991 Schumacher lecture Berry outlined six conditions necessary for emergence into the Ecozoic era. The essence of these conditions is that the human being must relinquish alienation and endeavor instead toward psychic communion with life processes – with *being* and *becoming*. Such a communion is not merely epistemological. It must be a living ontology. Berry contends that Descartes “desouled” the world with his mechanistic view. Phenomenologist Drew Leder insists that Descartes’ contribution to the Western worldview of the body and Western medicine’s theory and practice is derived not from the living body, but from the corpse.

Renée will suggest that Berry’s urging of humanity toward an emerging Ecozoic era finds relevance in medical theory and practice. Implicit in Berry’s appeal is a renewed, ensouled relationship with the human body that understands that the human-nature relationship is intimate, integral, and always dynamic. Such a view is not anthropocentric. Rather, it is an integral view of the embedded human.

Renée Eli is a doctoral candidate in Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Her research proposes that a process-ontology of the body may shift human attitudes toward a flourishing human and other-than-human biotic sphere. Renée’s research asks us to come into psychic communion with our own body as an always enminded, organismic process in dynamic coupling with all other living processes. Renée is a retired Physical Therapist and Wellness Consultant living in Asheville, NC. A graduate of The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World’s two-year educator program, “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” Renée’s ongoing scholarship, consulting and experiential education programs are largely influenced by the lustrous vision and writings of Thomas Berry.

The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry

A Performance Piece in Honor of Thomas Berry

Recitation: Andrew Levitt

Music: Scott Walker



November 7, 2014

7:30 pm – 8:30 pm (doors open at 7:00 pm)

Place: The Greensboro Historical Museum

Funded by Dr. Margaret Berry and Anne Hummel

Free and open to the public; seating is first come, first served

Please join us for a performance piece in Thomas Berry's own lyrical and inspiring words, with musical interludes. Growing up in Greensboro, NC, Thomas Berry had a "Meadow Across the Creek" experience when he was eleven years old that became a touchstone for his life and work. Mirroring this moment of mystical rapport in childhood, Thomas' narrative writing and poetry invite us into a deep presence to Earth and Cosmos, as if participating in an unfinished symphony. Come walk with Thomas Berry. See with new eyes, hear with new ears!

Andrew Levitt holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. In his career life, he has worked with silence and words. He performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years. He then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. As Dr. Merryandrew, he currently works as a cosmic clown in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital. A nature poet, Andrew lives in Greensboro, NC with his wife, Peggy. In his neighborhood, he is known as the man who walks a big white dog.

Scott Walker has taught strings in the Greensboro area for over 30 years. Scott plays fiddle, guitar and cello and founded The Walker Family Band in 2002, which has delighted audiences throughout the Southeast with a distinctive take on traditional styles. His career has been dedicated to teaching young musicians in a variety of public and private schools, and as a private instructor of Suzuki music technique on cello and violin. Scott's love of traditional Irish fiddle tunes grew after he was introduced to the music by former student, Fred Lail. Realizing the potential to reenergize students' desire to play, he began to introduce Irish tunes as an alternative to Suzuki and classical repertoire, which resulted in the founding of Walker Street Fiddlers in 2009.

My own understanding of the great work began when I was quite young. At the time I was some eleven years old. My family was moving from a more settled part of a small southern town out to the edge of a town where the new house was being built. The house, not yet finished, was situated on a slight incline. Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in late May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and looked out over the scene.

The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and woodlands in the distance and the clouds in a clear sky. It was not something conscious that happened just then. I went on about my life as any young person might do.

Perhaps it was not simply this moment that made such a deep impression upon me. Perhaps it was a sensitivity that was developed throughout my childhood. Yet as the years pass this moment returns to me, and whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes to which I have given my efforts, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life.¹

Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

¹ Thomas Berry. *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 12-13.

Thomas Berry and Dante's *Divine Comedy*:
The Journey and the Vision

A Four-Part Series

Led by Andrew Levitt



Part 1, Introduction: February 1, 2015

Part 2, Inferno: February 15, 2015

Part 3, Purgatorio: March 1, 2015

Part 4, Paradiso: March 15, 2015

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Place: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
625 Fulton Street, Suite 8, Greensboro, NC, 27401

Cost: \$140 for the series

Limited to 12 participants

"We are returning to our native place after a long absence, meeting once again with our kin in the earth community..."

"The world of life, of spontaneity, the world of dawn and sunset and glittering stars in the dark night heavens, the world of wind and rain, of meadow flowers and flowing streams, of hickory and oak and maple and spruce and pineland forests, the world of desert sand and prairie grasses, and within all this the eagle and the hawk, the mockingbird and the chickadee, the deer and the wolf and the bear, the coyote, the raccoon, the whale and the seal, and the salmon returning upstream to spawn – all this, the wilderness world recently rediscovered with heightened emotional sensitivity, is an experience not far from that of Dante meeting Beatrice at the end of the Purgatorio, where she descends amid a cloud of blossoms. It was a long wait for Dante, so aware of his infidelities, yet struck anew and inwardly 'pierced,' as when, hardly out of childhood, he had first seen Beatrice. The 'ancient flame' was lit again in the depths of his being. In that meeting, Dante is describing not only a personal experience, but the experience of an entire community at the moment of reconciliation with the divine after the long period of alienation and human wandering away from the true center."

~Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*

Those who knew him well say that Thomas Berry frequently carried a copy of the *Divine Comedy* with him. For twenty years, he led a study group on Dante. And one student who studied with him in Assisi reports that he agreed to teach in the summer on the condition that he could teach Dante in the morning and ecology and cosmology in the afternoon.

As the above words from the opening of the first chapter of *The Dream of the Earth* suggest, Thomas Berry could refer to Dante's *Divine Comedy* for inspiration in a way similar to the way he said he would return to the image of the meadow across the creek. Yet one would seek in vain for a correspondence between Dante's cosmic perspective and the vision of the new story. As a cultural historian with a sense of the difference between Dante's time and our own, Berry recognized that we can no longer experience the relation between the human and the cosmos as Dante did.

Then why did he carry a copy of the *Divine Comedy* in his jacket and encourage his students in Assisi to engage Dante's work before they encountered his own? He would, of course, have known that Dante recommended his poem to his patron for its allegorical or mystical meanings as well as for its literal meaning and pleasures. He may, therefore, have been following Dante's example in recommending the *Divine Comedy* to his own students. But it seems likely that he would have also hoped that as students engaged Dante's work, they would begin to discern intimations of meaning in the grand vision of a unified cosmos and dream again the dream of the earth. In these sessions we will share in dialogue with Dante, Berry and each other to begin to understand how the journey of Dante's pilgrim can prepare us to engage the vision of grandeur in The New Story. And we will begin to see how Dante's work complements and completes Berry's vision.

Andrew Levitt holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. In his career life, he has worked with silence and words. He performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years. He then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. As Dr. Merryandrew, he currently works as a clown doctor in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital.

The Four Virtues: Presence, Heart, Wisdom, Creation A Day with Tobin Hart, PhD



Saturday, April 25, 2015

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Place: Sanctuary, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

607 North Greene St.

Greensboro, NC 27401

Cost: \$55 (includes lunch)

Co-sponsored by The Servant Leadership School of Greensboro

Please join us for a day with Tobin Hart, based on his book *The Four Virtues: Presence, Heart, Wisdom, Creation*.

We know that what is essential is not merely more computing or purchasing power, more facts to be memorized, a script to follow, or simply something to believe in. Instead, the essentials are inner capacities and qualities that are activated—switched on and embodied. These inner powers open consciousness and thus enable us to meet the world deeply. The world opens and is revealed to us to the extent that we can open to it. This is a kind of physics of the unfolding mind.

The process of opening to the world requires both the psychological and spiritual; when viewed together, these can often seem odd and paradoxical. The psychological develops our will, and the spiritual asks us to be willing. The psychological strengthens our sense of self, and the spiritual asks us to be selfless. The former helps us differentiate and individuate, and the latter invites us to lose our self-separateness. We'll see just how the inner capacities work together and that without their integration we can have trouble getting out of our own way.

At this unprecedented moment in history, we have access to the secrets from across the wisdom traditions, from the great souls around the globe, and from the human sciences. This incredible body of knowledge and wisdom can help us recognize characteristics of humanity at its best. When brought together, these insights—Eastern and Western, psychological and spiritual, scientific and religious, ancient and modern—form a matrix for growing our humanity and finding our way.

The word *matrix* itself describes just how this energy lives within us. In Latin, the word means “pregnant animal.” The matrix is “the place or medium where or through which something is developed”—a *womb*. We are this womb. Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth-century Dominican sage, noted that we are indeed pregnant, and that our progeny is nothing less than everything. Eckhart said, “We are meant to be mothers of God.” Our very purpose here is somehow to birth divinity through our humanity. We make this happen by bringing these powers together within us and taking them into the world. The implications are as extraordinary now as they were heretical for Eckhart then.

Like the compass, this matrix reaches out in four cardinal directions represented by: Presence, Heart, Wisdom, and Creation. All directions reflect a portion of us and a potion—a medicine—for us. In some traditions, the words *medicine* and *power* are used interchangeably. These directions are powers that can be used for knowing and navigating in the world.

These virtues are not beliefs or commandments or anything of that sort. Instead, these are dynamic human qualities that appear essential for a life of flourishing, fulfillment, and integrity. In order to tap the depths of our humanity, we have to embody these powers. In other words, these four virtues can only be grown from the inside out and then enacted in our interaction with the world. These become inner arts and inner technologies. Although they never guarantee it, they make it possible to bring our deepest life within reach.

These capacities help open the aperture of consciousness so that we may meet the world deeply from a deep place within. That’s what this is all about: deep to deep.

Tobin Hart, PhD, is father, professor, psychologist, and author of *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*. He serves as a professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia, as well as cofounder and president of the ChildSpirit Institute, a nonprofit educational and research hub exploring the spirituality of children and adults. His work integrates spirituality, psychology, and education.

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