

When the Source Ran Free: A Story for Our Times by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

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Watching the sun rise over the wetlands, the mist fading, even here in the midst of nature there is the strange stillness of a world in lockdown — waiting, wondering, anxiety, and fear its companions. I am writing these words in the time of the great pandemic, when for a few brief months our world slowed down and almost stopped; when as the stillness grew around us there was a moment to hear another song, not one of cars and commerce, but belonging to the seed of a future our hearts need to hear.

This song comes from a place where the angels are present, where light is born, where the future is written. This is a future that goes back to the beginning, to the time when the names of creation were given to humanity, when the waters were pure and the plants and the animals sang their true purpose and we were present in praise and thanksgiving. [1]

And now, even when thousands of years have passed, civilizations come and gone, even now in this time of the great forgetting—when the wells run dry, when the air is toxic, when we are at the end of an era in the time of the great dying—that essential note is once again present in my consciousness, that song of the angels that is also the song of creation, of what is born and comes into being. Without this return to the Source nothing true can be born, just more layers of distortion, more veils that obscure us from what is real. And this note of the Source is so simple. It is not an answer to a question, because in the simplicity of Self there is no question. Like a bud breaking open in springtime, it just is—life returning after a long winter, after storms and snow.

I will try to tell the story of this beginning, of this note of the Source, of this place of pure being. Because stories are what bring the unborn into life, allow their songs to be heard and understood. Stories are what weave us into the many colors of existence, and take us by the hand and lead us into the circle of life's dance. And at this time—when we are surrounded by all the signs of a civilization that has lost its way, that has forgotten what is sacred—it is vital that we recognize there is a new dance beginning, a new note of love that bonds together humanity and the web of life.

Every culture has its creation stories, whether they are of the Garden of Eden of Judeo-Christianity, or the Great Light of the Skywoman falling to Earth of the Haudenosaunee people. [2] They tell us where we belong in the beginning, and how this beginning is then woven into our lives. And for many centuries we live this story: we are a people after the Fall, banished from Eden, living by the “sweat of our brow”; or we are present in the generosity of a land where the Good Spirit protects Her people. And now, at the end of an

era, when these stories are mostly just remembered in books, and we live without our feet touching the earth, there is the possibility of a new story—one that carries the sweetness of that first spring day, when the sun grew round and warmed the land, and everything was known as sacred. And if we can take the note of this beginning and weave it into stories and songs, make it a remembrance that is alive in each moment, then the Earth can be healed and a new cycle of life begin. Or we will remain stranded amidst the debris of the world we created, of concrete and metal, the sacred nature of life long forgotten.

Of course I am also recounting my own story, because all we can truly tell is our own story—what makes us live and gives us meaning. And our own story is our greatest gift to life, if we can find the thread, the song of our own unique story, and untangle it from the stories around us, especially the dark dreams of consumerism, the collective stories of greed and desire, that are destroying the web of life. If we can return to and uncover the essential story of our own existence, we can give what is real back to the Earth, which craves this simple nourishment, this songline of a soul. The Earth in her endless generosity has given us life and the opportunity to live our story, and so we return this gift, this note of love. Many years ago I was shown how this can be an offering on the altar of life:

Wait till you feel your own story like a dream, like a possibility, and then give it to the Earth as an offering. Give your own story to the Earth as an offering, full of meaning, full of possibilities, and full of the song of the soul, that ancient song, so ancient it was born before the beginning and yet also knows the meaning of time. The Earth has been so much cut up that it needs again to know wholeness, to be given wholeness as a gift. What you can offer is your own story, which is your own wholeness, the essence of your becoming, to give that as a seed to the heart of the world.

My own story began one summer day when I was sixteen, when I read a Zen koan about wild geese, which opened a doorway into a world full of wonder. Until then I had lived the story of my family, of a grey middle-class childhood of boarding school and cold baths and sports. Then I began to practice meditation and had access to states of inner emptiness, but I was also given a key to a world full of light and laughter, sunlight reflecting off water. There was a garden in my boarding school beside the river where I would go when classes were over, and I could sit in this awakening world of wonder, of color and fragrance. It was a time of prayer without words, a prayer because around me all of creation was alive with light, and I could sit and see it all, the water flowing around my hands as they dipped into the river.

And now, half a century later, this garden again calls to me. Its story speaks to me of a different way to be that belongs to both silence and love, as well as to the simple sounds of nature, bird calls and wind in the trees, water moving over stones. I will try to tell this story as it comes to me, as I walk down the pathways of this garden and feel the memories in the air. This for me is the world before the Fall, before we forgot, when magic and wonder were as present as the breath.

But before I walk down these pathways, even before I enter this garden of magic and beauty, where the fragrant honeysuckle hangs over the wall and the jasmine is a symphony of white sweetness, I must speak a little of the darkness, because in our present time a dark thread is being woven into life's tapestry. This pandemic has faced us with a collective suffering, fear of death and fear for the health of loved ones, as well as our own future. There is also the pain of the poor, hunger and destitution, the migrant worker without home or job or food. This suffering is real and touches upon the social and racial inequalities of our cultures. And as this unfolds around us we also face the prospect

of the many calamities that await as climate collapse enters our world more fully—not just as a scientific prognosis, but as a fully felt reality, creating more refugees and migrant camps, starvation as the crops fail, as droughts and floods come more frequently. Yes, we have seen the seeds of love and compassion as communities come together to help and support each other. But we cannot deny the dark side of the coming years, as anxiety becomes fear, hunger becomes famine, social unrest becomes social collapse. This time of transition will not be easy. There is a dark price to pay for our abuse of the Earth, for the years we have lost in our patterns of denial, in our exploitation, greed, and corruption, despite all the warnings we have been given.

The first time we walked in the garden long ago, it was as children—innocent, naked, unknowing. Now if we remember to walk through the door that is always open we will have paid the price of our forgetfulness. We will have suffered and bled. It cannot be otherwise.

And now that we have wandered so far from the Source there is need to remember our origins, to return to the place where we were born so long ago. Our scientists tell us that the origin of our universe was the Big Bang almost fourteen billion years ago, when, from out of non-existence, first light was born, and then the physical universe came into being. And then, only four billion years ago, life first appeared on this planet.

But our home is not just the physical world, but also the numinous world of the soul and its stories, stories that describe our world coming into existence from Aboriginal Dreamtime, for example, which belongs not to some definable past, but to “everywhen.” Or as the mystic experiences, all around us, every moment of every day, the dance of life coming into existence as the infinite emptiness takes on form. But this deeper understanding of our existence has been covered over by the concepts of our mind and its patterns of thought. And so in order to reconnect with the Source we need to uncover and return to a more pristine consciousness. We need to reenter the garden where life and light and love were first woven together, where the threads that define our existence came into being.

This garden is hidden all around us, present in places our rational self cannot enter. Here the angels stand guard, keeping the integrity of what is sacred, holding the light of the first day. And they are also waiting for our return, for us to walk out of the cloud that covers us, this fog of forgetfulness, and to return to what is sacred, what is essential, what has neither past nor future even as it embraces both. Yes, we are born from stardust and that first light; we came whirling out of non-existence, and we carry this memory in our DNA, in the cells of our body and memories of the soul. And before the Earth becomes just dead matter, finally killed by exploitation and grief, we need to find this story, song, dance, dream, and so help the Earth become alive again, its colors to sing in the air.

Because just as stories nourish our soul, give us a sense of belonging, so too do stories nourish the Earth in hidden ways. This is part of the ancient covenant between humanity and the natural world, how magic is woven into the web of life and how that magic can come alive again, in the songlines of Dreamtime, in the images of the First Peoples, spirals engraved on stone, or the animals, bison and bulls, even a rhinoceros, painted on the cave walls in Southern France. Our rational world may have banished magic from our consciousness, but it is still very present in the Earth and Her ways. It speaks of the hidden mysteries of life, the power of sacred place, or the healing properties of plants. This is traditionally the domain of the priest or shaman, but is also our common heritage, part of the wisdom of the early days. And when we speak to the Earth with reverence and thanksgiving, when our stories are true, then the magic within the world can come alive,

and can nourish life, clear the water that has become polluted, return to its powers that have been lost.

Just as we have forgotten how to deeply listen to the Earth, so we have lost the knowing of how to speak to Her. We no longer have rituals that bind us together, nor do we listen to the wind or the sound of plants growing. And we no longer know the words that can commune with Her, or the stories that sing to Her. All this is waiting to be rediscovered, because it is our heritage, belonging both to our past and our future, our shared journey together with the Earth. The beat of the drum and the cry of the flute, the sacred song and the sound of feet dancing, all these are the ways our ancestors knew to commune with the Earth. Different music, different songs for the seasons, for times of planting and harvesting, for the hunt. The scent of ceremonial tobacco hanging in the night air. And so we need to relearn how to speak to the trees and the rivers and the stars, to whisper our deepest secrets to the still night air, and remember how we are all one family, bonded from the very beginning.

And with these words I am trying to tell the story of the early days, of laughter and joy and belonging. I am pointing down pathways of the garden of the soul, flowers and fruit trees, springs of clear water. And look, there children are playing, the moment is present with magic and sacred meaning, as well as fun and humor. Because we banished ourselves, we are always searching for what is already around us, spring blossoms falling. Our whole culture is an exile, the ground become barren beneath our feet. Yes, Indigenous Peoples hold much of the wisdom of those early years, the songlines and gifts of the Earth. In their language and stories they passed down this heritage, even as they were often banished, denied their voice together with the land that taught them. But we cannot return to their ways—those times in the forests or the desert are too far away for most of us. Instead we must walk our own path, rediscover with our own feet the ground that is so close and so distant. But before we can find what we need, we have to acknowledge that we are lost.

It is hard to see a whole civilization lose its way, becoming buried under the debris of its consumerist dreams and patterns of exploitation. But what has been lost can be found in a new way, as a reawakening of the soul of humanity and the soul of the world. For many years to come the outer world will continue to pay its price of social and economic collapse as this civilization encounters climate crisis, and the present pandemic has given us a foretaste of this. But for those whose hearts are open there is a seed of a new way to be, and this is what draws my attention: holding a connection between the worlds, the outer world of form and the inner world of spirit, bringing them back together in a dance of love. And while this has been the way of shamans and seers since the very early days, there is a new note present now, a call and a response: the cry of the Earth has been heard by those who belong to love and something can be given to the heart of the world to help it to sing.

This is why the return to the first day is so essential, because in that time before time is a place of purity and healing, “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal.” And from this water something new can be born—not from the structures of the past, with its patterns of power and inequality, its split between masculine and feminine, spirit and matter, but in the wholeness of life as it was in the beginning.

Like all seeds this new beginning will wait, germinating in the darkness until the outer world turns and a season of spring comes back to the land. Sadly, because of our greed and abuse of the Earth, this coming season of winter, of darkness, may last decades. We are entering a time of the darkening of the light that belongs to the end of an era. At this

point all our dreams of a global systems change or spiritual awakening are premature. Even in the present pandemic—when one would hope that its shock would warn us of the danger of denying climate science, of waiting until it is too late—there is little indication of real change. Rather we are seeing a desire by governments to “return to normal” as quickly as possible, even though as a piece of graffiti in Hong Kong written early in the pandemic stated, “We can’t return to normal, because the normal that we had was precisely the problem.”

And because our global systems based upon the myth of material prosperity are so entrenched, supported by autocratic leaders and corrupt corporations, as soon as possible we will return to cheap flights and disposable goods, continue polluting our air and filling our oceans with yet more plastic, clear-cutting more of our ancient forests for palm oil plantations. Present power structures and fear of real change will ensure that we perpetuate the imbalance that caused this crisis, and the social and racial injustice that make sure that the poor suffer most. To “escape the life of commodity and replace it with the life of community” and learn once again to live in harmony with nature will take time and pain as the old structures break down. But those who are keepers of the sacred ways will hold the seed in their hearts and in the Earth, and water it with their prayers and tears, as they have always done.

Yes, we will have to learn how to live at the end of an era, at a time of increasing insecurity, disturbance, even chaos. We will see more and more the value of care, compassion, and community, and develop the tools of radical resilience, as we are already recognizing in our response to the virus. But most importantly, we will discover again what it means to work for a future seven generations or longer. We may try to imagine a future of clean energy and locally grown food, of shifting to more of a gift economy. But for life to regenerate, for this seed to grow, we have to be first open to unknowing and insecurity, allowing the deeper organic wisdom of the Earth to resurface, a wisdom that knows the wholeness inherent in all things, in which humanity is not seen as separate from the land and its many inhabitants. Without this return to what is essential we will remain in the ruins of this fragmented, desolate world we have created.

Of course even in these decades of darkening there will be the small joys of life and love—the sparkle in a child’s eyes and a lover’s kiss. We will bake bread and make jam from the fruit in the garden and maybe replace some of our technology with silence and listening. Our world is not going to be saved by science; its wounds are too deep, its imbalance too fundamental. But there is new knowledge to be learned, awaiting our discovery, as well as the ancient knowing of the Earth that can teach us. The Earth is always generous. What matters is that we relearn humility and receptivity, and stop trying to impose our will upon nature. While we cannot return to the simplicity of an Indigenous lifestyle, we can rediscover ways to live that do not further alienate us from our common home. But at this present time, rather than make plans for new systems or an imagined future that may never happen, our journey needs to take us back through the doorway into the present moment where the garden of the world soul needs our attention.

My story has drawn me back to this place of pure love and light and joy, this place of becoming where the essence of life takes on form, as in the minutes after the Big Bang when light was born. It is a memory within me of the early days of our human time here on the Earth, when everything was alive and known according to its true nature, and the song of the soul of the world could be heard clearly—in the sounds of creation, the rain falling, the chorus of the cicadas, the call of the screech owl, but also in the silences that belonged to that time. And now, as the sun has broken through the mist in the early morning, and I look out on the garden my wife created on the hillside near our house, I

can still feel this presence. Here it is springtime, the fruit trees full of buds becoming blossoms, the wisteria falling lavender blue over the garden shed. Soon other colors will come, purples and yellows and pinks, bringing new fragrance; the garden will come alive with buddleia bushes and foxgloves, clematis climbing the fence, hummingbirds' tiny beaks drinking nectar. This is a meeting place of the worlds where all are welcomed, the spirits of the land and beings of light, full of natural magic, and this is how it always was in the beginning.

II

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed how quickly an imbalance in nature can and will affect us all, suddenly, without concern for borders or boundaries. We have witnessed our health care system being overwhelmed, our economic structures failing, with social inequality growing as the lines for food banks lengthen. And anyone not caught in the delusions of denial knows that this is just a warning, a harbinger of our coming climate crisis. Yes, there are hopeful signs of how quickly nature returns, with the air suddenly less polluted as our human activity slows, cormorants returning to dive for fish they can now see in the canals of Venice, wild goats roaming the streets of a Welsh village. But this pause will not last. And as so many are suffering under our inadequate global response to the temporary reality of this pandemic, our passage through climate crisis will be far more painful.

To limit this coming crisis there is so much work to be done in the outer world: cutting carbon emissions, planting trees, restoring wetlands, turning to renewable energy sources, changing our diet to less meat and dairy, and working on economic models that can heal our present social and racial inequality. We will all need to participate in ways to let go of the old world, to simplify, to live more sustainably. In the place of such tangible challenges, why should we give attention to a dream, a vision of a mythical first day? How can this help us alleviate the coming suffering?

There is a simple reason. We are the children of a civilization that has lost its way, that has put financial profit before well-being, and is pathologically destroying its own ecosystem. Unless we find our way back, all of our efforts will not bring the world into balance. There is a vital need to return to "the root of the root," and at the very core of our predicament is our forgetfulness of the sacred nature of creation. Having forgotten that the Earth is sacred, we use it as a resource to be exploited, and human beings have become consumers to fulfill this economic model.

And so there is a need, a calling, to return to the beginning, before the gates of Eden closed behind us, before we forgot the sacred nature of all that exists. It is a truth that every real journey is a return, "to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." Such a journey is one of remembrance, an uncovering of what is essential, even if so often hidden beneath the surface. And now, as our global structures are shown to fail, when our images of progress are shown as false, we need to go back to a story outside of time, to when the Source ran free.

And we need to remember the power of stories. The story that has created our present global civilization is one of constant economic growth and consumerism. It is the foundation of the American Dream and the idea that each generation will be better off

than its parent's generation, with the understanding that "more is better." This story has lifted millions out of poverty and yet at the same time has little concern for our actual well-being, and its dark side is its ecological impact. It is a belief system now creating increasing inequality and ecocide, as well as stealing the future from coming generations. As Greta Thunberg simply stated:

"Our civilization is being sacrificed for the opportunity of a very small number of people to continue making enormous amounts of money. Our biosphere is being sacrificed so that rich people in countries like mine can live in luxury. It is the sufferings of the many which pay for the luxuries of the few."

This story has enriched and empowered the few, and entranced us to such a degree that we are imprisoned by its beliefs. Again to quote Greta, "You only talk about moving forward with the same bad ideas that got us into this mess. Even when the only sensible thing to do is pull the emergency brake."

And now for a short moment, when the pandemic has pulled the emergency brake, we have the opportunity to remember that there is another story, a story so powerful it has remained in our unconscious memories, in our myths, for millennia. It is far more "real" than the story of cheap goods from China. It belongs to our very beginning and to the source of life. And rather than impoverishing us, it can empower us; rather than destroying the web of life it can sustain all of creation.

And it is a love story, because love is the basis of all that exists—the energy, the power that sustains creation. Without love atoms would stop spinning just as hope would die. The mystic knows that the whole of the created world is an outpouring of love, sustained by love. And back at the beginning, in the moment that is always present, love and light were born together—from out of the emptiness, the formless, love came into being, weaving the threads of existence. And even now, when we have lost our way, love or the longing for love still belongs to the central essence of being human. We can see this in our primal response to the present pandemic, love and care for others surfacing in a time of need. And yet collectively we are still living a story about money, without heart, without this central note. We need to find our way back to love, and the forgotten garden of the soul reconnects us to love—this is a part of its mystery, its magic.

And love belongs to oneness. We know this in our human relationships, how love draws us closer, and in its most intimate moments we can experience physical union with another. It can also awaken us to the awareness that we are one human family, and on the deepest level love can reconnect us to our essential unity with all of life, with the Earth Herself. Love will remind us that we are a part of life—that we belong to each other and to this living, suffering planet. We just need to say "yes" to this mystery within our own hearts, to open to the link of love that unites us all, that is woven into the web of life. Only from this place of living oneness can we support each other in this present crisis and then walk into a future that recognizes, and feels, the sacred nature of all that exists, and so help to bring our world back into balance. We can emerge from this pandemic with a deeper sense of our shared humanity and our love for our common home, its mystery and wonder. Or we can remain stranded on the desolate shores of materialism, as in a supermarket where the shelves are increasingly empty.

Love, like the garden of the soul, is not far away, hidden in some distant forest or behind a mountain range. Love is just here in our hearts, as well as in the air around us. And love is the ground of joy, the simple wonder of life being born. We can most easily feel both love and joy in the birth of a child, in this essential blessing. And then hear it in the

laughter of children, watch it in their games, before they remember to be like their parents and to forget, before life is covered over, when it is still each moment lived for itself, before the demands of growing up come pushing in. Always, if one looks closely, something magical is present, something that can neither be taught nor learned, and is sadly often lost with teaching and learning. It is a bird singing and sunlight on water.

Why some children are given this most precious yet simple childhood gift, while others never come to know it, is also a mystery. It may be more often found in a tenement than a mansion. I never knew it in my own middle-class childhood, and I do not think that my parents even knew that it existed. I had to wait to experience it through the eyes, the play and laughter, of my own children, to sense its magic, and then sadly see it passing as they left childhood behind. I think it belongs to love, and that where love is present it flowers and flows. Without love there is no soil for joy. But love can be present in so many forms there is no limit to where joy might show up, to where the wonder of life's springtime might bloom.

Our journey is now to remember, to reconnect, to return to this place of love and joy and beginnings. This is where the future will be born, not in some plan or project, however well intentioned. Without this wonder life will be stillborn, without this love the days will be grey rather than filled with color and discovery. This is the beauty of the story we are being offered, something so simple, so primary it is easy to overlook. But if we can recapture the laughter and wonder of children, if we can hold that note of love, and bring it into our lives—into our cooking and companionship, into our daily encounters with each other and with the Earth—then a secret will return. We will find that we are no longer exiles, but that the ground under our feet is sacred, and we are held, supported, nourished by life around us, by our friends and communities, human and other-than-human. Like a tree in a forest we will know that we are not alone, but part of a web, a network of life, healing, helping, nurturing each other, as it should always have been, before we decided that competition was more important than cooperation, before we forgot the original instructions, before we lost our way.

III

How do we take a story off the pages of a book and return it to our lives? For most Indigenous Peoples stories are part of their oral tradition, often told again and again, but also a part of their way of life, their relationship to the animals and plants around them and the spirit of the land that was always sacred. Skywoman scattered the seeds of all kinds of plants; the first seed was sweetgrass, whose scent helps you to remember things you have forgotten, while the legend of the Salmon ensures the salmon's return each year by throwing the salmon bones back into the river. Story and ritual are passed down from generation to generation, shaping traditions and lifestyles, reflecting a living connection to the land. But now our culture and our land are dying because our central story has no heart and its relationship to the Earth is one of domination rather than cooperation or gratitude.

In returning to the beginning we need to find a place where this story can come alive and speak to us in our own language. Then its magic can awaken, and the simple power of a

living story can help us to live in harmony with the Earth, both physically and spiritually. We can return to the bond of love that is at the core of our shared existence. Once again we can journey together with the Earth.

It is essential to understand that for early storytellers the seen and unseen worlds, matter and spirit, were not separate. Animals are imbued with spirit; mountains, lakes, and other sacred places have spiritual power. There are many places where one can feel the presence of the spirit world—in groves of old trees, or amidst ancient standing stones. The senses become more attuned to what is unseen, to feelings rather than facts. So, for example, a Tibetan Buddhist's pilgrimage from place to place is also an inner visionary journey. There is no separation between them. Waking and dreaming intertwined in the original stories; Skywoman's original instructions, still valid today, instructed the people to "use your gifts and dreams for good."

Even in today's forgetfulness, the power of spirit can be felt in moments in nature. I remember when, as a young man, I first experienced a tropical storm while on an island off the coast of Papua New Guinea. First I could see a wall of dark cloud stretching from the sea to sky on the horizon, and then the wind came, bending the palm trees almost to the ground. Finally the rain arrived, a vertical wall of water, saturating everything in moments. It was magnificent, powerful, leaving me soaked and in awe. All of my senses were immersed, attuned to its strength. On a summer's morning a web of dew sparkling in the early sun evokes a similar quality of wonder, though for a fragile transient beauty.

In such moments the spirit world feels very present; awe and wonder speak to us. Sadly we mostly pass by, not recognizing how our soul was touched. But if we can stay with these moments "in and out of time," we will find we are present in a world very different from our busy lives—we are back on the Earth where our ancestors walked, before a curtain fell between the worlds, before we began to forget. Here there is no time, no image of progress, no need to possess or accumulate. Instead we are present in the life that nourishes our soul as well as our senses. This is the story of the first day, and if we can hold it, feel how it speaks to us, then we can help it to move into the pages of our own life.

Then our life becomes not just a journey through time, but a pilgrimage that takes place in different dimensions, and leads us, like the passage through the labyrinth, back to the center, to our secret self waiting to be discovered and then lived. And if we can leave behind the idea of separation, we will discover that our secret is also part of the Earth's secret, our dreaming part of the Earth's mystery. This is the rich tapestry of interweaving worlds that is part of our heritage, that remains in storytelling, where the land is alive, animals and birds can speak and trees can reach out to us. Consciousness is not just limited to people, but belongs to an animate world that we all inhabit. The simple power of story can return us to a living Earth in which "God is alive and magic is afoot."

In order to step back into the story of the first day we need to find a moment that speaks to us, that takes us out of the confines of our rational self into a more multihued, multidimensional reality. This is our older mind that thinks in images rather than words, that dreams and is more fluid than our linear thoughts. Children still live in this pre-rational self, as do artists, poets, and lovers, and they help to keep open the door for others whose consciousness is more constricted. But we can all reconnect and remember. It is where all of our stories began.

Because we are at the end of an era, a time of dying, we are also at a beginning. This is the nature of time that is not linear but cyclical, like the seasons and the sun. As we watch our systems fail we have a simple choice of whether to remain with these patterns of human and ecological abuse. Or can we imagine a different way to be that recognizes the sacred nature of all creation? There are signs of this second path in the ways of First Peoples, their earth wisdom, but so much has been lost along with their language and land, clear-cut like the ancient old-growth forests.

In our Western culture there are fewer traces of this earlier knowing. We have lost the teachings of the pre-Christian pagan world, and instead inherited a culture in which the Earth is not sacred, or magical, but a place of exile from heaven. And the dominance of rational thought in recent centuries has made our exile more total. Myths, dreams, and stories have lost their power. But if we are to survive the coming winter, we need to reclaim their numinosity, to walk in the symbolic landscape of our ancestors, and to hold that experience as a seed for the future.

This story I have been telling of the first day is just one way to remind us of what we have lost, and of how we might return to the garden. Just as there are many pathways in the garden of the soul, there are many ways to come to the gateway. What matters is that we value this work of our inner self and how it can lay a foundation for future generations. If we make this work of remembrance and reconnection, then the children of our children's children will find the signs that they need to help create a civilization that is not an exile but a place of belonging. And maybe, if it is born from love, the heart of the world will start to sing, and spring can come again to the land. ♦

An audio recording of this essay is available [here](#).

[1] When I refer to “the beginning,” rather than describing a particular historical period of our human experience, I am referencing an inner, mythic experience of life as being lived in close relation to the sacred and the Earth, before the Fall, before the story of separation from the Source, or the Divine, became part of our consciousness. However, I do believe that there were periods and places in our history when this quality of consciousness was central to our way of life, as is still reflected in some indigenous cultures.

[2] References to the Skywoman story come from Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*