An Ecology of Selves

We are walking ecosystems. Inside of our intestines live microbes that produce up to 90% of our serotonin, a neurotransmitter; in other words, there are beings producing thoughts in our guts.¹

When I first learned this, I experienced an ontological shift—a rearrangement of the reality I had known. I was never alone. I was made up of other beings who participated in a body that I had always believed to be just mine. Where, then, were the limits of my “self” if they did not align with that enclosed, isolated body?

The form of attention triggered by learning this fact led to a kind of self-emptying, steps that Douglas Christie describes in *Blue Sapphire of the Mind* (2013) in Christian monastic terms as *prosoche* and *kenosis*, respectively. These are necessary steps on the path to practicing contemplative ecology. They allow the practitioner to “notice and cherish the *koinonia* or community in which one had been invited to dwell, and to commit oneself to the life and health of the community.”²

It is almost paradoxical that we build this larger community through attention to the specific, through knowing where we are and what the local communities are in which we participate. “Nature” cannot be connected to in the abstract—only in the specific—lest we run the risk of producing inaccurate, alienating generalizations. Vandana Shiva calls this “decentered diversity”, which is agency-producing and justice-enacting.³ Womanist theologian Melanie L. Harris suggests starting with our own “eco-memories”, or “one’s own environmental familial roots and spiritual connections,” in order to achieve the attention to the specific that leads to greater community.⁴ We must bring this attention-informed specificity to our Earth community in order to truly appreciate it and participate in it.

The land places demands on us. Water places demands on us. They demand our attention (*prosoche*); they demand the emptying of the little ego of the self (*kenosis*); they demand the identification of the self with the larger Earth community (*koinonia*). The soil is our external metabolism. Our bodies are integral components of the greater body of the earth. Identity, individuality, and selfhood are extended over place and time, reaching out toward all life forms who surround us, who came before us and who will come after us. This is why the land and waters can place demands on us: because they *are* us. We are overlapping points in a great ecology of selves.

(Cont. page 2)
I join the WATERSPIRIT community with my own eco-memories of bioregions far from this one, yet also carrying my mother’s fond childhood memories of going “down the Shore.” I feel new ones forming in the little awe-produced place-out-of-time when the Navesink River opens before me on Oceanic Bridge, heading toward Waterspirit’s headquarters. These new waters are placing demands on me. They are already me; I am already them.

-Blair Nelsen


The climate crisis is an emergency. On September 20 people everywhere will walk out of their homes and workplaces together, and join youth-led #ClimateStrike actions demanding that leaders respond to this emergency. You can find more information and join here: globalclimatestrike.net.

Waterspirit has beautifully printed “In Honor of” and “In Memory of” Cards that help you give a card while making a donation in support of Waterspirit. If you would like more information on the cards, please call or email us. We will be happy to mail you some cards!

Empower NJ is a coalition of environmental, citizen, faith, and progressive groups in New Jersey launching a grassroots campaign calling on Governor Murphy to act quickly on climate change by stopping pending fossil fuel projects and their greenhouse gas emissions. (Empower NJ Mission Statement)

“Woven into our lives is the very fire from the stars and the genes from the sea creatures, and everyone, utterly everyone is kin in the radiant tapestry of being.” ~ Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ
Waterspirit Welcomes New Executive Director Blair Nelsen

Earlier this year, Sister Suzanne announced her plans to retire. Shortly thereafter, a hiring committee was formed to find Waterspirit’s next Executive Director. Their assignment was certainly a consequential one: after all, Suzanne has been at the helm of Waterspirit since its founding more than 20 years ago and her leadership has made Waterspirit into the force it is.

After a comprehensive search and hiring process, a decision was reached. We are delighted to announce that as of July 1, Blair Nelsen is the Executive Director of Waterspirit.

Blair joins us from Yale Divinity School, where she recently completed her Master of Arts in Religion, conducting research on eco-spirituality. Prior to attending Yale, Blair lived and worked in the Amazon and Atlantic forests of Brazil for 11 years, where she was engaged in grassroots ecological and spirituality work. Blair also holds an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies from Brown University and has obtained certifications in permaculture and tropical agroforestry.

“I believe in the potential of a strong spiritual foundation to fuel effective social justice work and I am thrilled to be joining the Waterspirit community,” Blair says. Sister Suzanne is staying on board to mentor Blair through the summer and fall – stay tuned for information regarding an event welcoming Blair and a celebration of Suzanne!

NESE Pipeline Defeat For Now!

On the evening of June 5, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) denied the Williams/Transco Northeast Supply Enhancement project (NESE) fracked gas pipeline six permits without prejudice. This pipeline would stretch more than 23 miles across the Raritan Bay and New York Bay.

This is a huge grassroots win for all in New Jersey who have been fighting to protect our communities, water, and air from this pipeline and a new 32,000 horsepower compressor station. In the NJDEP denial letter, the NJDEP explained that the dredging needed for the Raritan Bay pipeline could harm water quality by stirring up toxic contaminants like PCBs, mercury, and arsenic. Unfortunately, Williams/Transco resubmitted an application for this pipeline five days later on June 10.

We need to keep the pressure on the Murphy Administration to deny these permits. The Empower NJ No Fossil Fuel Projects Coalition is calling on the Governor to enact a moratorium on all new fossil fuel infrastructure in the State of NJ. We are urging everyone to call the Governor on “Moratorium Mondays” at 866-586-4069 (or any other day!) to advocate for clean renewable energy NOW, and for him to enact a moratorium on all new fossil fuel infrastructure in NJ. We cannot reach the renewable energy goals we need for climate change action now, and for clean safe air and water for all life, unless we put a stop to these new fossil fuel projects throughout NJ. Go to www.empowernj.com for more information.
From top, left to right: Meditation for Earth; Waterspirit Assistant Director Jean-Marie Donohue speaks at an Empower NJ Tour For A Moratorium; No Fossil Fuel Projects event; Waterspirit staffers past and present bond during the Water, Watercolor & Wine series; Drumming for Water is Life; Core of Fire dancers perform at Summer Solstice; Collective trash assemblage art with artist Lisa Bagwell at Eco-Fest; Barnegat Bay Oyster farmers serve their wares to appreciative event-goers at an Evening of Food, Drink, Film & Reflection; Some fun pictures from the Waterspirit Goat Yoga fundraiser; Spreading the word about Waterspirit at the Red Bank Street Fair; Essential oils and daffodils atop the Spring Equinox altar.
Calling all artists! Waterspirit is participating in the CREATE Core Courage art for social justice competition. For this competition, Waterspirit is inviting artists of all ages to use watercolors to express the importance of clean, safe water. Paintings might, for example, highlight issues of concern—places where water has not been respected and cared for—in order to raise awareness. Paintings might instead highlight the artist’s connection with water, like favorite places remembered or the brighter future we are working toward. Perhaps the painting moves beyond narratives of utopia and dystopia entirely. Let your creativity flow! Artwork must be submitted through the website in the form of a high-resolution digital image by September 1. Winners will be notified by September 15, when they will be invited to showcase the original work at the CREATE Core Courage social justice art event in mid-October.

If watercolors are not your preferred medium of expression, you might want to take a look at the other calls for submission on the event website, available at www.createcorecourage.art. Other issue areas include Earth Justice, Art Against Racism, Children’s Rights, Religious Freedom, Queer Rights, Disability Justice, Veteran’s Rights, and Modern Day Slavery. CREATE Core Courage’s mission is to bring attention to the continuing need for social and institutional change by sharing human experience through the unifying and healing language of art.

Monmouth County Eco Tour 2019

Waterspirit is a proud participant in the Monmouth County Eco Tour 2019. This tour intends to share local sustainable practices that create resilience in the community to connect, encourage and inspire others. The event will be held on Saturday, August 17 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at various locations throughout Monmouth County. At Waterspirit’s stop on the tour, visitors will be invited to join in a brief contemplative prayer for the Earth, with an Earth-honoring ritual to be conducted at 1:30pm. Prayer will take place in the Oak Grove at Waterspirit’s headquarters, or inside the sanctuary in case of rain. We would love to see you join us for this event. More information on the tour can be found at www.mocoecotour.com.
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Fall Equinox Celebration

An evening of ritual and reflection to celebrate Autumn’s bounty and beauty while reflecting on the deeper meaning of the season of cooling breezes and lengthening nights. The celebration will include live music by mystical folk-pop duo Tommy and Abby Anton. Refreshments to follow. Donations according to means. Reservations preferred.

Meditation for Earth

Join us for a contemplative prayer for Earth, music and silence. “The environmental challenge that we are experiencing and its human causes, affects us all and demands our response.” -Pope Francis.

For reservations or information on these programs or WATERSPIRIT, please contact us at water@waterspirit.org or (732) 923-9788.

MISSION STATEMENT

Waterspirit is a center of ecology and spirituality that informs, inspires, and enables all people to deepen their consciousness of the sacredness and interdependence of all creation with a focus on water as critical in sustaining all life.

Waterspirit
is a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

INCOMING TIDE

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