The Adventure of Creativity

BY **ROGER BERTSCHAUSEN**, SENIOR MINISTER, FOX VALLEY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP, APPLETON, WISCONSIN

Many years ago I was working very late one Saturday night on a sermon. This particular sermon was about the mythological Jesus. The main point of the sermon was that I really don't care whether there is a shred of historical truth in the story of Jesus. What I care about is that it's a good story, and it contains truths about life—about how to live my life.

Here's the scene: It's ten or eleven at night, and I've got nothing—just a few fragments with nothing holding them together. There's no clock, but I feel a clock ticking away anyway, each passing moment inching me closer to reaching for the panic button. Suddenly, out of nowhere, an image pops into my head. It's an altar painting by Matthias Grunewald that I studied a dozen years earlier and heard Mark Belletini mention in a sermon more than a decade ago. Named the "Isenheim Altarpiece," the piece dates back to the early 1500s. The crucifixion panel in the piece is one of those gruesome ones I generally don't care for: fingers distended, limbs twisting, blood oozing from various wounds, and, maybe most hideous of all, festering lesions all over the crucified Jesus' body. Another panel on the altarpiece paints an entirely different picture of Jesus: it depicts a beautiful, fully healed, radiant and joyous Risen Christ shooting up from the grave. Gone are the lesions. Gone is the pain. I have to say that this panel struck me initially as a little bit hokey.

But the interesting thing is that Grunewald painted the altarpiece for a hospital chapel. Many of the patients at that hospital suffered from a gruesome skin disease that produced the same kind of lesions Grunewald painted onto Jesus. Imagine the power of that painting for those patients: here's their Lord, suffering just as they were suffering. And here he is healed! The patients experienced this Jesus not as a historical person locked in a distant place 1500 years earlier, but as a living presence right then and right there in the hospital. Jesus was a presence that acknowledged the horror of their disease, but also a sense of hope, a sense that they were all something more than their disease. This, I think as I sit there in my dining room, this is the timeless, mythological Jesus. With that image in my mind, the sermon instantly gels. I look around the dining room: Where did *that* come from?

A second story: At a recent congregational gathering, I invited participants to use art supplies we had assembled to create an image of the divine (or whatever was of ultimate concern to them). I'll be honest (though I wasn't honest initially with the class). I hate this kind of project. I have lots of voices whispering in my head: "You are not creative. You do not have an artistic bone in your body. Everybody is going to laugh at what you create. You can't do this." Call these voices the anti-Muses. So I figured as the leader of the class I'd make myself too busy to do the project. But the better angels of my nature whispered, "You better do this project, buddy." So I took a deep breath and tried to open myself up to the creative process.

I decided to go up to the supply table without any preconceived notions about what I might try to create. I'd try to let the supplies and the possibilities speak to me. This was venturing into new, scary territory for me. I grabbed some playdough and some pipe cleaners and some shiny half marbles and returned to my seat.

Quest

Vol. LXVIII, No. 5 May 2013

The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT CREATION

- THE ADVENTURE OF CREATIVITY *Roger Bertschausen*
- THE GARDEN OF EDEN *Charles Blustein Ortman*
- WHERE I COME FROM IS LIKE THIS *Meg Barnhouse*
- FROM YOUR MINISTER *Meg Riley*
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING *Lynn Ungar*
- ANOTHER KIND OF KNOWLEDGE *Scott Russell Sanders*

As I sat looking at the supplies, I thought about images of the divine that spoke to me. I found myself imagining a craggy tree seemingly growing out of a rock. I love seeing that little miracle in nature. It speaks to me of the divine—the unquenchable spirit of life, beautifully imperfect and tenacious which springs forth sometimes where you least expect it. The divine is grounded in this world, in the rocky earth. So the black playdough became the earth. Gold pipe cleaners became the tree trunk, green pipe cleaners the leaves. The shiny half marbles became the rocks. I created an image of the divine that I absolutely love. I can't pretend it's an artistic masterpiece—but it's meaningful to me. As I sat looking at it, I thought, *Where did that come from*?

Here's another story—this time not mine. This is the story of the people on earth who saved the wounded Apollo 13 spacecraft from what seemed like certain doom. As the movie depicted, after the spacecraft's explosion, a bunch of NASA scientists and technicians sat down with all the contents they knew were onboard the spaceship. What they had to work with were things like duct tape and operating manuals. While the crew struggled to keep going on board the ship, the ground crew figured out what critical needs the astronauts had. And they figured out how the space crew could use what they had onboard to meet these critical needs. They tried one idea and concluded it didn't work. They tried another, and another, and another. Eventually they figured it out. *Together* they figured it out. Where did they get that ingenuity? Where did it come from?

Process theology asserts that we co-create the world with the divine. God is the force pulling us forward. God is the force encouraging us to be good and whole people. God is love. But we make decisions and we take actions. God doesn't do those things for us. God doesn't make us do those things. We do these things, perhaps encouraged and influenced by God. Or not. We are playmates with God. Our shared playground is the world.

> Each of our individual lives is one giant creative exercise.

So, in the process view, everything we do helps create or shape the world. Each of our individual lives is one giant creative exercise. With each step forward, we create something. Sometimes it's beautiful. Sometimes it's not. But each moment of life, each step forward, is a creative moment. This is what process theology means when it says we "co-create" the world.

The implication of this understanding is that all of us are creative. If you're alive, you're creative. Even if you can't draw a stick figure or rhyme a line. Even if you are tone deaf and dance like you have two left feet. Telling myself I wasn't creative was a lie. We are all creative.

Another implication of this belief is that creativity is not limited to the arts. The Apollo 13 ground crew's efforts to figure out how they could get the ship safely home was every bit as infused with creative opportunity as my work at the craft supply table. Life presents us with one creative possibility after another.

But where does all that creativity come from? The ancient Greeks had an answer: creativity comes from the Muses. The goddesses who are the Muses come up to you, whisper in your ear, or they whisper from inside you. They are the source of creativity in Greek mythology.

Did the Greeks mean that creativity *literally* comes from the Muses? I don't think so. At least that's not how I interpret their explanation. The whispering Muse just provides a picture of where creativity comes from. It's an image, a metaphor. It portrays what it feels like when a creative idea pops into our consciousness. I didn't feel like a Muse burst into my dining room and whispered "Isenheim Altarpiece" in my ear as I panicked about my sermon. But it did feel like the image popped into my consciousness from somewhere outside of me, or very deep within me. Picturing a Muse whispering the idea into my ear is a good image of what happened.

So though the Muses explanation is not literally true, it captures certain truths about the creative process. One significant truth for me is that creativity comes from something beyond just me. There is some alchemy of brain and experience and wisdom that adds up to more than me. There is something, well, divine about creativity—not divine like the controlling God of orthodoxy zapping it into me, but divine in the Process Theology sense of God as the Call Forward.

You never quite know when the Muse will arrive. I don't think there's anything I can do to compel the Muse to appear. But I do think there are things I can do to invite the Muse to visit. I can slow down and be quiet and connect with nature. Slowing down and finding peace and quiet seems to pretty consistently invite the Muse to visit. It creates in me a sense of openness and receptivity. Sometimes I wonder if the Muse isn't there far more often than I realize, but I'm just too busy or preoccupied to hear her whispers.

Another thing that helps me invite the Muse is letting go of the self-judgments and doubts. Those mantras I reflexively started chanting when

faced with the art project do not invite in the Muse. They put up walls against her. What works best for me is to gently notice these mantras. Heaping more self-recrimination on and declaring, "What a loser I am for having these thoughts that I'm a creative Neanderthal," doesn't help. Instead, I need to notice the presence of such thoughts without judgment, and then politely but firmly ask them to leave.

Of course, when it comes to inviting in the Muse, different things work for different people. Slowing down and being quiet might be helpful for you. But the Muse might be more likely to visit when you are active or using your hands. Different things work at different times. Solitude can help invite the Muse in. But sometimes—like with the NASA ground crew struggling to save the Apollo 13 astronauts—it's being with people that helps invite the Muse.

Our co-creation with the divine is a complicated, unpredictable and utterly unavoidable task. There is no way to know when the Muses will show up, or what they will say. But it is our job to listen, and to offer our creative best to this world we create together. ■

General Assembly

CLF members are invited to volunteer to be delegates at the 2013 UUA General Assembly (GA) in Louisville, KY. Delegates for the CLF vote their own conscience and provide help at the CLF worship service and in the CLF booth in the exhibit hall. Unfortunately, we are not able to help with GA expenses. It is also possible to be an offsite delegate. Go to http://www.uua.org/ga/congregations/index.shtml for information. Contact CLF Executive Director **Lorraine Dennis** at **ldennis@clfuu.org or 617-948-6166 by June 1st** if you would like to volunteer. ■

The Garden of Eden

BY **CHARLES BLUSTEIN ORTMAN**, SENIOR MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION AT MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

I was nine or ten when my mother gave me permission to plant and tend my first garden. She was a gardener too. In addition to ten children, my mother raised several lavish beds of exquisite purple and gold irises. I've associated irises with her ever since, and so they've always been my favorite flower.

My garden wasn't a flower garden, though. I was given a rectangular patch of ground out behind the garage, and in it I planted my two favorite vegetables—corn and peas. The children in my family didn't have much use for vegetables as a rule. But we all liked corn and at least some of us liked peas. I liked them both, and so that's what I chose to try to grow.

That gardening project (and subsequent gardens too) provided as much of a miracle as I had ever experienced, or would experience until the birth of my children years later. You plant seeds in the dirt. Through the summer you make sure that they have plenty of water and that they aren't choked out by too many weeds. You watch the seeds sprout into little plants that grow and grow. And then you witness the very beginning formation of the fruit. In time, spikes on the corn plant develop into the fullness of ears, and the little pods on the sprawling vines swell as a row of peas takes full shape inside them. And when the time is right…you get to eat them! It's truly astonishing for a nine-year-old—or for someone of any age.

It's small wonder that the writers of the Book of Genesis chose a garden as the setting where our story, our common human story, begins. I always thought I was particularly lucky to have a garden early on in my personal narrative. And at least in this Western Civilization, we all have this story of an exquisite, metaphorical, mythical garden as our shared beginning. The flourishing Garden of Eden, complete with its rivers and jungles and forests and orchards. Complete with its lush flora and teeming fauna. Complete with its myriad creatures. The key word in all of these descriptive phrases is *complete*. In this ancient creation story of our culture, the world and all of its almost innumerable parts were complete, were one—one with God.

In this ancient creation story of our culture, the world and all of its almost innumerable parts were complete, were one—one with God.

I have to believe that the metaphorical God of Genesis was as blown away watching his garden develop as I was watching my peas and corn come along, except maybe a bazillion times more so. Can you imagine what it might have been like to give witness to and midwife the first orchid, the first watermelon, the first three-toed sloth, the first...everything?

As I picture it in the Book of Genesis, God isn't necessarily a singular being. I prefer to think of creation happening in this story through the agency of a whole group of super beings. What would these gods have said to each other as they stood and watched the very first sky-blue robin's egg crack open and give way to the peculiar little creature that emerged from inside? "Holy moly!" Or some expletive.

And then, what might they have said when they created the first human being, and then the second? I have to imagine they were rather pleased with

themselves, at least at first. I suspect our group of metaphorical gods must have been quite delighted with themselves and their creation altogether. I wonder how long it might have taken, though, for them to tire of all that perfect *completion*. Perhaps it was a few days; maybe an eon. I wonder how long it might have taken them to cook up the idea of the two trees in the center of the garden—the tree of life and the tree that contained the knowledge of good and evil. Now that was a stroke of divine genius!

That little bite of apple doesn't represent a fall so much as it represents a blossoming.

The presentation might have unfolded in a scene like this…. The chief god is riding along on the breeze during one of his early evening visits with the first couple. I picture him moving along, humming a little celestial air, "La dee dah, dee dah dah…Oh, by the way, Adam and Eve, don't eat any of the fruit from that tree over there. Those apples… they contain more knowledge than either of you are capable of dealing with. You can't handle truth like that." And of course you know what has to happen next, whether or not you've ever heard the story before.

Sure enough, along comes the snake, and Eve is totally enthralled. Some historians believe that the snake represents the more earthy, the more nature-oriented (dare I say *matriarchal*) religions that preceded our Judeo-Christian strain. The new gods bait the trap; the old snake makes it irresistible. Humanity takes the bite that launches us, forever after, into a state of self-awareness and disunion from the wholeness of that garden, of that original completion.

The garden is the metaphorical uterus of the universe out of which we are expelled. We are no longer ignorant of our existence, no longer fed without our own personal effort, no longer sheltered without the sweat of our brow. Having emerged from the garden, we are no longer capable of being in effortless harmony with *All-That-Is.*

I suspect that in the story, the gods had to feign anger at Adam and Eve for having broken the one taboo that would have prevented them from becoming fully human. But I suspect that the whole gang of gods must have secretly cheered as the prospect of the unpredictable found its way into their design. Creativity now gained expression beyond the gods' own efforts. Creativity was now also in the minds and hearts and hands of mortals. The gods must have been quite pleased that their plan to get the kids to move out of the garden was so successful. Easy enough for the gods.

Having sprung from that metaphorical womb of the garden was quite a different story for humanity, though—a story fraught with unknown possibilities of free will. And so a part of our struggle has been to get back to the garden ever since. As Joni Mitchell puts it in her song "Woodstock":

We are stardust;
We are golden;
We are billion year old carbon;
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.

It would have been easier, yes? It would have been easier to have stayed in that fertile crescent of divine completion. Easier to have stayed in the garden where we were *one*, unseparated from the universe, from mother/father god. It would be simpler even now to be back in that garden—not to be challenged by issues of the environment or oppression or world hunger; issues of political inflexibility or sectarian warfare. We would have no need to anguish over the things we don't know, and more over things we *do* know. We wouldn't have to worry about where we came from or what might be our ultimate destiny. We would never have to fret over unrequited love, or grieve the loss of a loved one, or mourn the advent or the conclusion of a debilitating disease or some other loss.

If we didn't know ourselves as ourselves, we could not know of a universe where anything less than completion or wholeness is possible. In such a garden we couldn't experience a sense of separation from our source, from one another or from our planet. Nor though, could we appreciate the beauty of the very earthly, very spiritual connections that do hold us all together.

There are religious perspectives that encourage people to go back, to deny the world. There are religious perspectives that encourage people to consider themselves as separate from creation in order to be closer to God, closer to the source of being, closer to a state of bliss that might be achieved by shutting the world out.

But I believe theologian Matthew Fox got it right when he described the fall in the garden, not as original sin, but as "original blessing." That little bite of apple doesn't represent a fall so much as it represents a blossoming.

The first garden was never meant to be ours forever. We had to leave in order to learn what it was and who we are. We had to leave in order to learn how to hold life and those in it as precious. We had to leave in order to learn to care and to love. We had to leave so we could figure out ways of growing—not back to, but forwards toward—the garden, carrying with us our burgeoning humanity of knowledge and love.

Here's the thing—our desire to get back to the garden is as natural to us as breathing. But unless we are able to leave that shelter first, then nothing else could ever be precious to us. Until we are expelled from the garden, until we choose life, we are incapable of loving anything or anyone. What being human allows us is the possibility of recognizing our mortality, so that we might hold dear every moment and

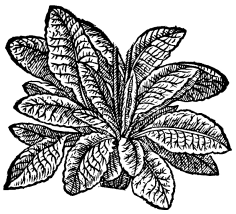
every connection that makes us real, makes us alive, that makes us human in this world.

The truth of it is that we are all challenged by issues of the environment and oppression and world hunger, issues of political inflexibility and sectarian warfare. We do anguish over some of the things we don't know, and over many more that we do. We are left to consider, often with more than a slight amount of trepidation, where we come from and what might be our ultimate destiny. We do fret over unrequited love; we grieve the loss of loved ones; we mourn the ravages of disease and other losses. We do all of these because that's the result of self-awareness, the result of being human.

In this all-too-short script that is our life, these are the blossoms and the vegetation, the annuals and perennials, that we have been given to cultivate so that we might grow our souls.

Our lives are beautiful accumulations of all kinds of flowerings that come as the results of the gifts—*including the hardships*—that have been given to us Our part of the story is, and has always been, our free will—the care with which we choose to embrace or ignore the opportunities to tend the soil and the spirit in the ongoing work of creation.

We rejected Eden, that garden of naïveté, when we sprouted from the womb. Like Adam and Eve, our very nature calls us to the cultivation of discovery, appreciation and love. The garden we seek now is not the one that we left behind long ago. It is a much finer garden, with far richer soil, blessed by all the trials and tribulations that have been and that will be a part of our lives. We are stardust; We are golden; We are billion year old carbon; and we've got to work our way… up to the garden. ■



Where I Come From is Like This

BY **MEG BARNHOUSE**, MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

When I was twenty-three, I felt myself skating over the surface of my life. So focused on *who* I was, I wasn't paying attention to *where* I was. Beauties would pass me by. I would find my mind in tomorrow already, not noticing today. So I started seeing things out loud. "This is the time when the daffodils are blooming," I would say to myself. "The sky is pale blue, and there are wispy clouds way up high." My brain would retrieve the name of the clouds. Cirrus. My fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Greiner, called them "horse tails."

One good part of my spiritual path is earth-based, so I like to know where north, south, east, and west are from where I sit. I like to know what is underneath me, too. Three hundred and seventy million years ago there was an ocean here in South Carolina. It was narrowing because the tectonic plate that carried the continent of Africa was headed this way on a collision course. Three hundred and sixty-three million years ago it plowed into the plate carrying the North American continent. The edge of Africa was pushed underneath North America, and it melted. The earth here was pushed up into mountains as high as the Himalayas. The piece of Africa that melted floated up to the surface as the granite along the Pacolet River, whose waters powered the textile mills where Spartanburg County workers wove cotton into cloth until the mills closed down in the 1990s.

The rocks around my house were formed by heat and pressure eight to ten miles below the surface. They are on the surface now because, after the plates had collided for a hundred million years, they began pulling apart at the rate of an inch a year, eventually forming the Atlantic Ocean. Over time, weathering and erosion have removed maybe fifteen miles of surface. The Blue Ridge Mountains to the south and west of my house are remnants of the towering peaks …not even the remnants; they are the roots of those peaks, having made their way up from deep below.

Under my house is dense clay soil formed by the weathering of the rocks that have come to the surface. They are crystalline rocks made up of crystals of quartz, feldspar and mica, pyroxene, amphibole, and olivine. As water seeps into the molecules of the minerals and mixes with acid from the roots of plants, these minerals change into clay. The quartz breaks down into tiny pieces and becomes sand.

My yard looks still, but it is not. Change happens fast and change happens slowly, but change is always happening. Geologists call that "dynamic equilibrium." The earth is on the boil.

Life, says Zen therapist David K. Reynolds, is "playing ball on running water." Dynamic equilibrium. In order to keep my feet under me, I have to remember where I am. I want to know the names of the trees and the grasses. It is my goal to know always, no matter where I am, whether the moon is new or full, waxing or waning. There is a sliver of a new moon today. It rose just after the sun rose and will set just after the sun sets. It will rise a little later every day until, at full moon, it will rise as the sun sets.

I have to know where I am in order to be here for my life. I don't want to skate along the surface. Getting oriented helps me dig in. So I talk to myself about what I see, about what the earth is doing, about where I am in time, and about where I am on the crust of the planet.

From Waking Up the Karma Fairy: Life Lessons and Other Holy Adventures, *published by Skinner House Books in 2003.* ■

From Your Minister

BY **MEG RILEY**
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Thomas King, in his book, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* writes,

> *What if the creation story in Genesis had featured a flawed deity who was understanding and sympathetic rather than autocratic and rigid? Someone who, in the process of creation, found herself lost from time to time and in need of advice, someone who was willing to accept a little help with the more difficult decisions? What if the animals had decided on their own names? … What kind of world might we have created with that kind of story?*

Thomas King poses those questions after sharing a completely different kind of creation story than Genesis, a Native American story involving mud and rain and animals and humans and deities, all engaged in the messy process of co-creating a world of balance and connection and ongoing, meaningful relationships which are fraught with conflict. Not a perfect place, not a paradise created by a perfect God, which is then forever forbidden territory to humans, shamefully imperfect and disobedient as we are. Weirdly, though, as bad as we are, we're still better than anyone else in the garden, still masters over all other beings on earth.

A sentence repeated in each chapter of Thomas King's book is "The truth about stories is that's all we are." The poet Muriel Rukeyser said, similarly: "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms." The Anishinabe writer Gerald Vizenor says, "There isn't any center to the world but a story."

Creation stories, then, are mirrors for how we see ourselves and all of creation. I will never know what it could have meant to grow up in a world centered on a creation story which is about balance and co-creation, imperfection and connection. Where no one was banished, no one sent out from paradise; everyone bickering and working it out together in community.

Like it or not, while I live on the land that once held those stories, the dominant creation story I live with comes from far away, on another landscape, where an old man with a beard is given credit for creating the heavens and the earth. Dominant forces of culture, including capitalism and militarism, took over the telling of this creation story and deepened it in particular ways. The need for hierarchy and control, rigidity and denied entry, chosen people and damned people, the earth as something that is owned, have shaped our collective psyche when we try to imagine what it means to be part of creation.

So, when we know these stories aren't helping us anymore, that in fact they are pushing our planet to the brink of destruction, how do we key into another story instead? Not by trying to be someone we're not. Not by joining the "Wannabe" Indian tribe, for those of us who are not First Nations people.

For me, loving the earth has provided the way forward. The Buddhist teacher and monk Thich Nhat Hahn says, "The true miracle is not walking on water or walking in air, but simply walking on this earth." My own love for the earth is most deeply realized in my relationship with my garden, simply because I spend the most time, put the most love and care, there. But really, any place we connect with the earth, with our feet or even with our minds, can offer us a path.

My garden has become my teacher about trust and co-creation. I used to fear gardening, afraid that it would be one more thing I would fail at. Now I see that what people mean when they say someone has a "green thumb" is that the person is willing to enter a deep and caring relationship with plants, to notice what they need. As a gardener, concepts of success and failure are irrelevant. It's all an experiment every day, with thousands of tiny green co-creators helping to tell a new story.

My friend Kay Montgomery looked at my garden once and said that the most amazing thing about it is that I have no idea what I am doing! I was thrilled that she understood so clearly just exactly what I love most about the garden. I have no idea what I am doing and yet—the garden grows! People are now asking me for advice, and sometimes I'm even able to give it.

Now, I know my way of gardening isn't for everyone, and those of you who are planners would be thoroughly horrified at my process. Many people like to carefully plan out a garden before they put in the plants. And I've made some serious mistakes. Horseradish, just for starters. What a terrible idea that was!

But for me, gardening has been profoundly transformative. It has taught me more than I've ever known about co-creation, trust and the joy of playful experimentation. I am more awake in my garden, more in the community of Buddha in my garden, than anywhere else. I am struggling to move from plants to animals—starting with dogs, moving towards humans!

My transformation from living in the stress of maintaining the fiction of isolation to relaxing into the depth of connectedness, in the garden and in the rest of my life, has been messy, gradual, complex, and imperfect. I'm clumsy. My steps often feel small, too small to matter. But it is my way of participating in the process of creation, my way of telling the story of how we are bound together into one crazy, unpredictably beautiful whole. ■

REsources for Living

BY **LYNN UNGAR**, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

It seems that for as long as we've had people, we've had stories of creation. As human beings we like to have an explanation of where we come from and why things are the way they are. The world is created through the splitting of a great cosmic egg, or a great cosmic monster. People are called up through song, or created from mud. Suffering comes into the world through the shenanigans of a trickster god, or through opening a box that shouldn't be opened. The stories are all different, but they all speak to our need to know who we are, how we got here, how we belong to the creatures around us, why life is the way it is (and, often, why life has to be so darned difficult).

As Unitarian Universalists, we, too, have a creation story. No doubt, it's familiar to you:

In the beginning there was The One, all of everything packed together into an unimaginably dense Core of the Universe, the Seed of Everything. No one knows how long it was there, or how to describe the Nothing that surrounded it. It was before time, before Something and Nothing.

And then, in an instant shorter than an instant, The One exploded out into the Many, crossing what could now be called space at unthinkable speed. And there was the beginning of atoms. And across the unimaginable stretches of what would now be called time, new elements formed, the building blocks of existence.

And those elements became gas clouds that gave birth to stars, and the stars lived and died, giving birth to new clouds, new elements, black holes, galaxies, planets. And eventually, eventually, a medium-sized rocky planet came to dwell at a medium distance from a medium-sized star. Rain came to this planet in vast storms, creating oceans, and somehow in the oceans and the lightning and the elements a spark of life arose.

Across the unthinkable numbers of millennia, that spark of life learned to divide in half and make new life. And as the years wore on and on, cells learned to share themselves with other cells, and eventually there were plants and animals in a profusion that will never stop shifting and transforming and adapting so long as life exists.

That's our creation myth, a story that is no less beautiful or powerful for the fact that it actually happened. I call it a myth rather than a scientific account because this story of creation holds religious weight and meaning for us. It isn't just a set of facts, it's a story about who we are, where we belong, what it means to be human.

What does the story say? Well, no good story has a single, "and the moral of the story is..." revealed meaning. But here's a few of the things our story of creation means to me:

- **The universe is creative and values diversity**. Physics tells us that entropy always wins, that energy disperses and things fall apart. But our story takes us from the singularity to a vast range of galaxies and nebulae and stars and planets and plants and fish and birds and mammals, each unlike the rest. Diversity is a core part of who we are. Might as well enjoy it.

- **Death and struggle did not enter the equation through some kind of misdeed or mistake.** The only way to have creativity and diversity is for things to die, while at the same time new things are being born. Evolution happens through the survival of the fittest, which only happens through beings failing to survive. If you're going to have the possibility of change and growth then you have to accept struggle and death as an intrinsic part of the package. It might not be fun, but it's true.

- **There is no such thing as perfect.** Evolution is possible because DNA regularly goes off track. Most of these flaws have little effect. Some are deadly. Some few make it possible to live in new ways that an earlier generation could not have imagined. And you don't know right away which change is going to be which. Desiring perfection is a failure to imagine that something different than what you expected could be wonderful.

- **We're all in this together.** We all—and by "all" I mean not just all people or all animals, but all of *everything*—came from the same place. But more than that, we became who we are together. Evolution always happens in a context. A being doesn't evolve toward some divinely-decreed ideal, it evolves to fit in better in the place that it lives. Who we are is quite literally determined by the community of life that surrounds us. It might be a good idea to live in a way that honors that reality.

We live in a universe that mysteriously decided that it would be better to be a whole bunch of things rather than just one thing. In this universe, matter and energy (which turn out to be the same) can never be created or destroyed, but neither can they stay the same for very long at a time. We live in a universe that we have the power to shape, and which has the power to shape us, in each and every moment of our lives. Creation is not, and never was, a one-time thing accomplished by a god or gods. Creation is a story that has been unfolding for billions of years, and we have the immense privilege of making a few marks in this particular chapter. That's our story, and we're sticking to it. ■

Church of the Larger Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist
25 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108-2824
USA

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 55362

Did You Know
That the CLF offers online classes on a variety of topics? See www.clfuu.org/events for details.

Web Site www.clfuu.org — E-mail clf@clfuu.org — Toll-Free Line 800-231-3027— Jewelry 617-948-6150
CLF Unitarian Universalist, 25 Beacon St., Boston MA 02108 USA — Telephone 617-948-6166 — Fax 617-523-4123

I believe there is only one power, one shaping urge, but I also believe that it infuses everything—the glistening track of the snail along with the gleaming eye of the fawn, the grain in the oak, the froth on the creek, the coiled proteins in my blood and in yours, the mind that strings together these words and the mind that reads them.

The only sure antidote to oblivion is the creation. So I loop my sentences around the trunks of maples, hook them into the parched soil, anchor them to rock, to moon and stars, wrap them tenderly around the ankles of those I love. From down in the pit I give a tug, to make sure my rope of words is firmly hooked into the world, and then I climb.■

*by **Scott Russell Sanders**, from* Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World, *published by Beacon Press in 1993. Sanders serves as distinguished professor of English at Indiana University, in Bloomington, Indiana.*

Bumblebee young clinging to their mother as she feeds on goldenrod flowers. Photo by Janet Lane.