Seeking integral community in an ecological age . . . .


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The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life.

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The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

In this issue: “May Day,” by Denise Long; “A Songaia May/Earth Day,” by Fred and Nancy Lanphear.

May Day

I have always been intrigued by May Day, a collection of various labor holidays and pagan and Christian Holy Days. In its social and political sense, May 1st is International Worker’s Day, commemorating historic achievements of the labor movement and in remembrance of the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago which led to the official sanction of the eight-hour workday. In many European countries, May Day is an official government holiday that is often referred to as “Labor Day.”

I am even more fascinated by the ancient spiritual roots of May Day. It was originally a Celtic and European festival celebrating fertility and the return of spring and the sun. As with many pagan holidays, it soon had its Christian overlay. May Day is exactly a half-year from November 1, All Saints Day. It was also known as Beltane, the ancient Gaelic holiday celebrated in Scotland and Ireland. May 1st was Cross-quarter Day, marking the midpoint in the Sun’s progress between the spring equinox and the summer solstice. In rural areas, it was the beginning of the pastoral season when herds of livestock were driven out to summer pastures and mountain grazing lands.

The lighting of bonfires on mountains and hills was the most important activity of Beltane. In fact, the word can mean “bright fire”, or “shining one”. The Druids would kindle bonfires on top of a hill and rush the village cattle through the flames to purify them and get rid of the vestiges of winter sickness. People would also jump between the fires to purify themselves and to seek good luck in the coming year.

In a May Day sermon, James Ishmael Ford, a Unitarian minister, said that this holiday speaks to the spiritual shift we experience when winter cynicism and despair finally give way to hope and a sense of possibility. It is a time for looking at new directions and possibilities.

I like May Day with its complex layering of spiritual and political elements, pagan and Christian roots, green earth and hot ashes. It is brim-full of image and metaphor. It reminds me of the cross-points in my own life, the intersection of politics and faith, the convergence of activism and fire-gazing. I feel a longing to gather together my many competing selves and herd them through a purifying fire, cleansing away all that weighs me down.

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A Songaia May/Earth Day

We at Songaia celebrate Earth and May Day together in what we call Festival of the Earth. Our celebration will be on May 10th this year. Our Festival morning activities include a wonderful breakfast, then a tour to the developing huge Brightwater Treatment Plant nearby. The afternoon begins with:

- Nature walks in our woodland and/or site visits of the community.
- A celebrative gathering that includes singing (like This Pretty Planet, Let there be Peace on Earth, The river Is Flowing) readings from Thinking like a Mountain by Joanna Macy, and declaring our intentions for this coming year as we dedicate ourselves with a new tree planting.
- Maypole dance with young and old included (lots of fun and laughter) with live blue grass and Celtic music.
- Pot luck feast.
- Dancing with the music of our friends (see above). This gives the band a practice time and we all enjoy it so much!
- Clean up and off to rest!

Although pieces of the celebration have changed over the years, our community has celebrated the Festival since 1988. Some years we have a more internal day, others years there are lots of folks. Some of you may have participated in our celebration over the years.

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The mission of CES is to offer a vision of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.

If you like to become a member of CES, you may do so by sending a letter to CES at 2516 Winningham Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516 with your contact information and dues. Annual dues are US$30 (individual or family); reduced price, US$20; outside U.S.A., Canada and Mexico, add US$10. Sustaining Member US$130. Contributions are welcome.