

My concept of Nature enables me to make some sort of logical sense of life on this planet. I see God as the energy or the power of Nature; a power which is vast and unimaginable, but which also manifests as tiny and almost equally unimaginable, both at the same time. My current thinking is that Nature cannot be seen as a force for 'good' in the ethical sense of the word, but good in that it creates, destroys to re-create, and is infinitely flexible, adaptable and indestructible. In human terms she is also ruthless and cruel. Natural disasters – storms, volcanic eruptions, drought and floods – kill life of all forms, while in animal life creature eats creature right down the food chain. Nature is not 'nice'.

But it is Nature, with her power, omnipresence, fecundity, resilience and adaptability as well as her beauty, which stirs me emotionally and which demands my respect, awe – and worship. I celebrate life and respect all creation as great manifestations of Nature.

Jo Rogers

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The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network

The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network brings together friends and fellow seekers who are linked through a collaborative Network File to which members contribute and which is distributed to them four times a year. There is also the opportunity to meet together at our conferences.

Through sharing our insights and beliefs, we aim to restore, inspire and encourage one another by:

- Revering the totality of the divine reality of nature which is revealed to us through the infinite multiplicity of forms and forces;
- Developing creative ways of worship for body, mind and spirit;
- Affirming a Pagan spiritual perspective as being fully compatible with the human quest for self-knowledge and ultimate meaning;
- Encouraging ways of practical action on social issues which are directly related to a nature-centred faith and philosophy.

The Network was founded in 1990 by the Reverend Peter Roberts. He believed that there was a need for a Nature / Earth / Creation centred voice within Unitarianism. The Network provides a forum and creative expression for this and has become a recognised, credible part of the British Unitarian movement. Its name has evolved through 'Unitarian New Age Network' to 'Unitarian Earth Spirit Network' which, by popular consent, is felt to be a better reflection of its membership.

We are a mixed bag – some would describe themselves as pagans, druids or wiccans but the majority of our members are gardeners, hill walkers, nature poets, artists – *Unitarians* first and foremost but who feel that their spirituality and creativity are strongly linked to the Earth and Nature.

The Unitarian Earth Spirit Network is completely financed by annual subscription. For this, members receive four Files and the opportunity to contribute to them. All our conferences are open to non-members.

The Network is one of a number of Unitarian Societies and details of how to join can be found via the website – www.unitariansocieties.org.uk



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unitarian views of earth and nature – an introduction

a unitarian information leaflet

A major principle of Unitarianism is the right of the individual to follow the guidance of the spirit. For many this has meant a closer identification with nature-oriented theology than is the case with mainstream Christians.

Some find value in the teachings of those 19-century Unitarians who believed that to revere nature was to revere God. Rev. Richard Acland Armstrong (1843-1905), for example, wrote of God speaking through 'mountain and valley, cliff and cataract'.

Others may find their inspiration in the writings of people such as the medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen. Her poetry pulsates with a rapturous, sensuous love for the earth which does not encourage a running away from the natural world but an embracing of that which evokes joy, awe and love.

A modern phenomenon in Unitarianism is the interest in pre-Christian spirituality in Britain which revered the forces of nature and sought a unity and connectedness with the whole of life.

With such nature-inspired elements, the placing of the earth at the centre of the spiritual life is an obvious consequence. This can be evidenced by the increased stress on ecological themes in Unitarian public worship – in hymns, prayers and sermons. Some congregations build a whole service around some ecological theme or even celebrate an annual 'Earth Holy Day'.

For many the words attributed to Chief Noah Seattle have a deep significance: *"This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth...We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves"*.

Vernon Marshall

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My view of nature is that we need to be connected, in tune, in harmony with it. Only then will we find the need within ourselves to protect it. As humans we have the power to destroy but not create life and are unique in our conscious ability to destroy our own habitat. That is why it is vital that we are connected with nature and have an understanding of how it works.

I am an environmental scientist and ecologist and so I have an academic as well as spiritual interest in nature. This is obviously not the case for everyone, but a spiritual connection is beneficial, I believe, not just for the environment, but for our well-being. It allows us to consider our place in the world and to discover relationships within and between everything, including humans. These relationships are the most fundamental aspect of the Earth and if we only consider the human element we are only looking at a very small part of the whole. These are relationships between the soil, plants, animals, atmosphere, oceans, rocks; between all the living and non-living aspects of the Earth.

How and why this all fits together so harmoniously, when not disturbed, is so complex. Although science constantly progresses our understanding, it is still so limited. It is beneficial though to maintain that wonder of the natural environment and not to analyse it all the time, in the same way as reading a book or listening to music purely for pleasure.

It is possible to find a spiritual connection with nature in many ways; outdoor pursuits such as climbing, mountaineering and sailing; study of the natural environment or just being amongst it. You may have a favourite place or type of environment where this connection is greatest; mine is woodland. You do not need to understand the science or be particularly fit; just find a place that feels right for you and allows you to experience a connection with what is around you.

Jenni Taylor

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Whether I walk alone or walk with a friend; whether I walk in the mountains, beside the sea or past a flowing river and trees, I find my heart singing. My song is a song of exultation at the grandeur of nature. And sometimes its vastness tinges my thoughts with sadness. It is purely the emotion of being part of it. I feel a spiritual connection to it – a sense of privilege and a sense of awe. My feelings are not of a god having created all this but of spirits unseen within it. They are the spirits of the long ago who

walked the paths and ascended the same summits or threw the same pebble into the sea. If all this is the work of a creative artistic God, well it is brilliant. I delve no further than to say 'Thank You'

And if you can take your eyes away from the far distant horizon and the overarching sky – whether it be resting pale and blue or swirling with wind and storm-filled clouds – and you look closely, there is a microcosmic world. Here is the next miracle. The petals of the small flower shine a colour that attracts the bee. The bee takes the nectar and both flower and bee will live and bequeath another generation into the flow of the world. This is the ideal. There is no destruction and no fear. The bee, the hive and the nectar are a community in nature.

The animal kingdom amazes me. Its chain of destruction is fearsome and restless and you never see a dead animal unless it has been killed by a human. The animal system cleans up after itself.

Nature makes this earth a sacred and uncertain place, a jewel set in an endless dark universe. I know that humankind can create too and improve on nature but mostly we tend to destroy it along with ourselves. How sad for the creator.

Tony McNeile

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Very early in life I absorbed Christian teachings and philosophy, and they have remained with me. But now I

also think that concepts of 'good' and 'bad' are often culturally imposed and can change according to where we live or whatever is 'politically correct'. Humans have the capacity to choose their lines of action; we choose whether to make this World of Nature a better or a worse place. We have the capacity to be emotionally as well as physically hurt, and to hurt others, and it is our choice whether to inflict hurt or not. But whatever **we** choose, Nature will survive even though the human race may not. We need to accept our lives as part of Nature, to accept its cycles of life and death, light and dark, harmony and strife. We are a part of those cycles and are interconnected with the whole of the rest of creation.