

ADVANCING FROM THE MODERN QUEST FOR MIRACLES TO A POST MODERN SCIENCE OF THE MIRACULOUS¹

by Matthew Fox

ABSTRACT

The mechanical model of the Universe that so dominated the modern era effectively banished the deep wondrous and miraculous to a distant realm outside daily existence and experience of psyche and creation. Modern religion responded by defining miracles as essentially “divine interventions contradicting nature’s laws.” But what if existence itself is miraculous and wondrous and our capacity for awe, reverence, gratitude and “isness” itself were the true meaning of the miraculous? Is this not what the mystics teach and what post-modern science is destined to teach us as well?

Approached with an appropriate sense of wonder, we can see the depth of the miraculous within nature and within human nature in particular. Modern science removed the fantasy that we and our earth occupy the physical center of the universe, but post-modern science has demonstrated that we do live right in the middle of the scale of things, and we have the creative powers to discover our place in the scheme of things. Reawakening awareness of the sacredness of being, the sacredness of existence, enlivens our sciences to recognize the light of the multitude of divine sparks. Awakening wonder empowers compassion, and sparks our creativity to heal the damage we have done by believing we were masters of the world, when we are actually embedded in the web of creation.

We will explore these and other questions about the miraculous within nature in general and within human nature in particular.

KEYWORDS: Miracle, creativity, compassion, education, mysticism, cosmology, anthropology, religion

We are thinking together this evening about the topic of miracles and I have chosen as a framework: "Advancing from the modern quest for miracles to a postmodern science of the miraculous." I want to begin with a few peoples' thoughts about what a miracle is or isn't.

I am sure you all know Einstein's statement that there are only two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle and the other is as if everything is a miracle. That observation is profound. In fact it will form a kind of substrate of much of what I have to say this evening. It is expressed, I think, in the words of Meister Eckhart in the Fourteenth century when he said "is-ness is God." The miracle of existence is the substrate of any other miracles we may encounter. Another insight comes from one of the truly authentic saints walking on the planet at this time, and that is our brother Thich Nhat Hahn, our Vietnamese Buddhist brother. He says, "Our true home is the present moment. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment." To me, coming from the Western tradition, this is an exact echo of what Jesus said, when he said, "The Kingdom and Queendom of God is among you." So, walking on the green Earth and being fully present to the moment of walking on the Earth is itself a miracle far greater than walking on water. Implications of this are the real profound moral dilemmas of our time, such as the suffering of Mother Earth and her creatures; the implications of this are profound. We should be careful of rushing into extraordinary versions of the miraculous, when in

fact what we think is ordinary is already extraordinary.

I would like to begin with some reflections on what is a miracle after all. The word "miracle" etymologically comes from the word *mirari* which means to wonder at and also to smile. They go together nicely. To wonder deeply is to smile. It is to break into joy, gratitude, and release. I would propose that the modern era was not real good at smiling. It was very serious about things like "torturing Mother Earth for her secrets." (Francis Bacon). Development of our powers of smile, wonder and awe were seriously diminished in Western civilization in the modern era. We were about more serious stuff as we know, serious stuff that has culminated in nuclear bombs, submarines to deliver them and the ability to tear down a rain forest in a day, that it has taken God and nature 10,000 years to give birth to and will not occur again on this planet and perhaps not anywhere in the universe. Webster's dictionary says, and you must understand, I do not live by Webster's dictionary, but it reveals a lot, when it defines miracle this way: "an extremely extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." A second definition: "an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing or accomplishment." Of course Webster's dictionary comes out of the modern era, and the whole idea that a miracle is some kind of Zazam effect, that is, God intervening with nature's course is peculiarly modern.

I think it comes from this, in the modern age, Westerners were taught that the

Universe was a machine, which is a pretty done thing, a finished thing. We made up this idea that a miracle is breaking through the machine rigidity, the absolute laws of this Universe as we have been taught about it. But as you move from modern to post-modern science and modern to post-modern consciousness and also welcome in pre-modern consciousness, (which has the much fuller experience of the awe of nature and existence); as we make that move, we shift profoundly our understanding of miracle.

What then does miracle really mean? Here are some antonyms, the opposite of miracle, because one of the best ways to negotiate a spiritual concept is to go to its opposite first. For example, if you want to know what justice is, take in injustice, feel the kick in your gut at what is unjust and you will begin to taste what justice is. Let's first go to antonyms, opposites of miracle: mundane, dull, ordinary, routine, everyday, commonplace, boring, unexciting, humdrum, dreary, monotonous, unremarkable, tedious, mechanistic, repetitive, predictable. It all makes you tired, doesn't it? This is stuff that feeds the old cynics, the old goat in all of us. It feeds cynicism. This is not what the miraculous is about. There is a lot of this feeling in the air today. Wherever there is cynicism there is this wallowing in what I call the opposite of the miraculous.

Now, let's look at what the miraculous means. What are synonyms for miraculous? Amazing, astounding, astonishing, incredible, unbelievable, phenomenal, marvelous,

extraordinary, mind blowing, inextirpable, wonderful, wondrous, remarkable, surprising, awesome. That is what miraculous means, to be struck by awe. How present then is the miraculous in our daily life, in our work, in our citizenship on this blessed planet?

The Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti several decades ago said, "I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder." This is where science comes in today to really feed us with the authentic meaning of miraculous. What we are learning when we are hearing the stories of creation, the 14 billion years that brought all of us here, and the kinship we have with all of the beings of this Universe as we know it: All of this is enough to pump awe to a whole new level, never before and perhaps rarely experienced certainly in recent Western history. I want to look at the subject of awakening our studying of miraculous nature, studying miraculous nature. I want to begin with this observation, it is very important for scientists and other serious people to recall, that to study is a form of yoga. Study is a spiritual practice. Study is a prayer. This is the Jewish tradition for sure, where, to study Torah is to enter into prayer, so long as you bring your heart into the study. It was also part of my tradition as a Dominican. We were taught that the hours you spent studying are just as prayerful as the hours you spend chanting the psalms, or any other kind of prayer. In fact there is a classical story of Thomas Aquinas, who was a Dominican. He was visiting a monastery and writing a book. A brother came up and said, "We are chanting the offices

downstairs. You should come down.” Aquinas said, “I am busy. Leave me alone. I am studying.” Then the guy came up again and said, “You have got to be down here. We are praying.” Aquinas slammed his hand on the table and said, “I am praying! Get out of my room!” So the whole idea is that to study is to pray, if you bring your heart to it. That is the point.

A certain amount of the Western quest for knowledge has not brought its heart to it. It has not been an interaction with wisdom. It has just been an interaction with knowledge and that is not enough, because that is not human. Knowledge by itself is raw power. Do you remember the teaching from the Celtic people, that says, “Never give a loaded gun to a young man who has not first learned to dance”? Knowledge in itself is a loaded gun. It needs to find receptors who have hearts. The mind is not a disembodied reality. The mind is meant to connect to the heart. The whole teaching then from the Celtic people is that a person who has not learned to dance, has not learned to first celebrate life, is in no place to be taking life. At this time in history, people who have been studying nature must recover their capacity for heart knowledge and bring that into the project. That of course it seems to me is what your entire organization is about, reconnecting heart and mind.

Indeed, this reconnection is the very struggle we face as a species today, a struggle of whether we are even sustainable or not. It is a struggle of how we are treating the rest of nature, which of course will result in our own capacity for survival. It seems to

me that the playwright Antonin Artaud wrote something very appropriate for this critical moment in our history when he said, “It is good that from time to time cataclysms occur that compel us to return to nature, that is, to rediscover life.” Cataclysms occur to get us to return to the fuller understanding of nature, which is the rediscovery of life itself. What I am saying then is that life is a miracle. Our being here to study life is a miracle. I propose that every breath you take and I take is a miracle. The fact that the flowers over 100 million years ago fine tuned the oxygen on our behalf and other animals' behalf is a miracle; because the atmosphere at that time was not appropriate for our lungs and would have not allowed our presence on this planet. I would say that all of these accommodations to our presence are wondrous, amazing, awesome and therefore miraculous.

Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer Prize after his death for his book *The Denial of Death*. He has another book and there is this amazing sentence that speaks to what I am talking about. He says, “Ancient people, unlike modern people, had not yet lost their awe of nature and of being.” He says it all in this one sentence. The indigenous and pre-modern people, unlike modern people, had not yet lost their sense of awe at nature and being. That is what we need to recover. That sense of awe is the miraculous. Our ancestors had this for tens of thousands of years and we have pretty much erased it in the last few centuries. When we recover this sense of awe of nature and the awe of being, we will be in a whole new place. We will

no longer be beating up on nature, including our own, and we will no longer be neglecting the gift and the preciousness of existence. We will not be taking existence for granted.

One of the exciting people here this evening, and you are all exciting, but I ran into one fellow I haven't seen in years, Courtney Milne sitting over here. He is a photographer and a mystic who has done some brilliant photographic books on the wonders of the world. He has traveled all over the world to get photos on the sacred sites of the world, from Ayers Rock to Machu Picchu and others. He had tremendous mystical and other kinds of experiences all around the world including having his camera stolen in one sacred place. He just came up to me before dinner and told me this amazing story. He said, "I did all of these books about these sacred spaces, places all over the world. For the last seven years I have been taking photographs of one place--my back yard, the pond in my back yard. I have 35,000 photographs if you want to see them. Each one is more revealing of the beauty, depths and sacredness of this one place, which rivals Ayers Rock and Machu Picchu."

That, my friends, is exactly what I am talking about. It is what Thich Nhat Hahn was talking about. We are walking on miracles everyday. You don't have to get on a jet plane and fly to Machu Picchu to know those things. Mother Earth is blessing us everyday. If you have feet to walk, that alone is a miracle. I know that because when I was twelve I got polio and

was told that I may never walk again. At thirteen I was able to walk again. It was an overwhelming blessing. I said to myself, "I will never take my legs for granted again." This taking for granted is what our civilization has to get over. David here, the gentleman who I was eating dinner with, was telling me how he and his wife are working as medical people in Uganda for one month a year. I was asking what he learned from it. One of the points he stressed was how much we take for granted in our lives here. The basics, including the stress of living in drought in Africa, in living with AIDS in Africa and so forth, we just don't know; we are out of touch with how miraculous our very existence is on a daily basis.

I will put out some questions. These are for you to answer more than me. You people have more scientific degrees than I do. I ask: Is light a miracle? Is enfleshed light or matter, what David Bohm calls "frozen light," a miracle? It's one in a billion form of light. Is water a miracle? Is breath a miracle? And the lungs with which we process breath? Is the human brain a miracle? Is the eye a miracle? It's all wondrous. It's all amazing. We make a huge mistake if we wait until our deathbed to say thank you for it. As Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer you say in your whole life is thank you, that will suffice." But he didn't say, "And wait until your last breath to say it."

Are rainforests miracles? Are elephant's miracles? Whales? Dogs? Polar bears? How surrounded are we by miracles? What

are we doing about it? How are we allowing this wonder and this awe to seep into our souls, our minds, our bodies and our educational systems? Our political systems? Our economic systems? Our worship systems? Have we created armored suits so that none of this is really received by us at the depth at which it is coming at us?

There is a beautiful statement by Baudelaire, the nineteenth century French poet and art critic. He says, "We walk through forests of physical things which are also spiritual things that look on us with affectionate looks. "We are continuously being blessed by the beings of the world. But are we preoccupied with our agendas so strongly that we are not receiving?"

There is a beautiful story that happened last year near where I live in San Francisco on the ocean outside of San Francisco Bay. A whale got stuck tied up in ropes. She had a rope right through her mouth and she was thrashing around and getting tighter, beginning to drown. Five men went out in rubber suits with machetes to try to release her. It was a very dangerous task. One flip of her tail and they would have been done for, but she remained very still for the hour and a half of this operation. One of them was working on the rope in her mouth, eye to eye with her for over an hour. They succeeded and undid the ropes. This is what happened then. The whale took three laps, three circles. You would do that too if you had just been liberated from prison. Then she went up to each of the five men and nudged them. A thank you. For me that is a profound story. It is just as

Baudelaire was saying. It is a story about the yearning of the rest of creation to see our hearts and a reminder that we are kin with the rest of creation. To really grasp the depths of this we have to rediscover this sense that Einstein talked about that the miraculous is a daily event. We must not take life for granted.

As Rabbi Hessel says, "Life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe, but a will to wonder." The will to wonder, the will to be open to awe, that is the miraculous that can come alive in our time and it must, because it is in that context that we become warriors on behalf of health and well-being of the other creatures on this planet.

Let me give you one example of where I find today's science reminding us of how miraculous our lives are. We all know the story about how Moses went to the top of the mountain and found God in a burning bush, took his shoes off out of reverence and so forth. Mt. Sinai. You can spend several thousand dollars and make that pilgrimage yourself to Mt. Sinai if you care to. However, given today's physics, the truth is that every bush, we now know, is a burning bush. Protons and light waves are in every atom in the universe. And those beings that are green, who have taught the rest of us how to eat, because they have learned how to eat the sun with photosynthesis, these beings are especially burning. You don't have to take a trip to Mt. Sinai. You can step right outside this hall, pick up a leaf and you are encountering a burning bush.

Today's physics has democratized the theophany that was the launching pad of the entire Western spiritual tradition. Be with that for a minute folks. This is stunning. That is just one tiny example. Take another example in the Christian tradition. John's gospel says, "Christ is the light in all things." We now know there is light; there are photons in every atom in the universe. This means that the Christ presence is in every atom in the universe, which parallels exactly the Buddhist teaching that the Buddha nature is present in all beings in the universe. All of this is about awakening our awareness of the sacredness of being, the sacredness of existence. It is becoming simpler for us to realize these things. We don't need all of the paraphernalia of organized religions and churches to get to the heart of the matter. As a species we have to travel much lighter at this time. We need a deeper spirituality, but not necessarily more religious institutions.

Meister Eckhart put it this way in the Fourteenth century. He said, "Every creature is a word of God and a book about God." In other words, every creature is a bible. He said, "If I spend enough time with a caterpillar, I will never have to prepare a sermon, because one caterpillar is so full of the divine." What we know from science is that every caterpillar has a fourteen billion year history, as do every one of us. The caterpillar carries the carbon, nitrogen and magnesium from the supernova explosions from five and one half billion years ago, but also the hydrogen and the helium from the original fireball of thirteen plus billion years

ago. It is all wondrous. It is all amazing. It is all, therefore, miraculous. It was Aquinas who said, "Revelation comes in two volumes, nature and the bible." This is what religion in the West has been missing for centuries. It has put all its eggs into the bible basket. The bible is only 2,500 years old. The universe is over thirteen billion, and this contains the sacred writings of divinity. It is in all of our bodies. Our bodies are much older than the bible. Our bodies are cosmic bodies. We must be paying more attention to the revelation of nature.

For that task, we of course call upon the sacred vocation of the scientist, because the scientist unpacks, unveils, therefore helps reveal the grace that nature is, the presence of the divine that nature is, the sacred throne on which the Goddess sits. Again, Aquinas said this in the thirteenth century and of course his whole effort was to bring science into Christianity and he paid a price for it. He was condemned three times before they canonized him as a Saint. Keep that in mind. He said, "A mistake about creation results in a mistake about God." That ennobles the scientific quest as much as any one sentence can enoble it. Turn it around and it means this: an insight into creation is a revelation of God. It adds to our understanding of God. To take the example of the photographer who has spent so much serious time taking pictures of just his backyard pond, as he tells me he is going deeper and deeper into the wonder, the miracle of that one place. This is true of you people who spend hours and hours, years and years, months and months in your sacred study, which is your prayer, in your

laboratories or at your computer examining the miraculous that is the wonder and awe, whether it is in the microcosm or the macrocosm or in between in this sacred place we call nature.

I am doing a book currently on the recovery of the sacred masculine because it is obvious that the divine feminine is back, the Goddess is back. She's pissed, but she is back. The Black Madonna is back and she is whipping things up. The sacred masculine has to step up to the plate. The divine feminine needs a partner. I am keen on that. One of the archetypes I am trying to arouse for men to get going again is the archetype of the hunter/gatherer. Certainly for 95% of our species we were hunting/gathering. I am asking now, how have we taken this energy of hunting/gathering? Which was certainly a survival mechanism among other things. How have we translated that into our world today? I look around and I say, "Oh, it's hunting for a shopping deal, a sale." Is that hunting/gathering in today's version? Hunting for a parking place, is that hunting/gathering? When I get into the depth of it the first thing that comes to my mind is the scientist. What is the other side of Mars? What is at the extreme of these expanding galaxies? Everyday in the paper there is evidence that scientists are hunting and gathering. It is a beautiful thing that we converted that energy into something so powerful and significant as learning the story of how we got here. The story of where here is, therefore, hopefully of where we might be going and how we can get there. The quest for truth is a

hunting/gathering exercise and it takes the same spiritual warrior-hood that any other spiritual practice takes. It takes strength. It takes integrity. And it takes caring. Many of you have invested many years into this kind of hunting and I want to acknowledge that.

Let's now turn to one of the most remarkable sentences about miracles that I have ever read. This comes from my brother Thomas Aquinas. He says, "The greatest miracle of all is a virtuous life." The greatest miracle of all is a life lived virtuously. Now we are talking about the miracle in the human. I alluded to the miracle of the burning bush, the miracle of the light in all things and the miracles of the fourteen billion years that got us here. Now let's look at human nature. This is an astounding statement that blows me away, that human virtue is the greatest miracle we have got going for us. Think about it. Is what Gandhi did a miracle? Taking on the British Empire, not firing a shot, and winning? Is what Martin Luther King did a miracle? Filling the jails and bringing about some basic civil rights legislation and turning segregation, at least at many levels, around. Is what Malcolm X did a miracle? Including his own conversion in Mecca where he got over his own reverse racism and accepted every human being as a child of God? Is what Oscar Romero did--standing up to the military in El Salvador, and to his own church, because the Vatican was attacking him for standing up to the military in El Salvador--a miracle? Is what Dorothy Day did--working and living among the poorest of the poor in urban areas and starting houses

of hospitality in the poorest places and bringing a lot of young people into that arena of service, a base community that stood up to the dictatorial rulers in Latin America for decades, even amidst great persecution--is that a miracle? Is what Mozart accomplished a miracle? And Mother Theresa? And Hildegard of Bingen?

Our admiration, that is what miraculous is about, admiration for the greatness of human courage and integrity, what we honor and those we honor the most and praise the most. This supports Aquinas's thesis that to live a virtuous life is profoundly miraculous and admirable. It comes home to all of us because every one of us is called to live a life of integrity and courage that is wondrous.

Every one of us is unique and every one of us is in a unique place today. Also, all of us are living at a very unique time in planetary history, human history and even cosmic history. In their recent book, *View from the Center of the Universe*, two very fine cosmological thinkers, Joel Primack (a very active NASA astrophysicist) and his wife Nancy Abrams have put together this wonderful book essentially on what we have learned in the last five years from the Hubble telescope about our universe and our place in it. They have come to some amazing conclusions. Of course we are not the center of the universe like pre-Copernican thought. There is something peculiar going on with us and here are some of their findings. First of all, the Earth is going to live 8-10 billion years and we are at the 4.5 billion year mark, which means

to say we are half way through the life of the Earth. At 8-10 billion years the sun is going to gobble the Earth up. It's going to go away. So we are in the middle. If we had come a lot sooner or if we had come a lot later, we would not be in a position to be examining, to be studying the kind of holy lessons, holy beings that we are living with and studying today. Furthermore they say that in terms of the history of the universe, being fourteen billion years old nevertheless, that we are here at this time, we are still able to pick up the receding galaxies, and that before too long future generations are not going to be able to pick up the receding galaxies. And we are able to pick up the sound of the original fireball and the radiation and light from the original fireball, and that too will not be so visible in future time. We are at the right place to be here. Like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, this mattress is too soft, this one is too hard, this one is just right. We are at a miraculous place, just like where Goldilocks found herself to be.

Furthermore they say the size of our bodies is so interesting. They believe, having done the counting on this, that if you look at all the beings in the universe, the macrocosmic beings, the big ones and the microcosmic, humans lie right in the middle. And they say that our bodies are the right size to be studying the universe because if we were much larger, if our heads were larger our brain would have to put all its energy into processing our body and not into looking through telescopes or whatnot to the rest of the universe. This is stunning and astounding and therefore miraculous

information. This is why they talk about the view from the center of the universe. We are not centered as they thought before Copernicus, but there is something going on. We are in the middle of something. We have the chops to relate to it. We have the intelligence. We have the creativity. And we have the hearts, if we put ourselves to the task. What this underscores is, on the one hand, our dignity as a species, and also our responsibility, and those go together. What Eckhart called our nobility is also our responsibility.

What are some of these virtues that are calling us today to our miraculous life of being virtuous human beings? One of them that does not get nearly the press that it deserves is curiosity. Curiosity is one of the most holy enticers and forces of allurements in the entire universe. Unfortunately I have never had a class in Curiosity 101 or much less Curiosity 303. I wonder if we shouldn't be teaching curiosity or at least encouraging it and awakening it much more fully than we do in the processes we call education. We should be rewarding curiosity because without it we truly withdraw, take for granted, grow stale and freeze--truly freeze. Another virtue that I think is appropriate for our time is the virtue of creativity. Remember the word virtue, *virtus* in Latin, means power. We are talking about our powers. Our species is precisely defined by our creativity. When anthropologists go out looking for our ancestors, they just don't look for biped's bones, they look for biped bones with artifacts next to them. Some tool makers are considered to be pre-human, so

archeologist's interest has focused on art work, such as the paintings in caves 40,000 years ago. That is when they have found our immediate ancestors. Just recently, archeologists found human tools and beads from the beaches of Morocco, in cave strata that have been dated to 82,000 years ago. These are the oldest ancestors we have found to this moment. We know they are our ancestors because they were busy making beads for artistic ornamentation. If for the anthropologist the working definition of a human being is a biped who makes artistic things, I don't know why our education systems don't catch on.

Where is creativity in, "no child left behind?" This is why the most creative youngsters in our country, which are inner city kids, are dropping out like flies, because there is absolutely no acknowledgement of their humanness, i.e. their creativity, in the classroom. It is not just the young who are dropping out. I was in Napa a few months ago and a woman said, "I am a teacher. I'm a great teacher. I love teaching and I'm quitting. Every good teacher I know around here is quitting. We never felt it was our job to give an infinite amount of exams to kids. We think it is our job to educe from the kids their curiosity, their creativity and their mindfulness. This is no longer the agenda in education in this country." I've been working lately with an African American, a thirty-two year old poet, rapper and filmmaker. We are trying to reinvent education from the inner city out. Beginning with an after school program from 3:00 to 6:00. It is built around several elements; one is a spiritual practice with the

body. That is to say he will be teaching you Kung Fu or the marriage of heaven and earth, which are things he learned when he was ten years old in the ghetto in the inner city and it literally saved his life. We are both convinced that it is this awareness of our power through our bodies and creating boundaries with our bodies that is so essential for young people to hold for themselves. He has taught these same practices in juvenile detention homes with profound results. For the first time in these kid's lives they have learned to calm the reptilian brain and to get in touch with their own powers of silence and self-inner discipline. A big part of our program is also a thirty minute teaching each day, which will be about the new cosmology, the wonders of our body, the genius of Howard Thurman, or some other worth while topic. Then the last hour and a half of their afternoon is going to be spent making movies, making rap, poetry, theater about these topics, the new cosmology, the wonders of our body, Howard Thurman's spiritual philosophy of community, or some other worthwhile topic. We are very excited about this. We see a way here--without arguing about it, without going to school boards and all the politics--of just bringing it forward. The kids will be viruses because they go to school the next morning, they are going to go to school and say hey this learning thing can be fun. We are making movies, making rap about our place in the universe.

We have learned that the universe has set it up for us for fourteen billion years. No one is teaching us this in school.

They will be the viruses to change education; we won't have to work through school boards. Life is too short for that. As an example of what these kids can do, Professor Pitt has made a four minute DVD, a video about the subject and spirit of meditation. What is refreshing for me about this is several things, one is you can see that Pitt is presenting a spiritual practice he has been doing since he was ten, for over twenty years, this is serious teaching here. He's teaching it with the new art forms of rap and video making. What I find when I see this is a great load off my shoulders. The new generation can step up to the plate. They are ready to step up to the plate. They have whole new languages, whole new art forms to tell the important stories today. They do need us elders for content. Pitt has told me he has been waiting twenty years for me to show up because he knew he needed the content. Meanwhile, he has been preparing. He has become a crafts person, a filmmaker and he's done his inner work. Now he's ready to do his warrior work. In this four minute video, you can get a feel for the new languages of creativity that are at the finger tips of our young people today.

Does that give you hope like it gives me hope? There is a whole new thing happening. I spoke on Fathers' Day at Howard Thurman's church in San Francisco, and afterwards this young African American man came up to me. He said, "You're the first adult I've heard who understands my generation." This is exactly where we are at, we know that we have new tools, we know we are powerful. But we don't feel that our parents know it; we don't

feel that the school system knows it. We know Dick Cheney and George Bush don't know it. The media doesn't know it.

Mother earth in her suffering today is not passive, she's active and she is awakening a lot of young people, and a lot of creativity everywhere. That is why the virtue, the power of creativity needs to be tapped into everywhere. These young people need intergenerational wisdom. They need elders who can help them with the content. They need what scientists and explorers of human nature and more can help them with. Not because you want to make some kind of esoteric fancy, get out-of-your-body experiences. No, we like to stay in our bodies, on this healthy body of mother earth. Because currently it's not healthy--it's unhealthy--because humans have been taking a lot of weird trips lately. It is very important, our invitation from the young, though they may not articulate it always very clearly. They want us in on the picture. It's going to be a joint project, the marriage of elderly wisdom with youth wisdom. With these new art forms there is no telling what can happen. I presented Dr. Pitt's video at one place, and an older gentleman came up to me and said, "I can't imagine any young person seeing that and not being curious about meditation." Isn't it about time that we are curious about meditation? What makes meditation so important today? It can calm the reptilian brain.

When you can calm the reptilian brain then that mammal brain, which is our capacity for compassion, can finally

break loose, can finally emerge. This is what the Buddha calls for, what Isaiah called for, what Mohammad called for and what Jesus called for. Our capacity for compassion, where has it been? It has been swamped lately with the reptilian brain. We can find a way to quiet that reptilian brain. This is what meditation does. Because reptiles like solitude, to lie in the sun alone, they are monks. You befriend your reptile brain by taking care of the solitude needs that are in you. Then the mammal brain can flourish. No other virtue is as all-important, according to every spiritual teacher that has ever walked this earth or worked it. Compassion can finally begin to happen. The middle brain, the mammal brain can finally emerge. Remember that the reptilian brain is four hundred and twenty million years old. The mammals compassionate brain is two hundred ten million years old--half as old--but it does not get the attention, especially in the modern era, that it clearly deserves. Then igniting creativity and putting it to the service of compassion is where it's at today regarding our virtuous work on this planet. This is service; all of us are called to participate in the healing of this planet in some way.

It is so clear that our creativity is our way out of problems, i.e., clean fuel, clean energy and so forth. Recently there was this article in the paper, something I've never thought about before, about scientists hunting, gathering for some problem solving.

Scientists are eyeing the jet stream, an energy source that rages night and day, 365 days a year, just a few miles above our heads.

If they can tap into these fierce winds the worlds entire electrical needs would be met, they say. The trick is figuring out how to harness the energy. But the jet stream blows from west to east six to nine miles over the northern hemisphere with speeds up to 310 miles per hour twenty-four hours a day. This is a very interesting concept. I never thought of that. This, plus solar energy, plus wind energy on the earth, plus so many other ways to go. Again, we're living in a moment of the unleashing of our creativity. This is really the strong point of our species-our creativity and our capacity for compassion. Here again is where today's science really serves compassion. Science has rediscovered an ancient mystical awareness of interdependence. Interdependence is now obviously one of the primary principals of today's physics. Interdependence is the basis of all compassion. Thomas Merton, a Catholic monk who died perhaps of assassination a number of years ago, two hours before he died, gave a talk on compassion. He said, "Compassion is keen awareness of an interdependence of all living things that are all part of one another." Science had confirmed this. You and I are literally living with the atoms of the stars, the galaxies, and indeed the molecules in our lungs are those that Buddha breathed, that Jesus breathed, that others have been breathing. We are living interconnected lives in every sense of the word.

What we have now is a new basis for human behavior and it matches ancient teachings: Jesus saying, "be you compassionate as your creator in heaven is compassionate," and the Buddha taught that

compassion is the whole ballgame, the whole law. Compassion being the most used name for God in the Koran by far. Is God the compassionate one? We have a wonderful marriage here of science and its teaching interdependence and our spiritual traditions and our capacity for compassion. So compassion then becomes a virtue that will be the hallmark of our generation. We are talking about the next evolutionary step of our species. We don't have 500 years for it or even 100 years. This has to happen swiftly, time is running out on us. Time is running out, and also we are adversely affecting the other species.

Compassion is not about sentimentally, feeling sorry or pity for one another. This again is Webster's dictionary mistake. Webster's dictionary says the idea that compassion is about a relationship between equals is obsolete. In fact, I propose that Webster's dictionary is obsolete. "Passion means justice," says Meister Eckhart, calling from the Jewish tradition. Justice is about finding the balance. David was telling me that one thing he's learned from being in Africa is how unbalanced our world is. In terms of accessibility to basic health care, accessibility to basic healthy water, and so forth. We have to hunt and gather the forces of justice. The forces of balance again. Because that is what compassion is about. Compassion is not something sentimental sweet or mushy. Compassion is about finding the dance in the world between ourselves and others and within all the communities of which we are a part. This of course means the human community as well.

Think right now of the sacredness of water, because that's the real issue around the world and it's going to become more of an issue. Who is going to own the water? Thomas Merton one day wrote in his journal, "It's raining outside my hermitage. I'm going to take my hat off and walk in the rain, because some day they will be selling us the rain." That day is here already. I was taught by a Native American teacher, a Lakota man named Buck Ghost Horse several years ago. He said: "you want to know how holy water is, how miraculous water is? Go without water for three days." It's simple, it doesn't take a sermon, doesn't even take scientific investigation. Just go without it for three days and you will know what a miracle that first sip of water is. The truth is people all around this globe are going without water on a regular basis, and without healthy water. These are some of the lessons I wanted to share with you around this topic of our daily experience of the miraculous.

One more virtue that needs special attention today is the virtue of generosity. Sometimes we forget how generous nature is. Are we aware for example that the entire earth system runs on one billionth of the sun's energy everyday? The sun is giving away all this energy all we need is one billionth. Are we thanking the sun? There is a beautiful poem from Hafiz, the fourteen century Sufi mystic, that says, "Even after all this time the sun never says to the earth, 'you owe me.' Look what happens with a love like that, it lights up the whole sky." There's a give away going on, there's a give away

going on in nature all over the place and we are invited to the table. Not just to receive but to deliver. That is, we have to grow up as a species. We have been taking, especially western civilization, from mother earth and her children, her creatures for so long. Now mother earth is asking of us, "Isn't it time that you act like grown ups and give as well as take?" That act of giving is what we mean by generosity. I found the word generosity so primal to the miracle, the miracle of being human. When you can tap into your generosity, our being fully human, the miracle of your power, of your virtue is shining. What I find about this word generosity is terribly interesting. I find it to be one of the richest words in our language.

Behind the word generosity is a Latin word genero, to beget, to produce, to create, to cause to exist, to bring to life. So it's the basis of our word generate, to be generative. To be generous is to be creative. The word generosity incorporates our creativity. In addition, behind the word generosity is the word genes or origin, birth, descent, father, family, nation, offspring, race, ancestors. All of these include the word generous. It is our ancestors too. There is this cosmological meaning to generosity too. You're bringing in fourteen billion years of ancestors when you're tapping in to your powers of generosity. That is a miracle. In addition the word generous comes from the same source as the word generosity. Your genius is the showing off of your generosity, the display of your generosity. This is not about building your ego up. It's about participating in the generosity of the rest of

nature. The miraculous, wondrous, stupendous generosity of the universe. Which has dared to bring our species aboard; a species very exaggerated in our intellectual capacities, and very feeble in our capacity for heart and compassionate steering of the intelligence. We've been proving the last few centuries the deep danger of knowledge, naked knowledge. Our species has to shift and now, to the hunting and gathering of wisdom. To draw the wisdom from all the spiritual traditions of the world, including science. To draw from our own hearts from that of our children and from the warnings that science is giving us. Part of the hope of our time is the despair. I look at human history and see nothing moves humans like necessity. The truth is that we are living in a moment of immense necessity. This is one way we draw on our capacity for generosity and creativity. One story I was told by a scientist a few years ago that really stuck with me is this: when our ancestors discovered fire they left Africa. I would say it was especially curiosity that had us leaving Africa and we went on our ways. A bunch of our ancestors landed in Euro-Asia and the ice age hit. They just left the hot savannas of Africa and now they're in an ice age. I bet they spent a thousand years blaming one another. Who turned off the heat? What did you do? What bad dreams did you have? Meanwhile they got to work, they started killing mammoths, learned how to sew them. They learned how to live in caves and tell stories at night (instead of watching television, watching other people's stories at night). They developed all kinds of survival mechanisms. But the point is they survived. We come from tough stock.

Now we have self-pity that always goes along with patriarchy. Patriarchy by definition feels sorry for itself, because it banished the mother capacity of compassion within itself, so it has to look for mother outside. It falls into to self-pity. One concrete example would be the Vatican in our time; It is overwhelmed with self-pity. Because it destroyed the mother principal within itself, that's called karma. We have all kinds of whining and cynical media people and politicians telling us, "Woe, woe, woe! We can't do it. We don't have the creativity. We don't have the energy, don't have the time. We don't have the money." All self-pity. Every one of us comes from very strong stock. Our ancestors made it from the heat of Africa through the ice age. Don't tell me we can't make it today from this precipice of global warming to a new way of living on this planet. Every one of you in your work as healers, searchers, investigators, scientists--every one of you, every one of us and everyone of the community that we represent has a profound role to play in this gathering of wisdom. This gathering of wisdom and hunting for wisdom will be the hallmark of our generation. These are some thoughts I brought to share with you. We might learn something from Gregory Bateson when he says "the hardest teaching in the Christian gospels is Saint Paul when he says God is not mocked." Gregory Bateson says, "This saying should be applied to the relationship between humanity and ecology, the processes of ecology are not mocked." In other words there has been a ledger that has been kept, not by a God in the sky but by what

Hildegard called the “web of creation”. She says humans are a part of the web of creation. There is give and take as there is in a web. She says if humans ignore the justice that keeps the web together then God, she says, will allow creation to punish humanity. It's not God seeking vengeance. It's the web of creation that's going to put us in our place.

That is the moment at which we gather today, that is the reason we are asking questions about where is the miraculous and how is our grasp of the miraculous shifted in this post-modern time? You people have the stuff that we all have within us, the chops. To stand with the strength of the spiritual warrior. The strength of the green man, the strength of the goddess and of the Black Madonna. At this time in history to reopen the human agenda and the human perspective to the basic truth that the miraculous happens with every breath we take. If you've ever been present for a birth of a baby you know how stupendous and sacred that first breath is. If you've been present at the last breath as a person dies you know how special that breath is. There is no reason then for us to take every breath in between for granted, quite the opposite. Every breath in between can be the energy that brings out of us our Divine-like generosity, compassion, joy and creativity. That would be miraculous. Don't you agree?

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REFERENCES & NOTES

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