

Integrating Permaculture, Transition, and Mythology in the Chaos Age

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Conversations with Willi Paul and Authors Gregory Gronbacher, Peter Ruddock, Douglas Williamson, Arthur George, Gary Z McGee, Margo Meck, Stephen Gerringer and Ray Grigg

Contents

Prelude - “Shamans are neither born nor created: they are Called.” Interview segment with **Stephen Gerring**, Joseph Campbell Foundation

Intro - email correspondence between **Willi Paul** and **Martin Weyers**, Mythological RoundTable® Program, Joseph Campbell Foundation

Conversations -

[“A Myth and a Prayer” – Article and Conversation about Mythology with Gregory Gronbacher and Willi Paul](#)

[“Transition Mythology” - Interview with Mythologist / Entrepreneur Willi Paul, by Peter Ruddock, Transition Palo Alto](#)

[Exploring the Western vs. Indigenous Intersection in Costa Rican Mythology Conversation with Douglas Williamson, Earth Charter International](#)

[“Exercising the Artifacts” – Interview with Mythologist Willi Paul by Arthur George to Support the Mythic Roundtable at Granada Books, Santa Barbara](#)

[“Rebellion Coming.” Conversation on Creative Mythology with Willi Paul and Arthur George](#)

[“Will Mythology Save Us?” Conversations with Willi Paul and Arthur George](#)

[“Your Myth or Mine?” Gary Z McGee on Our Self-inflicted Mythology. With Reaction by Willi Paul](#)

["The Myth Lab: Myth and Permaculture" - Interview with Willi Paul by Mythologist Margo Meck](#)

[“Creation Mythology” - Article and Interview with Author Ray Grigg by Willi Paul](#)

prelude

“Shamans are neither born nor created: they are Called.” Interview segment with **Stephen Gerringer**, Joseph Campbell Foundation

Willi Paul: Are shaman born or created these days? Any examples?

Stephen Gerringer: Shamans are neither born nor created: they are Called.

“A shaman mediates between consensus reality and the spirit world on behalf of his or her people (a female shaman is technically a shamanka, but that term has yet to find its place in English). The shaman travels to the Otherworld in trance facilitated by what [Mircea Eliade](#) terms “archaic techniques of ecstasy” - drumming, dancing, fasting, ingestion of visionary plants (mushrooms, Ayahuasca, peyote, ibogaine, cannabis, etc.), and such. In the Spirit World shamans learn to heal the sick, foresee the future, influence the weather and the movement of game animals, and can even cause illness. **The shaman’s Calling is a double-edged sword – shamans are respected, but feared, and often live a little apart from the people they serve.** Though the word is Siberian in origin, Eliade designates the ecstatic, inward experience of the shaman a “primary phenomenon” ubiquitous in primal cultures, regardless of where and when they are found.

In most primal societies no one decides to be a shaman when they grow up. The shaman’s Call manifests in early adolescence as an illness that triggers a deep psychotic break with consensus reality, often indistinguishable from a schizophrenic episode. This “shamanic crisis” is truly dangerous – not all survive. Another similar yet distinct way the Call sounds appears in North American indigenous cultures where every male is expected to undertake a vision quest during adolescence; a potential shaman is recognized by the nature of the visions he experiences (e.g., perhaps an animal guide identified with shamans in the tribe’s mythology)..

But the shamanic crisis is only the first step. Some refuse the Call. Those who do embark on the path are apprenticed to a shaman and receive intense training, often lasting many years.

Certainly shamans can be found today among the Sequoya in the Amazon, the Bwiti of Gabon, the aboriginal peoples of Australia, and other indigenous populations. But there’s an argument to be made that shamanism cannot exist apart from primal cultures.

Yet the human brain has changed little the last 12,000 to 15,000 years, and the same patterns that gave birth to shamanism remain in play. It’s true that modern society is hardly conducive to the shamanic experience: an adolescent in New York experiencing a break with reality is generally diagnosed as schizophrenic and treated with drugs to suppress the visions, and often even institutionalized. In more “primitive” societies he or she is supported and honored; the psychotic episode is allowed to play itself out, with the result that the individual becomes a respected, contributing member of society.

(Christina Grof, a student of Joseph Campbell at Sarah Lawrence, turned to him for support years later when she found herself overwhelmed with visions and psychic experiences, suffering from an apparent mental breakdown that almost led to her institutionalization; Campbell identified her experience as a “kundalini awakening” common to Eastern cultures and placed her in touch with a colleague, psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, who not only helped but eventually married Christina. Together the Grofs were able to persuade the editors of the DSM-IV – the diagnostic bible of modern psychiatry – to include a **distinction between mental illness and spiritual awakening**. Change comes slowly and the shamanic crisis is still regularly misidentified, but the field of psychology is at least beginning to recognize it as a valid experience.)

So are there legitimate shamans active in the First World today, despite the absence of a traditional tribal path?

Well, I don't believe one can decide to become a shaman the way one chooses a vocation: policeman, nurse, construction worker, business executive, or shaman. Nor does simply drinking Ayahuasca or ingesting ibogaine a shaman make ... but I have met those who clearly heard the Call, usually as a result of what Joseph Campbell terms a Wasteland experience – a “long, dark night of the Soul” - and have dedicated themselves to this discipline.

It's not an easy path. Whether traditional or contemporary, a shaman is someone who has experienced a deep inward turn, and as a result has developed the tools to move back and forth between this plane of existence and the Spirit World, mediating between the two on an individual's or a community's behalf.

Despite the temptation to think of this exclusively in metaphorical terms, from what I have witnessed it is a very real, profound experience. In fact, while pondering this question I touched bases with Keya Hutchens, a good friend who is a shaman based in Minnesota – though she hesitates to call herself that these days, given the “new age” baggage attached to the term. Calm, nurturing, and grounded today, her experience echoes these observations.

Joseph Campbell notes that the difference between a shaman and a priest is that the priest is the agent of a collective order, conveying an established mythological tradition that has descended from others; the shaman, on the other hand, speaks with the authority of his or her own experience. Absent an authentic, living mythology – much like today – the shaman's image can serve as a metaphor for each individual's journey to discover her/his personal mythology, grounded in the experience of one's own inner world, and how that perception is reflected in the world we all share.

For those who wish to [explore shamanism further](#), I recommend anthropologist Jeremy Narby's “The Cosmic Serpent” and the essay anthology, “Shamans Through Time: 500 Years on the Path to Knowledge” (which Narby edited with Francis Huxley), as well as Daniel Pinchbeck's “Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism.”

Source: [Joseph Campbell Rising. PlanetShifter.com Magazine Interview with Stephen Geringer - Community Relations, Joseph Campbell Foundation, by Willi Paul](#)

intro <http://www.planetshifter.com/node/1424>

email correspondence between Willi Paul and **Martin Weyers**, Mythological RoundTable® Program, Joseph Campbell Foundation

Martin: Dear Willi, thank you very much for your understanding, as well as your great patience!

I have been discussing your request, once again, with some of my JCF colleagues. We have no doubts, that you are a pleasant person and we have great respect for your dedication and your achievements (for example your interviews and presentations)! Some of my MRT colleagues have already been in touch with you, and they also reported that you are doing well. You have cultivated a respectable set of ideas about the collective hero, which is your personal admission and we appreciate this latest twist you have given to the hero's journey as your personal agenda.

Our point is, that the JCF Mythological RoundTable® Program is designed as a network of local representations of the Joseph Campbell Foundation. The idea is, to engage our JCF associates to have local gatherings, where they can discuss Joseph Campbell's ideas and related topics with other JCF associates.

Again, we don't have any problem with the fact, that your concept of the hero's journey and how mythology should be used properly, differs widely from what Campbell taught. Also, an exchange, for example, through interviews, as suggested in your recent email, could certainly be inspiring for both sides. (So please feel free to contact any of my JCF colleagues or MRT leaders individually!)

However, it would be somewhat inappropriate, if someone who questions the foundation's most basic assignments, acts as a representative of the same foundation.

For example, somewhere in your interviews you are saying:

"I have broken away from the Joseph Campbell crowd on the concept of the Hero. I no longer want individual Heroes but now support the community as the Hero. People with critical initiations and knowledge should return to the community from their journey to build resilience."

(<http://planetshifter.com/node/2252>)

According to our mission statement, our goal is, among other things, to foster the work of Joseph Campbell. I'm sure you will agree, that your viewpoint, as pointed out in the quote above, is not in accordance with our JCF mission. While it is highly acceptable as an expression of your personal mission, of course (and we don't take any offence!), it's difficult to imagine a representative of JCF who does not agree to what we consider as part of our most fundamental assignments. To become a representative of those you have been "broken away" from, simply doesn't make sense, right?

I imagine, a discussion about the collective hero, permaculture etc. would make a great MRT gathering, or two. However, the focal point of our MRTs should be more closely related to mythology, religion etc., in the spirit of Joseph Campbell.

There are so many mythology groups and presenters around, for example on Meetup.com. All of these groups and individuals are most welcome, because they add a note to what Campbell calls the symphony of mankind (in his forward to the Masks of Gods series). However, while we appreciate the huge variety of

viewpoints of our MRT leaders, it makes sense only to accept those as the local face of the foundation, who are agreeing to our mission statement and act in accordance to the JCF assignment.

Please let me add a personal note: I really like the idea of the collective hero. For example, I always considered my all-time favorite movie ('2001 - A Space Odyssey) as a collective hero story of mankind. Also, I like the idea of collective responsibility, for example for ecological or social belongings. I fully agree, that far too many times, what started as an individual search, easily becomes an obsession with oneself. These are the dangers and challenges, we are all facing. On the other hand, I wouldn't ever demand that people need to be collective heroes, neither would I say, I "no longer want individual heroes", because I simply respect different approaches. Campbell has been stressing the necessity of the individual journey so many times (individual); he has also been stressing the importance of the return of the hero and 'bringing the boon back to society' (collective). That's what you're doing so well, however, the approach is somewhat different from ours.

I'm hoping this find you well, Martin

Willi: Thank you, Martin. For your time and honesty.

With a zillions of years of well -meaning Heroes, from the military, sports, arts and letters, the planet is now on the brink of death. There must be a better way to teach and lead our citizens. My forth Mythic Roundtable in Berkeley is in process.

In the same spirit as my ongoing investigations into Campbell's Hero, I am now also working on the idea of "collective initiation" (via ritual) and "activist mythology."

The bliss is good here. Peace. **WOX**

Martin: Willi, thank you so much for your patience! I forwarded your request to my JCF colleagues. (The JCF leadership expects me not to make such decisions on my own, but to discuss it with a number of long-time MRT leaders.) We have been reading through your website and, based on the information posted there, believe that your personal admission is a bit different from our JCF perspective. You know, Campbell was supporting the idea of the individual journey, while you are promoting the idea of a collective hero's journey. That doesn't mean, there's anything wrong with your approach. However, we believe that it's just a different agenda, that is not really compatible with our own. So we decided that the MRT format is inapplicable for the mission you're following. I'm hoping this finds you well, it's not to be understood as criticism. However, our MRT leaders are volunteers who are promoting Campbell's ideas in their local community. That's the idea behind our JCF Mythological RoundTable® program.

Wishing all the best for your journey

[martin.weyers at jcf.org](mailto:martin.weyers@jcf.org)

Willi: Thanks for the important feedback Martin.

First, are you or one of the inner circle at JFC interested in an interview? You can review my interview with Stephen.

Second, thank you for acknowledging my POV on the Campbellian idea of the hero. After 6 years of initiation, journey and reporting to the global community, community is the much needed hero to make the changes we require. Consider the integrated ideas of localization and sharing from permaculture and Transition. Individuals, of course, will continue to play a key role.

My Mythic Roundtables reveal a strong support for my work. Would my pending report from these 3 public sessions be of interest to the blog there? Have you read my contribution to the MythNow Blog? See: [Mother, Sun, and the Compost Pile](#)?

Willi: Transformation is required from all of us now! Peace.

Conversations



“A Myth and a Prayer” – Article and Conversation about Mythology with Gregory Gronbacher and Willi Paul from [Planetshifter.com Media](https://planetshifter.com)

"Myths are public dreams. Dreams are private myths. By finding your own dream and following it through, it will lead you to the myth world in which you live. The passage is from dream, to vision, to the gods... and they are you. All the gods, all the hells, all the heavens are within you. The God is in YOU. It is not something that happened somewhere else a long time ago. It's in you. This is the truth of Truths. This is what the gods and myths are all about. So find them in yourself and take them into yourself and you will be awakened in your mythology and in your life."

- Joseph Campbell

"Our future depends on our willingness to abandon worn out methodologies and outdated ways of reading the Judeo-Christian myths. These grand narratives must be read again with fresh eyes, the advantages of science, and our better modern sensibilities. To continue to read them in literalist fashion is to harm the original intent of the ancient authors, the underlying truth of the texts, and to ruin any opportunity for our culture to once again embrace their underlying sanity."

- Gregory Gronbacher

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Please enjoy author and seeker Gregory Gronbacher's excellent article: [Looking back to look forward – explorations in comparative mythology](#), reproduced in full after our conversation.

Willi: Have you had experiences that fit into Joseph Campbell's initiation, journey and hero scheme?

Gregory: Somewhat. I'm reasonable enough to avoid casting myself as a hero too often. Also, I find Campbell's overall trajectory somewhat excessively individualist and tainted by the myth of progress. Yet if this schema fits my experiences at all, it's in the spiritual-religious arena. I've undergone being called out of ordinary, everyday life into an adventure that took me far from my starting point, brought excitement, openness, and then ordeal, struggle, and sometimes victory.

My initial religious experience was a spiritual awakening, at age 15 in a Catholic setting (I was raised nominally Lutheran, but more or less secular, maybe even High Pagan.) This awakening was a call out of ordinary, everyday life, to an adventure in worlds I never knew existed. I ended up converting to Catholicism and earning advanced degrees in theology and philosophy and even at a point working for the church as a lay theologian. I benefited greatly from the journey and adventure with Catholicism, but my ordeal came in my early 30s with issues of maintaining integrity (intellectual, practical, and spiritual), refusing to bow to an abusive, controlling institution, and eventually renouncing the church and entering a period of spiritual wandering.

I traveled through Buddhism, Taoism, forms of Paganism, Atheism, and attempted a few return journeys to a more progressive, lesser institutional Christianity. These returns luckily failed, since such a path for me would have been regressive. Currently, I am immersed in Reform Judaism, but I struggle with primal, underlying eruptions of yet another call (which I seem to be refusing, or perhaps delaying) toward what I might describe as a Humanistic Druidry - an ecospirituality that has much overlap with your work on sustainability and which is focused more on caring for nature, others, and self, and less on deity, iron age myths, moral purity, and tribal commitments.

I appreciate the Jewish community and love the beauty of Jewish theology. And it's possible that the call I sense is a call to integration and not departure.

Yet I am being compelled by my own thinking and evolution toward what for me would likely be a more genuine spirituality to match my thinking on divinity, cosmology, ethics, anthropology and one that would better sync with my own experiences of the world. This is possible within Judaism, but it would take effort. Yet the alternative requires effort too – the effort of building a new tradition.

And I can't help but be convinced that I am not the only one being drawn to this path and journey, that some sort of global awakening is underway with the collapse of Abrahamic traditions and their exhausted cosmology - toward an emerging spirituality of right relationship with nature and with others. This spirituality would be one of meditation, mindful living, mutual cooperation, justice and sustainable living. Once it emerges more fully, I believe will prove revolutionary - and popular.

Willi: I am creating new Nature-born and modern community sharing rituals. Spiritual not religious in construct. Do you share this calling? Any examples?

Gregory: Well, that depends on how you define spiritual and religious. If by spiritual and not religious you mean non-restrictive, relying less on institutions, free-flowing, open, and allowing for personalization, then sure. But if you mean "anything goes", no intellectual foundations, fuzzy thinking, no boundaries, no

principles – then I can share much of your efforts, but will likely find them without adequate foundations to endure or be meaningful in a communal setting. If spirituality becomes too idiosyncratic, it becomes difficult to ground community around such.

Willi: Can the community be the hero now?

Gregory: Yes, I think we may be witnessing a move away from the unhealthy individualism that has us all embarking on isolated quests toward an awareness that we are moving forward, evolving in a collective, communal way. The best journeys are a mix of personal and communal affairs. Additionally, the notion of the separation of the individual from the community is somewhat artificial.

Willi: Good. Folks from my third Mythic Roundtable think that the hero is now integrated into the Campbellian triad and that the “evil” monsters are actually us; that the monsters are part of the community now. A nice paradox?

Gregory: Yes, I do like that addition and insight. I don’t want to eliminate the notion of the other completely. There can be people committed to such evil that they indeed do separate themselves from others and force that identity upon themselves and deserve marginalization. I think it’s rare, and even in these cases, such individuals reflect those parts of us and the community at least in shadow form.

Willi: Can you offer a critique of Campbell’s work in this Drought – ISIS – GMO Age?

Gregory: I tend to agree with John Michael Greer, Peter Grey, Richard Heinberg, and Jason Kirkey (and others) that we are in a period of decline and transition. What's declining is Western Industrial culture and infrastructure. What's keeping most people in denial about our decline is the pervasive myth of progress - that the human trajectory is always upward to something better.

This myth is preventing real solutions to our growing problems from gaining traction, too.

I'm not a Campbell scholar, but I think Campbell's basic schema of the Hero's Journey is tainted by the same attachment to progress and guaranteed happy endings. Campbell wasn't a blind idealist, but he still often seems convinced that progress is a certainty. There are not enough chthonian aspects to Campbell's sense of the spiritual journey.

Our age of ecological upheaval, ISIS, fundamentalism, GMO (et al) - what may emerge from our ordeal with these things (symptoms and by-products of the collapse) may not be what some expect. We are likely heading for a humbler, slower, simpler future that will please some, but horrify others who expect an endless supply of ever-better and cheaper iToys and living without concern for nature or others.

Willi: Please tell me who controls our mythic trajectory right now and how you and I can engineer (your) “humbler, slower, simpler future.”

Gregory: I think we all control our mythic trajectory, but obviously those of us aware and engaged will likely be more influential. As I type that last line, I stop and wonder if I am overly optimistic? I think of the stunning amount of messages/images/symbols/narratives being tossed at us, forced on us, thrown at us, shoved at us – by government, by corporations, by their marketing and propaganda, and even by mainstream religion that too often tries to control the culture at large.

Humbler means less certain, more skeptical, less ideological, more realistic, more grounded in reality and not abstract, speculative theology. Slower means meditative, gentle, willing to allow to address others as persons of dignity, not forcing our ideas, not forcing decisions, engaging in conversation rather than preaching at. Simpler means stripped down to the bare essentials – I think of Judaism – it's rich, but not always simple. It could benefit from simplicity – from eliminating much of the tradition that is today outdated – redeeming the first born son, circumcision, religious purity laws, certain parts of Kashrut – much the same project as offered by Reformed Judaism to mold Judaism into an Ethical Monotheism accessible to all with a universal message of love and justice.

What I love about Reform and other forms of Liberal Judaism is the dynamic hermeneutic, the requirement that every Jew of every age join the conversation and make an interpretative contribution. Who controls the Jewish mythic trajectory? Every Jew has a say in that trajectory.

Can Judaism be the vehicle for a humbler, slower, simpler future? I'm not sure.

Willi: Why should we care about the [classic myths](#)? About mythology at all?

Gregory: Mythology helps shape culture, and therefore history as well. Myth helps us find our place in the world, establish an identity, and often convey practical wisdom on how to live. Some have argued that we live in an amythic age. That may true, but knowing the myths that have shaped our culture as well as other cultures is an exercise in self-exploration, learning from the past, and seeing more clearly toward the future.

Willi: Who really cares about the past and why?

Gregory: Sadly not enough people care. But if you don't know where you come from how can you know where you going, no less who you are? Context offers perspective and nothing grants context like the past. We need not be chained to the past. We not be overly enamored with it, but we need to understand it as best we can. It's not just that we risk repeating the mistakes of the past, it's that we honestly can't fully understand who we are without the past.

Willi: Please share a few examples of what you call: "grand existential narratives?" Who gets in? Who gets left out?

Gregory: I really like the way you phrase this question, that is, the latter part concerning who is in and who is out, who is included and who is excluded. Most myths are tribal. They relate to a specific people. As such, they often easily shift into exclusionary mode - "our" gods, "our mission", "our message", "and our heroes" and so on. Also, many myths tend to create or proclaim foils - who is the bad guy, the enemy, the "other". This can create not merely tension, but lead to hatred and violence.

Narratives become grand and existential when they take on universal themes of human existence and offer themselves as stories that everyone can engage and relate to. Many Native American creation myths are an example. As is the creation stories in Genesis. I'd add that some Celtic myth also approaches this status with an emphasis on nature and honorable living - even if it's clothed in warrior images.

Concerning who is in and who is out? I think in our current myth of progress anyone who doesn't successfully manipulate the system and play along with the corporations is out. And by out I mean marginalized, even sometimes crushed. I think the myth of progress - which is our current grand narrative - has racial exclusions, gender exclusions, and despite its homage to individuality and self-expression, is really quite conformist. Not all diversity in nature is a good thing - think of cancer. But in general, diversity in biosystems is healthy and contributes to endurance and thriving. Permaculture appreciates diversity in a healthy way and a way from which we must learn.

Willi: How would you facilitate a neighborhood myth making seminar in East Oakland? Please include relevant symbols and Universal theme(s)?

Gregory: I've never been to East Oakland, so I hesitate to offer anything too concrete. I grew up in New York City, went to college in Ohio, spent 5.5 years in Europe, and now have lived for the past 20 years in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I think relevant symbols would include those from traditional religious systems – crosses, stars, pentagrams, crescents – but should also include newer and evocative symbols – spirals, circles, drums, dancers, astrological signs, etc. Further, I would give prominence to the newer symbols. Also, those who knew the local culture could add what might be locally recognized, meaningful, powerful, and even controversial.

Willi: [Symbols](#) and [archetypes](#) - What are they in your work and how are these things changing, if at all?

Gregory: Well, the Cross remains for me a powerful symbol of the healing restorative energy of kenotic love. Yet I think this truth about kenotic love remains even when one filters out Jesus and Christianity. There is nothing necessary about Jesus. (Or Torah for that matter.) I see the power of the symbol of the Cross, but I've divorced it from the more incredulous aspects of the narrative and system from which it emerges. Somehow, the message of the Cross needs to be interwoven into our newer spiritualities and systems of thinking - it may not take the shape of a cross, but the insight of kenotic love needs to carry forth.

Celtic knot work remains evocative for me - serving as a symbol of reality's interconnectedness and interdependence.

The spiral is also powerful - calling to mind evolution, both cosmic and personal.

The Well of Segais also serves a transformative image for personal meditation - as a place of rooting, of restoration, and of origins.

The Star of David is another symbol. No one is quite sure where it exactly originated. It's likely pagan in origin. Common interpretations include two intersecting triangles – one representing the divine impulse and the other nature.

Willi: Please see this [symbol/ archetype tool kit disguised an article](#) and reflect for us:

Gregory: Oddly, looking at the photos reminded me of Israel for some reason. I've never visited, but the images of Israel are of agricultural renewal, development, community, and nature. The image that spoke most movingly to me was the tree and the moon. The moon is a symbol of the Jewish calendar. The full moon marks many Jewish holidays. The tree is representative of Torah which is often called a tree of life. Further, the symbol spoke to me of autumn, of Samhain, of endings and beginnings.

The explanations of the symbols and the writings were evocative of much the same. Also, they spoke to me of my own project of blending and revitalization.

Willi: Are you religious or spiritual? Both or none?

Gregory: Both. On one level, I accept that many use the terms interchangeably in casual conversation. Yet I also see important distinctions between them. I tend to approach religion from the perspective of its etymology - from the Latin word to bind. Religion is a set of practices and traditions that bind together a

worldview. Spirituality, from my way of thinking, is more open and free flowing and focused on the process of determining and exploring that worldview, asking existential questions, and examining our own experiences of living.

Right now, as a Jew, I have a religious system to anchor my spirituality. If I heed the call that I believe I am experiencing toward ecospirituality, then I will have to join in the creation of the religious aspects of forming a tradition. And this won't be easy, because many drawn to nature based spirituality are Romantic types who shun system, doctrine, and the institutional aspects of religion that both restrain and maintain spiritual impulses.

Judaism is a religious system that has survived for thousands of years. If I embark on an ecospiritual path, I will certainly take much of the form of Judaism with me, applying it as a way of grounding newer expressions of spiritual seeking.

Willi: Can you compare pagan mythology with Jewish mythology and tell me if you can see a unity of spirit coming?

Gregory: I hope so. Earlier I commented on my own feeling called beyond Judaism to a more nature-based spirituality. A large part of me thinks and feels that perhaps the call is not to leave Judaism, but rather to stay and integrate nature-based insights into Judaism – not superficially, but in a more full sense. Such a project would likely not be popular with some, if not many.

Pagan mythology is broad – from many cultures, many centuries, and many peoples – and is both old and new. Jewish myth is more concentrated, edited, redacted, and collected into resources most Jews are aware of. I appreciate both collections of myth.

Yet I believe that Jewish myth stresses both the dignity of humans as well as the dignity of nature, caring for humans as well as caring for the ecosystem. It frustrates me when I read pagan theology, pagan writings, and pagan myths and find more concern for trees and rivers than human beings, more concern about backyard farming or solar power than feeding the poor and reintegrating the homeless.

Some may find my sentiments to be overly simply. But I'd be happy to be challenged or even refuted.

Judaism has much overlap with Paganism – at least in terms of structure. First, the nature-based aspects are many – the Sabbath starts at sundown, the calendar is lunar, the new moon is a feast day, there are many nature-based epiphanies throughout Torah – burning bushes, pillars of fire, thunder, cloud, rain, and whispering winds. Nearly every Jewish holiday has an agricultural significance which allows the Jewish holidays to form an alternative Wheel of the Year.

Jewish notions of Divinity are not what many people think – there is much room for approaching God as an archetype, for understanding God in a panentheist fashion, finding the Divine infused throughout nature and being most powerfully revealed in the cycles of agriculture, the unfolding of the seasons, and in the rhythms of the moon and tides.

So, perhaps my sense of being called further is a call to integration and not departure. Time will tell.

Willi: “... Jewish myth also had something many of the other myths lacked – a strong, revolutionary alternative track of mercy, love, generosity, care of the poor, and justice.” Are you speaking about history or today?

Gregory: Both, but sadly, more so history. There is a moral genius in ancient Jewish myth that in my opinion is lacking in other mythic systems. The concern for justice, love of neighbor, care of the poor - these themes are not substantial in many other ancient myths. Sadly, many Jews today don't engage their myths and thus this moral revolution is often a thing of the past.

Recent news about Jewish-Israeli settlers destroying the olive trees of Palestinian farmers is horrific, sad, and tragic. It shows how many Jews today, even self-proclaimed religious ones are out of sync with their own myths. Torah clearly states that you should not destroy the trees during war and that you should leave the loser with the agricultural means to survive. Destroying olive trees - symbols of peace and continuity - is gross immorality.

I think the moral concerns present in Jewish myth will need to carry over in new myths that we tell and live. I am highly drawn to many of today's Neopagan-Druid myths concerning a love of nature, care of the ecosystem, reenchanting nature and once again capturing a sense of its sacredness. But what is often lacking is the emphasis on human dignity and inter-human morality - the same holding sacred of humans as nature. Any lasting and valuable spirituality has to honor both nature and persons.

Willi: I found your use of the word (re)enchanting strangely powerful. Where can we find enchantment today?!

Gregory: I believe we can find reenchantment in wilderness, in nature (I offer the distinction between an urban park and a nature preserve in Alaska or somewhere remote, as an example). I believe we can find reenchantment in some forms of religion with whatever we deem and actually treat as sacred.

Enchantment is when we find something sacred, alive, special, transformative, engaging – when something reminds us of deeper questions and existential issues. Enchantment happens when something inspires awe and connects us to the essential wholeness of being.

I think some find enchantment in church (although I think less people are doing so, thus the drop in members and participants), some in astrology, some in story, some in cooking, some in magic, some in the occult, some in hobbies – the possible arena's for enchantment are many.

Willi: I have spent many years transforming [Permaculture and Transition movements](#) with a Quaker POV into [new myths](#). I would like your critique.

Gregory: I've only started reading and wrestling with your work, thank you for sharing it. It's fascinating and offers so much - overlapping with many other projects of nature based spirituality moving in the same direction. I will indeed be spending more time with your writing and interviews. Some initial impressions:

First, I deeply appreciate your definition of myth and its relationship to truth. Philosophers can often forget the subjective-personal aspect of truth that doesn't erase its objectivity. A story can be true, but not appeal to all. Thank you. Second, the notion of permaculture is one that must be part of any nature-based spirituality - and these seem to be the slowly developing spiritualities that I am convinced will become dominant. Yet many of these spiritualities are what might be called "soft" they haven't moved yet to the more serious work of eco-activism and responding to the needs of nature and humans. Permaculture offers a strong and practical foundation to channel this impulse.

If I had to offer a critique, it would likely be more in the form of a reminder to all of us attempting to develop myth, ritual, and new spiritual systems - is tough work. It takes more time than we think. It's even painful at times. I really don't think we've grasped the significance of what we are doing.

Willi: A comment. Many permaculturists actively protest any connection to religion in their science-based design. Part of my mission is to share the significance, or holism, in all things Nature.

Gregory: I can totally understand that. But human meaning is intrinsically entwined with nature. And that meaning is also part and parcel of spirituality in its most basic aspects. I'm not advocating we worship permaculture, or even nature for that matter. But I am an advocate of allowing nature to serve as a spiritual touchstone. Therefore, I share your holism and your mission.

Willi: Are there brand new [creation myths](#) emerging? Similarity, do you see new apocalyptic myths rising?

Gregory: Yes, I think new creation myths are emerging which focus on evolution, singularity, and the Big Bang - the scientific foundations of our current understanding of cosmogenesis.

Yet for these myths to become narratives, they will need poetry, plot, and artistic treatment so as to be accessible to people in general and appeal to more than the intellectual.

The advantages of this mythic approach is that it harmonizes with other insights of interconnectedness, unity, mutual responsibility, and human enmeshment in the web of life, as opposed to somehow standing outside of it, apart from nature.

Willi: Can sounds be catalysts to a higher consciousness? Please share your thoughts on sound symbols, archetypes, and new myths. The [connection](#) is here:

Gregory: Yes! I have experienced sound as such a catalyst. For me, there is nothing quite as meaningful and moving as hearing the return of the song birds – it's a sound of hope, or renewal, and a source of epiphany. Many other sounds of nature have the same effect on me, and others.

Music has an inherent spiritual quality. The power of music is evident across the various styles of music. Why else do we incorporate music into liturgy?

Drumming, chanting, meditation bowls, bells – are all instruments of awakening, transformation, and connecting.

Willi: What are the source(s)?

Gregory: Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Loyal Rue, Ursula Goodenough, Jason Kirkey, and others. In Jewish theology, the work of Arthur Green, Jay Michaelson, and the folks who form Wilderness Torah are about a similar project.

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[Looking back to look forward – explorations in comparative mythology](#) by Gregory Gronbacher

Our current Western industrial way of life is in a period of transformation marked by cultural and practical decline. Many are in denial about our current state, but the evidence of our current decline is building. Our myths, religions, and economies are exhausted – chaos is seeping out along the social margins.

Decline is not the same as extinction. The West will survive, but only by embracing new myths, forms and structures, and likely after a period of disruption. What is certain is that Western ways of being religious – the traditional source of our myths – are changing rapidly and in ways that will likely surprise us.

Openness to reality and the effort to avoid narrow ideology is the foundation of wisdom and restoration – we must allow ourselves to be informed by our experiences and reflection on them – not be limited “isms” that attempt to force reality to comply with their theories – we must live according to the truth if we are to once again have a thriving economy, functioning political order, moral culture, and religious and spiritual sanity.

Truth matters and humans encapsulate our core truths and find our meaning and place in the world through stories. The human person is a story-telling, metaphor-loving, symbol-making being for whom myth conveys information regarding fundamental, existential meaning. The human person relates on a psychological-spiritual level to stories, narratives, icons, and parables.

Myth – grand existential narratives – provide a culture with its central narrative(s), thus establishing the framework for wisdom – a collective sense of purpose, place, identity, and set of shared values. Therefore, the language of spirituality is that of myth, metaphor, and symbol.

We live in the age when the Judeo-Christian mythos that sustained Western culture is decaying, most likely beyond the ability to revive and invigorate the culture in their current reading. Only an interpretative revolution and vibrant rereading will reinvigorate them. As our once central myths erode, the West currently suffers from an increasing anarchy of meaning and value, and is tending toward nihilism.

Shatter the shared mythic narratives and symbols that provide a culture with its basis for collective thought and action, and you’re left with a society in fragments, where biological drives and idiosyncratic personal agendas are the only motives left, and communication between divergent subcultures becomes impossible because there aren’t enough common meanings left to make that an option.

Many scholars and mystics believe that only religion can accomplish the fundamental unifying task. Nihilism becomes self-canceling, once reflection goes far enough to show that a belief in nihilism is just as arbitrary and improvable as any other belief; that being the case, the assertions of a religious tradition are no more absurd than anything else, yet when based on humane values often provide a more reliable and proven basis for commitment and action than any other option.

The only way to avert the slide into nihilism’s abyss is to revitalize our sacred narratives and myths. And key to the revitalization is the updating of the Judeo-Christian mythos with a variety of insights, including those from evolution, science, organic systems-thinking, psychology, and social science.

A Multiplicity of Myths

Western culture has many mythic systems to choose from. The culture of the Roman Empire coalesced around Virgil’s works that depicted in mythic form the Divine purpose of the Empire in total military conquest of the known world. The Aeneid, which appeared around 19 BCE provided the story in which nearly all Romans found themselves and saw themselves.

Beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, the so-called “barbarians” lived in cultures animated by their own mythic systems.

The peoples of the Scandinavian countries had their traditions of oral stories passed down through the centuries. Eventually, these stories were written down in the now famous Eddas – poetic stories of the Vikings and their conquests, conflicts, and way of life. These stories of valor, magic, and warrior culture were finalized in written form in the early 1200s CE.

The Celtic peoples also lived in a mythically rich culture – with variants of national myths abounding among the Irish, Welsh, and Scottish. The Ulster Cycle, the Myths of the Four Invasions, tales of Queen Maeve, Cul Cullen, and other foundational stories each taking on their own flavor depending on the tribe telling it. Again, these stories existed once only in oral form, to be committed to writing centuries later. The majority of the Celtic myths being written down between 900-1100 CE.

All these myths reflect the aspirations, values, goals, and self-identity of the peoples from which they emerge and in turn help shape the same in future generations.

Common to the vast majority of these Western myths is violence, trickery, the sexual power of beautiful women, the nobility of the courageous warrior, slavery, and glory through military conquest. There are indeed traces of kindness, forgiveness, mercy, and generosity – but these values are secondary in importance compared to honor, courage, and bravery – usually exhibited in warfare and armed conflict. As for women's rights, basic human rights, and the care of the poor – not much ink is shed.

The Myths of another Tribe

As the Celtic peoples were telling their stories by the village fires of ancient Europe, another tribe of people had already committed their foundational narratives to writing. These people – the ancestors of what today we call the Hebrews, Israelites, or Jews – lived in the area of the world once called Canaan, today called Palestine and Israel.

Jewish myth had its fair share of violence and war. On a few occasions the ancient authors write of Divine calls to genocide, the need to stone adulterers, unruly children, and those who worship improperly. Jewish myth has its tales of glory in war and violence at home. It reflects the mores of the time.

But Jewish myth also had something many of the other myths lacked – a strong, revolutionary alternative track of mercy, love, generosity, care of the poor, and justice.

The same set of myths that calls for slaughtering the women and children of conquered towns, also has an undercurrent of loving your neighbor as yourself, welcoming the stranger, radical hospitality, tolerance, and the glorification of peace as well as war.

Jewish myth features commandments that set it apart from other mythic systems – gleaning, a trend away from capital punishment, environmental concern, and humane treatment of animals, a strong call to care for the needy, poor, and marginalized, and a foundational yearning for radical justice.

Jewish myth lays out hints of an economic system based in agricultural fairness, the sharing of land, and the periodic forgiveness of debt. Jewish myth calls for limitations in warfare and conflict – don't burn the trees or sow the land with salt. Leave something for the losers to survive upon.

Jewish myth – much of which predates other Western myths by centuries, contains something missing from most of the other mythic systems – mercy and a drive toward humane culture.

To be clear, I am not blind to the violence and nastiness that is all throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Yahweh has to be talked in off the ledge more than once. His hand of wrath has to be stayed by more sober and merciful voices of reason.

Yet the seeds of justice, love, peace, and tolerance are there in ways they are not in other mythic systems. And the interpretive freedom, the inventive hermeneutic, and the traditions of Midrash and relevancy reading do not exist in other cultures as strongly or in some cases, at all.

Our best scholarship and the best of archeology, cultural studies, and history shows that the Jews originated from among the Canaanite peoples, assimilating the local culture into more peaceful and just ways, rather than taking the land by conquest after a physical Exodus from Egypt. The myths of these peoples reflected innovative and revolutionary values as well as the common values of ancient peoples.

Adopting the Jewish Interpretative to Myth

Revelation is a continuous process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the Tanak (Jewish Bible) combines history remembered with history metaphorized, expressing sacred myths that are primarily sweeping spiritual statements, providing context for answers (but not necessarily the answers themselves) to life's basic questions. Jewish identity and personal spirituality requires weaving our own experience into these myths to form a narrative context for our life.

Scripture recognizes the Sacred Presence that communes with humans throughout history, hidden in all that happens in the world, and testifies that this Power is concerned with holiness and justice. The writings are our ancestors attempt to give voice to that Presence the best they could, through storytelling, poetry, analogy, and rule making. That voice was imperfect, but progressive.

The texts contain our ancestor's thoughts about God's will and wisdom, but not God's dictated words. The sacred texts are not inerrant or infallible – they are a collection of inspired writings that recorded our ancestor's understandings of the Divine. The texts cannot serve as historical or scientific documents, and their moral application must be subtly, culturally applied. Since Torah consists of many viewpoints, and sometimes contradictory ones, our reading is always selective.

Scripture contains revolutionary ideas and timeless truths – the equality of all humanity, the equality of men and women, and the inherent dignity of all human life created in the image of God. It dictates love of strangers and calls for the care of the poor and the downtrodden. It bespeaks the dignity of labor and the need to treat workers well and pay them proper wages. Its vision remains vital for Western renewal.

Literal readings render the core myths irrelevant. We are right to reject the ancient views of sacrifice, patriarchalism, family structures, and violence that are incompatible with a contemporary understanding of the world. Despite this necessary filtering, the Biblical writings contain a core of insights that still ring true and animate contemporary Western culture and spiritual practice.

We are to apply the texts to our current realities – with both the text and our current understanding of reality in dialog, neither trumping the other. The texts are living and meant to speak to every generation.

To do so, each generation must engage the texts in an ongoing conversation. Every Jew (and Christian who claims the texts as their heritage, too) has a voice in this conversation and a role in the Bible's ongoing reinterpretation.

We can no longer be religious in the same way as our ancestors. The world has been irrevocably transformed and so have our patterns of thought. We must find ways of engaging iron-aged myths with postmodern thinking. What is required is critical naïveté – the ability to recognize myth for what it is, move beyond the literal concerns, and then, with updated knowledge, engage the myth allowing it to inform, engage, and transform us.

Toward Mythic Renewal

Ancient Israel was a people who preferred peace, believed they were obligated to the poor, and set themselves on an arc of justice that continues today in the better aspects of Western culture.

Christianity built on this mythic tradition of mercy, furthering the more humane aspects of the West.

Our future depends on our willingness to abandon worn out methodologies and outdated ways of reading the Judeo-Christian myths. These grand narratives must be read again with fresh eyes, the advantages of science, and our better modern sensibilities.

To continue to read them in literalist fashion is to harm the original intent of the ancient authors, the underlying truth of the texts, and to ruin any opportunity for our culture to once again embrace their underlying sanity.

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Gregory's Bio –

Originally from New York City, I've called the West Michigan area home for the past 20 years – it too, is a space in between – a pleasant place nestled in between coasts, cultural craziness, and crowded cities.

I'm a married homebody with high social needs who loves to read and engage in good conversation with small groups of friends. Before I got in touch with my more grounded, introverted inner self, I got around, mostly for educational purposes.

I attended Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio – a vibrantly Catholic, solidly liberal arts school, where I majored in politics, theology, and philosophy. Next came a year and half in Liechtenstein for my M.Phil. in philosophy and political theory at the International Academy of Philosophy. I followed my time in the Alps with three and half years in Ireland, doing my doctorate in philosophy (and being blessed) with the Jesuits in Dublin.

Christian social ethics, free market economics, natural law approaches to ethical reasoning, personalism, social philosophy, classical liberalism, phenomenological realism, and the various theological touch points of these areas have formed me, my thinking, and my theology, and have always captivated me.

My theology is progressively rooted in tradition. My approach is mythical-allegorical. I tend toward the existential and even the Jungian. I believe the encounter-dialog-reading of our scriptures is ongoing and evolving. I find the Divine presence in nature, much like Moses did at the burning bush, and I find the revelation to be similar – God is the ground of being, the patterns of order in nature and the world, the source of life and goodness.

I believe religion's purpose and meaning is to make us better people – individuals who are capable of love and generosity. I believe we can be transformed by engaging our myths, symbols, and liturgies. I believe prayer is the sanctification of the expressions of the heart and a form of meditation. I believe the heart of religion is found in the teachings of “love your neighbor as yourself, love the stranger in your midst; walk with humility, practice kindness, show mercy, and strive for justice.”

My spirituality has evolved to where I occupy “a space in between”, rooted in Liberal Jewish theology and belonging to a Reformed Jewish community, but with

my theology colored by insights from Progressive Christianity and nature-based spirituality and mediated through my own Celtic cultural heritage. I invite you to join the conversation and I welcome dialog, questions, and all comments.

Willi's Bio –

In 1996 Mr. Paul was instrumental in the design of the emerging online community space in his Master's Thesis: "The Electronic Charrette." He was active in many small town design visits with the Minnesota Design Team. Willi earned his permaculture design certification in August 2011 at the Urban Permaculture Institute, SF. Mr. Paul has released 20 eBooks, 2260 + posts on PlanetShifter.com Magazine, and over 325 interviews with global leaders. He has created 68 New Myths to date and has been interviewed over 30 times in blogs and journals. Please see his cutting-edge article at the Joseph Campbell Foundation and his pioneering videos on YouTube. A current focus is Myth Lab – a technique that Willi is implementing in his current Mythic Roundtable series.

* * * * *

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Peter Ruddock

Willi Paul

“Transition Mythology” - Interview with Mythologist / Entrepreneur [Willi Paul](#), by Peter Ruddock, Transition Palo Alto in support of **Peninsula Mythic Roundtable, April 1, 7:30 - 9:30 PM, [Mountain View Community Center](#), Free.**

Bay area mythologist and publisher Willi Paul will lead the Peninsula Mythic Roundtable: “[Tools and Inspiration for Creating New Myths](#)”. Sponsored by [Transition Palo Alto](#) & [Planetshifter.com Magazine](#)

Willi will read one his recently published “[New Myths](#)” and direct a live “[Myth Lab](#)” exercise that will generate a new myth with audience participation.

Writers, artists, mythologists, storytellers, teachers and activists are encouraged to attend the roundtable.

Mr. Paul recently held similar events in [Santa Barbara](#) and [Davis](#) to enthusiastic groups.

Join us for an evening of myth building. Help your neighbors create a new myth, perhaps one that will get across the principles and values of Transition to a wider audience. Get inspired to go home and create some stories of your own. Hope to see you on April 1.

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Roundtable Interview with Willi by Peter

There are many kinds of stories. How does myth differ from other types?

I usually include short stories, poems and lyrics in my mythic design pool. Integrated with illustrative audio, video and/or graphics, I include story elements: plot, conflict, antagonists / protagonists, lesson(s).

Here is the [current list of elements or influences](#) that I use to produce New Myths:

1. Para-normal
2. Universal struggle / message
3. Journey, Initiation, Hero / Community
4. Symbols
5. Alchemy
6. Nature is Sacred
7. Threat of apocalypse
8. Digital - Non-Digital Collision
9. Future-based
10. Permaculture and Transition

Why do you like to [work with myths](#)?

- + I love the arguments between the classic and new mythologies. In this transition, a new world waits.
- + It is a great challenge to integrate new issues and movements in the design of a relevant global mythology.
- + There is a rich basket of ideas in the pursuit of myths. Have you captured a new idea lately?
- + Myths are steeped in falsehoods, values, politics, dogma and bias. Tricky stuff!
- + The goal of creating a set of new universal values is daunting. I welcome great challenges now.

You specialize in interviews, written and video. You made a number of [Transition Tales videos](#) for Transition Palo Alto at its Sharing Expos. Why do you use this method to get people to tell their story?

I suppose video is the “techno-flavor” of the times: the power / ego of the recorded live moment? I hasten to add that text interviews require less bandwidth and are easier to build, edit and search online. Many feel violated if you take their image. My 148 YouTube [video library](#) is now largely sidelined to Twitter, G+ and LinkedIn as I share my vision forward.

What are some elements of myth that you think particularly relate to Transition?

[Localization](#) is a key myth / transition duo, as is [sharing resources](#). A third is that we need to build and practice [new rituals](#) with Transition lens.

Do you think Transition needs a hero? If so, what kind of figure might this be?

I have broken away from the Joseph Campbell crowd on the concept of the Hero. I no longer want individual Heroes but now support the community as the Hero. People with critical initiations and knowledge should return to the community from their journey to build resilience.

* * * * *

Willi Paul

New Mythologist & Transition Entrepreneur

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Exploring the Western vs. Indigenous Intersection in Costa Rican Mythology. Conversation with Douglas Williamson, Earth Charter International and Willi Paul, Mythologist. Presented by NewMythologist.com

[Legend of the Irazú Volcano](#) (Costa Rica)

Near the city of Cartago, Costa Rica, mighty Irazú stands watch over her domain. As the ancients tell, Irazú was the favorite daughter of a local leader, Aquitaba. The village where they lived was at war with a rival leader, Guarco, who wanted to control the entire valley. Desperate and fearing he would lose, Quitaba took Irazú to the highest peak and offered her in sacrifice to the gods to help him win the battle. As Guarco's forces close in, Aquitaba called on the spirit of his daughter to help their people. Immediately the mountain where she had died exploded in fire and ash and rained destruction down on Guarco's warriors. That day, the volcano became known as Irazú - making her unique among her male volcanic counterparts.

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Conversation with Douglas and Willi -

ONE

Willi: Do you see any creative tension (mixing) between the Indigenous and western cultural myths and rituals in Costa Rica?

Douglas: I think its creative tension, definitely tension, as those who are experimenting are trying to compromise different traditions and ways. Sometimes it comes off as authentic, and sometimes as contrived. Don't you find? I think it's good that people are experimenting though. I am skeptical usually, but open to experience always.

Willi: Are there festivals or products that, as you say, create a compromise in the traditions there?

Douglas: I sense that there may be some but my feeling is that most of the impetus is coming from outside Costa Rica. It seems to be a kind of tourism. People come here with the desire for a mixing of indigenous and other traditions, but it doesn't seem to be a Costa Rican impulse for the most part. Costa Rica has a very small and poor indigenous population and the average "Western" Costa Rican is much more interested in a typical North American materialist value system and standard of success than with a traditional indigenous value system. There are some pockets where the indigenous worldview crosses over that I've seen, but it's quite rare.

TWO

Willi: What are the fundamental mythological concepts of the sustainability movement? Are these shared by all there?

Douglas: I'm not sure I am ready or qualified to answer this question. I don't even know if I have a good working definition of what a "mythological concept" is. I can say that there are a lot of mythological bits and pieces within the sustainability movement, many pertaining to Earthrise, Gaia, nature gods, justice, vengeance, cleansing/destruction, and more.

Willi: I like where you are going with this. It seems that you went with symbols of sustainability. If we insert permaculture for sustainability, what do you see? How about the Transition Movement? But, yes, there is a ton of experimenting going down in Gaia!

Douglas: So, I'm still not sure what you mean by "mythological concept". I guess I touched on some concepts before like cleansing/destruction and renewal above. I think these play a strong role in the sustainability movement. I think the concept of paradise, heaven on Earth, Eden, play a role in the movement too. There seems to be an unagreed-upon concept of the ideal that underlies some of the movement. Sadly, much of the sustainability movement is an opposition political position, and so a lot of the concepts that drive the movement are negative reactions to current unacceptable situations. Personally, I prefer to focus on a proactive utopic visioning, rather than a reactive negative motivating.

THREE

Willi: Does the [hero](#) work at the community level?

Douglas: I think this is a great question and would be a lot of fun to map through. Once again, I have to claim insufficient knowledge of the hero archetype and narrative to really answer this question adequately. It seems to me that certainly there are aspects of the hero story that could be transposed onto a community narrative. I do wonder though if there are sufficient individuals who have such a strong community identity to be able to identify themselves as strongly with their community as individuals do with individual heroes. This question arose in the webinar that I attended and I think it's well worth exploring more deeply and fits in neatly with a lot of the thinking I am doing about utopic societies.

I would also like to note that while I think the hero archetype and narrative is something that we all know and appreciate, perhaps it is more useful for us in visioning the future to step away from that narrative in order to increase our collective appreciation of alternative narratives. The hero narrative seems to be the one we always look to for guidance, perhaps because it is the most developed, the most known, the most popular. But, what if we were to change the priority of our narrative desires to creating narratives that viewed "community" as the central character or actor without attaching the narrative structure of the hero to it?

I think this utopic visioning needs to see community as having its own narrative, detached from the hero story. I think this is what the Earth Charter tries to envision, as do stories and philosophies expounded in enlightenment political philosophy like The Social Contract, and stories including Utopia, Erewhon, and Ecotopia. Granted, these narratives, as well as all of the dystopias, are in some ways criticisms of present (or contemporary) communal rules and mores. These kinds of narratives are emerging all over the place, although they are presented in small bits and as criticism of certain aspects of contemporary society. I have been seeing a lot of the tiny house stories of late, and these seem to be one example of the emerging or reemerging narrative that speaks to lifestyle and community. The off-grid energy narrative is another. Any you are attracted to?

FOUR

Willi: How is Nature viewed in Costa Rica? By tourists? Locals? Business?

Douglas: Interestingly nature in Costa Rica is viewed by many as recreational and commercial (tourism). There is a decent segment of society here that reveres the natural world on a spiritual level, myself included, but those are less numerous. The Costa Rican identity is in flux at the moment and the nature aspect of it is pretty strong, although superficial too.

Willi: Can you name some of the "flux forces?"

Douglas: The flux forces here are the economy and materialism. Costa Rica is a country in transition. It is a middle class country with aspirations to be materially rich like the USA. The economic transition here is driving many towards materialistic values, although politically, the country understands better than most the value of nature and preservation. Still, there is, in my view, a perspective dichotomy among Costa Ricans between material aspirations and appreciation of nature. The material aspirations are favored over nature connection and as the economy creates greater differences between wealthy and poor, and the middle class is reduced, the value system will be ever more favorable towards the material and against the spiritual and natural.

FIVE

Willi: Is [localization](#) a viable strategy there? Has this influenced the stories?

Douglas: This concept is mostly carried out by foreigners here. It has not influenced the narrative here as far as I can tell.

Willi: Please describe what the foreigners are localizing!? How?

Douglas: Ok, I think you mean localization in the sense of an opposite to globalization. In this case, there are plenty of foreigners who are here creating small intentional communities, some with values similar to transition towns, a lot of permaculture, organic farming, etc. It's slightly colonial, but Costa Rica has always

been heavily influenced by the USA, so the North Americans and Europeans who are here, some are very much into using superior economic wealth to create communities and retreats, many with values of localization, although their presence here is a result of globalization.

SIX

Willi: Is [creation mythology](#) a strong presence now?

Douglas: Not that I can tell. I like creation stories a lot. I just spent a week at the beach and I experience a lot of creation feelings when looking at the horizon, the vastness of the sea, sky, stars, sunset light. I enjoy listening to the physics folks discuss theories, enjoy the cosmology of Swimme and Berry, and appreciate the myths I know about the creation of the world.

Willi: If you were to write and produce a play with creation as the dominant theme, what elements / plots / mythic sources would you use?

Douglas: I don't know. I'm less interested in creating foundational myths as I am about visioning narratives for the future. The only thing that comes to mind in answer to the question is water, an element (compound) I have an affinity for and find is fundamental as a starting point for creation.

SEVEN

Willi: What is the role of initiation for the people? Are these coupled with resilience?

Douglas: I don't know what you mean by "role of initiation". Which people? Are you referring to rites of passage? Again, you'll have to define what definition of "resilience" you are using. I am familiar with more than one.

Willi: For resilience, see [this work](#). Initiation is an active community & personal alchemy, a change; growth. It is a key principle in J. Campbell's work.

Douglas: Ok, I'll try and answer as best as I can, although I'm not entirely sure I'm on the same page as you regarding "initiation", which "people" you are referring to, and your understanding of "resilience". It seems to me that most people are reluctant to take the hero's journey and as such, avoid initiation entirely. In Costa Rica, most people, I find, are not very adventurous and most seek paths of less resistance. This seems to be normal most places I've lived. As for resilience, I'm not sure where that comes into the equation. Costa Rica seems average regarding resilience, although there is perhaps slightly more awareness on a political level of the dangers of global environmental change and economic instability, hence more resilience.

EIGHT:

Willi: Given that the Earth Charter's ethical vision proposes that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible, what are some of the [mythic artifacts](#) that support this movement?

Douglas: Again, I am going to have to ask for a definition of "mythic artifacts". Perhaps, there is some of the answer above in the answer to your second question. I think the myths that speak to interdependence and interconnection include Indra's Net and the present mythology of the quantum theory. Does that answer help?

Willi: Artifacts as I find and develop them are key to the [Myth Lab](#). Please dig in on this a bit....

Douglas: First of all, the Myth Lab looks fantastic. I will have to dig in when I have some time. Great work! I don't think I have an answer to your question really. There are perhaps elements of the different aspects of the Earth Charter in artifacts like green buildings, multi-use food spaces such as greenhouses that also serve as residences, organic community gardens, nature trails in preservation areas that support the flourishing of local communities, etc. I don't know how small an artifact can be that represents all of the facets of the Earth Charter.

Ok I think that's all for now. Thanks for all the back and forth. Very interesting and enlightening for me. I don't think I have the knowledge yet to adequately respond to you on many points, but I'm hopefully moving in a direction that will get me there eventually. Any tips on reading would be helpful. Believe me, Campbell is high on my list. I'm reading the Red Book at the moment and also a lot of theory on improvisation, which is my method of choice for exploration with groups.

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Today, while [deforestation rates of natural forest](#) have dropped considerably, Costa Rica's remaining forests still face threats from illegal timber harvesting in protected areas and conversion for agriculture and cattle pasture in unprotected zones. The popularity of Costa Rica as an eco-tourist destination makes parks a source of income rather than an expense, and past governments have been known to use park funds for making up budget shortfalls instead of maintaining protected areas. Corruption remains a problem in Costa Rica, though not as much as in nearby countries.

* * * * *

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[“Exercising the Artifacts”](#) – [Interview with Mythologist Willi Paul by Arthur George](#) to Support the [Mythic Roundtable at Granada Books](#), Santa Barbara on 1/22/15.

Willi: Thank you to my fellow mythologist Arthur George for this interview, author of the excellent [The Mythology of Eden](#).

Arthur: In July and again in September, I posted here 2 conversations I had with my friend and fellow mythologist Willi Paul about the “new myths” and [creative mythology](#). Willi will be leading a [roundtable](#) on creating new myths at the Granada Book Store in Santa Barbara, California, on January 22, so we thought it would be timely to discuss here on my blog – [Mythology Matters](#) - the ideas he will be presenting there. Our conversation is below.

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Interview with Willi by Arthur

1. How do the “new myths” differ (if at all) in content and/or purpose compared with traditional myths?

Lately I am seeing this “old vs. new” myth debate forming a hybrid set in that many plots and heroes from classic mythology can support the messages in the new myths of the **Climate Change Age**. We see that new myths reflect the universal issues of 2015: species extinction, terrorism, GMO and drought to name a few. Let’s take the journey, initiation and hero triad from Joseph Campbell’s work and support [new community survival songs, poems and tales](#). While technology enables both new and old mythologies to be experienced on a tablet or a home browser, new myths require a new vision and design – and intervention. See [Myth Lab](#).

Also, there are many types of mythologies to drive a new planet consciousness including *creative, creation, classic, apocalyptic, sound, and mythopoeic*. I am working on a **Unified Model of Mythology** to better understand this synergy moving forward.

2. What is the creative source for the new myths? How is human psychology involved?

Sources include boredom with the classic myths and our destruction of Nature and each other. I believe that we all artists with the capacity to reach inwards and outwards to experience bliss. Meditation is a key source for the creative.

In a recent exploration into depth psychology, I proposed the following [Permaculture & Nature Archetypes and their Symbols](#):

+ **Permaculture & Nature Archetype**: A love to preserve unique landscapes for future generations. Mistrust of greedy, short-term land and energy developers

Symbols: Tree of Life, Permaculture logo, Yosemite, Seeds, Amazon Rain Forest, US Gulf Coast

+ **Permaculture & Nature Archetype**: Our hope is to build sustainable systems in our local neighborhoods and towns. Fear of food and fuel shortages; fights for resources between neighbors and governments

Symbols: Crude oil on rails, GMO; Convergence and sharing expo events; neighborhood plans and new rituals

+ **Permaculture & Nature Archetype**: A deep love for freedom to own fire arms; fear of guns and killing.

Symbols: AK-47, US Flag, Scenes from mass shootings, vigils, pawn shops

+ **Permaculture & Nature Archetype**: Fear that global warming will destroy all life on Earth. Mistrust of business and goal of short-term profits

Symbols: Rising coastal tides, melting polar ice, coal fired power plants.

+ **Permaculture & Nature Archetype**: Mistrust of energy privatization and corrupt safety practices. Love of the system and blind faith in corporate responsibility

Symbols: BP, PG&E, Duke Energy

Archetypes can be seen as conscious and unconscious “code” to build and advance human evolution. The Internet is our primary broadcaster for new archetypes, symbols and new myths. Like software code – it is compiled, tested and re-written over and over throughout history. Heroes update the data and write the new code.

3. Can you summarize the process for constructing a “new myth” for the present age? How does this differ from how the traditional myths were composed (to the extent we understand this)?

New Myth makers need initiation and tools to guide them. Reading Campbell and other leading authors, including Mircea Eliade and JRR Tolkien. Many see a new mythology channels in Star Wars. Ultimately new myths will rise from our personal interaction with community, Nature and Sci-fi and less from formal western religions.

I often engineer new myths by using the Five Stages of the [Myth Lab Process Model](#):

Step 1: Discover the Artifact

The Artifact is a Nature-Human combination. Some examples include graffiti, a bill board message, an historic sculpture, and a permaculture garden, all with hidden special powers and messages to the neighborhood.

Step 2: Analyze the Artifact

The Artifact can evoke a magical journey or a mythic struggle and is the foundation focus or primer for new symbols and the imprinting and creation that follows.

Step 3: Mythic Imprintation

Imprinting is defined as a two-way interaction with a selected Artifact that generates synergistic meaning for both participants and the Artifact. Called “mythic imprinting” in the Myth Lab, this iterative and transmutative stage is grounded in the initiation, journey and hero work from Joseph Campbell and is one way that neighborhood artifacts can help neighbors generate new songs, poems and myths.

Step 4: Create New Myth #42

1. What did you like about the Artifact? Describe the visual and sonic messages in the forest journey.
2. Did the Artifact remind you of any story or song from your childhood? How?
3. Did the piece heighten your senses or support a new vision for you? Please describe.

Step 5: Share the Journey and New Myth with the Community

This is the Hero’s duty.

Here some of my favorite New Myths from the Lab:

[Forest Vibrations * Sacred Lights, Children’s Video – New Myth #42, Myth Lab #3](#)

[Land Sky River Stars](#) – New Myth #46, Myth Lab #5

[“The LightDNA Boys from the Blue-Green Galaxy” – New Myth #49, Myth Lab #8](#)

4. What, if any, role does one’s community play in developing new myths, or as serving as content in these myths? How large or small in scope is the community?

The community is our extended family. Through [localization](#), our neighbors can become our news sharers, vegetable farmers and spirit guides. Here is a wise and caring future template for new myths. Now Mount Olympus becomes East Oakland and a Myers lemon tree is a powerful symbol of community zest and sustainability.

5. In light of the role of ritual in many traditional myths, what kinds of rituals do you envisage as taking place in connection with new myths? Perhaps you have some examples?

I am generating mostly new community sharing rituals that by-pass the “Wal-Mart price point,” throw-away scene that drains our spirits.

Please consider these examples of new rituals:

[Rituals of the Return \(via Transition Movement\)](#)

[“Nature is not a Ritual” – Online Roundtable Topic](#)

[5 New Nature-based Rituals for the Permaculture Transition](#)

[Our road share prayer ritual for](#)

[Cascadia’s Light Network. New Myth 33](#)

[“Spring Holidays & Transition Tales 3.” Transition Palo Alto’s Spring Sharing Expo, March 16, 1 – 3 pm at Common Ground, Palo Alto. Video Interviews Hosted by Willi](#)

6. How can music (or other sounds) constitute a myth in whole or in part (supporting it)?

While I understand that few are trained to hear sounds as symbols (or myths), this is where I started my work in sonic mythology. If you create a [lattice of interacting elements](#) that includes words, graphic symbols, soundbytes and a unifying score, the artifact(s) can emerge and a story can unfold.

See this synergy at work in:

[DUSK – Sound – Symbol – SCORE Design for Children’s Permaculture Stories. Video. New Myth #61. Willi Paul, Newmythologist.com](#)

I do envision a day in the near future where humans will close their eyes and experience new myths and rituals.

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Tools & Inspiration for Creating New Myths

[A Mythic Roundtable](#)

Presenter: Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Magazine

Granada Book Store 1224 State Street

Santa Barbara, CA January 22, 2015 7 – 8:30 PM



"[Rebellion Coming](#)." Conversation on Creative Mythology with Willi Paul and Arthur George. From Planetshifter.com Magazine

Introduction

The last volume of Joseph Campbell's Masks of God is entitled, [Creative Mythology](#), in which he speculated on how mythology will challenge and change the future. The book was written in the mid-1960s. Now, almost 50 years later, two cutting-edge mythologists interview each other on Creative Mythology's current impact in the mythological scene.

Here is a second conversation between [New Mythologist](#) and [Multimedia Explorer](#) Willi Paul and mythologist and writer [Arthur George](#), whose recent book: [The Mythology of Eden](#).

Please review our first conversation entitled: ["Will Mythology Save Us?"](#) also from Planetshifter.com Magazine.

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Prelude

"We might well ask if the myths and symbols of the past serve any purpose?

...with what I'm here calling creative myth, which springs from the unpredictable, unprecedented experience-in-illumination of an object by a subject, and the labor, then, of achieving communication of the effect. It is in this second, altogether secondary, technical phase of creative art, communication, that the general treasury, the dictionary so to say, of the world's infinitely rich heritage of symbols, images, myth motives, and hero deeds, may be called upon - either consciously as in Joyce and Mann, or unconsciously, as in dream - to render the message."

[Role of Inherited Legacy of Myth and Symbol](#) - J Campbell

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Arthur's Questions for Willi -

How do you define "creative mythology"? Does it differ from Joseph Campbell's as set forth in his *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*?

Creative mythology is a creative, sequential process incorporating street and web-based experiences, analysis and transmutation into artifacts, symbols and other data through an ethics-based [Myth Lab](#) process. While creative mythology can be a group or individual program, the results from the Lab are meant to be shared with the neighborhood from which it often starts.

Campbell also promotes the individual in this mythic map making:

"... In what I'm calling creative mythology, on the other hand, this order is reversed: the individual has had an experience of his own - of order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration-which he seeks to communicate through signs; and if his realization has been of a certain depth and import, his communication will have the force and value of living myth-for those, that is to say, who receive and respond to it of themselves, with recognition, uncoerced." (*The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, pp. 7-8)

Is Permaculture related to creative mythology?

Yes, of course. It is a primary source of both hope and angst in my world view. It is the augur that propels my [New Myth series](#). Here, I am building a Post-Chaos Era that infuses new symbols, rituals and song in my "creative mythology prayer."

Describe your own creative process when creating myths.

In addition to the above response, I often have a gut reaction to a scene or an object out in the world. This spark, if strong enough, then is inserted and tested in the first steps of the Myth Lab.

As I research then write the New Myth, it is often a stream of consciousness that produces the piece. Illustrations or the video then comes from this narrative cellar.

Assuming that you agree with Joseph Campbell that creative mythology has an individualistic derivation and nature, does this affect the possibility of myths produced in this manner being global myths? If you disagree with Campbell, please explain how and why.

Good question. If you are asking me if I speak for a neighborhood, a State or the planet at large, my answer is: “I’m trying to!” By the way, I have no reason to disagree with Campbell.

What do you consider to be good examples of modern myths qualifying as “creative mythology” that others have created, and why?

Peter Gabriel’s - **Last Temptation of Christ**

U2 – **Joshua Tree**

Bruce Cockburn – **Nothing but a Burning Light**

REM – **Murmur**

Led Zeppelin – **Mothership**

To various degrees, these musical journeys come from the places where the artists lived and worked as they built themes, symbols and Heroes and brought critical challenges to our consciousness in transitory times.

Do you believe that there are modern alternatives to creative mythology, in terms of kinds and functions of myths?

No. Campbell’s lens is a solid method - with a personal integrity – for me. Without the elements he describes, only counterfeit “myths” and corporate ads are likely possible.

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Willi’s Questions for Arthur -

What’s new, progressive, edgy or risky in classic mythology today? What’s controversial?

Our psychological understanding of the origins of myths both old and new is still growing. Myths are being used in therapy, in child development, and in books, blogs, and workshop sessions on developing creativity. Jung’s notion of developing one’s personal myth has taken hold, and there are several books out on the subject. The hero cycle continues to have legs because it has a transpersonal psychological base relating to the individuation process, so we keep seeing it (or cheap versions of it) in films and fiction writing. A number of books are now out advising how to apply the hero cycle in one’s own life. Regarding controversy, I would like to see the disciplinary gap between neuroscience (in relation to consciousness studies) and depth psychology be bridged, because that would likely yield still better insights into myths.

When do you think creative mythology started to have an impact?

For this purpose I will stick with Joseph Campbell’s meaning of the term, in which the myth arises from an authentic experience of an individual’s psyche, which inspires the person to communicate it as best as possible through symbols and language. Such a myth then can resonate in the psyches of certain other individuals to inspire their own meaningful experiences, which then too may be mythical and might also be communicated, and so on. It results from tapping psychic energy (libido) in the unconscious to stimulate creativity. This kind of creative process results in highlighting values of individuals rather than of human collectives and their institutions.

Insofar as the post-classical world is concerned, I agree with Campbell that creative mythology took shape in the 12th-13th centuries when people started seriously questioning the monolithic culture and values imposed by the Church and valuing individuals and their personal values (especially romantic love) more highly. This led to mythologies such as the Tristan romance, the Parzival story, and Arthurian myths. The impact of these among the upper and educated classes was immediate.

Where I would differ slightly with Campbell is in his leaving myths of the classical world behind from the perspective of creative mythology, as I explain in response to question 3 below. This was a result of his focus on counterpoising the individual spirit vs. the forces of medieval Catholic society that limited people's freedom and discouraged individuality and creativity. In the classical world, no central religious authority claimed authority over people and imposed doctrine and difficult standards of behavior in such a way, so there really were creative, inner psychological aspects of the classical myths were not so obvious until the advent of modern psychology.

Can you explain what classic interpretations of old myths fall in a creative mythology POV?

I think the issue is not that creative mythology invalidates earlier interpretations of old myths – the old arguments remain – but that our understanding of creative mythology can enrich our understanding of old myths, especially classical Greek myths. When we look at them from the perspective of creative mythology, we see that many of them contain elements of creative mythology. Modern psychological analysis of classical myths (e.g., that of Edward Edinger) has shown that many Greek myths, as well as the classical mystery cults that employed these myths, have deep roots in people's psychology and manifest timeless archetypal psychic issues that all people confront (or should confront), including even today. In so expressing these issues, many classical myths prove to be in line with what we now term creative mythology. Examples include various hero myths (Perseus, Jason, Heracles), Oedipus, and descent myths (Demeter and Persephone). When Campbell was writing *Creative Mythology*, these psychological dimensions were not as well-known and understood as they are today.

How do classic myths inform/support today's climate change debate?

Carbon emissions and therefore the issue of global warming obviously were not an issue until recently, but some of the old myths did promote respecting and taking care of the land, the earth, and nature as a whole. Initially, of course, the earth and nature were the Mother Goddess herself. Any taking from nature (for food, for example) was ritualized to show respect and thankfulness.

Later, just to take the Hebrew Bible as an example, there the land was treated as a treasured gift from God and so was an important concern having ethical and cosmic dimensions. In the Eden story, Adam was charged with maintaining the Garden of Eden. Similarly, in the Genesis 1 creation myth, God was not simply turning the earth over to humans simply with license to exploit and dominate it, as was sometimes popularly thought. Rather, my reading of the Hebrew text (Gen. 1:28) is that this was ultimately a conferral of responsibility to take due care of the earth. Even our behavior can harm nature, as seen in the lead-up to the flood story where violence and disorder pollute the earth making the flood necessary to cleanse the earth (cosmos) and offer a new start. And Hosea 3:3 reported the consequences to nature of human sin:

Therefore the land mourns,
and all who dwell in it languish,
and also the beasts of the field,
and the birds of the air,
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

Who or what is in the creative mythology camp at present?

I don't think anyone (other than perhaps fundamentalist fanatics of any persuasion) would propose to create old-style functionalist myths to which Campbell contrasted creative myths, so the practitioners of creative mythology are not just a "camp." It seems to me that most mythmaking efforts these days (including yours) fall within the meaning of creative mythology. This is especially prominent in filmmaking because cinema runs through our entire culture. We also see mythographers, psychologists, and schoolteachers endeavoring to promote individual creativity through the use of myths. Artists do this on themselves.

In your new book, *The Mythology of Eden*, do you use creative mythology metaphors or symbols?

In my book I analyze the Eden story as written, so I was limited to the mythological material actually contained in the story, in particular its symbols. The story arose in a culture promoting collective rather than individual values, and it advocated and defended a particular religious point of view and doctrine (Yahwism) and sought to discredit and destroy the old pagan religion, especially the goddess Asherah. So the Eden story represents the kind of established mythology and doctrine that Campbell contrasted with creative mythology.

Nevertheless, one can find in the Eden story some elements of what we now see in creative mythology. For example, the symbol of the sacred tree (cf. the tree of knowledge of good and evil), originating in pagan religion, offered a way for individuals to access divinity directly and alone, to have their own sacred experience. Also, the end of the story, when Adam and Eve gain the knowledge of good and evil, in psychological terms represents an elevation and evolution of human consciousness to a higher level (ego consciousness), something portrayed in many ancient myths. This is relevant to contemporary efforts (as in the integral movement) to raise individual and human consciousness to higher levels that reintegrate the unconscious, the feminine, etc., with ego consciousness, which should assist in the creative mythology process.

Please juxtapose 2014 technology and creative mythology. What happens?

The relationship between technology and myth is complicated, but if we focus on what our technology means for developing "creative" myths, it is obvious that our new technology as well as our ideas about future technologies offer additional ways in which to express mythological material, and therefore can serve the purposes of creative mythology. Just think of science fiction. While myths ultimately originate from deep within the psyche, in order to resonate in one's culture the narratives need to be dressed up in elements of that culture. So the technology that is all around us and is so much a part of our culture should feature in contemporary mythmaking.

What is your creative mythology evaluation of my *Myth Lab* and *New Myths* series?

It is a fascinating and indeed creative effort in exploring the various ways in which "creative myths" can be generated, and to actually do so. I look forward to seeing more!

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Web Resources for Arthur -

Blog - www.mythologymatters.wordpress.com

Website - www.mythologymatters.com

Willi Paul's Web Sites -

<http://www.planetshifter.com/>

<http://openmythsources.com/>

<http://newmythologist.com/>

<http://communityalchemy.com/>

SCORE - Sound / Myth Design -

<http://communityalchemy.com/>

Myth Lab -

<http://communityalchemy.com/>

Mr. Paul's e-Community Groups:

Depth Psychology Alliance - New Global Mythology Group Founder -

<http://www.depthpsychologyalliance.com/>

LinkedIn - New Mythology, Permaculture and Transition Group Founder -

https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=5080106&trk=my_groups-tile-grp



"Will Mythology Save Us?" Conversations with Willi Paul and Arthur George. From [Planetshifter.com Magazine](http://Planetshifter.com).

"The next step is to remember where myths come from. Depth psychology teaches us that they come ultimately from our unconscious psyche, principally the collective unconscious. On the one hand, this fact too shows that myths can be global. On the other hand, it means that the new myths can't and won't be so 'new.' They will have to be based on archetypes that formed during our long psychic evolution and which generated the old myths. The difference now, as in the past, is that in order to resonate and have life the new myths must wear the dress of contemporary environments and cultures."

- from the June 23, 2014, [blog post](#): "What Should Be the New Myths? Global Myths?" by Arthur George, mythologist and author of the new book [The Mythology of Eden](#).

"[Permaculture Emerges in Partnership with Nature](#). Permaculture is a new agri-design movement that promotes healing Nature and sustainability with local - global actions. New archetypes come into public conscious thru [permaculture's three ethics](#):

- (+) Care for the Earth
- (+) Care for People
- (+) Return the Surplus

- *Willi*

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Willi Interviews Art -

Can you offer a vision of what the present day Eden would look like? Are there actual examples that we could critique?

I don't consider Eden, even in the original story, as ultimately having a clear concrete geography or detailed physical characteristics. As Joseph Campbell observed, the Eden story "yields its meaning only to a psychological interpretation," and the Garden of Eden is really a metaphor for our minds (Thou Art That, p. 50). While in the Garden prior to their transgression, Adam and Eve were in what we would call an unconscious or pre-conscious state, where they did not perceive or understand opposites, whether those of good vs. evil or otherwise. In reference to the creation, the post-Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann called this primitive state where all was one unity the "uroboros" (The Origins and History of Consciousness, pp. 5-38). Adam and Eve's gaining the knowledge of good and evil gave them the faculty of mind to perceive and understand opposites, which today we recognize as ego consciousness. Thus, this step was really the completion of the creation of humans, at which point they could walk out of the garden and live in the real world. In light of this, any attempt to recreate and live in any new "Eden" would be regressive. Rather, human consciousness must move forward and upward, further from Eden (see Question below). It would be best for modern myths to be oriented in this direction, as was the main line of the original Eden myth in my interpretation.

Is chaos central to our modern mythic resource pool?

Ultimately it has to remain central, though "chaos" is no longer the best term for this. In the ancient creation myths, the pre-creation state was described as one of primordial waters, which were chaotic in the sense of lacking form or order. Creation was visualized as establishing an ordered cosmos from earlier chaos, featuring things like time, multiplicity, opposites, and cause and effect. As psychology shows, water is a prime symbol for the unconscious, which is reflected in the primordial waters in this creation motif. In her book Creation Myths (pp. 2-4), the post-Jungian psychologist Marie Louise von Franz wrote that the creation motif of order being created out of chaos is rooted in our own experience of coming into consciousness; in psychic terms, our becoming aware of the ordered world and the world coming into existence are equated. We experience this when waking in the morning as the outside world of space, time, order, and cause and effect fall into place. Similarly, developmental psychology shows that infants don't initially perceive such an orderly outside world, but that within a few years it falls into place as a sense of self emerges.

Since "chaos" is nothing other than our own unconscious, this is not something that will disappear. And since our unconscious is the source of myths, of course it will remain central to our mythic resource pool. We can stop calling it chaos, however, as that suggests that had/has an external metaphysical existence.

Do you subscribe to my thesis that there are old, time-worn and almost forgotten myths and new myths emerging based on many ideas including permaculture, Nature in peril and corporate evil?

Certainly we see that most of the old myths no longer resonate with our psyches and are dying. Any new myths are in their infancy and so are hard to assess at this point. In order to be successful, they must “move” us, which is to say they will need to come from and resonate with the same inner parts of the psyche that gave the old myths wings. I’m not so sure how successful we can be in consciously thinking up “ideas” and trying to build myths around them, because historically the mythmaking process has worked the other way around, from the unconscious to ego consciousness. But as discussed in the context of two questions below, this process could evolve as our psyche itself develops so as to reintegrate suppressed and repressed unconscious content into our conscious selves.

Nevertheless, since so many of the old myths were based on our awe of and essential connection with nature, there is reason to believe that the new ones can too; we just need to dress them up in ways that we can better understand and accept using elements from our own culture. I agree with you that permaculture can have a role here, as can sustainability in general.

What is the meaning and value of the serpent in today’s mythic conversation?

Serpent symbolism is probably the most complex and varied around, encompassing even various opposites (e.g., life vs. death, wisdom vs. evil, chaos vs. creation, causing and curing illness). This is because the various physical characteristics and behavior of serpents resonate with various parts of our psyche. Serpent symbolism is very much alive (it continues to be prominent in our dreams), so it has mythic value and should remain a component of myths. Given the multivalent nature of serpent symbolism and the fact that it is a product of our unconscious, however, it is hard to predict what myths may emerge containing serpent symbolism.

Where is the center of the world? Who owns it?!

In the ancient world, a Center (sometimes actually “called the center of the world”) was a sacred spot where the divine, in the heavens and the underworld, connected with the earthly, including with us humans; it is where the 3 planes of the cosmos meet and thus lies at the heart of reality. Archetypically, it was also thought of as the place of creation. As such, a Center was a sacred place, where a temple or other sanctuary (including sacred trees) was situated and people could interact with their deities and experience transcendence. Thus, the Garden of Eden, sanctuary where humans interacted with God and gained the godlike knowledge of good and evil, also can be considered a Center. In reality, various peoples and communities each had at least one Center of their own. Such multiplicity of Centers was not considered a contradiction and nobody fought over the matter, because people were thinking mythologically: What was being experienced was sacred space, not earthly geographical space.

Such ancient way of viewing the matter provides the key for us too. Sacred space is existential for humans, and can exist anywhere on earth. The lesson to draw is that the Center really lies within ourselves, so it can be anywhere we are, when we are attuned to it. So each of us owns it (our personal Center), and we can own one collectively. The key to it for each of us is finding an approach to spirituality that works to make us, as Campbell said, transparent to transcendence (see question below).

Can you point-out a modern day Mother Nature myth?

Cameron’s film Avatar brought these mythological themes out pretty well, albeit in Hollywoodized fashion. There the Na’vi lived close with nature and their spirituality reflected that: They had a mother earth goddess Eywa and connected with her at the sacred Tree of Souls, which was a means of transformation. In

contrast, the humans had depleted earth's environment and, through a corporation, were encroaching on Pandora without heed or care. The story thus touches on the issues that you asked about in question above.

Is a new universal creation story unfolding now? Or is it more likely a universal death story? Or are they being combined?

Many older mythologies did combine creation/life and destruction/death, either in cycles of the cosmos (Indian, Maya) or in seasonal cycles, but in light of scientific explanations for such things it is not clear to me that this motif will endure in future myths, at least without substantial updating. But it still has a place. Although the matter of physical creation of the universe is now largely a subject for scientific study, the mere wonder of the universe (including how it came into being) and the mystery of life will continue to inspire us and can generate myths. The threat of universal death (e.g., environmental catastrophe, blowing ourselves up) should afford future mythological material since death itself in any form provides mythological material.

From: [Building the Future with New Global Mythology, Free eWorkshop with Willi Paul](#) -

"What Will/Should Be the New Myths? Global Myths?" by Arthur George

"I would venture to say that the folks on the anti-globalization, pro-local and pro-diversity side of the fence also tend to be the very people who most appreciate myths." Please expand on this.

I don't have scientific poll data on this; this is just an observation based on my personal experience, including reading. In my experience, people who live closer to nature, embrace diversity in all its aspects, support local communities in their various aspects (culture, agriculture, businesses), have also been most sensitive to the things that generate myths, mythical content, and to knowing about and preserving myths.

"The above analysis confirms that we need to look to the same sources of creativity that have generated myths, spirituality, and art in the past: artists, writers, composers, musicians, and (more modernly) filmmakers. This is only natural because creativity springs largely from unconscious processes, which artists succeed in tapping for inspiration and then bring to concrete life for themselves and the rest of us."

In my recent piece, entitled: ["Permaculture, Carl Jung and the New Archetypes" \(+ PDF\) by Willi Paul, New Global Mythology Group @ Depth Psychology Alliance](#), I propose that the symbol and archetype dyadic is a two-way data flow between the collective unconscious and the collective conscious. What is your reaction? Also, in your quote above, are you not referring to Campbell's Creative Mythology (also developed in my piece)?

I see from your piece that you do see artists, etc., as playing a key role much as I do. The traditional Jungian approach is that myths proceed fundamentally from archetypes of the collective unconscious, while our conscious psyche refines that content into intelligible symbols and narratives. Your idea that the conscious psyche can also be involved in creating (new) archetypes is intriguing, and I look forward to seeing how that plays out in practice and in psychology theory. It would be great if that turns out to be the case, because we would have greater control (and responsibility) over the development of new myths and other elements of culture, and the new myths would evolve more quickly.

As to your second question, Campbell is indeed one of the influences on my thinking regarding this point and I do recall the passages from his Creative Mythology that you mention to that effect, but actually at the time I was thinking more of Chapter 3 of his later book, The Inner Reaches of Outer Space, which he entitled "The Way of Art." There he argues that the way and methods of art make one (both artist and audience) transparent to transcendence, which brings forth myths as well as art.

“In the end, a key to having resonant, living global myths will require a corresponding effort to elevate (evolve) the human psyche itself so that we will be more receptive to global myths and better able to create them.”

That’s a huge statement (of faith?). How do you propose the human race tackle this?

Actually, I don’t think this is so huge (in terms of being a departure from mainstream thinking) or a matter of faith, and it seems to me to be generally consistent with what you are proposing as mentioned in previously, which also involves developing our consciousness in connection with generating new myths. As I mentioned, above, the Eden story is really about the elevation of our consciousness, which is a continuing historical process, as shown by a number thinkers, such as Jean Gebser in *The Ever Present Origin*, by Ken Wilber in his *Up from Eden*, and by Neumann in his works. The psychologist Jonathan Haidt recently brought forth data showing that in biological evolutionary terms our psyche has evolved more rapidly than we previously thought possible (*The Righteous Mind*, pp. 247-52). Jung himself, in his *Symbols of Transformation* (Collected Works, vol. 5, pp. 7-33), traces about how humans moved from fantasy thinking to more directed thinking in language in the space of the last 2 to 3 thousand years.

A problem resulting from our psychic development over that period, however, has been an over-dominance of ego consciousness resulting in the suppression and repression of unconscious content, which among other things has rendered our culture too masculine, warlike, and out of touch with nature. The human psyche needs to rise to higher levels where our conscious self-better integrates the contents of our unconscious that in fact are seeking to break out into the open and be heard and accepted. Among other things, this would facilitate more and better new myths, as well as a more prominent “nature lens” that you write about. Describing exactly how to get there would take an entire book, and actually some thinkers such as Allan Combs and Ken Wilber have written extensively on this. I bullet point some suggestions at the end of my new book, and they include dream tending; shadow work; attention to our sense of humor; meditation practices; artistic/creative activities and maximizing stimulation from the art of others; in some cases psychological therapy; nourishing the feminine and nature; and conforming educational theory, institutions, and practice to this overall paradigm.

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Questions for Willi from Art -

What overall messages/truths that were advanced by some of old myths are no longer appropriate?

I can’t say. I am not a trained mythological scholar. In all honesty, I would have to run an internet search to even come up with a specific Greek or American Indian or Norse myth for us. It is fair to say that many of the general lessons in the classic mythic data base are valid and wise. And I always support the mythological triad from Joseph Campbell: initiation, journey and hero. It’s just a matter a getting stuck in history or taking risks and plunging ahead for new myths.

Key Counter Question: What is a mythologist? What does a mythologist do? What are the tools of the trade?

The process of understanding “old myths” vs. “new myths” needs more investigation and debate. I explore this phenomenon in “Permaculture, Carl Jung and the New Archetypes.”

What new (replacement) messages/truths should the new myths advance, what will be their source, and to what extent can/should we specify this at this time?

First, I think that the collaborative experience of building and sharing a new myth with one's community – and then with the world – is key here.

Second, the [8 Key Elements in my New Mythology scheme](#) include the following:

1. Localization – back to sustainability and community; self-sufficiency
2. Nature- Centric
3. Spiritual
4. Future-based
5. Universal themes(s) and message
6. Para-Normal in conflict or characters
7. Initiation, Journey and Hero
8. Permaculture & Transition: values and principles

Finally, two myth building tools are:

Artifact – The Artifact is a Nature-Human synergy; examples include graffiti, a bill board, historic sculpture, and a permaculture garden. Artifacts have special messages for people and their neighborhoods.

Mythic Imprinting – From the Myth Lab, this iterative and transmutative process is grounded in the initiation, journey and hero work from Joseph Campbell framework and is one way that neighborhood artifacts can help the community generate new songs, poems and myths.

Similarly, in terms of the plots of myths (setting, environment, elements of the action) and their attendant symbols, what elements from the old myths are no longer appropriate and what new elements will the new myths likely feature? Or is it too difficult to predict?

While I appreciate your need for detail and definitions here, my work with the new mythology is nascent at best! Most of my 57 New Myths illustrate a post-chaos tribal life in Nature by surviving permaculture / transition folks. The major plot line is love / survival. A permaculture symbol set is included “Permaculture, Carl Jung and the New Archetypes.”

Again, old stories can and do offer good elements and messages, just like the new myths, but their characterizations and settings are often no longer “hyper-sticky” in the Global Warming Age.

Why is permaculture central to your thinking about the new myths and global myths? Does this just reflect your personal interest in nature and mythology concerning nature, or to you really think it needs to be emphasized more traditional subjects of myths de-emphasized (priorities seem necessary), and if so why?

Permaculture is a horse in need of shoes. It has a new Nature-based agri-design tract and some community building muscle. I like permaculture because I can integrate other solutions with it, like a new global spirituality that can be a global community practice and a terrific storyline augur for the New Mythology.

I understand the need to study and respect the past but I am confident that I have the right mix of vision drenched subjects, values and risk. My mythic priorities are clear: to reveal and redesign for a future based on the realities of the next 50 – 75 years of chaos on Earth – to keep the human race evolving in positive ways.

Your model and proposed kinds of new myths have a strong social-political component in the context of nature, the environment, and agriculture. Do you see a role for other new myths, also arising from nature, that would play a role in personal spiritual transformation and elevation of our consciousness, and if so what would be the archetypes/symbols here? For example, do you see a place for outer space to play such a role in the new myths, and if so how?

Food, shelter and community are really the only things that matter now and in the future. Outer space is too Hollywood for me! Nature will be gutted and maimed in much in the chaos era so we need to expand permaculture and the New Myths to heal it and us.

Your model calls for new myth-producing archetypes to develop on the conscious level through the operation of our consciousness, in addition to the traditional archetypes that evolved at the unconscious level as Jung maintained. To what extent do you consider your concept of the origin and nature of such archetypes to differ from or be similar to Jungian archetypes? Is this your own original idea, or do you find precedent for it in psychological studies or theories/writings?

Great question. I guess you might say that I very recently “jumped over Jungian Falls” and into my own teetering raft! What I know about Jung is part Red Book images and the Wiki quote. I may still need to process what he means by “instinct.” I shoot flares. I do this occasionally when I want to test the jargon, academic egos and the soil.

In what sense is Permaculture, Nature, or “Permaculture & Nature” together an archetype according to your model, and how is this archetype produced? (This question concerns the stage before one starts writing myths based on the archetype as you describe in Stage Five of your piece.)

Permaculture & Nature together does not make an archetype. Nor do these concepts individually or combined make a symbol. I took the definition of archetype from the Jung passage. I would ask that you visit my Myth Lab process to see how I write a New Myth.

You describe the new myths being stimulated by the 4 emotional connectors of fear, mistrust, hope, and love. How and why did you center upon these 4 and what others did you consider but not include? Did you find that these same 4 were central to myths in the past, or are these more particular to new myths?

The idea of the 4 emotional connectors came to me almost instantly and it seemed to fit the model. I had other options. My work in alchemy undoubtedly plays a key role in these ideations and visions.

You mention Joseph Campbell as holding that, in Creative Mythology, the new myths will not originate in collective rituals that communicate to individuals, but will originate in artists and other creative individuals who have deep psychological experiences that they are then able to communicate to the collective as new living myths. How does this relate (or not) to your idea of new archetypes originating from the collective conscious, which in turn will generate new myths? Are these somehow the same processes, or perhaps two steps in the same process?

My first thought is that humans are increasingly damaged soulfully and genetically. We live in greed and toxicity. In this sickness, sometimes new strains and voyages can occur. I understand that my manic-depression affords some creative tools and experiences that others may not have. My 5 new archetypes reflect both pain and hope on all levels, from local to world-wide.

In your diagram “The Garden Symbol in Old and New Mythology,” you mention things like local farmers markets and flea markets, community farms, and rooftop gardens as being symbols in the new myths. Please elaborate on how these will become (or have become) mythological symbols according to your idea of how archetypes from the collective conscious form such symbol? Also, how can such locally based things generate global myths?

The collective symbols that you mention are rather new on the planet and will need more critique, acceptance and dispersion in the New Myth paradigm to have any real global traction. Also I believe that I conjured up the 5 archetypes first and then derived appropriate symbols to go with them. So the order in your question may need to be revisited.

In what sense can the new myths be “global”? How can they be achieved without compromising the diversity of cultures, languages, local traditions, etc. (such as you describe in the above-mentioned Garden diagram)?

This is old/new fertile ground. One of my mission-critical themes is localization (from Transition) which certainly champions the diversity of cultures, languages, local traditions in local towns and sustainable communities.

Is it not possible to share our common struggles and symbols to co-develop and create new archetypes? Of course we drive the Internet together as a global community building and myth generator tool.

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Bios -

Arthur George is a cultural historian, mythologist, and prizewinning author who retired from a 30-year career as an international lawyer in order to follow his bliss by studying and writing and speaking about mythology and related subjects in order to enhance our knowledge about myth, heighten the importance and role of myth in contemporary society, enrich people’s lives, and better our world. He is the author (with his wife Elena) of *The Mythology of Eden* (published May 2014), which examines the biblical Garden of Eden story from the perspective of mythological studies, and is a frequent speaker at scholarly conferences and other events on mythological, religious, and related topics. He earlier authored (also with Elena) the definitive history of the city of St. Petersburg Russia (*St. Petersburg: The First Three Centuries*), which was awarded a literary prize by a jury of Russian scholars in 2005. He has a blog at www.mythologymatters.wordpress.com and a website at www.mythologymatters.com.

Willi Paul is active in the sustainability, permaculture, transition, sacred Nature, new alchemy and mythology space since the launch of [PlanetShifter.com Magazine](http://PlanetShifter.com) on EarthDay 2009, Willi’s network now includes four web sites, a [LinkedIn group](#), 3 tweeter accounts, a G+ site, multiple blog sites, and multiple list serves.

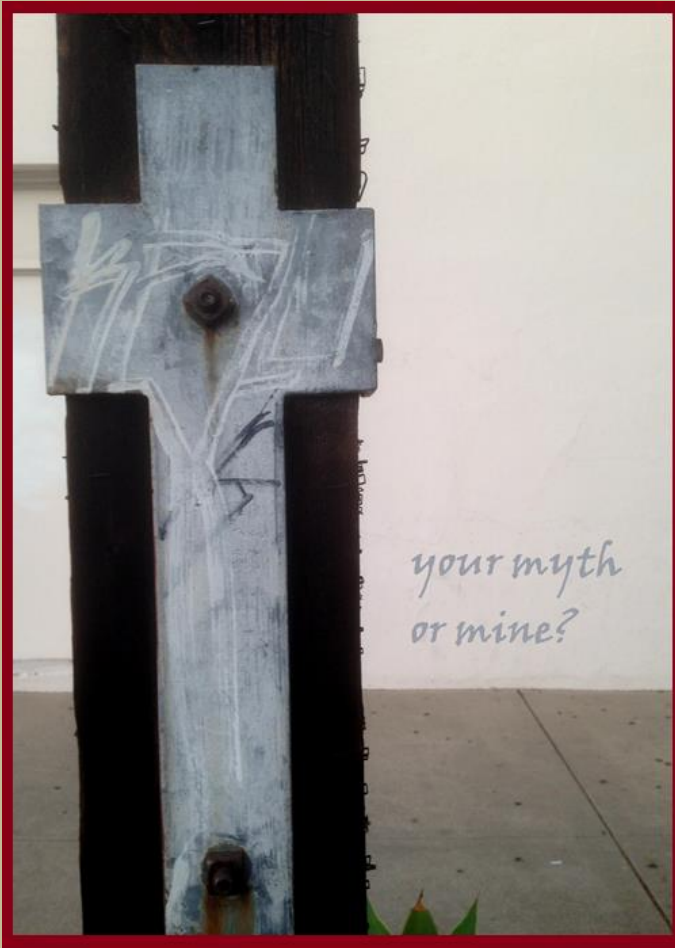
In 1996 Mr. Paul was instrumental in the design of the emerging online community space in his [Master’s Thesis](#): “[The Electronic Charrette](#)..” He was active in many small town design visits with the [Minnesota Design Team](#).

Mr. Paul has released [16 eBooks](#), 2197 + posts on PlanetShifter.com Magazine, and over [380 interviews](#) with global leaders. He has created [56 New Myths](#) to date and has been [interviewed](#) over 30 times in blogs and journals.

Willi earned his permaculture design certification in August 2011 at the [Urban Permaculture Institute](#), SF.

Please see his [cutting-edge article](#) at the Joseph Campbell Foundation and his [pioneering videos](#) on YouTube. His current focus is [Myth Lab](#) - a project that Willi presented at his third [Northwest Permaculture Convergence](#) in Portland, OR.

Willi's consulting work is at [NewMythologist.com](#)



"Your Myth or Mine?" Gary Z McGee on Our Self-inflicted Mythology. With Reaction by Willi Paul, [Planetshifter.com Magazine](http://Planetshifter.com)

"The old gods are dead or dying and people everywhere are searching, asking: What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as of one harmonious being?" – Joseph Campbell

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"Self-inflicted Mythology: The Power of Creating our Own Myths by Gary Z McGee

All of life is a meditation, whether we are aware of it or not. Put even more succinctly, life is a meditative mythology. We are, each of us, walking, talking myth-machines going through the motions of our mythological projections. In any given culture, we are the hardware, and mythology is the software.

We are naturally creatures of myth. It's a human need to be told stories, and to tell them. Joseph Campbell described mythology as having four basic functions: the Mystical Function: experiencing the awe of the universe; the Cosmological Function: explaining the shape and image of the universe; the Sociological Function: supporting and validating a certain social order; and the Psychological (pedagogical) Function: how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances.

As it stands, our current mythology is somewhat progressive in the cosmological function but seriously lacking in the mystical, sociological, and psychological functions. We, as individual mythmakers, have the power to change this, to create new, healthier stories that work in all four categories. And we must if our species has any chance of surviving on this planet in a healthy way. When our mythology is one of dominance, control and comfortable inertia, we become stagnant, hard and closed off to the underlying essence. When our mythology is one of passivity, chaos, and orgiastic passion, we become too vulnerable and soft, fragmented and unable to contain the underlying essence. But when our mythology is one of healthy moderation and balance between these polarities, the underlying essence can be tapped, and the overarching theme becomes a sort of existential solace, or connection to the heart of creation; what Nietzsche called the "Primordial Unity", which revives the balance between our Dionysian and Apollonian nature.

The more of us creating new, personalized myths, instead of relying upon old stagnant myths, the more likely we are to achieve a higher and healthier state of evolution. In a balanced culture, bad myths will get weeded out and good myths will progress. In an unbalanced culture, even good myths can stagnate and become bad myths that no longer apply. Like James Russell Lowell said, "Time makes ancient good uncouth."

One very powerful way of bringing forth this balance is through the art of self-inflicted mythology: the personal creation of living myths. Self-inflicted mythology (the cornerstone of self-inflicted philosophy) bridges the gap between science and spirituality by showing a child-like trust and hope for the human condition, in itself, which leaves open the realm of personalized mystery and enchantment.

It is a way of dreaming away from the world (current myth), in order to discover other-worldly knowledge (new myth) that can then be used in the real world upon our "return." It's a Promethean act of courage in the face of the current myth. Its structure is based upon metaphor, simile, and analogy, which keeps our third-eye sharp enough to intuit "otherworldly" mechanisms for perceiving reality, but it also has a direct effect on reality itself.

One must tend to the soul with art, poetry, and myth, with failure and loss, with ambiguity and complexity; rather than soulless, machine-like, diagnosis and treatment. Otherwise the world that's created becomes unhealthy and unsustainable. It becomes a world where products are primary and people are secondary. Like Daniel Quinn wrote, "We have an organizational system that works wonderfully well for products. But we don't have a system that works wonderfully well for people."

The myths we harbor can work for or against us. Our current myth is a violent, exploitative, dog-eat-dog system. Our duty, if we have the courage, is to update this outdated, unsustainable myth into a healthy, sustainable myth that meets violence with laughter, exploitation with expiation, and the dog-eat-dog system with a human-support system.

"My work is really about changing the old stories — the defining narratives and myths of our civilization, and therefore the institutions and systems that are built on those myths," says Charles Eisenstein. "They don't resonate much anymore. We need new stories that will change the world." Our tool for changing the world is our own personalized myth. Our vehicle is our meditation. Our goal is, as Thomas Berry said, "to move the human community from its destructive presence on the planet to a benign or mutually enhancing presence on the planet."

For those in whom a mythology is healthy, there is an experience of tonality with the human condition, of equilibrium with the cosmos, and an overall sense of symmetry and meaningfulness. For those, however, in whom a mythology is unhealthy, there is an experience of atonality with the human condition, of dissociation with the universe, and an overall sense of asymmetry and meaninglessness. It's our duty as mythmakers to create responsible mythologies that are healthy contributions to reality. But first we need to take a step back and think like an outsider. We need to let go of the outdated myths and unhealthy stories that are inadvertently destroying our world. We need to release the old myth in order to embrace our newly created myths. Think past it, around it, inside and out of it. Let it be what it is, and then let your imagination run rampant all over it.

Take the framework of your yester-life and break it, reshape it, widen it, rebuild it out of rubber-bands if need be. The point is to prevent the frame from ever becoming a locked safe. And if it already has, it isn't too late. You know the combination. And if you've somehow forgotten it, then shatter the lock. You're the only one who can. Like Leonardo da Vinci said, "It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

Please don't let humanity become a soul-less destructive mechanism that suppresses love, creativity and imagination. Don't turn your life into a commodity. Instead, allow your life to become an adventure. Be mythological.

Creative myths are wonderfully cathartic because they cast on the primordial screen of our imaginations archetypal echoes and immense personifications of our hopes and capacities. Mythology bridges the gap between science and spirituality through a kind of mythological methodology: a subjective method of scientific inquiry using archetypal psychology as a vehicle toward discovery.

Mythology is the world on an elephant on a tortoise; science is explaining the infinite fabric of reality beneath the tortoise. Both are needed for the creative scientific-mythological victory over human limitation.

We must create our own forms of faith, our own gods, and our own myths. This will be an arduously Nietzschean task, but a most important one. Human beings make progress not by becoming more rigorous but by becoming more imaginative. Like Joseph Campbell said, "It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations."

But societal change is never a black and white issue of total abstinence of outdated traditions to be replaced by the renovated new. History always has, and always will, proceed dialectically. Societal change will be a mixing of the old myth (x) with the new myth (y) to create the hybrid myth (xy), or "new" middle-gray mythology. Like Mark Twain said, "History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." Let's just make an attempt at taking the good aspects of mythology forward and leave the bad aspects behind.

At the end of the day, creating our own myths is a way of putting our own fingerprint on the history of human evolution. It's a way of taking old and current myths into consideration, learning from them, and then shedding them like an old skin, so that we can discover something new.

Like Francesca Lia Block said, "Choose to believe in your own myth, your own glamour, your own spell." At any rate, it will give people something to do, to help fit them into their own destiny, to help prevent their wandering aimlessly about in an empty, desolate existence. It's a way of bringing meaning to the meaninglessness in our own unique way, and then sharing it with others. Like Carl Jung said, "Dream the myth forward." Forget genes and memes, take the mytheme and astonish the world.

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Reaction by Willi Paul (**Bold**)

Who is this one harmonious being, this hoped for savior that Campbell was seeking? Maybe the Earth?!

Meditation is a big deal to both McGee and Eisenstein here but how many people would admit to practicing any form of meditation? **No, life is not on a yoga mat, in a latte or a Black Uber ride home. It is a rent race, with bizarre neighbors, guns on yellow buses and foreign enemies on TV.**

Have you seen any “mythological projections” from “individual mythmakers,” lately? **Need to ask McGee where these are lurking.**

I recently added resilience as a new, [5th basic function of myth](#). Permaculture makes New Mythology.

The more of us creating new, personalized myths, instead of relying upon old stagnant myths, the more likely we are to achieve a higher and healthier state of evolution. **We need to aspire to community myths not personalized myths. We desperately need to embrace the Earth as “the one harmonious being.”**

McGee suggests that the art of self-inflicted mythology is the personal creation of living myths as a way of dreaming away from the world (current myth), in order to discover other-worldly knowledge (new myth) that can then be used in the real world upon our “return.” **This sounds a lot like Campbell’s initiation, journey and hero (return).**

It’s our duty as mythmakers to create responsible mythologies that are healthy contributions to reality. But first we need to take a step back and think like an outsider. We need to let go of the outdated myths and unhealthy stories that are inadvertently destroying our world. We need to release the old myth in order to embrace our newly created myths. **How one goes about this para-cultural exorcism is not explained by the author.**

Mythology bridges the gap between science and spirituality through a kind of mythological methodology: a subjective method of scientific inquiry using archetypal psychology as a vehicle toward discovery. **Here McGee falls of his cliff and doesn’t look back for us. More unsupported mythings.**

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Credit / Bio: Gary Z McGee, a former Navy Intelligence Specialist turned philosopher, is the author of Birthday Suit of God and The Looking Glass Man. His works are inspired by the great philosophers of the ages and his wide awake view of the modern world. Permission to re-post article provided by Wakingtimes.com.



[The Myth Lab: Myth and Permaculture](#) - Interview with Willi Paul by Mythologist Margo Meck, [mythandmore.com](#)

Activist, Permaculture promoter, and myth maker, Willi Paul, presented his Myth Lab, “Mythic Roundtable: Tools and Inspiration for Creating New Myths” on January 22, 2015 at the Granada Book Store, 1224 State St., Santa Barbara. Please see the results from this event at [Planetshifter.com](#) in early February.

I was curious about his method of combining myth with his passion for permaculture. I sent him a couple of questions and he was kind enough to respond. Here is our correspondence:

Question – I hear the word “myth” used more and more frequently. As a term is popularized, it becomes a victim of its own success. Even in Classical Greece, the term had multiple meanings. When you use the term “myth” please clarify what you mean by it and if that meaning is consistent throughout your work?

Willi Paul - Myth is a new, universal story that is generated by issues / crisis of our times like climate change, species extinction and drought. Classic myths support with general structures and motifs like hero, journey and initiation. My myths deal with new community types like the permaculture and Transition movements. But my myth also includes bliss, an alchemic power to see past the hype and empower solutions. I believe that creative mythology, as described by Joe Campbell, is the right overall framework for individuals in these times.

Question – The mythic motif of death and resurrection or rebirth is founded in agricultural/vegetative mythologies (e.g. Aphrodite/Adonis, Jesus the Christ, Ishtar/Tammuz, Inanna/Damuzi, etc). What mythic motifs, if any, are you seeing emerging from the permaculture phenomenon?

Willi Paul – I prefer to use symbols rather than motifs as these are more powerful connections:

Shovel – turning, renewal

Cob bench – community

Pond – water birth, diversity

Sun flower – Nature Steward

Moon – magic, Nature wisdom

Bees – togetherness, eco-business

Lightning – ecoAlchemy – transmutation

Cob feet – dance, new Nature rituals

Broken concrete – reuse – recycling

Butterflies – metamorphosis, freedom

(for more on Willi Paul's perspective click here: [Permaculture Symbols](#))

Secondly, new archetypes work with new symbols now:

A. Permaculture & Nature Archetype: A love to preserve unique landscapes for future generations. Mistrust of greedy, short-term land and energy developers

Symbols: Tree of Life, Permaculture logo, Yosemite, Seeds, Amazon Rain Forest, US Gulf Coast

B. Permaculture & Nature Archetype: Our hope is to build sustainable systems in our local neighborhoods and towns. Fear of food and fuel shortages; fights for resources between neighbors and governments

Symbols: Crude oil on rails, GMO; Convergence and sharing expo events; neighborhood plans and new rituals

C. Permaculture & Nature Archetype: A deep love for freedom to own fire arms; fear of guns and killing.

Symbols: AK-47, US Flag, Scenes from mass shootings, vigils, pawn shops

D. Permaculture & Nature Archetype: Fear that global warming will destroy all life on Earth. Mistrust of business and goal of short-term profits

Symbols: Rising coastal tides, melting polar ice, coal fired power plants.

E. Permaculture & Nature Archetype: Mistrust of energy privatization and corrupt safety practices. Love of the system and blind faith in corporate responsibility

Symbols: BP, PG&E, Duke Energy

(for more on Willi Paul's comments on this click here: [Permaculture, Carl Jung and the New Archetypes](#))

Question – I believe humans are hard-wired for story. There is much distress in some groups that Hollywood is dying. It is possible that form of storytelling is in decline, but I doubt if humans will ever be storyless. Please detail your experience in using story to explain, enlist, and engage in expanding permaculture awareness.

Willi Paul – The best place to start in your journey to new stories is [Texting Joseph Campbell – Five Methods to Design New Stories & Myths eBook #18](#):

The Five methods that I have invented to date are:

1. Building a Mythology Generator for the Sustainability Age
2. Mapping Future Myths for the Transition –
Workshop & Video, First Study of Myth Symposium, Pacifica Graduate Institute
3. Myth Lab
4. SCORE: sounds symbols myths
5. Mythic Engine

Thank you Willi Paul for you input on this important issue. Your creative integration of myth making and permaculture promotion are truly inspiring.

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[Margo Meck](#) is a mythologist, writer, story consultant, and speaker. She received her Ph.D. in Mythological Studies from Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA. in 2007. She has lectured on various myth related subjects such as Personal Mythology, Proof of Identity in Myth and Fairy Tale, and the Hero's Journey.



“Creation Mythology” - Article and Interview with Author Ray Grigg by Willi Paul, NewMythologist.com

“Has the [Prima Materia](#) changed? Or perhaps do we need new myths to find it?” – Willi, LinkedIn Mythology Group 11-28-14

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[Creation Mythology](#) by Ray Grigg

The first thing to realize about the biblical Creation story in the first two chapters of Genesis — the mythology and its earlier roots in Sumeria have shaped the fundamental thinking of Western cultures — is that a beginning also implies an ending. This may explain our ability as a culture to be relatively unconcerned about the threat of an environmental apocalypse. The expectation of an ending is built into the way the Western mind thinks, made inevitable by the beginning that inhabits the other pole of its mythology. This is one of many ideas thoughtfully explored by [Susan Murphy](#) in her fascinating book, *Minding the Earth, Mending the World: Zen and the Art of Planetary Crisis*.

The original Eden, Murphy explains, was an idyllic place, existing in a suspended state of perfection where birth and death did not occur, where pain and suffering were absent, where predator and prey mingled in peace, and where the undivided wholeness of Divine Grace had not yet been broken into confusing components by Adam's and Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

All this is lost when Adam and Eve succumb to temptation. Not only are the two sinners evicted from the Garden, but the innocence of Eden is also lost. The Fall is total. Nature's state of suspended perfection is shattered. The thoughtless harmony of the unsullied beginning collapses. Predators now kill prey. Change and impermanence are unleashed. Pain and suffering must be endured as a punishment. In this fallen world, the sexual urge — not that different from the temptation that lured Adam and Eve to the forbidden fruit — becomes the source of birth and then the haunting shadow of promised death. Having been cast out of Paradise, humanity must now live its numbered days in a homeless state of conscious remorse and guilt, adrift in a hostile and ruined place where its only power is to name and subdue nature while surviving as best we can. This is the situation at the end of the Old Testament.

The New Testament provides salvation for the fallen. God manifests in the wreckage of Eden in the form of Jesus, who promises salvation by dying for humanity's original sin. All is forgiven in his death, resurrection and ascension. So the descendants of Adam and Eve can escape their guilt and humiliation through belief. The curse from disobedience is lifted, an eternal reprieve from death and suffering is granted, and a return to the paradise of Heaven once more guarantees the company and order of the Divine Presence.

Except this forgiveness is not granted to nature. No reprieve is offered to Eden. The birds of the air and the fishes of the sea, the beasts of the fields and the predators that devour them are not returned to their original, uncorrupted state. They remain in their fallen condition with no promise of salvation. The natural world in which humanity must live is not restored to its initial perfection but continues in its debased and spoiled form.

This creates an inherent and profound dichotomy between a saved humanity and an unredeemed world. Although humanity is on Earth, it is no longer of Earth. The original oneness in Eden is not mended. Humanity's sense of accord with nature has been expunged, first by disobedience and then by the promise of salvation. Each event has increased the disconnection, while distancing humanity from its obligation to care for Creation. A fallen, ephemeral and chaotic nature of incessant struggle exists only to be used and abandoned on the way to humanity's eventual salvation. The final Ending that is anticipated by the only Beginning — the inevitable Armageddon, whatever its form — will be the last cleansing of the imperfect before everything is returned to the eternally perfect.

Nature, therefore, is doubly victimized: first by the Fall — of which it is wholly innocent — and then by the impending apocalypse — of which it is also wholly innocent. In this story, Earth and all the marvels of Creation are only a stage upon which the human drama of sin, redemption and salvation occurs. In the interim, between the very Beginning and the very Ending, an imperfect nature is merely present to be used by an exceptional humanity that will, by the certainty of belief and the promise of salvation, eventually escape the bonds of its sin. At the final reckoning, whatever remains of a tattered, exploited and abused nature, will be restored by the wisdom of Divine intervention. Despite the devastation, all will be fixed and all will be well.

These are not thoughts that lie close to the surface of human awareness. As with each mythology, its unspoken assumptions are mostly hidden in the secret recesses of its stories, rarely explained in their undisguised form because they are too close to the core of a culture's identity to be articulated. Although ordinarily unnoticed, they are nonetheless so fundamental that they are responsible for shaping and directing most thought, attitudes and behaviour.

A culture's mythology only comes to the surface of its own consciousness during times of upheaval and crisis: when circumstances become dire, when questions become profound, when doubt becomes intense, when urgency becomes fear, when the search for new meaning is forced to venture into places never before explored.

This is the situation in which Western culture now finds itself. The old mythology is stressed and failing. It is being examined, exposed and challenged in a rebuilding process that is usually long, arduous and painful. So some thinkers, such as Susan Murphy, are returning to the beginning to understand what is amiss, and how we might find a new way forward.

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Interview with Ray by Willi

What is the Bible these days? How is this text influencing the super-texting / skateboarding youth of ours?

Myths, like those in the Bible, shape the foundational ways in which we think and experience, shaping our sense of reality so fundamentally that we find it extremely difficult to separate sufficiently from these myths to be objective or to find an alternative model for understanding the world in which we live — as Marshall McLuhan playfully noted, we can be certain that water was never discovered by fish. Reality is not a fact; it is an interpretation of sensory information. Our fundamental values and attitudes about existence, meaning and behaviour are inculcated by the deepest assumptions that our culture imposes upon us, and these assumptions that are rarely explicitly described because we have to escape the culture to notice them.

Prior to the super-texting or skateboarding activities of youth, from the moment they began breathing as infants, their culture was imparting mythological meaning to them. They learn this by osmosis. Christmas, Easter and Halloween all carry mythological messages. Youth learns the particular values inherent in the culture in which they are submerged: their sense of individuality; their loyalty to parents, family and the larger community; their notions about death and afterlife; their society's expectations of them; their sense of justice and fairness; their strategies for resolving conflict; their ethical standards regarding stealing, sharing, giving, conflict resolution; their sense of time; their relationship to nature. This is the “water” in which these youth are immersed.

Youth may rebel against some of these forces when they are attempting to define themselves, just as a two-year-old learns that he or she is a separate individual from its parents. Separating from a culture is an adult challenge that requires a confrontation with the sense of reality created by mythology.

The Bible is essential to the mythology of Christian cultures, but other stories and literature form the basis of thought in other cultures. The Qur'an, the Gita, the Tao Te Ching, the Analects of Confucius, the Dharma of Buddha, the dreamtime of Aborigines, for example, all arise from different mythologies and shape the experience of reality in different ways.

Technology is homogenizing this process somewhat through globalization. But the super-texting and skateboarding youth of Japan and America will still be very different, particularly as they mature and the culture's hold on them deepens.

“A culture's mythology only comes to the surface of its own consciousness during times of upheaval and crisis: when circumstances become dire, when questions become profound, when doubt becomes intense, when urgency becomes fear, when the search for new meaning is forced to venture into places never before explored.”

What new mythology, if any, is emanating from the classic mythology?

New mythologies are extremely difficult to build because they do not happen rationally or deliberately. We unconsciously assimilate them rather than deliberately invent them. New experiences force new mythologies upon us. These are events that we usually interpret as crises, primarily because myths are culturally stabilizing forces that we are reluctant to change. The creation of a new mythology feels, at first, as if the old standards of meaning are being torn apart.

We are presently in the early stages of a transition period, so this emerging mythology is extremely difficult to identify. The mythology of the hero will probably persist, although his or her quest will be different. The assumptions about reality underlying the Greek mythological stories may persist, simply because they justify the three major Western absolutist religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam by creating a bifurcated universe of a literal “heaven” and “earth”, two different places and two different forms of existence. We are now confronting the environmental consequences of this mythology because it compromises our sense of reverence for Earth itself and for our ability to fully belong to it.

Classical scholars have noted that all Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato. Western culture may be similarly formed by Platonic thinking. This will be explored further in the following questions. But an additional footnote is needed here. While Plato pointed up to heaven and ideals, Aristotle pointed down to the earth and direct experience. Western thinking has been dominated by these two very different but related measures of reality. The former supports Christian absolutes and ideals; the latter supports science and empiricism.

Marshall McLuhan noted that our culture is “retribalizing”. Rather than an individualistic and analytical explanation of things, this is more a process of responding to impulses and feelings, to image and emotion, to a holistic sense of things. We will find supportive stories from older mythologies to reinforce these developing inclinations. Nature will become a larger part of this mythology.

What is the status of classic myths in your point of view?

The literal stories in the myths are largely decorative now. But the assumptions and values underlying them are far more significant than the stories themselves. Attention should go to what the myth means, not what the story relates. The story is the tip of the metaphorical iceberg.

Deteriorating environmental circumstances may force us to return to borrow from old pre-literate mythologies.

Do you see key linkages between classic mythology and the Old Testament? New Mythology (or Creative Mythology) and the New Testament?

The notion of the perfection of an idea, an absolute that is the basis for judging our transient and imperfect experiences as humans, has supported the notion of a god of absolute perfection and power, of total control and order. The Greek's Zeus became the Christian's Yahweh. Yahweh is the unsayable “YHWH” with vowels added. It has its equivalent in the unknowable realm of ideas—in Plato's metaphor, we see only the shadows of Reality on the cave wall. Greek thought and mythology, in other words, formed the basis for Christian belief and thought, and its residual presence in the Roman empire, as it persisted throughout the so-called Dark Ages, and then as it was reconstituted in the Renaissance, nourished and justified Christianity.

The New Testament is just an extension of this same process. A perfect Saviour transcends the imperfections of an earthly world to promise a restored perfection. Jesus becomes the embodied link between a perfect Heaven and a fallen Earth.

Heaven will save some of us from our sins on Earth, Ray? Do really think people believe this?

Christians are required to believe this if they are Christians. So are Muslims if they wish to be Muslims. This notion of salvation is fundamental to their moral reasoning, their ordinary behaviour, and their post-death expectations.

But such words such as “Heaven”, “save” and “sin” in your question are all mythologically loaded. From a different mythological perspective, where or what is “heaven”? “Saved” from what? What “sin”? Not all mythologies have such questions, words and concepts, and if they do, they are understood very differently. “Soul” is a similar word. So is “self”. Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese mythologies are create a very different sense of reality.

Many argue that we are in the apocalypse now. Thoughts?

From an environmental perspective, we are in an apocalypse. But our dominant Christian mythology is expecting something different in the form of an Armageddon. This raises the issue of time. The environmental apocalypse is slow relative to our human sense of change, although fast relative to geological time. The beginning of the Anthropocene is dated from either the origins of agriculture 10,000 years ago or from the Industrial Revolution 250 years ago. Our attention span is too short to easily notice the monumental changes Earth's ecology is undergoing. And we live in a culture of accelerated speed, impairing even further our sense of time and change. Science is telling us that we are in an apocalypse but this is incompatible with personal experience. Everyone takes as normal the relative absence of butterflies, songbirds, tigers, wolves, fish, etc.... Older people may notice changes and be alarmed but few people have a perspective that is planetary and millennia in scope. We rely on science to inform us in this regard, then we reflexively dismiss its comprehensive view because it conflicts with the narrow one we have.

Urbanization is another factor influencing our sense of apocalypse. Our experience of nature, of biodiversity, of climate, of order and of normalcy is mostly determined by civic factors such as parks, flocks of starlings, thermostats, traffic jams, and the rituals of city life. Crop failure is registered as the price of fruit, vegetables and grains in the supermarket. This distances us from the place where the apocalypse is really occurring. But floods, rising sea levels, extreme weather events and new diseases bring the urbanite into a more direct contact with apocalypse.

Is there a new Adam and Eve? Where is Eden now?

This is another of those mythologically loaded questions. If, however, “Adam” is understood as meaning “man”, and “Eve” as meaning “woman”, then they have been in a process of transformation from their very beginning. Each new generation is a new model, built differently by cultural, environmental and epigenetic processes to be anatomically and psychologically different and new.

The location of “Eden” depends on one's mythological perspective. For Christians and Moslems, Eden is still lost. A more objective and scientific perspective would define “Eden” as exactly where we are on Earth. The tragedy for them is that we are losing it. If anyone thinks mythologically, they would understand that we are losing “Eden” again, for the second time; if anyone simply measures the present degradation, they would bemoan losing the present and only “Eden” we have. The tragedy of losing it once is unforgivable; the tragedy of losing it twice is even more unforgivable.

“Having been cast out of Paradise, humanity must now live its numbered days in a homeless state of conscious remorse and guilt, adrift in a hostile and ruined place where its only power is to name and subdue nature while surviving as best we can. This is the situation at the end of the Old Testament.”

Isn't corporate capitalism and the military industrial complex fuelling apocalypse?

Yes. Corporate capitalism and its various manifestations have been explored frequently by many important thinkers trying to understand why we are trashing our planet. Corporate capitalism provides one explanation for our destructive human behaviour. Perhaps the greatest danger of this economic system is its adaptability and efficiency. At a deeper level, however, corporate capitalism is a symptom of how we think of ourselves, what we do to find meaning and purpose, what we believe, our relationship to nature. A culture of corporate capitalism perceives nature as an object to be used and exploited, not a pattern of ecological wisdom of which we are but a part. The military industrial complex is probably the most cynical, venal, and overtly destructive expression of this attitude.

Who or what is the Divine Presence?

In Christian mythology, “Divine Presence” is just the return of a post-Armageddon world to the ordered control of Yahweh — meaning Jehovah or God. Creation, in effect, returns to some semblance of Eden, to the original condition of order before it was destroyed by Adam's and Eve's original sin.

“Forgiveness is not granted to nature.” Why does Nature require forgiveness?

The point being made in the [Creation Mythology](#) essay was that humanity is granted forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ as a Christian's personal saviour. This saves humanity from the Fall, from the eviction from Eden and returns humanity to Yahweh's grace. When humans fell from grace, so did nature. But the access to salvation that is provided to humans by Christian faith is not provided to nature —or, one might say, the ruins of Eden. This is the sense in which forgiveness is not available to nature.

Outside this mythology of a fallen Eden, nature requires no forgiveness. It is always functioning exactly appropriately at any given moment, doing exactly what the conditions require. In this non-religious understanding of nature, it has always been an “Eden” and it will always be an “Eden”.

When was the Earth in an uncorrupted state?

Earth has always been in an uncorrupted state. It has nothing to corrupt it. Outside of the Eden Mythology, it is a self-contained and self-regulating wilderness in the universe, a Gaia thoughtlessly thinking itself into constantly new incarnations of itself, a system in perpetual renewal. Humanity has only been a small expression of its creativity. We have come, and in all likelihood, we will go as did the trilobites and the pterodactyls.

Part of our evolving mythology will be this realization. We will be forced into a position of greater humility, of a relationship with nature that is more co-operative than adversarial. But this will probably be a very uncomfortable learning experience for humanity.

I say the hell with humans! We can stampede into our end time and rid the planet of our evil ways! Yes!?

Without a “heaven” there can be no “hell”. And nature doesn't understand “good” or “evil”. Things just are. Living organisms come into being and they pass out of being, both as individuals and as species. Change is continual, always following its own internal wisdom.

“The final Ending that is anticipated by the only Beginning — the inevitable Armageddon, whatever its form — will be the last cleansing of the imperfect before everything is returned to the eternally perfect.”

My [New Myths](#) are post-Chaos and incorporate support systems from Transition and Permaculture? Do you see such a post-apocalypse?

We don't yet know for certain the character and extent of an apocalypse, or even if one is coming. The environmental deterioration indicates that something serious is going to happen. But we don't know what it will be. History has a way of surprising us — we stumbled into the unexpected catastrophe of World War I but we have managed, so far, to avoid a nuclear holocaust. Global climate change will likely provoke many kinds of unpleasant possibilities, from drowning coastal cities and disturbed food production to rampant political instability and biospheric chaos. These and many other variables could combine with unpredictable results.

We are already noting some changes in the way we do things. Transition communities and permaculture are just the beginnings. But “post-Chaos” implies that chaos will occur, or that it will end should it begin. “The human tragedy,” wrote Niccolo Machiavelli, (1469-1527), “is that circumstances change, but man does not.” We bring our human character with us wherever we go. Any hope for a “post-Chaos” utopia should be tempered by who we are and what our history has been. Granted, our present moral behaviour as a species is more civilized than in the past. But our environmentally inappropriate behaviour has escalated from local to global, with potentially dire consequences. And we should try our best to make the best of all possible futures. At the same time, we should be prepared for disappointment.

Do you believe that Nature will not survive the apocalypse? How should the few surviving humans treat Nature then?

If the present rate of environmental degradation continues unabated, or if we slip over the tipping point to uncontrollable global warming, human civilization is in serious trouble. It may not survive as it is presently constituted. Nature will lose vast numbers of species — the Anthropocene, as our human age is being defined, is now marked by one of the planet's great extinction periods. Should our modern civilization collapse, its detrimental environmental impacts will also diminish or end. The optimistic scenario for nature is that it will survive the trauma, as it has in the past. In a few million years it will have reconstituted itself in a new form.

In the interim, assuming civilization and/or some humans survive, nature will be regarded with an unusual combination of fear and respect. Anxiety and humility will be the prevalent mood for a while. Humanity will attempt to treat nature with exceptional deference. We may remain extremely cautious for a long time. We may have to reduce our sense of self-importance if we are to survive as a species.

But, to return to the mythology theme, we have travelled this route before. The Creation myth in the Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions, is really a story of our failure to live within the bounds of certain explicit rules. In ecological terms, we failed the test of belonging to nature; instead, we attempted to make it belong to us. The Eden misadventure is probably a recounting of our actual experiences in the Mesopotamian region of the Middle East. That cautionary lesson has been relearned over and over again at many different times and places throughout our history. It has yet to permanently change who we are and how we behave.

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Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index -

1. Psychological Wellbeing
2. Standard of Living
3. Good Governance
4. Health
5. Education
6. Community Vitality
7. Cultural Diversity and Resilience
8. Time Use
9. Ecological Diversity and Resilience