

It may be that some little root on the sacred tree still lives. Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom and fill with singing birds.

*Black Elk (1863-1950),  
Holy Man and Visionary of  
the Oglala Lakota Sioux*

## Our Home Needs Fixing

A headline around the world this month has been *CALIFORNIA IS BURNING!* The rainy season has now arrived, several months late. The fire danger is over. We here at Starcross were spared being directly impacted but we did get heavy smoke.



Now comes forth the dramatic resilience of this land. I would like to see some headlines that say, *CALIFORNIA IS HEALING!* Before the rains came I had been watching a tiny green plant push its way out of the dry earth. It is now about a foot high. I can only imagine how deep its roots must go. I sat and looked at it for a long time, I suppose it was a kind of meditation.

Neighbors from our county were providing practical assistance at the northern fires.

Firefighters from down the road were on hand. Local humanitarian groups are responding to the great needs. Unsung heroes from all around us are spending their nights at the fire scenes with the arduous task of rescuing very frightened and injured animals. Our State Senator, who happens to be a dentist, is a leading force in the forensic examination of those who perished in the fire.

All these people are like the plant I was watching in one respect —they have deep roots of compassion. This is a part of the resilience of rural California.



There are new and very troubling developments which ought to be a warning for everyone. Our retiring governor, Jerry Brown (1938 – ) recently put the issue this way,

*We've had fires for long before the Europeans showed up here. Our indigenous people had a different way of living with nature. For 10,000 years, there were never more than 300,000 people living in California. Now we have 40 million. ...So it's not just one thing. It's how people live, it's where they live and it's the changing climate. .... The truth is we're going to have more difficulties. Things are not going to get better. They're going to get more challenging because of the continuing alteration in the climate — lack of moisture, early snowmelt and faster winds, the whole thing.*

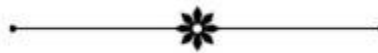
So what is our governor going to do in retirement? He's going to become the director of an international program focusing on climate change. Its mission statement says that science and technology should make life on earth better, not worse. One of its projects is maintaining the dramatic *Doomsday Clock*, a symbol which represents the likelihood of a human-made global catastrophe — including climate change.



This Thanksgiving we heard from friends studying or engaged in humanitarian work abroad. A number have pointed out that it certainly seems like our present national administration has abandoned a powerful response to the challenge of climate change because such actions would interfere with profits. I had a deep sense of sadness when one of them put it simply and strongly, that it was “very refreshing” for her not to be in the United States at this time. I think many people abroad share the same attitude. And I certainly understand it. The federal government has withdrawn from international treaties concerning climate change and has approved project after project that will leave us more environmentally vulnerable.



I join those who are also concerned about the erosion of our moral core. The scope of this erosion extends from our lack of environmental stewardship to encompass humanitarian crises as well. 85,000 children under the age of 5 have died of starvation in the senseless war in Yemen, largely the result of sophisticated military equipment we have sold to Saudi Arabia. And we stand more or less alone on the world stage in not condemning the incredibly brutal murder of a WASHINGTON POST journalist by Saudis in Turkey. It was, for me, shocking to hear a government spokesman state that such an action would be “bad for commerce.”



The day after Thanksgiving a major report mandated by Congress and compiled by scientists in 13 federal agencies presented a very bleak warning of the consequences of climate change in the United States if major steps are not taken immediately. Among other things, they say that the American economy will decline by up to 10% by this century's end. This very detailed report is directly at odds with Mr. Trump's agenda for environmental deregulation, where he incorrectly argues his approach will spur economic growth. He has taken hard line steps concerning everything from vehicle tailpipes to withdrawing from the Paris Agreement under which nearly every industrial country in the world has pledged to cut



carbon emissions. The congressionally mandated report warns of devastating effects from a changing climate which include wildfires not only in the West but also in the Southeast, crop failures in the Midwest, crumbling infrastructure nation wide, disrupted export and supply chains, and agricultural yields falling to 1980s levels by midcentury. A small minority may make higher profits from continuing present practices. For the rest of us, the consequences will be catastrophic.

Mr. Trump's response to this major report came four days later. It was simple. *I don't believe it!*, he said with a laugh. And that puts an end to any help we may have hoped for from this administration.



National governments can help a lot. In the '70s there was an international effort to ban aerosol sprays that injured the beneficial ozone layer in our stratosphere. I am told that as a result, the ozone shield is recovering. In the next few weeks the European Union will probably prohibit single use plastic bottles. Governments can make a difference but we can not expect much help from Mr. Trump's administration. Thankfully that's not the end of the story.

Local governments can also contribute. In my own state and in others as well, and even in counties and cities, local governments are enacting policies in attempts to at least delay the impact of climate change.

Many spiritual traditions recognize that individuals also have a role to play in this struggle.

On Sunday Chanukah begins. A Jewish teaching that I have always admired is the concept that hope can be found even in very difficult situations. In 165 B.C.E, Jewish patriots drove out an oppressor and reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem. They cleaned it and removed all foreign symbols. However, when the time came to light the perpetual flame, they found they only had enough oil for one day. With faith they lit the lamp anyway and it burned for eight days until new oil became available. This is the story on which Chanukah is based.

There is another bit of Jewish history that means a lot to me,



and that is the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, usually translated as “repairing the world.” The phrase originated with Isaac Luria (1534–1572), a Kabbalist mystic, in the 16th century. This “repairing” was a way of looking at the presence of both good and evil in the world. Different meanings have evolved through the years. In the 1950’s the phrase often referred to social action programs. Recently it has meant quite literally repairing the earth and has become a way of combining Jewish spirituality with ecology. Many ideas have evolved out of this concept including Jewish Earth Week, which focuses on practical things that an individual can do such as picking up trash, working in a community garden, practicing composting, and many things like that.

Actions of this nature are a very practical way of teaching our children that we must act as stewards of the earth. We cannot individually restore the balance that has been disrupted. However, as the Talmud puts it, “we cannot excuse ourselves from taking part” in efforts to repair the world.

***Brother Toby***