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## **EARTHRISE: AN INITIATION OF THE COLLECTIVE INTO THE FEMININE**

### Collective Initiation into the Feminine

On Christmas Eve, 1968, humanity saw the earth from space for the first time. That image turned the attention of North Americans from the mysteries of outer space to the beauty of our planet. As part of the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States, the intention of Apollo 8 was to explore “the great out-there,” sending back data on the moon’s atmosphere and terrain. It did that, and much, much more. Through its photo of Earth suspended in space, the mission accomplished a remarkable feat: humankind turned around and saw with new eyes what we have, right beneath our feet. In the flash of an image on a television screen, our attention pivoted from conquering space toward understanding our own planet.

Within a year of seeing Earthrise, space exploration began to lose its appeal for the U.S. public. NASA’s budget shrank by sixty percent. Interest in the planet on which we live gained momentum.

Earthrise called us back to Earth. We saw how beautiful our home planet is, how isolated it is, how precarious its situation, suspended alone in the vastness and darkness of a great unknown. For a second, we experienced both our vulnerability and our connectedness. For a moment, we became students wanting to learn *from* our planet, and *about* our planet.

Thus we in the U.S. and in Canada were initiated into an awareness of Earth, Mother and Home...all aspects of the feminine.

“Mother” and “home” being associated with Earth throughout time and humanity, the photograph of our lonely and fragile planet reminded us of our smallness, our need for care and protection, our dependency on nature and on each other.

Home: a sense of belonging, of being cared for, of being safe, of feeling secure.

Mother: the essence of home, of belonging, of safety and security.

Most modern people in North America suffer a deep sense of alienation from the planet that supports us. Our ancestors obtained security by placing Earth in the very centre of their cosmos. Today, we derive our sense of security from money, and we are filled with fear of poverty and scarcity. In many ways, we have lost our instinctual relationship with the ground beneath our feet.

Yet, in our own modern ways, we are attempting to recover that loss.

Think about how many of us travel, how many of us are drawn to learn about other cultures, to volunteer our skills in making life better for those less fortunate. Many of us travel out of a yearning to find Home, to experience belonging, to discover what we are made of and to find out whether anything greater than ourselves supports us, will look after us.

A first-world problem is unrelenting schedules that separate us from ourselves. More and more people are turning to mindfulness meditation. Some people travel significant distances to participate in yoga by the beach, or to undergo emotional release therapy supplemented by massage and healthy foods.

I see these as attempts to reconnect with Earth as Mother and as Home.

We North Americans aren't very good at receiving nurture or nourishment from Mother. We're not very good at recognizing Home. So, yearning to find our way home, we enroll in classes, borrow practices from other cultures, adopt foreign rituals. Looking for Mother, we explore foods and languages and love.

Through all this crisscrossing of land and water, of bodies and beliefs, of stories and experiences, our view of the world is changing. In our minds, Earth is morphing from something abstract to a living being, from globe to shared home. Consciousness of ourselves as citizens of the world, wherever we happen to be born or live, is developing.

Our induction into the feminine values of inclusiveness, community and organic growth is becoming integrated in contemporary ways.

### Collective Evolution Since Earthrise

The Apollo 8 photo drew the collective North American psyche toward a reordering of its values. While the Earthrise image appeared in the midst of a transition already underway, the archetypal truth contained in this picture, and the synchronistic timing of its appearance, provided a focal point around which various social concerns of the times gathered.

Awareness of Earth's ecology started before humans saw the planet from space. In 1962, a seminal piece titled "Silent Spring" – written by a U.S. marine biologist named Rachel Carson– called attention to pollution of land and water through pesticides and chemical runoffs from industry. In 1965, the European scientist James Lovelock began defining the idea of a self-regulating earth controlled by the community of living

organisms that includes bacteria, fungi, plants and animals. He published his Gaia Theory in 1971 – three years after Earthrise.

Early in the 1960's the environment held a spot on the U.S. national agenda. Liberal intellectuals and elected officials argued that protecting the environment, and improving its quality, would secure the greatness that the United States had attained in its reputation with the rest of the world. By the mid-60's the environment had become a major topic of debate in the nation's capital.

The image of "Earthrise" was one of the things that moved these issues to the streets. Sixteen months after the televised photograph, in April, 1970, the first Earth Day took place, inspiring eco-theatre, speeches and discussions around the country. About 1500 colleges held teach-ins, and demonstrations blossomed in front of government and corporate buildings. Approximately 20 million Americans joined together in expressions of concern about the state of the environment. By the mid-70's, universities had created degree programmes in environmental studies, and Canada's Greenpeace was engaging in high-profile activities.

Soon after the public encounter with the earth in 1968, the space program itself started collaborating with foreign space agencies. In 1971, the U.S. invited the Soviet Union to join them in working toward a docking between Apollo and Soyuz ships in space. Russia accepted. The two countries began exchanging scientific information, and completed the docking mission in 1975. Such joining of knowledge and resources introduced a novel way of developing closer strategic political relationships, and marked the end of the superpower space race.

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A feature of the cultural symbol is its resonance to the needs of the current era. Proof of a collective symbol's relevance resides in the emergence of rituals, stories and ideas that "catch-on" with the masses. These novelties materialize through the inspirations, loyalties and efforts of individual people.

I want to highlight a few examples of such transpirings from the last two decades.

Where can we see the feminine principle showing development in terms of its power and authority? The answer to that question can be found by looking beneath the surface of collective occurrences, works of art, and initiatives at various levels of government...by noticing themes that point toward cultural advancement in the making.

The themes come in different forms, and circle the feminine over and over again, in an effort to gain enough libido to break into cultural consciousness.

Here is a collective event. In 1997, two female icons died within days of each other. Most people remember where they were when they heard of Princess Diana's death. Mother Theresa died on the eve of Diana's funeral. The long-standing fascination with these two women reflects the split feminine in our western culture: the princess and the saint, the whore and the virgin, the physical and the spiritual. Princess Diana and Mother Theresa carried our projections of the divided feminine that exists within our own selves.

The proximity of the deaths of these women offered the collective North American psyche a powerful symbolism: the death of the split feminine *in potentia*. The demise of this split is possible.

Some people were ready for this, and able to perceive it. For many, the deaths remain on the concrete level.

Nevertheless, an opening occurred in the North American psyche. Works of art emerged to assist in bringing the feared and devalued aspects of the feminine into collective and individual awareness.

At the time of the deaths of the Princess and the Mother, Eve Ensler's production, "The Vagina Monologues," was gaining popularity. It brought women of all ages together in a celebration of the long-despised vulva. Two hours of stories told by and about the vulva facilitated a "coming-out" as women sat together in shared laughter and surprise. The play constituted a modern-day Inanna leaning back against an apple tree, lifting her skirts, exposing and praising her vulva. Inanna's act signaled a commencement from the state of a hesitant, fearful adolescent girl to that of an adult female delighting in her womanhood and wishing to test its powers.

In 2003, six years after the appearance of Ensler's show, Dan Brown's novel, *The de Vinci Code*, revived public interest in Mary Magdalene and in the legend of the holy grail. Something in the collective must have been ready for a more complete image of the feminine because, despite poor writing and weak character development, the book sold very well. Almost overnight, the perception of Mary Magdalene became more substantial and well-rounded. She took on flesh and blood. Since then, interest in Magdalene, in the Black Madonna and in various forms of the feminine has escalated.

Currently, the Broadway play "Wicked" draws sell-out crowds, and has done so since it began twelve years ago. The production explores the life of the Wicked Witch of the West from Baum's children's story, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz." The two main

characters are female. One buys-in to the patriarchal view of women as commodities; the other rebels in service to her own nature. One embraces the conventional ideals of innocence and bodily beauty as feminine; she follows a collective morality of giving and pleasing. The other embodies the assertive and natural feminine, acting in accord with the deeper and invisible requirements of the moment and thereby gaining a reputation as unpredictable. By the end of the show, the rivalry between the two characters, and between their positions, finds truce in relationship. The message is clear: both sides of the archetypal feminine have a place and a function. The instinctually-acting feminine can do something that the approval-seeking feminine cannot, and vice versa.

Turning to issues of governance, consideration of humanity's impact on the environment continues to grow. In many countries—though not all—the electorate demands compassion and sensitivity to ecology and human welfare as well as to the traditional issues of security, expansion and the economy.

Over a hundred countries have some kind of protection for a healthy environment written into their constitution. Canada is not one of those countries. That may soon change.

David Suzuki realized that when people believe they have the right to clean air, clean water and clean soil, the environmental conversation shifts at a societal level. Last year, he and his team established the Blue Dot Tour. Their aim was to get one community to approve a declaration of the Right to a Healthy Environment in six months. It did not take six months. Within three weeks, the city of Richmond, British Columbia, signed such a declaration. Fifty-seven municipalities have now followed suit.



On a more mundane level, Calgary finally instituted a recycling program and is working on a composting option for its residents. Individually, most of us play hidden parts in the drama of cultural change and evolution. When I carry my recyclables to my blue bin, I sometimes feel like I am participating in a collective ritual, and it feels good. Though small and often unconscious, these kinds of activities affect the cultural psyche.

As events like these circulate through our days and our communities, the unified feminine gains strength, coming into awareness through allegory and also through experience. The conscious orientation of the collective already tilts toward more relational dealings, storied reporting and communal values. "Occupy Wall Street" modeled a feminine way of organizing and leading...one of horizontal power, process-directed, consensus-based, speaking to systemic changes.

The conception of the ideal leader is shifting from the hero and warrior to something more balanced. One-sided aggressiveness and masculine prowess appeals less to the masses than it once did. The 2008 presidential election is a case in point. Hillary Clinton came across as more masculine than Obama did. We all know who was elected. . . the person who exhibited a receptive attitude and used the language of relationship and hope rather than strategy.

Change *is* afoot.

In part, we have Earthrise to thank.

## Conclusion

Catching our imagination, the blue and white and brown image of Earth against the blackness of space transformed the way many of us think of our planet-home. We began to see it as a home for life, a living being that we can both harm and help to heal. We began to recover what was left behind in our hurry to move ahead: the meaning of the term "Mother". The habitation of Home. The feminine capacity for relating to the earth, her peoples, and all her life forms.

Thank you.

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