

From the Editor:

Hello Fellow Wild Ones!

I am delighted and honored to be the new editor of Westwords. I invite all members of the Animas community to offer their words and images. While the act of writing and creating is both cathartic and therapeutic, sometimes the act of sending the written word out into the world is similar to having a ceremony or commitment witnessed by others. If you have words or images that want to be seen by the world or witnessed by the AVI community please send them to me at rick@rmdg.biz for inclusion in Westwords.

I often struggle, while between Animas adventures, to stay connected to the work and feelings that I experience so deeply when I am immersed in a course, in a wild place, in a supportive group. It is my hope that Westwords will be a platform for Animas community members to maintain their connections both with each other and with the work. I hope that the words and images in Westwords will evoke the same feelings and touch the same places as AVI courses and soulcraft practices.

As I was gathering and preparing content for this issue of Westwords, and I came across the poem below on Joanna Macy's web site. Each time I read it, I think of all of us in the Animas community and our individual and collective turnings towards (see poem below), and I am filled again and again with a gratitude that brings tears to my eyes. What an amazingly beautiful dance we are all engaged in as we turn together, each discovering our own authentic and unique movements, and each contributing to the collective movement/grace of the dance that will and must save our species (and many others too).

With enormous gratitude,



Rick Wishcamper

THE GREAT TURNING

"You've asked me to tell you of The Great Turning, of how we saved
the world from disaster.

The answer is both simple and complex.

We turned.

For hundreds of years we had turned away as life on earth grew more
precarious.

We turned away from the homeless men on the streets, the stench from
the river, the children orphaned in Iraq, the mothers dying of AIDS
in Africa.

We turned away because that is what we had been taught.

To turn away, from our pain, from the hurt in another's eyes, from
the drunken father or the friend betrayed.

Always we were told, in actions louder than words, to turn away,
turn away. And so we became a lonely people caught up in a world
moving too quickly, too mindlessly towards its own demise.

Until it seemed as if there was no safe place to turn. No place,
inside or out, that did not remind us of fear or terror, despair and
loss, anger and grief.

Yet on one of those days someone did turn.

Turned to face the pain. Turned to face the stranger. Tuned to look
at the smoldering world and the hatred seething in too many eyes.
Turned to face himself, herself.

And then another turned. And another. And another. And as they wept,
they took each other's hands.

Until whole groups of people were turning. Young and old, gay and
straight. People of all colors, all nations, all religions. Turning
not only to the pain and hurt but to beauty, gratitude and love,
Turning to one another with forgiveness and a longing for peace in
their hearts..."

-- Christine Fry (October 19, 2004)

3 Dimensions of The Great Turning:

1. Actions to slow down the destruction being wrought by industrial growth society. These actions are what we generally think of as "activism". This is a call to protect life and to save as much as you can. But this alone, is not enough.
2. Planting the seeds for new structures after the old ones fall away, such as alternative fuel, alternative ways of growing and distributing food, alternative health, alternative currency. But, this also is not enough.
3. A revolutionary shift in consciousness is needed. A sense of awe, gratitude, wonder, and devotion to our planet, life, and each other must arise from the heart.

Signs We are Making a Difference / The Great Turning Continues to Unfold

1. The Australian government has banned incandescent lighting on the entire continent requiring all Australians to use compact fluorescents. Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says replacing incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs would cut 800,000 tons from Australia's current emissions levels by 2012.
2. 15,000 billboards have been removed from the city of Sao Paulo since a ban on outdoor advertising went into effect in early 2007.
3. The Vatican, that's right, the Vatican. Pope Benedict XVI declared the Vatican the first carbon-neutral state. The Vatican will install more than 1,000 solar panels in 2008.
4. The Green Jobs Act!!!! The house of Representatives passed a bill dedicating \$125 million to train 35,000 people annually in "green collar jobs"
5. Seattle announced a zero-waste policy capping the tonnage of exported garbage at 2006 levels as well as calling for annual reductions. The plan includes incentives for composting as well as for recycling buildings and building materials.

Letter from Bill

My big news this season is the completion and launch of my new book, *Nature and the Human Soul*, on which I've labored – ecstatic and crazed -- for twenty-five years. Friends and colleagues ask how it feels to finally be done and to see it now making its own way in the world. Well, I'm actually a bit *surprised* by how I feel. Beyond the predictable excitement (yes, tinged with a bit of anxiety) and the soul-stirring gratification, my dominant feeling is simply ... gratitude, a profound gratefulness to have been blessed with such an absorbing and challenging project for so many years. It's surely a big piece of what I've been called to do in this life.

Certainly, like everyone, I've had my fair share of frustrations, disappointments, failures, and burdens, but yet I can say that for the past 27 years I've seldom had doubts about what I was born to do. I don't mean write books or guide programs. I mean on the chthonic level — where the subterranean gods dwell. It is the apperception of my own personal mythos that has made all the difference in my life, and my gratitude for this is measureless. (Wondering about the personal mythos of which I speak? Please see the prologue to *Soulcraft*.)

My hope for this new book is that it might become a useful thread in what I think of as the most exciting, and urgent conversation of our time — the current global discourse about how to build a society that's not only sustainable, but also just, compassionate, and cooperative — and, beyond that, deeply imaginative and joyous. The conversational motif that is sung loudest in the book concerns the necessity of individual maturation and of a species-wide shift in consciousness.

In complementary contrast, most of the current global conversation about culture change has revolved around the vital need to transform our politics, economics, agriculture, energy systems, technology, and schools. All essential. But I've grown certain that we won't have a deep enough or lasting solution until we have societies of more mature people — in essence, fully human beings. And this takes something more and different (and deeper) than better government, technology, business, and so on. It requires a new and profound understanding of who and what we humans are — and it demands cultural practices and institutions that enable us to evolve into that potential, into our human destiny.

I believe that the theme of ecocentric personal development is an essential dimension of the global effort to give birth to the future human.

One of the things I'm most excited about now is to see Animas Valley Institute — its participants, guides, staff, and Board — enter more fully into this most essential global conversation and adventure of our time. Toward that end, I've asked my publisher, New World Library, to send copies of the book to selected individuals around the world, people who are doing some of the most exciting work today in building a new society fully partnered with the greater Earth community. These are ecocentric leaders, well known and not-so-well-known, in a great variety of fields. In future editions of *Westwords* and on Animas programs, I'll be keeping you informed about the unfolding conversation.

And I want to invite each of *your* voices as essential fibers in that conversational tapestry. One way to do this is through your submissions to *Westwords*. As you read the book, let us know what you think, feel, imagine, and sense. Not only or primarily about the book, but about your relationship to humanity's great and urgent undertaking of this twenty-first century.

I encourage you, as well, to engage other people in the great conversation of our time, people you know and care about. And then let *Westword's* editor, Rick Wishcamper (rick@rmdg.biz), know what themes and feelings have emerged for you — and what images of the future human.

Keep in touch.

All the best of both the dark and light to you this solstice season,

Bill

Letting Go

I am falling, falling,
Falling underwater.
Down to the deep moist roots
Of rushes lost in mud.
Sinking into silt and slime,
Dark with the rot of ages.
Falling to the core,
Where the secret small green push
towards light is nestling,
still unborn,
unfound.
despite insistent probing.

Oh! The warm, wild, wet of the in-between places,
Where movement is completely effortless,
Negligible,
Unnecessary,
Smooth.
Oh! the pale white reeds of the rushes' roots,
like the trunks of aspen floating in the moonlight.
The slow weave of the deep, deep waters,
womb thick with night,
the warm fat bed of the mud
to soft receive me,
hold me, suck me
ever deeper towards the core.

Unseen.
Unfelt.
Unknown.

Believed in.

— Cris Mulvey



“Light” Watercolor by Cris Mulvey

The Heart of Gratitude

I'm sitting in the late summer sun of a northern Vermont day, as the wind blows off the lake and carries stories through the trees as they whisper and bend. I place my hands on my heart and belly and the sun moves into me like liquid heat, causing an immediate and familiar feeling...gratitude. A prayer with no words. A window in my heart flung open. Words begin to form. They start slowly and then start to move more quickly, like water rounding a bend in the river. Thanking words. Simple. Out of the first warmth in my chest the words take a leap, like a fledgling leaving the nest and chirping itself into the air.

I've never noticed this before. How gratitude starts as an experience in my body, a spontaneous opening in my heart, which slowly begins to birth words of thankfulness in its warmth. Gratitude first, and then the Thanking.

Brother David Steindl-Rast suggests that “all gratitude celebrates belonging”. In that moment, as I sit in the sun and feel the warmth of my heart opening, I am feeling, in an instant, my connection to the natural world. In that moment I have a place...I belong...I'm in relationship with the luminous web and the simple beauty around me.

Gratitude comes in a burst of grace. It softens my hard places and opens me to the larger, more flexible places of possibility. It increases my sense of well-being and invites me to inhabit my true belonging, within and without.

In this season of thanksgiving, may we each be surprised and blessed by the gentle warmth of gratitude and the thanking it inspires. May we all know our true belonging

From the heart of gratitude, my prayer for peace:

Spirit of all Life, Beloved Mystery,
You who gave us Earth and Sky, Sun and Moon and Stars,
Body and Spirit, Creatures and Stones and Oceans of Water,
We call to you from the deepest place of truth, with gratitude and longing.

Make of our hearts a great bowl
Where Love can enter like some shining wave seeking shore.
Stir us and mix us in this Heart Bowl
Until every cell of our being is changed and opened...
Until our fear turns to love and our violence turns to peace.

Make of our hearts a great bowl.
Wash us in your Light
Until wonder returns,
And generosity flourishes,
And the wisdom of simplicity roots down deep.

Help us each to stand in our power
And to see your reflection in all places,
Especially in each other.

Spirit of all Life, Beloved Mystery,
Make of our hearts a great bowl,
Where the waters of Peace flow in and out
And the Garden of Earth is restored.

Dorothy M. Mason, LPC, IM

Dorothy Mason is an AVI guide whose work springs from a clear devotion to the earth and love of the symbolic world as a tangible, guiding force in our lives. As a teacher, licensed psychotherapist, Interfaith minister, ceremonialist, and vision quest guide, with additional training in the healing arts of Reiki, energy work, dreams, and deep imagery, she is dedicated to supporting others to live a full, grounded spirituality as a part of everyday life. Her ongoing exploration of the wisdom traditions and mystical teachings of ancient cultures continues to offer inspiration, depth, and focus to her life and work.

Beauty

Your wings are a blur. Soft,
delicate engines transporting you
forward, backward, sideways, around
and into stillness, levitating
before a purple beauty, drinking
what the gods have offered you.

I can not get close enough
to you. I want to see deeper
into the blur, to absorb
your colors, to look through
your eyes for the source
of energy which holds you floating still enough to taste the nectar.

I dare not approach, as you
would just fly away. I watch
you visit purple beauties
all around. You vanish,
then reappear at the face of
one in front of me. I see
the zebra stripes of your body, the
orange-red flame inside
the blur. You are off
again, whimsical as the
breeze supporting you.

I wanted to capture you,
to photograph you; but
these acts would be lies. Even
the wish is a lie.
The truth is, in this moment
I long to be you – transported
in a blur of energy, held
still by some magic at the face
of a beauty, drinking
what the gods have offered
me, drinking from every
beauty I can sense.

You are still coming and going,
weaving your way around
me. Three times you have
approached my head, where
I could hear for a moment
the hum of a blur.

I do not fully know what I
am becoming, but for you
I would be a poet.

--Mike Sheffield, 2007

Feeling Disconnected from your soul? Simple Things You Can Do:

- Make contact with someone from your Animas experience—pick up the phone and let's support each other!
- Call in an animal or other guide for a short (or not) dialogue
- Say a prayer for Earth
- Have coffee with your least developed facet of Self or your most frightened sub-personality
- Take your inner beloved on a romantic date
- Find nature wherever you are and embrace and be embraced by Earth

Selected Resources on The Great Turning:

“To Remake the World,” by Paul Hawken - <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/265/>

“Beyond Hope,” by Derrick Jensen - <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/170/> (for another perspective on Hope check out Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* - <http://www.powells.com/biblio/1-9781560258285-4>)

“The Great Turning: Reflections on our Moment in History,” by Joanna Macy - <http://earthlight.org/jmacyessay.html>

“The Big Picture: The Larger Context for All Human Activities,” by Michael Dowd - <http://thegreatstory.org/Bigpicture1.html>

“The Rise of Integral Culture,” by Paul H. Ray - http://www.noetic.org/publications/review/issue37/main.cfm?page=r37_Ray.html

Bioneers - <http://www.bioneers.org> Post Carbon Institute - <http://www.postcarbon.org/>

Yes! Magazine - <http://yesmagazine.org/> Orion Magazine - <http://orionmagazine.org/>

Ecologist Magazine - <http://www.theecologist.org/> EarthLight - <http://earthlight.org/>

Global Public Media - <http://globalpublicmedia.com/>

Upcoming Animas Programs (For Additional Information on Animas Programs Visit www.animas.org)

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| 2/10/2008 | Seduced by Earth: Deep Imagination, Soulcraft, and the Dreaming of Nature. Guides: Bill Plotkin and Geneen Marie Haugen. Location: Esalen Institute, Big Sur, California. |
| 2/20/2008 | February All-Camping Quest in Death Valley. Guides: Bill Ball and Rebecca Wildbear. Location: Death Valley National Park, California. |
| 2/27/2008 | Tele-Conference with Bill Plotkin on the Soulcentric Development Wheel Principles and Practices for Personal Development |
| 3/12/2008 | Deep Imagery: Opening the Window to the Imaginary World. Guide: Diane Timberlake. Location: Whidbey Institute, Whidbey Island Washington. |
| 3/19/2008 | The Way of Council and the Art of Mirroring. Guides: Annie Bloom and Peter Scanlon. Location: Great Bear Lodge, Nashville, Tennessee. |
| 3/19/2008 | Tele-Conference with Bill Plotkin on the Soul Centric Development Wheel Principles and Practices for Therapists and Coaches |

Call of Blackfeet Country

Walking out into the mouth of winter,
I feel the downward call.
Go deeper! Deeper still.
Crack the river's crystal shell.
Dive deep into the old
Eternal blackness!

Like the beaver,
Mine the mud beneath
To break into a
Different, light-filled world;
To meet with Gods
Who hold the secrets of the world.
The ancient songs, the keys to all the mysteries.

Ask them to show you how to live.
Give them time to answer.

Give them cause.

There amongst the weave of wine-dark willow
The torn and tangled snow, wind moves imperceptibly.
Snow yields to the river,
drop by silent drop,
all year long.

Like that: Feed yourself
to the source that tugs,
breath by breath,
all life long.

-Cris Mulvey

Help Us Celebrate the Release of Bill's New Book!

- Check out the new website for *Nature and the Human Soul* (<http://natureandthehumansoul.com/newbook/naths.htm>), where you can read the first chapter of the book, and you can see the schedule of book signings and of the 2008 programs on the Wheel of Life (subject of *Nature and the Human Soul*).
- From the website, you can also order:
 - an autographed copy of *Nature and the Human Soul* ... or ...
 - order the book through the Amazon link, which generates income for the Animas scholarship fund.
- Write an online review on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or Powell's websites, or on the websites of other relevant on-line communities.
- Start a NATHS discussion group.
- Suggest NATHS to your book club.
- Get the word out to friends and family. (The successful launch of a new book makes all the difference in its overall success. If enough people (1000-1500) buy NATHS in the first week, it stands a real chance of making bestseller lists. Bestseller lists provide tremendous exposure and get the book, and its message, to many more people).

Contribute to Westwords

As a publication intended to serve the Animas community, Westwords is most effective if its content is of and from the community. Please consider contributing to Westwords. We would love to receive your poems and artwork, stories about your transformative experiences (Animas programs or other), or reports about activities and events in your communities that pertain to the Animas mission and the Great Turning (or anything else you are inspired to send!). Please send your submissions by March 1 to rick@rmdg.biz.

Animas Valley Institute Mission:

Animas Valley Institute helps people become more fully human.

Our programs support participants to

- uncover the mysteries of their souls — their unique way of belonging and contributing to the world,

- deepen and broaden their intimacy with the wild Earth, and live everyday grounded in both soul and nature.

Animas meets people where they find themselves in life.

- If your burning question is: *Who am I really?* Animas supports you to create a way of living that is both authentic and socially successful.

- If your burning question is: *What am I here for?* Animas supports you to encounter your soul and uncover its specific, indispensable gift to the world.

- If your burning question is: *How can I make my unique contribution to a world in need?* Animas supports you in becoming a deeply imaginative leader and an artisan of cultural change.

If you don't have a burning question, but long to burn, Animas helps you set yourself on fire.

Vision

Animas Valley Institute envisions a world in which inspired youth, true adults, and wise elders work together to create an eco-centric, just, and deeply imaginative society. This cultural transformation to a more fulfilling, compassionate, and equitable way of life has been called the Great Work of this century, the Great Turning toward a mutually enhancing partnership between humanity and the larger Earth community. Animas supports this Great Turning, participates in it by assisting people to become soul-initiated artisans and visionary leaders, and welcomes all who are called to co-create it.