



# RELIGIOUS NATURALIST ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

created by religious naturalists for religious naturalists

December 2023

## In This Issue

**Monthly Article:** Mother Nature's Prayer

**News and Events:**

- Winter Solstice
- Regular Events

**Help Wanted:** Volunteers to help with social media

**Music of the Month:** Dark of Winter

**Video of the Month:** How to be a Naturalist

**Forum Topic of the Month:** Marking Winter Solstice

**Living Thing of the Month:** Spotted Hyenas

**Book of the Month:** The Theory of Everyone

**Website of the Month:** Center for Wild Spirituality

**RN Links:**

- Members' Contributions
- Members' Projects

## Feature Article - December 2023

### Mother Nature's Prayer by Ursula Goodenough

Our Mother, who art within us,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy ways evolve,  
Thy will calls forth  
This earth that is now our heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And fill us with tenderness  
As we repair our trespasses.  
And lead us forth into fulfillment,  
And deliver us into harmony.  
For thine is our wellspring  
And our grounding and our glory  
Forever and ever, amen.

Probably all RNA members, regardless of religious or non-religious heritages, are at least familiar with the Lord's Prayer given its ubiquity at numerous services and commemorations.

I've recently tried my hand at writing an alternative version, shown above, where several RNA members suggested excellent edits after I posted it several months ago.

The original Lord's Prayer is attributed to Jesus in both Luke and Matthew. He would have voiced it in [Aramaic](#); a Latin version is [here](#). I crafted my version to retain the familiar and beautiful structure and cadence of the King James' version, allowing it to be sung using existing [hymnity](#). But I address the words not to a Lord in Heaven but to the wondrous forces and glory of Nature – our wellspring and our grounding -- personified as Mother Nature.

The prayer personifies. It names a Mother Nature to whom we can pray, a Mother who gives and fills and repairs and leads and delivers, a Mother who has a story. This is, of course, a metaphor, the bedrock of our language and hence our ability to make meaning. Writer James Geary: "A metaphor is both detour and destination, a digression that gets to the point." A similar metaphor speaks of Gaia rather than of [Mother Nature](#), and personalized concepts of nature are embedded in many Asian, Indigenous, and Pagan traditions.

The Mother Nature's prayer for sure works better for me than the original (and please feel free to share it with others and to tailor it to your sensibilities). That said, I am actually less drawn to prayers that personify the natural world, and more drawn to prayers that celebrate the natural world. I resonate with Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote in 1871, "Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul."

Beholding means grateful. Jubilant derives from "make a joyful noise." And "contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view" connotes deep interest in and reverence for our earthly understandings and the humility that accompanies such reverence. So for Emerson, to pray is to voice reverent jubilant gratitude.

We religious naturalists take Nature to mind – the facts of life -- and to heart, experiencing jubilation and gratitude and reverence and humility for the gift of the natural world of which we are a part.

So do religious naturalists have prayers that say these things? Most assuredly. The best of these, I would say, come to us from our "nature poets". Here are seven of my favorites, with more in [my book](#) and on our compilation of [RN Voices](#).

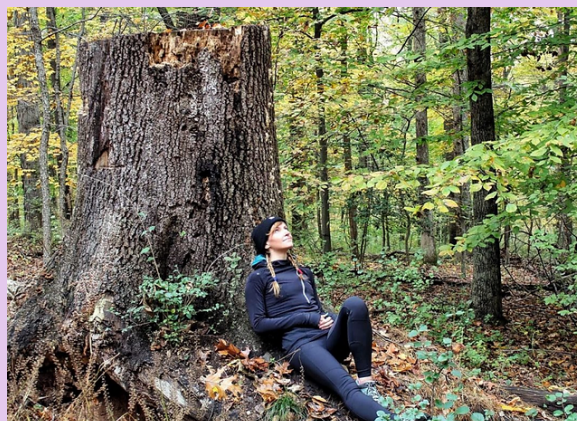
From Mary Oliver:

*Praying* [Praying](#)  
*Wild Geese* [Wild Geese](#)  
*Sleeping in the Forest* [Sleeping in the Forest](#)  
*Mindful* [Mindful](#)  
*The Summer Day* [The Summer Day](#)

From Wendell Berry:

*The Peace of Wild Things* [The Peace of Wild Things](#)  
*A Vision* [A Vision](#)

During the upcoming post-Solstice season, while our days grow longer or shorter depending on your hemisphere, may your prayers, be they personified or celebratory or both, come to you as blessings.



## News and Events

### A “Middle-Out” Approach to Achieving Peace: Avoiding WWII and Climate Disaster

*Thursday, January 18, 2024, 5 PM Eastern Time*

Presenter: **Frances Flannery**, Co-Founder of **BioEarth Community**, peace advocate, and professor of Religion at **James Madison University** in Virginia.

The IRAS webinar is FREE but registration is required.

Please register using the link below.  
[Register for January 2024 Webinar](#)

### Winter Solstice: Emanations from a Point of Stillness - Bart Everson

*Over the course of 2023, at the eight stations in the Wheel of the Year, Bart Everson has shared with the Gaian community **eight guided, breath-based meditations**. It is our hope that these meditations will help you to observe and to celebrate Gaia's journey around the Sun, and to explore possible meanings embedded in various parts of the cycle.*

<https://gaianism.org/winter-solstice-emanations-from-a-point-of-stillness/>

### Religious Naturalist Unitarian Universalist Discussion Group

Thursday, December 28th, 3:30 PT, 4:30 MT, 5:30 CT 6:30 ET

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9291456582>

Some of you may still be celebrating the holidays, but we didn't want to skip two months in a row, so we will be meeting to discuss "Living in the Metacrisis with Jonathan Rowson.

<https://youtu.be/IjQQB608yIQ?si=voAXTyiYh8kr2PX8>

### Build-Out report: Social Nearer-ing

Forget social distancing; we're getting really close! It's too soon to announce names, but our Social Media Team is growing fast, with two "hires" in process, and two more for the nascent Content Creation Team! RNA headquarters are popping with activity, and we don't even *have* headquarters! RNA's [OrgChart is here; check it out!](#) Wanna join the fun? [Go here.](#)

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### Regular Events:

#### Deep Transformation Network Monthly Meeting

Attend the live monthly network meeting on the **first Tuesday of every month at 1:00 pm Pacific** (check your time zones carefully!) <https://deeptransformation.network/spaces/10286307/feed>

#### Sacred Depths of Nature Presentations and Podcasts

Follow this link for the latest presentations and podcasts on *The Sacred Depths of Nature* with Ursula Goodenough.

<http://sacreddepthsofnature.com/conferences/>

A calendar of JD Stillwater's upcoming events can be found at <https://www.jdstillwater.earth/events/>

### Help Wanted

RNA is seeking volunteer staff who are frequent users of TikTok, TwitterX, LinkedIn, or Instagram. For a few minutes a day, you can help create a thriving RNA presence on one of those platforms. [Step up here](#)



## Forum Topic of the Month

### Winter Solstice

Do you mark this special day of the year in any way? If so, please share.

<https://religious-naturalist-association.org/forums/topic/marking-winter-solstice/>

## Music of the Month



Dark of Winter <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpb1Uh7w9I>

## Video of the Month

### How to be a Naturalist



Dani Conner Wild gives tips on How to be a Naturalist (during a thunderstorm) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JflcARqW8k>

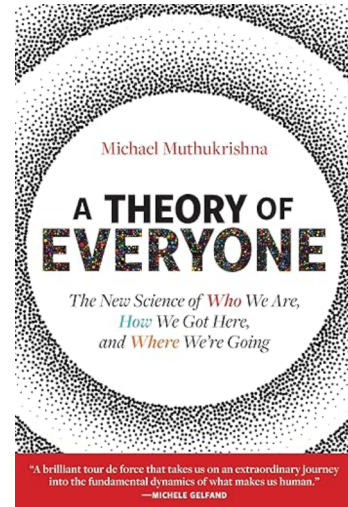


Taking  
Nature to  
Heart

## Book of the Month

### A Theory of Everyone: The New Science of Who We Are, How We Got Here, and Where We're Going

by Michael Muthukrishna



Michael Muthukrishna's ambitious, original, and deeply hopeful book *A Theory of Everyone* draws on the most recent research from across the sciences, humanities, and the emerging field of cultural evolution to paint a panoramic picture of who we are and what exactly makes human beings different from all other forms of life on the planet.

[View on Amazon](#)

## Living Thing of the Month

### Spotted Up Close



### MASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE, KENYA

Soon after dawn at Lemek Conservancy, spotted hyenas arrive at a pond to drink. Widely misunderstood, hyenas are fierce, intelligent, and social, living and hunting as members of matriarchal clans. Jen Guyton captured this close-up with an armored, remote-controlled robot designed by National Geographic photo engineers.

## Website of the Month

### Center for Wild Spirituality

You may feel it on a deep, unspoken level: a call to weave the threads of your unique gifts and privileges, your particular wounds and experiences, together with the stories and beings of the place you call home.

The reconnection of Spirit and Nature is essential to the profound shift happening in our world. Your offerings toward the new story may not have a form yet. That's okay. Most of what is needed right now does not have a template.

The journey of listening and responding to the particular ways you belong in this pivotal time is a collective one.

<https://www.wildspirituality.earth>

Center for  
Wild  
Spirituality



### RN Links

**Members Contributions:** Our members contribute sermons, articles, videos, music and other material related to the Religious Naturalist orientation. Go to <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/members-contributions/> to check them out. Please consider contributing your own material. There is a link on the page for submitting items.

Elle Harrington has contributed new articles to the Sermons & Articles section. Take a look.

### Members' Projects:

The RNA website has a section called [Members' Projects](#). This page provides links to projects of RNA members. If you have a project related to RN that you would like included on this webpage please email a description to [projects@religious-naturalist-association.org](mailto:projects@religious-naturalist-association.org).