

## OLD TURTLE

Thank you to our very gifted readers! Your voices brought the story to life!

Douglas Wood wrote this book several years ago. It won the Children's Book of the Year award in 1993. I think we, meaning both the Unity community and my family, have been reading it about that many years. It is an ageless book.

I wondered this week why Wood chose a turtle as the hero and the change agent in the book. Why not Eagle which soars so high? Or why not the Elephant which is one of the largest and most powerful? Why a turtle?

Well the turtle is the oldest drawing symbolizing Mother Earth. Turtles are found in creation stories in Native American and Hindu traditions. Turtles live on land and sea, although technically many people use different names depending on their habitat or where they live and spend most of their time. Turtles live mostly in the water even though they climb onto the shore or bank to lay their eggs. Those that live mostly on land, some even in the desert, are referred to as tortoises. And Terrapins are those who live both on land and in water but they mostly live near brackish water near rivers and in swamps.

Turtle shell patterns have 13 segments. There are 13 moons in the lunar year. Turtles live very long lives. Many turtles live to be 80 to 100 years old and in the Galapagos Island, there are giant tortoises believed to live to be 200 years old. Since turtles lived longer than most humans, they came to be associated with longevity, even the idea they might live forever. So they also became associated with wisdom.

Turtles are connected to their shells. They can't crawl out of them. In some traditions, the top, rounded part of the shell represents heaven. So they carry heaven with them. And the bottom, flat part of the shell represents earth. They are always connected to both heaven and earth. This sort of fits with Unity's idea that each of us is fully human, or earthly, and fully divine, or heavenly. It also symbolizes the idea that we cannot separate ourselves from either that which we consider heaven nor the affects of our activity on earth.

In this story, the earth and all the animals existed first. In the creation story in Genesis chap1, humans were created last. And they were given dominion over all the creation. Dominion that carries the element of stewardship.

In the story, where is God? That is the first argument isn't it? Each part of the earth wanted to claim God. And Old Turtle stepped in to settle the argument by saying God was in the mountains and the stars and the willows and the ant. "God is gentle and powerful. Above all things and within all things. God is all that we dream of and all that we seek; all that we come from and all that we can find. God IS."

Once Old Turtle established that God is everywhere, people came upon the earth. What were the people supposed to be? "A message of love from God to the earth and a prayer from the earth to God." But quickly in the story the people forgot. They forgot who they were and where God was. And the people did not honor all the earth, mountains and sea and animals. The people killed each other and they hurt the earth.

In Unity we learn that we are all one in Spirit. There is one power and one presence in all and in all of us. What else unites us? We may look different, we may talk differently, we may worship differently but where do we all live. On earth! We only have one planet—well so far. And no matter what our part of the planet looks like, we are the stewards of our planet. What we do affects our part of the planet, which ripples out to affect the whole planet because it is one living organism. When I cut my finger, I don't have cuts on every part of my body but that one cut can get infected and that spreads quickly to affect my whole body. We have seen how a volcano in Antarctica can affect air travel around the globe. And a tsunami in Japan washes up on our shores. And the pollution put in the air in one spot shows up thousands of miles away in other countries for everyone to breath.

In the story, how did the arguing stop among the people? By listening to the earth. The mountains acknowledged God in the sea and the ocean acknowledged God reflecting the sun in the mountain peaks. And when the people listened, they began to see God in one another and in the beauty of all the Earth.

How can we listen to the earth?

What do we hear?

What can we do? How can we begin to honor the beauty in all the Earth?

Affirmation: I am in awe of Earth's bountiful blessings.

