

Earth, Dirt, Gardens: Finding God in the Extraordinary Ordinary
The Human-Divine-Dirt Connection

Ken Wilson 7.7.19

When Em suggested series on garden ... OK but I want dirt.

Topic today? **The divine-human-dirt connection.** Apple Demo: 75% covered in **water**; a third of remaining land is **desert**; another third **rocks/mountains/pavement**, etc. leaving only 10% of earth surface with dirt to grow food [1/3 > feed]

Wm Logan calls dirt, **“The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth?”**

Thinking lately about my crappy connection to dirt. Mother was gardener, I paid no attention. Scooping poop, finding dirt to bury.

Our ancestors from 10K years ago were hunter-gatherers who had an intimate connection to dirt—spent a few hours a day rooting around in dirt for tubers to eat. Knew their lives depended on good dirt. As does any farmer. You gardeners know dirt.

We evolved *for* and *from* an intimate connection to dirt.

This intimate connection is all over Scripture. Genesis 1, credits dirt with bringing forth plant life on Day 3 {**“let the land/earth/dirt produce vegetation!”**} and land-based creatures on Day 6. {**let the land/earth/dirt produce living creatures**}. **So land/earth/dirt is a life-generating power in Gen. 1.**

Gen 2 reads, **“Then the Lord God fashioned the human, humus from the soil, and blew into his [or its, at this stage the human is androgynous] nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living creature.”** (Vss. 7-8, Alter)

In the Hebrew vision we stand between the dirt and the divine. Our human name shares a root with Hebrew word for dirt.

Been reading up on Dirt [book]

“For more than a century, chemists have been trying to answer the question, ‘What is humus?’ And to this date, no one knows. Every time you try to break it down into its basic components you get acids of a slightly different nature. In fact soil scientist Dr. James Rice puts it, ‘It is very likely that no two humus molecules are or have ever been alike.’ Later, ‘Radical disorder is key to the functions of humus. At the molecular level it may be the most disordered material on earth.’” (Dirt, by Wm Logan)

If you soak dirt in water, it bleeds out its various colors: blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and blues.

Maybe one of the signs our culture is disconnected from Mother Nature and God and each other is how we call things that we find **disgusting** or **morally repugnant** as “dirty”

In Jewish imagination **we are God-breathed dirt**. God **knelt** in the dirt, **formed** us from dirt, and **cohabits** our dirt-nature by his SPIRIT/BREATH/WIND blown into us in a divine kiss.

And Genesis uses the **holiest** name of GOD, **YHWH**, as the One who has this **dirt-connection** with us.

Many names for God in Hebrew Bible. Genesis 1 introduces, the plural “**Elohim**” as the word translated God. In Genesis 2, “Lord God” appears, which in Hebrew is **YHWH Elohim**.

YHWH was considered too sacred a name for God to utter by devout Jews. As a result, pronunciation not clear ... So no one is really sure how YHWH is pronounced. It’s that holy.

So when ancient Israel hears that it’s YHWH **kneeling** in the dirt and **forming** the human from the dirt and **breathing** into the Dirt-Person, it would **remember their formal introduction** to YHWH, **Ex 3** which also emphasizes the **divine-human-dirt** connection

It's b-4 Moses has become Charlton Heston, the leader with the 10 Commandments. An asylum seeker from his homeland in Egypt.

He comes across a burning bush that gets his attention because it's not consumed by the flames. As he approaches a VOICE speaks from bush, "**Moses! Moses!!**"

Moses says, "**Here I am!**"

The VOICE says, "**Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals, the ground you're standing on is holy.**"

Later, Moses says to the VOICE, **Tell me your name** and the VOICE says **YHWH** [I am who am/I will be who will be]

Bible is first a **mystical** book. Derived from mystical experiences of God by the Hebrew people who came to know God in a certain way. A very earth-friendly vision of God.

IN mystical visions, the truth is **perceived** rather than simply described or even less asserted. "**The truth when really perceived and not simply described, is always a wonder**"

Exodus 3 is a mystical vision like this. First, a VOICE speaking from within a burning bush. The voice of God, **source of all living things.**

Two equations describe living things:

Equation of Photosynthesis: how plants make food out of sunlight, carbon dioxide and water.

Equation of Burning/Combustion: Describes how living things turn the power of sun stored in plants, into the heat energy to fuel their motion. (A **hydrocarbon** reacts with **oxygen** to generate **water** and **heat.**)

In burning bush, Moses is perceiving how all living things are burning, combusting

But one more part of the vision: “Take off your sandals, the ground you’re standing on is holy.”

In Genesis 2 and Exodus 3 (dual introduction to YHWH) it’s as if God is saying, **As I felt the dirt, making you, I want you to feel the dirt. It is holy as I am holy as you are holy, dirt-person.**

ALL TO SAY, Our connection to dirt and our connection to the divine are connected.

They say it’s good for people to take their shoes off and walk around on the ground barefoot. Compared to walking on smooth flat man-made surfaces with shoes on, walking barefoot on the ground sends more signals to the brain. More of your brain is tuned into your feet on the ground and that helps you keep your footing/balance. Falls are a major bummer for older people. Keep your feet on ground to keep out of the nursing home people!

And you gardeners are onto something rooting around in the dirt with your hands. When a human being puts their hands into the soil, they get a **release of the happy brain chemicals**—dopamine and endorphins.

University of Michigan did a study like they do. Had student guinea pigs walk around on campus/downtown and another group walk around in Arboretum. Walking is good in general, but Arb walkers did better. More calm, relaxed, less anxious after walking. Stress hormones reduced.

Different kinds of attention required in nature vs. city. City attention triggers more alarm system (alert to traffic, etc.) Nature attention gets us out of our head-drama, but in a calming way.

2-4 hours a week in a natural setting are equal in health benefits to 2-4 hours of exercise.

What can we do to improve our contact with dirt?

Tend some house plants. Put 'em where you can be around 'em.
Say hello every day. Feel the dirt. Water. Tend. [AA house plant]

Plant and tend a garden, my 2019 goal. [Show of hands] Niggled to plant a memorial garden for Nancy, who loved to garden. I have to fall in love with the idea first. Emily's sermon last Sunday. Neighbor has a raised bed Burpee catalog. Tall grass in middle. Milkweed for butterflies. Annuals, gardenias – mums.

Spend time when we can in a park or a woods

QUIET REFLECTION

Picture yourself in a natural setting (garden, park, woods – sitting, standing, walking ... take a minute to settle into the scene (sights, sounds, feel of ground under your feet or warmth of sun)

(As distracting thoughts arise, gently set them aside and focus on the setting around you as though you wanted to notice it in detail to describe later to someone else.)

Now, whatever scene is in your mind's eye, imagine becoming aware of God with you. Could be sitting or walking next to you, in front of you, behind you Could be Spirit in air, breeze.

Prayer, God open the eyes of our hearts to your presence surrounding us in the outdoor cathedral of this world.