

# Changing the Story - Garrison Institute

*By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee*

**“The only way to change the world is to change the story.”**

We know only too well the story that defines our world today. It is a tale of consumerism and greed, sustained by the empty but enticing promise of an endless stream of “stuff” as the source of our happiness and well-being. Some of us are finally coming to recognize the self-destructive madness of this myth, how we are [ravaging our own ecosystem](#) to fulfill a fantasy. Even the image of a [“green economy”](#) is just covering over the truth of unsustainable materialism, while all around us we are witnessing the effects of our culture’s whole-hearted embrace of this story: a beautiful world broken and dying, on its way to becoming a polluted wasteland.

We may even understand how this contemporary story is built upon an earlier one that took hold many centuries ago with the spread of monotheism: the story of a God who has withdrawn to heaven, to reign, apart and above, over an Earth now denied its sacred nature. This is the myth of separation—that we are separate from the Earth rather than part of its living wholeness—that fed into the story of science, in which the natural world was unfeeling matter to be controlled, a resource to be exploited. We are the inheritors of a patriarchal world in which spirit no longer lives in matter, and both the Earth and the feminine have suffered endless abuse.

And many of us now long for a new story, one that will restore reverence to the Earth and reconnect our souls to the sacred within creation, a story that will save our planet. Some have even already begun to articulate such a story: a beautiful and compelling vision of the entire universe as a single, inextricably interconnected, living whole, returning to us a sense of wonder that nourishes our body and soul.

But is this enough? How do we change the defining story of our world? Our collective culture celebrates its story of endless desires. It feeds us with its images that, though they can never nourish us, work like a drug for our minds and bodies, even as they exploit us and the Earth. We have become addicts to material prosperity and the ego-centered greed that drives it. Sadly even spirituality, which should offer us real freedom, has often become caught in this same web of desires, selling self-focused well-being, peace, or other inner qualities, rather than opening a doorway to real compassion and service.

Once we recognize how these stories hold us in thrall, entranced or entrapped, we can get a sense of their power. They are not just slogans created by politicians, corporations, or even spiritual teachers; rather they arise from the magical inner world where myths are born. We can recognize the archetypal dimension of earlier myths—the gods and goddesses of previous eras—for example: some can see it in the more [recent myth of a patriarchal, transcendent God](#) living in a distant heaven. The archetypal power of the present myth of materialism is more difficult to recognize because it is deceptive as well as seductive. And yet if one looks more closely, one can see the archetypes at work here too. There is the patriarchal myth of the domination of nature—a primal masculine power drive. But less obvious is the way in which the

dark side of the rejected feminine has caught us in her web of desires. For what is materialism but the worship of matter, which is none other than the domain of the goddess? We are more present in the archetypal world than we dare acknowledge.

And now in our quest to redeem our civilization and the planet we recognize the need for a new story, a story that returns the spirit to creation and honors the primal oneness that is the web of life. Like our current story, this new one may also be based upon an earlier story: one in which all of creation was seen as sacred, with humanity just part of the woven tapestry of life—a story still lived by many indigenous peoples. But this emerging story is also evolutionary, drawing as well on the more recent insights of particle physics into the underlying nature of creation to express its vision of the world as an interconnected whole, in which, like the symbolic image of Indra's net, each part influences the whole. And this new story of creation connects the smallest particle with an ever-expanding cosmos of billions of galaxies—and does so in a way that bridges science and the sacred, understanding them as expressions of the same reality.

This is a compelling story for our time. But do we recognize from where this new story arises? Are we acknowledging and honoring the inner dimension from which all such world-changing stories are born? We know the vital need for a new story, but are we seeking to change life without honoring the archetypal forces at work—the gods and goddesses that still reign in the depths of creation—without recognizing the primal world that is life's inner source? If a story is not born from the inner world it will lack the power to effect any real change.<sup>[1]</sup> It will speak just to our conscious selves, the surface layer of our being, rather than engaging us from the depths. The stories of the past, the myths that shaped humanity, spoke to our individual and collective soul with the numinous and transformative power that comes from deep within. How many men have been called to battle by the archetype of the warrior or the hero? How many churches have been built on the foundation of the myth of redemption? The power of the archetypal, mythic world belongs to the river-beds of life that shape humanity.

But sadly, our present culture has distanced itself from this inner world. We are not taught to revere these underlying powers, nor do we know how to relate to them. Our contemporary consciousness hardly even knows of their existence. We live on the surface of our lives, unaware of the depths that are in fact the real determining factors. Nor do we fully understand the influence of their stories, even though our present political landscape, the “[post-truth](#)” era, shows us the power of tribalism and its myths over fact.

When our Christian culture banished the many gods and goddesses, and then when science declared that myths were idle fantasies, we became more trapped than we realize. The archetypal world does not disappear because we close our eyes, because we say that it does not exist. Its power is not diminished by either our ignorance or our arrogance. And yet we have forgotten how to access and work with this power. Unknowingly we have disempowered our self in a fundamental way. We have closed the door in our psyche and soul—we only look outward.

And now, when there is this vital need to rewrite the story that defines our lives, we are left with the inadequate tools of our conscious self. We do not know how to welcome the energies from the depths, to constellate the power we need to co-create a real story. We have isolated our self from the energy of life's source we so desperately need. And so we are left stranded on the shore of our conscious self.

There is a new story waiting to be born, waiting to redeem the planet and nourish our souls. It is a story of oneness that includes the diversity of creation in a self-sustaining whole, a story that

can bring back the magic within nature that is needed to heal our damaged planet. We can sense it in the re-emergence of the goddess Gaia, whose archetypal energy and numinosity speak to us of the world as a living being. Her image and the sense of an animate Earth has re-entered western consciousness and acquired a life of its own.

But this is also a new story, arising from deep within the psyche of humanity and the world soul at this moment in our and its evolution. It includes the mystery of life as well as the understanding that science can give us. It is a story of cooperation rather than competition or conflict. We are not the sole creators of this story, because it is the story of life evolving, recreating itself anew, but we are needed to midwife it into existence. As with all births it needs to come from the inner to the outer world.

Traditionally human consciousness has the ability to connect the inner and outer worlds. This has long been the [role of shamans and poets](#), artists and mystics. These are the visionaries of the soul who have held this thread for humanity, who have been called to work in the depths and bring its numinous wonder closer to our collective consciousness. And now as the world is dying, and as the world is waiting to be reborn, it is calling to those who are awake to this inner dimension, who can make the connection between the worlds. As the psychologist, visionary, and gnostic, Carl Jung said, “*The world today hangs by a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of man.*”

Only when we recognize the inner origins of this world-changing story can we participate in this birth. Only when we work together with the symbolic, archetypal world can its power and numinosity come into our existence and speak to the whole of humanity. Only then will this story be heard. We cannot afford the still-birth of new ideas that lack the life force that comes from the depths. [We are called to return](#) to the root of our being where the sacred is born. Then, standing in both the inner and outer worlds, we will find our self to be part of the momentous synchronicity of life giving birth to itself.

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[i] Thomas Berry hints at this in his talk “The Ecozoic Era” (*Eleventh Annual E. F. Schumacher Lectures*, October 1991). He speaks of a “creative entrancement” as well as the “psychic energies needed” for transformation:

“My effort here is to articulate the outlines of a new mythic form that would evoke a creative entrancement to succeed the destructive entrancement that has taken possession of the Western soul in recent centuries. We can counter one entrancement only with another, a counter-entrancement. Only thus can we evoke the vision as well as the psychic energies needed to enable the Earth community to enter successfully upon its next great creative phase.”