

Back in 1968, when the modern, environmental movement first began to pick up speed, there was an unlikely catalyst in the process. It was unlikely because it came from outer space. Outer space is a funny topic. It's a turn-off for a lot of people. My dad was like that. At the mere mention of science fiction, he'd roll his eyes and change the subject. He was put off by the thought of little, green men up in the heavens. He was never rude. I won't say that he was never disrespectful. If he were here right now, he'd be rolling his eyes...at even the very title of this reflection—Return of the Easter Jedi Bunny. He'd definitely be rolling his eyes but he'd be rolling his eyes politely. My father was a deeply honorable man...and he loved me so. We had a very deep connection in this life.

It's ironic. So much of Star Wars, which he hated, is about the deep relationship that grew between a father and a son—the Skywalkers, Anikan and Luke...and to be reflecting on such a relationship on Easter Sunday, the celebration marking the rising of the faithful son over death at the hands of his enemies. Only days before, he was heart-broken on the cross, as Christians tell, in great conflict with his father. He cried out, "Why have you forsaken me" before he perished... Although he would have understood the irony, he would not have valued it, not in the context of little green men.

Nevertheless, the modern, environmental movement was catalyzed by something that came from outer space. No, it was not Easter Jedi Bunny. It was a picture. It was a beautiful image of something we'd never seen before. It was a picture of our home. The crew from the Apollo 8 mission had...

...lost radio contact [with the command center, Houston, as expected]...when they went around to the dark side of the moon. And there was inevitably some suspense. Then, when they came back in radio contact they looked up and snapped [a picture called Earthrise. That picture] exploded in the consciousness of human kind. It led to dramatic changes. Within 18 months of this picture the modern, environmental movement had begun. [Al Gore, The Inconvenient Truth]

Inspired by something that came from outer space. Joni Mitchell wrote about that image. She wrote,

At a highway service station
Over the month of June
Was a photograph of the earth
Taken coming back from the moon
And you couldn't see a city on that mirrored bowling ball
Or a forest or a highway or me here least of all
You couldn't see these cold water restrooms
Or this baggage overload
Westbound and rolling, taking refuge in the roads

We can find the sacred equally...in the most refine and in the most mundane of things...but only if we're not afraid of the wilderness out there and only if we're not afraid of our own selves...but we are sometimes...because something falls in us so low. Times are hard sometimes. Yet, something also rises. Some things fall beyond our reach, beyond this life and even past death, as we imagine it... Some things fall so far and so deep, so dark and cold and distant...and we find ourselves alone...and free and fine...because something also rises. Mysterious and powerful, unimagined and holy now. I believe... I mean, I might be wrong but I doubt it...because this morning, the stone is rolled away. Something falls and something rises—mysterious, fierce, tameless, brave, wild and truly free. So, reach deep into your wild heart, something within is born anew.

Crazy Christians all around the world are over-caffeinated now, having awakened this morning at daybreak, some time before the dawn... Some have climbed mountains...or found quiet spots in open meadows, or a quiet places in glens of trees... Crazy Easter-celebrating Christians in warmer climes are gathered now at shorelines, looking east across the ocean or across waters of some kind. They're standing on rooftops in the centers of the cities or floating in kayaks on fresh-water lakes to see the sunrise, up from below the far horizon...to see the Son rise up somehow from beyond the reach of death...and into life again. They believe in a powerful story...and I believe it too...and strangely enough, so did my father. In his own way, he sang out clearly...

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!

If we try, we can hear them singing to ensure the Glory come. What a blessing it is, to be here, to be here just as we are today—well-dressed and perfectly on time, unpolished and imperfect. Thank God, for all of this! This is where the laughter is. So, reach deep into your heart. Something within you is being born.

Good morning and good Sunday. I hope this new day find you well. Today is Sunday, April 9th. Today is Easter Sunday morning, complete with hot cross buns and farm-fresh eggs painted in rainbow colors...and complete the Easter Jedi Bunny, returned to us from outer space. Have you ever encountered the famous Easter Jedi Bunny? Do you know that there are Easter eggs up there in outer space? There have to be, right? I mean, what sense would it make if there weren't Easter eggs up in the heavens? That would be crazy, right? []

Do you remember looking up as a kid, looking up at the stars in deepest wonder and fascination? Do you remember being a kid and starting to really think about all that? ...how infinite? ...how endless? ...how dark and cold and called by mystery? How old were you when you first imagined walking on the moon? Were you seven? ...or seventeen? ...or were you seventy years young? Or have you yet imagined such a thing? And are you still in touch with that awe-struck, playful and timeless part of you?

“What does Easter morning mean for kids in outer space?” A nine-year-old friend of mine asked this of me one day. I hesitated. I didn't know how to answer the question. Most of us wouldn't know how to answer a question as wild as this

one. Those of us who do know how to answer such a question only know how to do it because we still allow ourselves to dream the dreams of like children. Do you do that? When we allow ourselves to dream, the answer to the Easter-in-outer-space question is usually obvious...but if dream and you still don't know, you can always just ask the Jedi Bunny. Ask the Easter Jedi Bunny. He's very wise. He knows everything. Bunny-wan Kenobe is his name. He's super nice and he will quickly reassure you that Easter is awesome in outer space. As it is on earth, so it is up in the heavens—hot cross buns and farm-fresh eggs and all.

Not everyone knows the legend of the late-great Bunny-wan Kenobe. Obiwan Kenobe was much more popular. Obiwan Kenobe was the Jedi Knight in the Star Wars tale who trained the young hero, Luke Skywalker. Obi-wan shared with him secrets about a magical power called “the force.” It's legendary. Once properly trained, a skillful Jedi can make positive use of “the force” ...in order to see without one's eyes, in order to fight above one's capacity, in order to access power that is unique in the universe...and is yet entailed in every thundercloud and in every drop of rain, in the petals of every sunflower, in every sunset sky and grain of sand.

“May the force be with you” became something like a mantra. It was a cross between a mantra and a prayer. And it meant...“Bonne chance” or “best of luck” or “buena suerte.” It was a hopeful thing. Fiercely hopeful. Fiercely hopeful and stronger than death. Strong enough to roll away the stone. We know the Earthly tale, right?

After the death of Jesus, after they had taken his life, “there was a man named Joseph. He was “a member of the Council.” He was a good man.

He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. [Luke, 23:50-3]

Still, the body needed to be prepared. And so,

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath... [Luke, 23:55-6]

Their good faith commanded this of them. After the end of the Sabbath,

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the [Lord] Jesus. [Luke, 24:1-3]

They must have sort of wondered about this. Wouldn't you? I would, without a doubt. It's strange to me...and I've had 2,000 years to reflect. Surely, it was very strange to these women. And...

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood [right there] beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has

risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words. [Luke, 24:4-8]

So strange it was, that day, to know that his brave words were true.

Now, when I was a kid, I struggled with this story. It was hard for me. Easter meant that a lot was being thrown at me all at once. First, there was this death and resurrection story—which was a lot all by itself—but it was compounded by eggs and bunnies and hot cross buns and family time. I tried to pretend like it all made sense but it didn't to me—not at all—but no one but me was the least bit concerned about it. I was the only one. I tried to make sense of things but I needed help. That was when I first reached out to Bunny-wan Kenobi. ~~Strike that.~~ That is not quite true. It's better to say that that was when I first invented Bunny-wan.

Star Wars came out in 1977. I was only 12. I watched it on the big screen, twice in the very first week. It was awesome. I look at it now and I laugh. The special effects are not that special—not by today's standards—but in 1977, they were truly amazing. I was awed. It occurred to 12-year-old me that, in life, so much is possible—beautiful things, mundane things, unlikely things, unimaginable things. That impressed me so, so much when I was twelve.

Are you twelve? Are any of you still twelve? How many twelve-year-olds are in the room? How about eleven-year-olds? Will I have any better luck with that age? Perhaps, I should frame the question a bit more clearly.

There is a story by Sandra Cisneros called Eleven. It's a birthday story about the way it is. It's lovely. Its first words are these:

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are—underneath the year that makes you eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five. And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

It's in this spirit that I ask you: Are you still twelve today? Is some small part of you still eleven or twelve years old? Find that part of you. Please don't let it fall away...and if it feels like it already has fallen away, see if you can call it back to you. The chances are good—they're favorable—that we can rediscover immaturity. Enlightened immaturity, let's call it. Let's see if we can live into that. It's a tool that might useful in this world.

So, when I was eleven or twelve, I saw Star Wars for the very first time...and I met Obi-wan Kenobi, the wise man, sage and teacher...and then, I invented Bunny-wan on the very next Easter Sunday. I might have invented Bunny-wan with my seven-year-old self...or with my four-year-old self...or with my fifty-seven year old self. I can still talk to Obi-wan and to Bunny-wan like they were spirits, like they were angel-guides that walk with me in life. When I want to learn about the wisdom of the force, I turn to Obi-wan. When I want to learn more about Easter in outer space, I turn to Bunny-wan. Is this too complicated? Do you follow? Ok.

So, Bunny-wan told me that the key to understanding Easter in outer space is wonder...because Easter is about the wonder of resurrection. It's all about how things come back to life. That's why it happens in the spring. It's all about fertility and unimaginable possibility. Thus, the eggs...the symbols of new life. Thus, the bunnies...the signs of fertility. Easter is all about bringing life to lifelessness, bringing new vitality to that which is inhospitable.

You know, we're doing this for real, right? We're literally bringing life to lifelessness. We're going back into outer space. It's a real-life mission called Artemis 2. Four astronauts—Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen—are preparing for 10-day-long journey around the moon and back. They will fly further into space than anyone ever has and it's all set to take place in November of 2024. They're so excited—three Americans and an astronaut from Canada. I'm so excited and so is Bunny-wan, especially today! Stephen Colbert interviewed them on The Late Show. He said,

It's a history-making mission in many ways—first Canadian, first woman, first person of color on a lunar mission... Let's start with you, Christina. What does it mean [to you now that you are a hero for other young people] coming up?

And I really can't express the kind of joy that they embody, the kind of life and hope that the four of them possessed. Christina said,

It's an amazing feeling, honestly. I think that the real thing to celebrate about this mission is that we've made a decision—as an agency and as a country—that we are gonna go for all and by all. If we're not taking contributions from every single person with a talent ready to share it then we're not truly answering humanity's call to explore. So, the fact that we're going in this era is what makes me most excited about this mission...

The cheers from the studio audience were deafening. So passionate, so unimaginable, so mysterious and so new, so filled with brand-new life. It was amazing.

We've all gone through so much in these last few years—the global pandemic, the right-wing insurrection at the Capitol in D.C., the unbelievable resignation of Tom Brady from the New England Patriots—now, it's time for new life to come our way. Green shoots, coming up right through the melting snow.

Things have changed so much in space travel. For instance, there is now more technology in the Apple Watch that pilot Victor Glover was wearing on his wrist than was in the whole to the Apollo spacecraft that first landed on the moon. Since the 70s, the space program had seemed lifeless...but now, we've rolled away the stone. Something falls and something rises. Something within is born anew. Would that this were true in Tennessee.

Last week, we held in sanctuary the tragedy that had unfolded in Nashville. In response, three legislators—Reps. Jones, Pearson and Johnson, the Tennessee Thre—took a passionate stand for justice. They broke with the rules of decorum and spoke out in chamber against gun violence in schools. They were punished for it. Roundly rebuked. Two of them, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson (from Nashville and Memphis respectively), were expelled last week from Tennessee Congress by a vote of the super-majority. One of them, Gloria Johnson from District 90 (near Memphis) narrowly survived the expulsion vote. Jones and Pearson are male and black. Johnson is female and white. All three spoke quite openly about what we're seeing with our very eyes, in real time. It isn't pretty. We are seeing the political cost of defending the lives of nine-year-olds at a private, Christian elementary school. What would Jesus say? What needs to rise right now? What secret-power-force within us needs to be born anew? I think that that secret-power-force is called belonging...but maybe not in the usual sense of the word, not in a common way.

As Brené Brown reminds us, somewhat uncomfortably, that Maya Angelou always said that, “we are free when we belong nowhere”...which may not sound that great at first but let's go deeper. Brené Brown did. She said that,

...true belonging is a spiritual practice and it's about the ability to find sacredness in both being a part of something, but also the courage to stand alone. ...for those of us who struggle to have the courage to stand alone, we know that we're at risk. We're risking that sense of being a part of something because we disagree, or because we have a different opinion, or because we love something...

Something falls so low in me, yet something also rises...and I am all alone and free and fine. Something falls and something rises—fierce and brave and wild and free. So, reach deep, something within is born anew. Brown says that the spiritual path of finding the sacredness of belonging and standing alone... She says,

That's the mark of true belonging. To be able to say, “Yes, I am a part of something bigger but I also will stand alone when I need to.” You belong everywhere and nowhere and that is liberation.

She offers excellent advice for all of us to follow. And here it is.

Don't walk through the world looking for evidence that you don't belong...because you will always find it. Don't walk through the world looking for evidence that you're not enough...because you will always find.

It's not enough anymore to make ourselves so small and afraid. It's not enough to retreat or to comply or to go along quietly and calmly. The world needs our fullness right now and we need fullness from the whole wide world. So here's the key:

There will be times when standing alone feels too hard, too scary and we will doubt our ability to make it through the uncertainty. Someone somewhere will say, "Don't do it. You don't have what it takes to survive the wilderness." This is when you reach deep into your wild heart and remind yourself, 'I am the wilderness.'

Perhaps, it is this wild heart that had fallen away from us for awhile, that fell beyond our reach, beyond this life and past death as we imagine... Out beyond all that, a holy thing and a truly precious thing yet lives. Ella Fitzgerald used to sing,

When all the world is a hopeless jumble
And the raindrops tumble all around
Heaven opens a magic lane
When all the clouds darken up the skyway
There's a rainbow highway to be found
Leading from your window pane
To a place behind the sun
Just a step beyond the rain

Right before she'd sing,
Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby

Newly now, we have something more than dreams to get us there. As Christina Koch reminds us, as she prepares herself for the unknown sky, she talks about something that is called "the Overview Effect." She says,

It is absolutely gorgeous. The Overview Effect is when you are looking through [what is effectively] the bay window [of the Space Station] looking down on the Earth and you see just that—the Earth, as it exists with the whole universe in the background. You see the thin, blue line of the atmosphere. And then, when you're on the dark side of the Earth, you actually see this very thin, green line that shows where the atmosphere is. And what you realize is, every single person you know is sustained inside of that green line. And everything else outside of it is completely inhospitable. You don't see borders. You don't see religious lines. You don't see political boundaries. All you see is Earth and you see that we are way more alike than we are different.

She sounds like a Jedi to me.

Something falls away in us and something also rises, some secret-sacred-power-force returns to us somehow.

Happy Easter, everyone. This world in this geat universe is a pretty, special place! I know I speak for Obi-wan and Bunny-wan Kenobi when I say, “May the force be with you,” on this lovely day and in the days to come.

May it be so. Blessed be, bonne chance and Amen.