

## **Salvation By Enchantment**

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### **Fall From Grace**

We are told that the world is broken. That we must fix it. But this is not true. We do not need to heal the world. We need to heal our relationship with it. Healing that relationship will require re-enchanting it. In enchantment is our salvation.

Once upon a time I was blessed to live an enchanted life. My default expectation was informed by parents who loved and showed interest in me. And then, by a Christian enculturation, I was given a religious framework that supplied a vocabulary to render and assure my sense of enchantment.

The story of the Christian god allowed me to experience the world as being interested in and responsive to me personally. Unfortunately, that story was about me more than about my relationship with the world as it had been corrupted, caricatured, and leveraged over centuries. As the corruption of that story became more apparent, I rejected it.

I had no other story of enchantment to take its place. My culture replaced it for me, unconsciously, with the story of materialism and celebrated the death of enchantment. But in tossing out holy water with the enchantment baby still in it, I found myself in a suddenly soulless world composed of disinterested objects. Where once the world was vibrant and personal, it was now dim and disinterested. Whereas I once was never alone, I became always alone. The world no longer knew me.

And this is how I largely remain. And this is how I think most of us are, for this is the underlying disposition of a commodity based culture. I believe this has led to the dark times we currently face. Where our initial turn away enchantment was made with the best of intentions, its cost, I think, has been increasingly devastating.

### **Defining Terms**

I should probably stop to define my terms here. I hasten to say that I see enchantment and reason as partners, supporting and guiding one another.

Enchantment is like a language in that it renders the world. It turns serendipity into significance and coincidence into meaning. An enchanted world is one flush to the gills with meaning where, within reason, the world becomes an oracle for your life. The world as tarot deck, menagerie with signs, symbols, and other invitations to interpretation.

In fact, enchantment is essentially a more vivacious word for meaning. As such, enchantment can not be reliably measured any more than we can measure love.

And falling in love is very much what living in enchantment is like. To fall in love is to walk through a world of strangers until some alchemy sparks and someone suddenly becomes radiant and irresistible in a way that makes you feel superhuman. Falling in love makes you feel significant at your core, regardless of your ability or your social or economic status, because not only have you found a radiant person, you understand that your own radiance has been recognized by that person.

So living in an enchanted world is something like that. It is to live in a world that is radiant and meaningful to you personally, where there is a deep and operative sense of mutual significance between you and the world.

### **Cost of Disenchantment**

To live in a disenchanted world is the opposite then. It is a world unaware that it is a story. It is an objectified world where investment is measured in dollars rather than experienced as relationship. This finally leads to the pillaging of planet and its people. I propose to you that we stand at the brink of extinction in large part due to the consequences of our disenchantment.

Thus, I believe it is imperative that we re-enchant the world. It is enchantment, not some new tech or policy that will deliver salvation. Fixes formed within a disenchanted mind will eventually repeat the pattern.

In fact, to name disenchantment as a cause of catastrophe is to understand that the world does not, in fact, need saving. The world knows what to do. The world does not need us to repair it. Rather, it is our relationship with it that needs repair.

We need to fall in love again, to rediscover a spiritual language that mediates a world that is radiant and meaningful to you specifically. We will engage differently when that happens. It will change how we live. And when that happens for enough of us, our civilization will change its priorities and practices.

I believe that such a shift is necessary in order for us to “save the planet”. Or even to make our failure to do so somehow poignant rather than just brutal. There is no such thing as a meaningless death in an enchanted world. Because there is no such thing as a meaningless life in an enchanted world. Consequently, one way or another, re-enchantment is our salvation.

In fact, it turns out that salvation and enchantment are reciprocally related.

### **Salvation**

I know salvation can be triggering. But historically, it was the genesis of the Universalist strand of our braided Unitarian Universalist tradition. The Universalists insisted, from within the emergent Christian paradigm that they came to be, that everyone - no matter what - reunited with god in the afterlife. They refused to believe a loving god would create beings to torture for eternity. Universal Salvation.

But as the centuries passed theology evolved. In the Universalists' hands, rather than an after-life proposition, salvation came to be concerned with saving everyone from harm in the here and

now through good social policy. Its most recent evolution is captured by our first Principle - the inherent worth and dignity (which I construe as the inherent holiness) of every person.

A while ago, I got to wondering about what the next evolution might be. Looking at the many concepts of salvation within our tradition and across the religious field - be it submission to Allah or Buddhist enlightenment, I came to understand that what they all essentially yearned for was the sense of freedom from fear.

From there I developed a litany which I think I may have shared with you before. Can you show the slide? Here it is.

**Salvation is the experience of being free from the grip of fear.**

**This freedom manifests in our ability to respond rather than react.**

**The ability to respond rather than react depends on the practice of becoming aware of our reactivity so that we might, alternatively, find peace in our faith.**

**Faith is a deep trust in your story of life.**

**Faith dispels the grip of fear.**

**Thus we find freedom in faith.**

***Our* faith understands that existence is interdependent and that each of us is holy.**

**Faith and awareness require practice.**

So enchantment is what an active faith looks like. It is consciously living a story of life that is cohesive and interested in you. Our cohesive story is that of interdependent holiness. This enchanting story, this faith, can be a lens that becomes a method, a method of salvation, both personally and planetarily.

When we transform interdependent holiness from an affirmation to a deep faith, when it becomes the conscious story in which we live, it can free us from fear and allow us to respond rather than react - which is the fundamental sign of salvation. Thus both salvation and enchantment rest on becoming aware of our own reactivity. If we are - and I have been - at the mercy of reactivity then it is more difficult to pay attention to our interdependent holiness.

I've meant to address enchantment for some time. When it first occurred to me to do so, I was actually feeling it some. Now I'm just remembering it. And I remember when I was feeling it, it felt a lot like it did when I was younger and every tree and bird, every neighborhood corner turned, every event and person were part of the same cohesive story and would reveal themselves as such if I just paid the right kind of attention. And when that happened it felt like my whole being was in a really good, really delightful, and heartfelt conversation.

It felt good. It felt like being in flow. But not as an individual. Flow is always a status of relationship. Meaning is team sport. Life becomes a dance.

But not necessarily all the time, I guess. Not yet anyway.

But just like before. I know that I've been there because I'm not there now. There's been a lot of stuff lately and I've been hijacked by reactivity. Reactivity disrupts enchantment. So I need to

work on that as I yearn to bring about more and more enchantment. I guess I've been making a study of it. I invite you to do the same. It's nice to be in love.

And life on earth might depend on it.

But, you know. No pressure.

Our present disenchantment or unconscious enchantment has led us to a soulless engagement with our planet and thus, in a sense, with ourselves and each other. A spiritual long night.

But it is from here that we can become conscious of our story and choose a more beautiful one; the light of interdependent holiness. As we encounter the world through that lens of significance we may celebrate the return of the light, even in these darkest days. Let us discover anew our enchanted, meaningful, mutual embeddedness with a world that remembers your name and knows your dance moves. Let us find faith in a bone-deep knowing of our interdependent holiness.