

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



Evidential Mysticism: The Art of Creation Spirituality

with Matthew Fox

Big ideas from this session:

- The Four-Fold Path of Evolutionary, Ecological Spirituality
- The Mass Appeal of the Techno-Cosmic Mass
- Education and religion as if survival mattered

Michael: Matt, it's a delight to be able to see you, be on Skype and to have you as part of this conversation series, which is titled *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*.

Matthew: It's good to be with you and with all the other thinkers that you've brought on board and optimists.

Michael: Yes. I interviewed Bill McKinnon just the other day, he was amazing. Matt, one of the things I am doing at the start is I am asking all of my guests to introduce themselves and don't be bashful, share with us what you are best known for, what you are proudest of, what you are involved in and take at least five minutes or longer and help us get, for those few people who might not know you who is Matt Fox, help us get you.

Matthew: For 34 years, I was a member of the Dominican Order in the Catholic Church and a priest for a good number of those years. Then I was fired by the Pope Ratzinger, the Inquisitor General of our time, who later became Pope Benedict the 16th. So I got a pink slip and that was because they said among other things, I was working too closely with Native Americans and I call god mother and I was [inaudible 01:40] theologian.

Those were their objections and I was a perversion of blessing to original sin. The original blessing was in my books that caught the attention of the Vatican and they seemed to have a great investment in original sin. I myself believe the whole universe is a blessing obviously and for 13.8 billion years that did a lot of things but it also gave birth to our species.

It may not have been as wisest choice but I took the risk and a real gamble in doing so. So, I think blessing is of course a theological word for goodness and my bible begins with the fact that the creation is good and in fact, it's very good when it's all taken together. That's what original blessing is. I can't take the condemnations from the Vatican too seriously.

I've written over 30 books and the key is this movement of creation spirituality which is of course a green spirituality. It's about the sacredness of creation and one of the books is on the Cosmic Christ, which is a marvelous architect for naming the image of god that every creature is or if you will, the Buddha nature is another phrase that comes from the East that says the same thing.

In the Jewish tradition, the tradition of the image of god is applicable to all creation, not just to human beings. So, it's about [indiscernible 03:18] and rediscovering our place in larger picture of the grace that nature is and in my writings, I have rediscovered these marvelous mystics of the West, such as Hildegard of Bingen who was a green prophet in the 12th century and [inaudible 03:43] who was a marvelous spiritual genius, ecumenist and a green spiritual thinker of the 13th and 14th century. He was a contemporary of Rumi, really. He was 13 when Rumi died and they have a lot in common. My most recent book shows that, and even Thomas Aquinas has a profound mystical side that's been ignored and I've put out my major work on Aquinas.

What I have been researching and teaching is now off the top of my head, this is a tradition that's been ignored in the rush to integral centrism that I think flowered frankly the birth of the modern era with the printing press and the invasion of the indigenous peoples all around the world from the European settlers and their military and so I think what I have been trying to do then is to push the restart button in Christianity and needless to say it has disturbed a few well-placed hierarchs along the way.

I also have been very involved in the alternative education, because over 35 years ago, I realized you can't teach spirituality in a European model of education that defines truth as clear and distinct ideas and leaves the heart out and the body out and the lower chakras out.

I design programs now for Master's degree and we had that program in Chicago for seven years and brought it out here to Oakland, California for 12 years and the Pope tried to kill it, which eventually he did. Then I started my own university for nine years immersed in creation spirituality, but the key is the pedagogy where we consciously try to develop right brain and left brain.

That is so important and of course, it is about bringing feminism into education because the problem that we have today is we acknowledge factories, we don't have wisdom schools, and wisdom in both the bible and around the world is feminine, and I think it's the

patriarchal explosion really of the modern era that banished wisdom and has been invested exclusively in knowledge.

While we've discovered a lot of things with knowledge, we are obviously in a very dangerous place today because we are missing the wisdom, and so I talk about the four Es, this is I think the moral agenda for greatness, if you will, or for survival and generosity that we have to address today.

The E of education. We have to do education differently. The E of economics. We have to and can do economics differently, incorporating all the beings of the planet as to their survival and health and not just the human. Then ecumenism, we have to religion differently. We have to gather the wisdom from all the world's spiritual traditions.

What do we have in common and what new can we learn from each other, and how does it link up with today's science to get the job done? The job being obviously the survival and sustainability of the planet as we know it and our own species along with the others. Then finally the fourth E is of course ecology. I think that's the setting in which we have to redefine our role on the planet and it cuts through everything, as does education of course, as politics, economics, religion, medicine, agriculture, media, and all of it we pass through the funnel we all education.

Education itself has to be critiqued and I have been doing that on the ground, so to speak, for over 30 years and with powerful results.

Michael: Amen, and I just want to publicly honor you and acknowledge you because back in 1988, which is when I was first introduced to Thomas Barry, Albert Lachance was doing a class on the new Catholic mysticism and February 1st, 1988, I was introduced to Thomas Barry's thinking.

Within 45 minutes of hearing this presentation of the universe story, what is now called the big history or the epic of evolution, I had goose bumps up and down my arms and legs, I started to cry and I realized I am going to spend the rest of life popularizing this message.

I wasn't finding too many people speaking with a strong green heart within Christianity and here I was, pastoring my first church. I was the town parson. I married, buried and baptized everybody in this little Massachusetts town of 1,400 people and I was actually contemplating leaving the ministry and didn't know whether I could stay in the church.

It was specifically your writings, *Original Blessing* and then later *Cosmic Christ* and Sally McFague, the two of you were the two people that were most significant in my life in helping me to interpret Christianity in a completely ecological, evolutionary context and a prophetic context.

So I just want to honor you as a mentor and an older brother on the path and not only have I read about seven or eight of your books but I have also just been really deeply appreciative of the way that you have integrated the arts in a prophetic way, music, dance, poetry, all the various art forms because that's what touches our hearts. That's what touches our souls. Prophets can all so powerfully speak using various artistic forms.

The fact that that's been core to your own pedagogy has just been an inspiration and a model I think for others and the other thing I want to just finally mention and honor you for is that I have been proclaiming what I am calling it the Religion 3.0 or the evidential reaffirmation that I am claiming is going to make the Protestant reaffirmation look puny in comparison because it is impacting all the religions of the world where Religion 1.0 is the authority of elders, Religion 2.0 is the authority of the sacred texts. Religion 3.0 is the authority of global collective intelligence, it is the authority of evidence, the evidential tradition.

I call myself an evidential mystic and I partly get that from your inspiration and the fact that you actually went, as I understand it, to Wittenberg and tacked on your own theses on the door or something. Tell me about that.

Matthew: When Ratzinger made himself a pope, I knew the Catholic Church was in for even darker times because I had been on a 12-year battle with this fellow and so I was wrestling because I had an invitation at the Pentecost to go to Germany and give some talks at a healing center there and Pentecost is of course the traditional celebration of the birth of the church and I was feeling it.

I said, I can't be too excited about the birth of the church or what's coming down with Ratzinger, so I asked for a dream and because I was actually thinking of dropping out but then I said, that wouldn't really be fair to the sponsor because they've been working on this for a year, so I asked for a dream.

I was in the middle of the dream and I got the message. Here is a first German pope in 700 years and this other German guy named Luther went and pounded theses at Wittenberg five centuries ago.

I got up at 3:30 in the morning, sat down in a rocking chair with a yellow tablet and I said I better have 25 theses inside of me. When the sun came up at 6:30, I had 95 theses in front of me. I was exhausted, I went to bed and got up at 10, read it over and said, I can believe in these. Then I did the two things. I did my original assignment at the healing center, gave a couple of talks and then went to Wittenberg and pounded the theses at the door there.

Then later, when the Italians started translating my books just two or three years ago and I was invited to Rome, I said I'll come and give some talks and what not, but I said I think I should do something else too, and this is at the height of the pedophile priest crisis.

I translated my theses into Italian and I said now what church, and I settled on Maria Major which is a basilica where Cardinal Law who is the kingpin of those who covered priestly pedophilia. He passed one priest around to different parishes who would abuse 150 boys and he was elevated. He was promoted to run this four century basilica in Rome.

So, I chose that spot at 10 am on a Sunday morning to pound my theses in Italian and there was quite a hullabaloo. The Vatican police beat up some of the people who were there and the pastor was there, and it was something but that's communication of the 21st century, so I got some mileage out of the 95 theses in Italian too.

Somebody has to do these things.

Michael: Exactly.

Matthew: This church one that you are talking about, the authoritarian thing, it's out of control and is offering so little than it's promising. Now thank god we have a decent pope at this time but still, Catholics and others should not be projecting their greatness, their responsibility on someone else, whether it's a pope or anyone else.

We all are responsible for creating a sustainable species and planet and we can't just expect one person in funny outfits to do it for us.

Michael: Amen. One of the other things that I feel this deep kinship and this deep soul brotherhood with you is around our mutual admiration and benefit from the life and the work of Thomas Barry. I just find to this day, I still call him my greatest mentor and I am just hugely grateful for his influence and I still find myself speaking things that he originally planted or in some cases, Miriam MacGillis or Brian Swim, Maria Von Tucker or yourself, others who have taken his work and gone in other directions, and then furthered it in my ways furthered his legacy.

Anything that you would like to say about how Thomas has made a difference in your own life, especially given this theme of this series that the future is calling us to greatness?

Matthew: Like you, I owe Tom a whole lot. He was a great human being, a great thinker and a great man. Brian Swim reminded me last year that it was 30 years ago that he and I met Tom at the same time because we invited Tom to my school, my institute in Chicago.

It was January and so I heard Tom speak for the first time there. I had read several of his books that had not been published yet and one thing about Tom, he would write books and then put them in his drawer. That's one reason I think he kept the Vatican off his trail for decades.

Michael: Yeah. The first time I met him, he gave me a complete copy of the *Riverdale Papers* and I was amazed.

Matthew: Yes, but I remember we got in the snow going to supper together in Chicago in January and I was writing my first book on Hildegard Von Bingen, and he went on about Hildegard. He was the first one I ever met on the planet who knew about Hildegard.

This guy, he was broad and he was deep in his knowledge and so I heard him speak on numerous occasions. He taught in our school and here and there and everywhere. One thing he wrote to me – I think it was on my 60th birthday or something, he said, “I think of you less as a priest and more as a Shaman,” and I considered that a compliment, especially since I do more work on Shamanism and he just said a lot of things.

As you say, he was not only a great intellect and so on but he could see into people. He had great intuition about people but he had this way about him that was kind of awe shocks and laid back. He never screamed and often you could barely understand him. He had this off-putting way about him that was humble but there are just so many lessons that he shared along the way with me, some of them personal and some of them obviously intellectual.

He once said to me that the only one in his order who he could communicate with was a lay brother who drove a tractor, that the others all thought he was crazy, studying Native American languages and Chinese and all these world religions and science, they thought he was off the wall.

One guy he could communicate with was a fellow who drove the tractor that didn't have too much education, so he didn't judge him one way or the other. So, there are just so many stories about our man here that are great to share because we all have different stories to share and they help to add up to what a special human being he was.

Michael: Yes. The first time I met Tom was at his place in Riverdale and we went out to the Broadway Diner and Brian Swim of course in the preface to *The Universe is a Green Dragon* writes about his experience at that same diner, eating over Greek salad and all of a sudden I realized, I was having a Greek salad across the table from Thomas Barry and I had this delightful experience.

I used to bring in my sleeping bag and sleep under this 500-year old great red oak tree that overlooked the Hudson River.

Matthew: That was such a mentor to him, I know he loved that tree.

Michael: Yes. He dedicates the *Dream of the Earth* to that tree. Matt, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about this is one of the ways you've integrated the arts and also really kept in touch with young people and young energy.

For a long time, I don't know if you are still doing them but I experienced a couple of your Techno cosmic masses and I wanted you to just share a little bit about that experience.

Matthew: We are doing one October 19th, actually, just a couple of weeks from now and the theme is cosmology and Brian Swim is going to be there as our teacher. We always have a teacher.

Yes, this is an effort to actually to awaken worship by using rave, which is essentially an all-night dance to bring about a trance, but the rave movement is global. There are raves happening all over on many continents and it's a way to make worship live again by using our bodies.

It incorporates all the chakras and so you dance but you also use the multimedia, DJs and VJs, rap, so all these new art forms that we have in the 21st century, why shouldn't they be put to the use of a good worship to awaken people and bring people?

A year ago, we did it for a thousand people at the Sounds True Conference in Colorado. It was very powerful and people of many traditions show up and get it. We always have rabbis as part of it and so I think it's a wonderful way.

Sixty-eight thousand people went to Burning Man this summer out in the desert in August, which is crazy and irrational of course. If you go to the desert, why don't you go in February or March but not in August? But why the 68,000 people come out in August, because they are hungry for ritual.

Humans need ritual and it's not just humans, other species have rituals too. What created Stonehenge? It wasn't a desire for a new football team. It was creating a relationship between ourselves and the cosmos, and we do this for ritual. That's what a real ritual is, it's about microchasm and macrochasm coming together and we need this.

Ritual is a [inaudible 20:58]. Ceremony and ritual is a way our ancestors, for tens of thousands of years taught their children. They didn't put them in a desk and said stay still for seven hours and we'll give you a drug because you've got a disease, they learned things through dance and ceremony and elders and young people working together, creating beautiful costumes and beautiful experiences together.

That's what real ritual is all about and I think that we've been cut off, because in the modern age we've taught to pray from the neck up and read books. What page are you on? That drives me crazy when you go to church and you spend your time trying to find the right page. You have to be literate to pray in this culture, which is crazy.

Praying isn't about reading, it's about opening your heart up and that's why I learned so much from indigenous from the sweat lodges and vision quests. I was at a Sundance again this summer, so powerful and so imbued with nature. That's how we are going to stir up the fire in our bellies to save mother earth is by reconnecting to mother earth in a sacred way, and that's what the ritual should be able to do.

Because a mass is in many ways an urban expression, because we use DJs in all this, but most human beings are living in cities these days, so we've got to find ways to bring humans together to create community, go through dimensions of joy and grief together. We always have a grieving dimension and that's so important.

People are carrying a lot of grief today and we have very little outlet for it, and that's why it comes out often as anger or depression, or violence.

Michael: Yes, exactly.

Matthew: We can't underestimate the power of ritual and how important it is.

Michael: I completely agree. In fact, while I was being turned onto your work and Sally McFague's, two other people that were very influential in my life in the late 80s and early 90s, and in fact I had a friendship with her until she died, Dolores LaChapelle, one of the amazing deep ecologists and in her book, *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex: Rapture of the Deep, Concerning Deep Ecology and Celebrating Life*, she gave me more of an appreciation for ritual and ceremony is so important given the nature of the human brain.

That's the way information has been carried from generation to generation because it has to be memorized, it has to be embodied in the body and emotions, and connect us to the land and connect us to each other.

I actually while I was at my first church, it was Joanna Macy, you, Dolores LaChapelle and Sally McFague who were my deep nourishment and I actually had a sweat lodge built on one of my parishioners' property because I ended up doing some training with Tom Brown, the tracker and learned to do sweat lodges.

Here I was the pastor of the only church in a town of 1,500 people and one of my parishioners lived on a private pond, so I had the sweat lodge but my congregation, most of them

didn't know about it. That was my neo pagan and feminine spirituality and goddess worshipping friends that participated in that.

Matthew: Great. What denomination were you, what tradition?

Michael: United Church of Christ. I grew up Roman Catholic but definitely didn't feel the call to celibacy and wanted to be married and have kids, and so I ended up becoming a United Church of Christ minister and I pastored three UCC churches, but I did have one foot in the Unitarian Universalist Association during most of that time. So, I've one foot in the UUA and one foot in the Protestant Christianity.

I still consider myself sort of Celtic in terms of the integration of earthy evolutionary Christianity but I also have a Taoist heart and Buddhism has been important also.

Matthew: So post-denominational, yes.

Michael: Yes, exactly. Your four Es, education, economics, ecumenism and ecology reminded me of a couple of things. Thomas Barry talked about some of the main institutions but he also talked about the four wisdom traditions that we need to hear most from now.

The wisdom traditions of course of the classical religious cultures but that's what we usually associate with wisdom but we also need to hear, in fact, perhaps even more, the wisdom of the indigenous people, tribal peoples, first peoples, the peoples in touch with the land still treat the land as an I-thou relationship, the wisdom of women, which as you've said already is not the same as the wisdom of men, and also the wisdom of science. The wisdom of the global collective intelligence movement, the scientific tradition. I am reminded of that.

Matthew: I could not agree more. The wisdom of the plants and of the stones, and of the animals, this cannot be underestimated. I have a Shaman friend who tells me the animals are having conferences today about us two-legged ones, they are worried about us. We are running things and we are not very bright and so they are having conversations on how they can help us.

They resolved two things. One, they can more fully into our dreams and secondly, those who are our pets can assert themselves more, so you might check that out with your pet, dog or horse, whether they are becoming more assertive these days. They are genuinely worried about us.

Michael: That's good. Matt, along this theme that the past is rooting for us, obviously this is a mythic mindset, the past isn't literally rooting for us, but when we hold in our hearts the fact that countless generations sacrificed and struggled, and had they not in many cases sacrificed we wouldn't even be alive, so we owe our very existence to them.

We hold that in our hearts and allow that to motivate us in the present so that we can be a blessing to the future. So I find that in terms of the mythic mindsets, the idea that the past is rooting for us, past generations are rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness, anything that you would like to say along that theme?

Matthew: Another language for that is of course the role of the ancestors. In the theological tradition, we could talk about the communion of saints, so all of that is the past but in the Middle Eastern tradition, the ancestors are not at the rear of the caravan, they are in the front. So they are not something we look back at, they are pulling us too. They are not just cheering for us, they are actually leading in a way.

Michael: I love that.

Matthew: It's another way of seeing history and I like it. When I first learned that several years ago, it just shifted some things in me, but they are pulling for us, you might say. They are not just pushing from behind, they are pulling.

The way I put it is, if Francis of Assisi were alive today or Dr. King, or someone else we admire, Gandhi, they wouldn't be just repeating what they did in their day, they would be out front today because they demonstrated the courage, it was just a big heart, the greatness of soul, the magnanimity in their time that was required.

Francis didn't have a Gandhi to look up to. He had Jesus to look up to but he didn't have a Gandhi. So, to realize that we don't want to just put the ancestors behind us. I think that can be comfortable. Also we can say Jesus too or Buddha, they are not just back in the past, they are also calling us to greatness today and I think it has to shift the energy a little and it's a little less linear, the caravan of history that we are involved in here.

We've got cheerleaders in front and behind and we also have the angels. I did a book with Rupert Sheldrake on angels. I've done two books with him. One was on angels. It's just come out in a new version and I met this amazing woman, this Lorna Byrne, I don't know if you've heard of her. She is an Irish peasant woman who is 61, grandmother of four, illiterate but she's been seeing angels since she was 2 years old and talking to them.

They told her not to tell anyone until they told her and that was five or six years ago, when her husband died, and then they said, "Okay, you can tell people." She dictated three books now because she doesn't write, about angels and what they have to say about humanity today and it's a rather interesting perspective.

One thing she talks about, which I really love this, unemployed angels. I interviewed her this past year, at Christ Cathedral in San Francisco, she talked about unemployed

angels. Unemployed angels? I said. I know a lot about unemployed people and now we have to start putting angels to work too?

She said at this time in history, god is pouring angels on the planet to help us and no one is asking them for help, so there is a lot of unemployed angels. I think that is really interesting. Again, it's part of getting over our [indiscernible 30:38] to realize that there are other intelligences and other spirits that we do not include when we do our population census.

Rupert Sheldrake says that he thinks that the angels guide evolution and he puts out that Darwin's co-developer of Darwin's Theory, Wallace, broke with Darwin precisely over this subject. Darwin said it was pure chance what was happening, what happened and Wallace said no, there must have been intelligent beings, i.e. angels involved in the decision making along the way.

So, I have to say, picking up a new book on angels called *The Physics of Angels* with Rupert Sheldrake and myself, it blows some minds but in this new version, we bring Lorna Byrne into the discussion in the introduction too and it's significant that every spiritual group in the world has their teachings about spirits or angels, indigenous people and the more recent religions.

So there is something there and I think it deserves our attention.

Michael: It's interesting, one of the most significant books I've read in the last decade or two is Stewart Guthrie's book called *Faces in the Clouds*, a 1994 Oxford University Press, the subtitle is *A New Theory of Religion*.

He talks about the necessary role of personification in the human brain that that's what we do to enter in relationship with our inner or our outer world or inner or outer reality is that we personify, that is we give human characteristics to what's more than human or other than human and in fact, we can't understand myths and religions unless we get personification.

Poseidon for example wasn't the god of the ocean or the spirit of the ocean as if there were some non-material entity separate from water. Poseidon was a personification of the incomprehensibly powerful and capricious seas. Gaia was a personification of earth. Eros was a personification of what we today call lover lust.

When you get personification, then of course angels and spirits, these are personifications of aspects of our inner and outer reality that when we understand that they become inescapably real. You don't need to believe in Poseidon, the oceans are real. You don't need to believe in Gaia. We need to honor Gaia, we need to respect Poseidon and we need to respect Eros, but it's not about believing in these as separate entities.

That's the way I find useful to think about angels, demons, gods and goddesses is this understanding that I call the godification of reality, the divine personification of our inner and outer reality and I find that in audiences where I speak literally from atheists to evangelicals, this is a way of thinking that's a bridge builder.

Matthew: Interesting. Sometimes when I speak, a lot of people say it's not a competition and I say, how many of you have had experiences of angels or you know people personally who you trust who tell you they have? Often, it's 80 percent in the audience.

Michael: Fascinating.

Matthew: Yeah, but it's about experience.

Michael: Exactly.

Matthew: Anyway, that's just one aspect.

Michael: That's great. Matt, one of the things I wanted to ask you and I have been asking this of most of the guests in this series is that peak oil, climate change, over-population, species extinction, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and on and on, there are some really scary stuff, stuff that can depress us, that can move us into despair, that can and often should fuel us to anger and to action. How do you personally stay inspired on a day by day basis to do the work that you do in the face of some really scary stuff?

Matthew: Thomas Aquinas is a great 13th century genius and theologian says that despair is the most dangerous of all sins. It's not the worse, injustice is the worst but despair is the most dangerous because when you fall in your despair he says you no longer love yourself, therefore you can't love others and compassion absolutely dies.

Then he says, "The worst thing a priest can do with their life is to teach despair," so I think these apocalyptic times in which we are living, which you've named well there, we have to be careful of this temptation to run on the headlines of despair. For one thing, the media like to run on the headlines of disaster, as we know and we should resist that.

We should not internalize that method. We have to find hope, possibility within our own message and within our own experience and we have to hunt and gather these signs of hope.

Like we've mentioned, the women's movement is a sign of hope. The men's movement is too, if we could shake up. I just wrote a brief article recently on what I call men behaving badly, all this stuff from the football teams, domestic violence and all this is coming out again. I see nothing of ISIS.

What's really at stake here I think is a misdefinition of missed masculinity. The young men are not getting messages about their own greatness.

I did this book on the sacred masculine a few years ago called *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, and a Native American came up to me and he said, "I taught in prisons for 12 years." He said, "Men in prison are notoriously busy projecting on others, they don't want to look inside and I've been looking for 12 years to find what they've got to look inside. Yours is the first book that a man can look inside and find the nobility inside."

I have good bumps. I just love that phrase. Men are out of touch with their nobility. We've been beaten down by the industrial revolution, by our being cut off from father sky, during the mechanical universe story that we are now displacing.

Men are questing and frankly, I don't think our religious traditions are cutting the mustard, so the point is though we have to find a blessing in life. I love the definition of hope from David Orr, the eco-philosopher, "Hope is a verb with the sleeves rolled up." Hope comes with work.

You are busy working trying to spread a solid message at this difficult time, I am trying to do the same and I know that I give out a lot of hope from the encounters I have with others who are suffering through the same questions, but also willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work. We have to go to work, as I say, on education, on religion, on economics, on politics, on agriculture and all of it needs reinventing as of course Thomas Barry insisted.

I think there is something to be said for rolling up our sleeves and you have to balance it. Of course meditation, silence, going into nature and experiencing the beauty and the affirmation, the affection from other animals, from plants, from rocks to feel the sacredness of the greater than human world is what fills me up and then of course, there are all kinds of poets, musicians, artists and filmmakers who are contributing I think to a more sane world.

It's like prayer, you have to structure some time to fill yourself up and I consider everything I am talking about to be prayer, to fill yourself up with the beauty of existence and of course to take that new creation story and to realize that the miracle that this planet is here and that we are here on this planet, and that we as individuals are here on this planet, the miracle of existence.

Eckhart says, "Is-ness is god." The raw bottom miracle is existence itself and that we are invited on board. So the rest is, when you think about it, is kind of like details, even the bad news. So the great news, the holiness of existence, it just doesn't cut the mustard, it doesn't cut through.

Michael: Yes. This would be a great place for you to just sum up, because I have been wanting to ask this question and I think this is the time to do it, for people who are not familiar with the four-fold path of creation spirituality, share the essence of that, if you would.

Matthew: I think we have here an architect with pattern for what all of us who undergo spiritual journeys. First of what we call the *via positiva*, the positive path of awe, wonder, joy and the light. That gets the fire burning. It's about falling in love with life, not just one two-legged partner till death do you part but with beings, with existence and all the rest.

I think science can assist in this tremendously today, given the new creation story. The *via negativa*, the negative path is the path of first of all silence, letting go of images, letting go of stories, letting go of problems and just being. That's what many people mean by mindfulness or meditation, to be in silence but the *via negativa* also involves the letting go that is involved in suffering, and suffering is a great teacher.

Even the suffering that we are in today, the mystics call it the dark night of the soul. I think we are in a collective dark night of our species today and that's not a bad place to be, it's a scary place but it's not because the dark night teaches us deep lessons of wisdom that we do not learn elsewhere.

The warrior in us has to be able to be present to the darkness and not go running off or going shopping or drinking booze or becoming addicts to television or sports, or something.

Michael: I've got to interrupt. I am looking out the window here and sitting on the fencepost is this gorgeous red-tail hawk. It's just a majestic being, so I just wanted to honor that right now.

Matthew: Thank you.

Michael: My new warrior training name, my men's movement name is Dancing Hawk.

Matthew: Perfect. What an affirmation, what a blessing, thank you.

Michael: Continue.

Matthew: Right. *Via creativa* comes next and that's our creativity and we can still underestimate creativity as a spiritual path, as a prayer, and when I talk to people, very often their most prayerful moments are in time to creativity is when you are not looking at your watch. You are too turned on, you are too going with the flow and this to me, theologically, is the Holy Spirit at work. Holy Spirit is the creative spirit and I think our entire education system utterly underestimates the importance of creativity.

I am looking at inner city teenagers taking my pedagogy there and the key is 65 percent of black boys in America are dropping out of high school. Why? Because they are bored, and what's missing is creativity. So, we show them we can bring it back but creativity is across the board.

Our cultures wanted to tell us professional artists are creative and the rest of are just bumbling along. Not so. We are all creative at many levels, just balancing a checkbook is a hell of an act of creativity for most people.

The forth path is the *via transformativa*, the transformative path and that is about steering your creativity not in just fame or making more money or growing your ego but in the service, the service of justice, healing and compassion and celebration, and that becomes the test really of our creativity. Are we putting it to the healthy use of generations to come?

These four paths I think name the real in-depth experiences of the spiritual journey. Like Rabbi Heschel said, "There lies in the recesses of every human existence a prophet or a warrior." They've got to get down to the recesses and I think these four paths help to name the recesses in all of us as human beings, and once you can name it then you know.

You are in a *via negativa* one day, you are in a *via creativa* another, cool. Your partner may be just the opposite that helps. We are on the journey together and it never stops. I envision it as an open-ended spiral that is continually growing and expanding, and challenging us of course to stay alive.

Michael: Beautifully articulated. Thank you. One of the questions that Connie has invited me to ask all my guests and --

Matthew: Give my best to Connie.

Michael: I will do so. It is that if you had the opportunity to have a dinner party where you had any three people in human history and yourself or a one on one over a beer, a glass of wine, a meal or whatever but any three people in human history, either all of you together or one on one, who would those three people be and why would you choose them?

Matthew: I think I like Einstein and Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen. Why? I think they are all profound thinkers out of the box in their own time. I love what Einstein says about, "We've been given two gifts, rationality and the sacred gift of intuition. Rationality should serve intuition," he says, "But we live in a society that honors rational and has ignored intuition."

Michael: Or even dishonored intuition.

Matthew: There you go. To me, intuition is the synonym for mysticism. So to put Einstein in the room with these two great mystics, both of them cared a lot about science, although of course their science was centuries older, would be fun. I would love to be taking notes and be the fly on the wall.

I think that also of course Hildegard brings the dynamism of this female warrior energy that we all need and she didn't play second fiddle to anybody. She wrote books and Abbots, telling him that they grumbled like bears and acted like jackasses and other things. She was kicking ass in the 12th century and I have to respect her for that, in addition to making marvelous music, paintings and her herbal remedies and all the rest. She was a renaissance woman.

Do you remember this fellow who used to have a TV program where he did things like this way back in the 50s or 60s? I forget his name now and he had a program where he put three or four historical figures at a table together. You should come up with that and take some of these names you gather and it would be great to have an exposition of that too.

There are so many marvelous figures from the past that I would love to re-connect with at whole new levels. Like you say, that's part of the joy of being human, the ancestors weren't dumb and many were courageous, and we wouldn't be here, as you said. Let's bring them in a room together.

Michael: Amen. This question just occurred to me. I have not asked anybody else this question but I will probably ask the remaining six or seven people in this series this question, because I think it's a good one and that is, Connie and I value death. We value mortality. We are so present to what a gift mortality and death, and chaos for that matter is in the universe.

Without death, you couldn't have a universe at all scales, from the death of stars that create the periodic table of elements to the death of mountains to create healthy soil and so on, and I have asked myself this question a couple of times in my life that if this was the last message that I had to communicate to the world, what would it be and really focusing?

Here is just an off the wall question, if this was your last interview, if tonight you died and this video was the last thing, especially this last segment, this last five minutes or so were the last thing that you had to say to the world and it went viral, because everybody knew that this was Matt Fox's last statement to people, young people, old people or whoever, what would you say? Just off the top of your head, off your heart?

Matthew: What comes to mind right away is a month ago, we had the memorial service to Rabbi Zalman Schachter, it was on his 90th birthday. It had begun to be planned as his birthday and then he died, and so we had this memorial service. It was marvelous, in Boulder where he lived for many years.

I remember there was a film, he was interviewed this past year, in his 89th year and he said, “Life has been a privilege. I loved and I have been loved,” and then he went on, but I think to me, that is the phrase. Can we all say our life has been a privilege, because that is about gratitude, isn’t it? Meister Eckhart, “If the only prayer you say in your whole life is thank you that will suffice.”

That would be my message. Live your life as if it is a privilege, because it is. It’s a hell of a privilege to have been here and don’t waste it, don’t squander it. Don’t spend your life as a couch potato. Stand up and be counted and develop your gifts, whatever they are and including your moral outrage. Part of grief is getting in touch with our moral outrage and dealing with it in non-violent ways, but steering it, like King did, like Gandhi did, like Jesus taught we were to do and the Buddha too.

That’s what I would say, live your life as if it is a privilege because it is and that’s really all I have to say.

Michael: That’s fabulous. One question I wanted to ask earlier and I’ve forgotten but I don’t want to conclude this without asking it and that is, for those of us who are authors or aspiring writers, you are one of these amazing people I’ve often referred to, you are one of those people who must write with two hands. You are consistently not just producing books but great books, amazing books.

What is your discipline? Is it like before such and such a time of day, all you do is focus on writing or what discipline do you use to be able to have that creative flow on such a consistent basis?

Matthew: I have a defined discipline because while I have been writing books I have also been administrating programs and even in university, non-profit and all that stuff and traveling, but what I’ve learned about myself is that I write in the morning. If I have a particular project, I’ll get up early.

For writing my first Hildegard book, I’ve had only the Christmas break, about six weeks, through mid-December and late January to write my book on Illuminations. I’ve done the research for years, I’ve taught her but writing it is another thing. So I got up at 3:30 every morning and got it done in that six-week time, for the most part. As I’ve already said, if you love something enough you’ll find the time and I love writing. I learn so much when I write and I am blessed to have an audience, publishers, and so that motivates me to get up early.

That has been my modus operandi for many years. Now that I am older, I don’t have so much administrative burden, thank god, but of course I have some limits on my energy

that I didn't have before either. So, for me I love what Heschel says. He says, "Learning is not for life, learning is life," and that so resonates with my experience.

I just love to learn and writing forces to learn. It forces you to research but to bring together research in some coherent form that allows you to tell others about the exciting things you've learned and so it's a love affair and that gets you up in the morning, if you have to.

I think everyone can find their own rhythm. Some people maybe write better at night. By myself, I do the writing in the morning and the editing in the afternoon, or of course I do administration in there some place in the afternoon, but that's how I've done it over the years and it is true that I've written quite a bit when I look back on it and yet, I've been busy doing other things too, like administration and raising money, and even declaring bankruptcy which I did a few years ago because the ballroom we had for the Cosmic Mass, I wasn't able to find a loan for it.

So I've had my bumps and bruises and wounds along the way but that's all part of living too and learning. It also puts you in the camp of others who would go bankrupt and I am sure there is a very great number in our culture.

Michael: Amen. Matt, again as I shared earlier, you have been such an inspiration and an older brother on the path for me for decades now and I just honor you and your work and I just hope your health continues and you'll continue to be able to share both your pedagogy, your way of teaching and bringing the arts together, left and right brain and all that, but also the prophetic edge. I think that is so needed in our world.

Thank you.

Matthew: Thank you Michael and thank you younger brother for the wonderful work that you are doing, including this series that you put together. You have a very fertile imagination yourself and you and Connie both, your road trip on behalf of mother earth is a marvelous thing.

Every place I go, I hear people who have been fed and nourished by your teachings and preaching. Carry on.

Michael: All right, thanks. You too, brother. Take care.

Matthew: Bye.

Michael: Bye.

