



# Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World

*Wangari Maathai*

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**Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World** Wangari Maathai  
**An impassioned call to heal the wounds of our planet and ourselves through the tenets of our spiritual traditions, from a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize**

It is so easy, in our modern world, to feel disconnected from the physical earth. Despite dire warnings and escalating concern over the state of our planet, many people feel out of touch with the natural world. Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai has spent decades working with the Green Belt Movement to help women in rural Kenya plant—and sustain—millions of trees. With their hands in the dirt, these women often find themselves empowered and “at home” in a way they never did before. Maathai wants to impart that feeling to everyone, and believes that the key lies in traditional spiritual values: love for the environment, self-betterment, gratitude and respect, and a commitment to service. While educated in the Christian tradition, Maathai draws inspiration from many faiths, celebrating the Jewish mandate *tikkun olam* (“repair the world”) and renewing the Japanese term *mottainai* (“don’t waste”). Through rededication to these values, she believes, we might finally bring about healing for ourselves and the earth.

## Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World Details

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## From Reader Review Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World for online ebook

### Eva Carroll says

What an amazing, inspiring woman. Definitely a book that will stick with me.

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### Barbara says

Wangari Maathai is a great human being to whom we owe much. This was not the book I was looking for at this moment, hence my lower than rave rating.

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### Rochelle says

I will start my review of this book with a quote from its final chapter: *"What is it that calls someone to serve, to make that commitment beyond oneself that can transform the lives of those around one and bring about change that had seemed impossible? It could be inspiration, and the knowledge that compels one to act. But sometimes we are called into action on behalf of a cause because of what might be called the god within us, the Source--the voice that we feel speaks to us, and us only, and says that a situation is wrong, an injustice has been committed and we must do something to reverse it. Here, we are in the realm of the mysterious, and in trying to suggest what causes us to act, it would be prudent to exercise a little humility, especially since so many of the challenges that confront us as a species are due to our arrogant belief that we know enough not to worry about the consequences of our actions. "*

I first saw a post celebrating the life of Wangari Maathai on Facebook and was immediately drawn to her radiant smile. Reading further about her I decided to get everything I could about her life on loan from the library. So, Replenishing the Earth is the first of her books in which she was asked to respond to a question about the spiritual basis for her movement. To her credit, she didn't ascribe a spiritual moment to her passion for healing the environment; in fact in the introduction she specifically states " Upon reflection, it is clear to me that when I began this work in 1977, I wasn't motivated by my faith or by religion in general. Instead, the motivation came from thinking literally and practically about how to solve problems on the ground. It was a desire to help rural populations, especially women, with the basic needs they described to me during seminars and workshops."

It is very clear in chapter after chapter that while spirituality was not her motivating, driving force, it was the Source of her inner strength to persist in the face of sometimes quite violent opposition to her message, and it is at the heart of her warning about the future of sustainable living for all beings. It is also clear that she is quite capable of applying the lessons of ALL of the major religions and spiritual traditions to what is already a deeply compelling question "why do people insist on destroying what ultimately sustains them and all of life on this planet? As she says, this and other questions that stem from it "insist on more than merely a scientific answer; which is why the ecological crisis is both a physical crisis and a spiritual one. Addressing it requires a new level of consciousness, where we understand that we belong to the larger family of life on Earth. If we were able to achieve this consciousness, we'd see that the planet is hurting, and internalize the spiritual values that can help us move to address the wounds. We'd recognize that it should be in our nature to be custodians of the planet and do what's right for the earth and, in the process, for ourselves."

Replenishing the Earth should be spiritual and scientific required reading for all.

## Nate says

Good read. I really like how she ties Christian based religion in with the environmental cause. In my opinion, I experience a lot of matriarchal based societies most convened with these same issues. Also, it's great how she recommends action instead of reaction

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## Tinea says

This is an extended articulation of the ethical values that guide and support the Green Belt Movement and Wangari Maathai herself, in environmental justice and human rights work. The pace is slow and meditative and goes on a bit too long (definitely read *Unbowed* first), but the ideas are powerful.

Environmental justice work is an especially hard kind of activism because the work is often tiny (plant slow-growing trees, grow local food, protect a scrap of land from logging) in the face of catastrophic, global disaster (climate change, desertification, extinction). Politically, the work is exhausting and selfless, and requires an eye for generational consequences instead of immediate results. I feel the need to read spiritual type books to ground my own environmental justice practice even though I don't personally get much from scripture or religion. But it helps me to place myself in all the glory of nature to avoid despair, respect small actions, and connect to an incomprehensibly grand and complex system. I'd lump this book alongside Wendell Berry, Gary Paul Nabhan, or *Belonging: A Culture of Place* by bell hooks.

The 4 values of the Green Belt movement are love for the environment; gratitude and respect for earth's resources; self-empowerment and self-betterment; and the spirit of service and volunteerism. Maathai also dissects the question of needs versus desires from her transnational position crossing constantly across cultures, academia and faith (Maathai is a biologist by training), and worlds of extreme poverty and extreme wealth. She connects at one point healing the earth and being in nature with healing human psyches. It reminded me of how in *Aftershock*, a book on coping with trauma for activists, Patrice Jones suggests that being in nature allows a traumatized mind, which Jones explains is stuck focused inside a traumatic moment, to become part of a larger, whole narrative.

*In the process of helping the earth to heal, we help ourselves. If we see the earth bleeding from the loss of topsoil, biodiversity, or drought and desertification, and if we reclaim or save what is lost ... the planet will help us in our self-healing and indeed survival. When we can eat healthier, nonadulterated food; when we can breathe clean air and drink clean water; when the soil can produce an abundance of vegetables and grains, our own sickness and unhealthy lifestyles become healed. The same values we employ in the service of the earth's replenishment work for us too. We can love ourselves by loving the earth; feel grateful for who we are even as we are grateful for earth's bounty; better ourselves, even as we use that self-empowerment to improve the earth; offer service to ourselves even as we practice volunteerism for the earth. (p.16)*

[For the Great African Reads book club]

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## Mary says

Wow! Not only did Wangari Maathai establish the Green Belt Movement but she also won the Nobel Peace

Prize and is still quite humble about her status. These recognitions are not as significant to her as the continuing work she is doing with the people she serves. The book mixes biblical text and her own interpretation to help us understand why it's so important to take notice of the environmental problems that have come before us and prevent them from continuing in our children and grandchildren's lives. She uses examples of her tribe and other activists to impress on us that the Green Movement is not just about planting trees but planting a whole new way of life. It's a book that will stay in my library for reference.

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### **Anandi says**

Highly recommended for anyone who has an inkling of concern for our planet. It was wonderful hearing Wangarai Waathai speak at St. John's the Divine, her answering my question about who her role models/heroes are and then chatting with her briefly as she signed my copy!

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### **Teren B says**

I had to read this for my english class and I wasn't really a fan of it. Personally I thought it was quite boring and dry. But to others it may seem spiritual and inspirational. I had to force myself to read it only because I had too. I didn't enjoy reading it at all. I will not be reading this again.

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### **Matt says**

Wangari speaks in clear language about the benefits of a nurturing, protective, and symbiotic relationship with the earth. She has a pointed way of writing, and brings up examples of cultures (mainly African, as is the point) and religions, along with some positive activist groups, that have relied on Earth's abundances more closely in the past, and continue to advocate for that reliance that mankind has on Earth. We have a limit to our resources. Not all of the planet's resources should be weighed monetarily. These are some of her mantras. She delves deeply into "the Source" and its relationship to religion and spirituality. She carves a fine, deep niche for spirituality + conservationism + love. It's a remarkable formula, and I'm hooked. I haven't logged this many quotes in a book since Terry Tempest Williams--Maathai's close friend, as it were.

Recommended if you are interested in nature, activism, and treating the earth as our mother.

If this sounds like treehugger mumbo-jumbo, you might want to steer clear. I, for one, find power in her words. A truly powerful Nobel laureate.

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Quotes:

"We can love ourselves by loving the earth." (17)

"people who are religious should be closest to the planet and in the forefront of recognizing that it needs healing" (18)

"It may require a conscious act of some of us saying no in addition to finding other, less destructive ways to say yes." (23)

"a worldview that's all too common: that there are always more trees to be cut, more land to be utilized, more fish to be caught, more water to dam or tap, and more minerals to be mined or prospected for. It's this attitude toward the earth, that it has unlimited capacity, and the valuing of resources for what they can buy, not what they do, that has created so many of the deep ecological wounds visible across the world." (43)

"Whereas in the past the community could be defined by how it shared the bounty of the land with itself and visitors, now it is disorientated and disconnected from the land and the customs that physically, environmentally, and morally sustained them." (54)

"Even though the item in question may be small, or its impact apparently benign, it may be part of a larger chain with much greater consequences." (68)

"Nature--and in particular, the wild--feeds our spirit, and a direct encounter with it is vital in helping us appreciate and care for it. For unless we see it, smell it, or touch it, we tend to forget it, and our souls wither." (89)

"nature is not something set apart, with or against which we react. It's not a place we fear as something within which we might lose our humanity or, conversely, a place where we might gain perspective and simplicity away from the corruption and treachery of the court or the city. It is, instead, something within which human beings are enfolded." (94)

"it seems that only when people feel a basal level of comfort are they able to examine the costs of their lifestyle" (114)

"We aren't material beings; we are filled with spirit." (115)

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## **Marit says**

A straightforward book that details Maathai's understanding and experience with the role of spirituality in the environmental and conservation movement. This is a thought book, not a research-based one or even an exhaustive philosophical treatise. Maathai bases much of her logical progression of the tenets of important spiritual values on her experience leading the Green Belt Movement. Few of the concepts stood out to me strongly, perhaps because I've gone over them in my own life and thinking already, but there were a few pointers she had about working with faith communities and embracing the inherent and needed spirituality of the environmental movement that I found thought-provoking or illuminating.

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## **Susan Steed says**

I'm such a big fan of Wangari Maathai, living in a political culture where spirituality is a dirty word, I love this book where she draws on many different religions and cultures, as lessons and guidance on what we can do with our time on earth.

Loads in this book, I found this interpretation of the Genesis stories fascinating;

"By placing the different concepts of domination and protection next to each other in the Hebrew scriptures, the scribes let humans know that we have the free will to destroy or tend, protect or subdue, act as dominators or as conservers and custodians. The consequences will be ours. Indeed, it seems to me that the mystery of our dual identity as both the summit and yet the most vulnerable of God's creation is literally laid out on the page side by side, in the twin creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. It is as if from the outset, the writers of the bible trusted the reader or listener to understand that both were valid expression of what it meant to be human."

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### **David says**

Another good read from the middle ground of the environmental debate.

pg. 43 - "The destruction of the environment is driven by an insatiable craving for more."

pg. 71 - interesting thought - if humans became extinct, no other species would die out because we were not there to sustain them.

pg. 72 - free will to destroy or tend, protect or subdue, act as dominators or as conservers/custodians.

pg. 75 - hell and heaven on earth

pg. 101 - looking at the world through acquisitive, materialistic eyes (Matthew 6.22,23)

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### **Katrina Dreamer says**

For me, this book didn't tell me much I didn't already know, but I greatly respect and admire what the author has done to advance the environmental movement.

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### **Nellie LW says**

It is a very practical book with real examples, quite informative and inspiring. I would quote the whole book if I could. At least I finally got to know how she came up with the humming bird story.

Let me be a humming bird and do the best I can.

A must read for

Those who want to heal the earth,

Those who want to know how the earth was,

Those who want to know where to start replenishing,

Those who are spiritual, religious or believe in the source

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### **Kim Buchanan says**

"Wangari Maathai is the founder of the Green Belt Movement, which has planted over 45 million trees across Kenya since 1977. In 2002, she was elected to Kenya's Parliament, and in 2003, she was appointed deputy minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, posts she held until 2007. Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. In 2009, she was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary, General Ban Ki-moon." (from the cover)

Started reading this in preparation for my sermon series last fall on Earth-care. I was drawn in by the "spiritual values" part of the sub-title. I think Maathai is exactly right: all issues that grow out of unfettered consumerism (poverty and earth-care among them) are spiritual issues.

In this book, Maathai reflects on the four core spiritual values of the Green Belt Movement: (1) Love for the environment (2) Gratitude and respect for Earth's resources. (3) Self-empowerment and self-betterment. (4) The spirit of service and volunteerism.

Maathai's vision is immensely hopeful to me--particularly because she has her eyes wide open to the spiritual darkness which has created the circumstances in which Earth has come to be so ill. Being grounded in the darkness at the same time offering practical solutions to create light--very, very helpful.

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