

Today is Easter Sunday, the day when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For those of us not familiar with that tradition, Christians believe Jesus was crucified on Good Friday, and rose from the dead after three days on what is now Easter Sunday.

Today is also the seventh day of Passover, which commemorates the Israelites' escape from Egyptian slavery and is observed with ritualized feast of the Seder, consisting of symbolic foods for everyone at the table, and many cups of wine for the adults.

The overlap between the two holidays doesn't happen every year, but it is not unusual, nor coincidental. Indeed, Jesus' Last Supper is thought to have been a Passover Seder.

In Jewish tradition, Passover is a time for family - as they gather to retell their ancient story of slavery in Egypt and the Exodus to freedom.

Easter Sunday has also been a time for families in most Christian lineages. I was raised Methodist, and Easter Sunday meant church, and a special Sunday dinner, and an Easter egg hunt.

I must confess I don't remember any of those church services, or the meals, but I do remember the Easter egg hunts.

There are some interesting correspondences with Passover and this business of the Easter eggs. One of the foods on the Seder plate is a hard-boiled egg – symbolizing both the festival sacrifice of Biblical times and the coming of spring. And toward the end of the meal, the children search high and low for the *afikomen*, a symbolic piece of matzo hidden by the adults with the intention of keeping the children awake and alert during the Passover proceedings. The finder of the matzo is typically rewarded with money or candy.

So that all kind of makes sense... but what's up with the Easter Bunny? Where did that come from?

That came from the German Lutherans, where the "Easter Hare" originally played the role of a judge, evaluating whether children were good or disobedient at the start of the season of Eastertide. Sort of a fuzzy little Santa Claus.

The hare was a popular motif in medieval church art. And it was widely believed in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds that hares were hermaphrodites, that they were of both sexes. The idea that a hare could reproduce without loss of virginity led to an association with the Virgin Mary, with hares sometimes occurring in illuminated manuscripts and Northern European paintings of the Virgin and Christ Child.

Eggs, like rabbits and hares, are fertility symbols from antiquity. Since birds lay eggs and rabbits and hares give birth to large litters in the early spring, these became symbols of the rising fertility of the earth.

So there's some pretty pagan stuff in the Easter mix, but we knew that. The way a number of Christian holidays are celebrated, most notably Easter and Christmas, include many adaptations of religious practices from pre-Christian Europe. The very word Easter comes from the name of a Germanic goddess – Ostara – whose festival was celebrated in springtime.

When we start to dig - even just a little - we uncover all kinds of things. There are threads from many times and places woven together into new fabrics, layers and layers of it, going back centuries.

Just to the south of here stands the tiny church called El Santuario de Chimayo. Inside that church is a round pit, the source of tierra bendita, "holy dirt" that is believed to have healing

powers. That church is apparently built on the site of what was once a hot spring that was sacred to the Tewa people. The healing hot spring dried up, leaving the healing earth.

That healing place had long been known and used by the Tewas prior to the Spanish occupation of the Santa Cruz valley. The name Chimayó derives from the Tewa words Tsi Mayoh, meaning "Hill of the East." This hill rises just above Chimayó and is a prominent landmark seen from all directions. According to anthropologist – and Tewa elder - Alfonso Ortiz, it was one of the four sacred hills in the Tewa cosmology.

Layers upon layers.

Just two days ago on Good Friday, modern Catholic pilgrims walked the road to Chimayo, seeking healing... like the Tewa before them. A more ancient tradition was hidden and kept alive, right under the noses of the Spanish conquerors.

Nothing ever really dies, it just changes form and goes on.

Archaeology as a discipline concerns itself with the physical evidence left by previous humans, and attempts to discover what their lives were like from scraps of bone and pottery and the like. Archaeology is a branch of anthropology, the study of humans. It is concerned with the past activity of humans, but where does the past end and the present begin?

When we encounter things like Easter, or Chimayo, we are compelled to exercise what might be called archaeologies of the Spirit, to uncover the layers, to tease out the threads of the past so that we may understand them.

There's a word for this. Syncretism.

Syncretism is the combining of different, often seemingly contradictory beliefs, while melding practices and traditions. Religious syncretism is the blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions.

Take Unitarian Universalism. We began as Christians, became Unitarian Christians, then post-Christians, layered first with transcendentalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, then humanism in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. We merged with Universalism, and have recently become a home for religious refugees of many kinds.

There are those escaping oppressive authoritarian religious expressions. There are those whose religious and spiritual identities are more complex, what I like to call the hyphenated ones, like UU Pagans, or UU Buddhists. There are those who come from blended families of different religious backgrounds and seek a religious community that can embrace and support their diversity.

Our task is to somehow weave all these threads together into a whole cloth of some kind. We have just begun this project. We really are in our infancy as religions go.

And sometimes I think we aren't so much a religion as a sort of meta-religion. But whatever we are, it serves us to be familiar with all the layers of our complexity.

The archaeologies of the spirit are not limited to religions or holidays, but also include the archaeology of the soul and self. I use the word soul here not as something that is independent of the flesh and capable of surviving death, but as the essence of one's being and identity. Something that arises as a unique and never-to-be-repeated expression of our individual body-mind, which is itself a unique expression of the particular place and time we are a part of.

The archaeology of the soul might be the most important, to uncover the threads and layers and roots within. Because many of us are a mix of all those things I mention above. We're complicated. Combinations. Blends. Maybe even a little lumpy in spots.

I can use my own experience as an example. I was nominally raised Methodist, although it was really more of a sort of generic Protestantism that was practiced on US Army bases in the 1950's and early 1960's.

I rejected all that at the age of 13 and became a Buddhist. My father, bless him, didn't bat an eye, and merely told me to go practice it. I remain what I call a free-range Buddhist to this day.

My father died when I was 16, and I became deeply angry at the God I didn't believe in. I carried that anger and that wounding until my early 30's, when I forgave that same God. That I don't believe in.

Shortly after that, I got on the Red Road, the path of the Sun Dance, the sacred pipe, and the sweat lodge. Some twenty years later, I was directed to take the heart of those teachings to my people.

The vehicle for that turned out to be Unitarian Universalism, and here I am with you.

I relate all this not because I think my story is special in any way – as a matter of fact, it was pretty messy and not at all edifying for many years – but because I wanted to set the stage for our excavations.

It wasn't until I started to dig that I realized how much influence that science fiction had had on my spiritual life. It wasn't until I'd dug a while that I realized how many of my spiritual teachers

had been women. And I've always had a sense of being deeply connected to the physical world, and that is grounded in a semi-feral childhood spent wandering in woods and back-lots, along train tracks and creeks and alley ways.

It's amazing what you discover when you start digging. What you've forgotten, or was so painful you covered it up. What is so fundamental to your being that the reasons for it are simply lost in the mists of time. Where your wounds are, and where your passion really lies.

Now, this kind of resurrection of the past has a few guidelines, and I like to share them with you.

First, step back and take a look at the big picture, the larger story of your life. Take some time to write that bigger context out in outline form. You don't have to get every detail, just the broad strokes. One way to do it is just list the years, starting with the current year, and write down a few sentences that describe significant events for each one.

Second, work from the known, or what you think is known, to the unknown. Work from the present to the past. Delve into each year in more detail, just allowing your artifacts to accumulate.

Third, overlook nothing. What seems insignificant may or may not be. Do not attempt to impose meaning on things at first. Allow meaning and patterns to emerge on their own.

Fourth, take your time. The archaeology of the soul moves at its own pace, and cannot be hurried. Sometimes progress may seem stalled. And revelation will suddenly illuminate your life when you least expect it.

And last but not least, remember that like Easter, we each have complex histories, layered and syncretic.

In his great poem, *Song of Myself*, Walt Whitman wrote, “Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.”

Which is probably why you’re here. Because there are many places where your multitudes and complexity are not recognized, are not ok. This is not one of those places. It’s ok to be home to multitudes and seemingly contradictory things.

The Easter story is usually framed as one of resurrection. And it is that. But it is also part of a larger, older story of endless rebirth. Of the cycles of the seasons, and the cycles of human life and culture. Resurrection upon resurrection for millennia.

Not only are you welcome here in all your messy glory, with your contradictions and complexity, you are welcome – no, invited - to reinvent yourself if you so choose.

Because the Easter story is also one of transmutation, of changing from one form into another, and never really dying, because the unity itself goes on and on, and we are part of that oneness. The Easter story is powerful precisely because it resonates and amplifies that larger truth, and that also resonates with the deep truth of our own stories.

Whitman closes *Song of Myself* with these lines, which perhaps as come as close as any to expressing the ineffable beauty of this:

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains  
of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,

I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.  
The last scud of day holds back for me,  
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the  
    shadow'd wilds,  
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.  
I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,  
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.  
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood.  
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.