

Upwelling

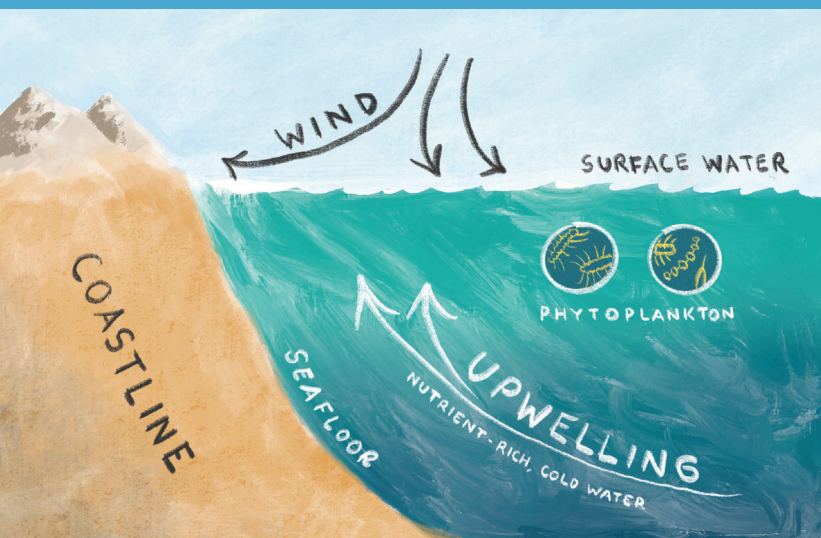
Connections and Reflections from The BTS Center

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 2

Autumn / 2022

Welcome to *Upwelling*, The BTS Center's occasional print newsletter. We are delighted to connect with you in this way, and we hope that when you are finished reading, you might pass your copy along to someone else who might be interested.

We've chosen to name this publication *Upwelling*, which is quite a specific ecological term in coastal ecosystems such as our own, where winds blow strongly and frequently across the surface of the ocean near where it meets the land. These winds push the warmer surface waters further out to sea, allowing space for deep, colder, nutrient-rich water to rise to the surface, in turn providing sustenance for a multitude of small creatures and allowing for a complex, diverse ecosystem to thrive. This process is known as upwelling.



For those of us awake to spiritual metaphor, upwelling speaks of the Spirit which moves across our own beings — agitating, provoking, inviting — preventing us from stagnating and pushing us to make room for new life to arise. At The BTS Center, we think of the work we are offering as a kind of upwelling, existing at the confluence of spirituality and ecology, catalyzing spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership. We hope that you will join us in this journey, adding your own holy movement to this spiritual ecosystem.

An Interview with REBECCA KNEALE GOULD

Rebecca Kneale Gould, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and co-directs the Philosophy, Religion and Environment focus. She is the author of At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America. While on sabbatical, she is currently serving as the Scholar in Residence at The BTS Center. Rebecca embraces the liberal Jewish roots of her multi-religious family tree, leads a monthly women's Hebrew chant group, and is active in various interfaith spiritual direction initiatives. She lives in Vermont with her wife and small flock of rescue sheep.

Ash Temin:

What drew you into the intersection between religion and ecology or environment and spirituality?

Rebecca Kneale Gould:

I've always found my spirituality to be rooted in the natural world for as long as I can remember. When I was in college, I was studying religion, and my first serious piece of writing was my senior thesis where I was essentially asking: "How do we imagine our way forward, theologically, in the face of nuclear war and possible global destruction?" (all of which seemed quite imminent at the time and now is resurfacing in terms of the war in Ukraine). It wasn't too many years after I graduated from college, when the very first public statements about global climate change were coming out, which nobody was really paying attention to. So, I began taking this intellectual path, which emerged from having already contemplated what it means for humans to be taking on destructive powers that formerly had been ascribed to divine or natural forces. And then, when I decided to go to grad school, I asked myself: Could I actually convince people that I could study religion and ecology together? At the time, "religion and ecology" was a very nascent field and so I really had to cut my own path. But that was really good for me!

AT:

I'm curious to know how you encountered The BTS Center.

RKG:

Well, I do think divine intervention may have had something to do with it! But more specifically, in the summer of 2021, Ben Yosua-Davis had reached out to me through my friend

(Continued, page 2)

(Continued, from page 1)

and his former professor, Dr. Laurel Kearns [who is a leader in the field of religion and ecology] who had suggested that he talk to me. So, as I engaged in conversations with Ben about some of the goals and methods connected to the work of the Research Collaborative, I became very interested in what larger questions were being asked and how he was trying to frame his research. After every conversation, I would think: "Wow, it is really interesting that this essentially theological space is doing this kind of [ethnographic] research work, and I love research and never get enough time to do it." But my larger response was also something of a ministerial/ rabbinic response. In my very first conversation with Ben, I found myself articulating out loud what has been brewing within me for some time which is: "How are we called to serve in this moment?" This is an ancient, perennial question, of course, but it is also a very particular one given the moment of climate crisis that is upon us. I came to see that this question, which I had been pondering for a while, was very much in line with the questions that The BTS Center seemed to be asking. I had already studied a variety of religious environmental groups as a scholar, and while I was paying attention to what was being accomplished in terms of advocacy and action, I was always much, much more interested in people's interior stories — how they were putting together what it meant to be a Jew or a certain kind of Christian and to care about the environment and to see those two things as deeply linked. I found that The BTS Center really seemed to be asking these kinds of deep questions and to be working in a different kind of way; not ignoring religiously-grounded activism or the "greening" of religious buildings, but digging more deeply into the questions of why we are in the place we are in as a culture and imagining ways to live differently. I have found that there's something refreshing and actually really spiritually satisfying, to be using my scholarly self, but in a way that is in direct service to a spiritual organization.



AT:
Have there been big surprises for you working with The BTS Center for these months?

RKG:
I don't know if it's surprising, but what I appreciate is the culture of gratitude that this organization intentionally cultivates. There's a real culture of listening and appreciation. There's a real sense of teamwork and mutual respect. And talking about despair . . . when you're actually working on something as vast as the climate crisis with a group of

people who are spiritually grounded, and very creative, then you feel like, yes, you still might go into that despair space, but you're together with a group of people who are actively looking reality in the face, which is hard, but it's exactly what we have to do right now. There's great challenge in focusing primarily on climate change in your work. And there's great opportunity, as well.

AT:
I realize that you're still in the midst of the work with us, but I'm wondering if you have a sense, even at this point, of how your time at The BTS Center might impact your work going forward?

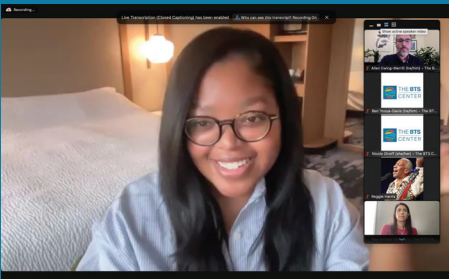
RKG:
I can't imagine not staying in relationship with The BTS Center in some way. And I also think that my work with The BTS Center will continue to inform both my teaching and my research. For instance, I really would like my students to engage with Rob Hopkins' book [*From What Is to What If: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future We Want*] because I think it's so positive. I think my students need to cultivate a "from what is to what if" mentality. I think the work on imagination that we just did for Convocation 2022 will help me to be a little bit more intentional about using language of creativity and imagination in my work. So, I'm hopeful that where I've gotten inspiration to respond to our current crises in ways other than despair, that I pass on that energy to them. I can't have this kind of experience and not have it affect my teaching. More broadly, it also has felt a little like a coming home, because the deep questions that The BTS Center is asking are the questions that I care about the most.

AT:
How does your spiritual practice inform the work that you do? And how did you come into the practice of chanting?

RKG:
I think of chanting as a form of prayer and contemplation. I've always felt the need for contemplative, quiet time. Like many people, I'm an introvert who "fakes" being an extrovert, and I have to get away to really restore. In terms of chant, the credit for my current work goes to Rabbi Shefa Gold who does truly innovative work in creating chants that draw directly from sacred texts, many of which are shared by Jews and Christians alike, such as from the Psalms or Isaiah. At a time when I really needed it, I enrolled in *Kol Zimra*, Rabbi Shefa's two-year chant leadership training program. And although it was about chant, the training was also very much about leadership and giving back to the community. And so now I lead a regular chant group of women who meet once a month. Chant can open up the meaning of [sacred] texts in various ways. But even if those texts aren't familiar, they speak to eternal human issues about connection and loneliness, and deep hope, and despair, and trust in something greater that can hold us as individuals and communities — all of these themes come up in [Rabbi Gold's] chants, in large part because the themes are already there to be found, in the sacred texts themselves and often, also, in the patterns of nature itself. I find that if I'm feeling out of sorts, I can walk outside and chant and it really does change something.

Convocation 2022

Convocation 2022 took place on October 6 & 7 — an inspiring, challenging, energizing time of learning, community, and respite. Over the course of two days, we led seven different online sessions: worship, preaching, communal song, speakers, workshops, affinity groups, and even a live recording of a podcast session. From start to finish, Convocation 2022 included profound sharing from scholars and activists and artists and authors and musicians and organizers and spiritual leaders.



One participant writes, *"I left invigorated, inspired with so many ideas, questions, and next steps to explore with church leadership. I found concrete next action steps in the questions being raised."*

We are proud to continue Convocation, a 117-year legacy of Bangor Theological Seminary, and to continue to explore new pathways for engaging the most crucial ideas of our time. The imagination and creativity that we witnessed at Convocation 2022, from participants and presenters alike, continues to inspire us as we plan new programs and continue to live into our mission of catalyzing spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership in our climate-changed world.



DECEMBER PAUSE

At The BTS Center, we are thinking deeply about the ecological nature of our work, not just in the subject matter we engage but also in the ways in which we do so as a team and as a community. We are committed to deepening our work in ways which align with the rhythms of nature (of which, of course, we are a part!). With that in our minds and hearts, The BTS Center team will be taking a December pause from programming as an experiment in contemplative work cycles.

Though we won't be offering much public programming in December, we'll be using the time to metabolize the year that has been, to connect with each other and with new ideas, and to integrate the learnings from our past programs with our hopes for what is to come. We know that seasons of rest are essential to new life, and so we hope you might also pause along with us, in whatever way feels right to you. We look forward to sharing how this time of intention unfolds for us and to hearing what might manifest for our community also in this time.

Adaptive Mind

Over the course of two days in early September, The BTS Center staff was joined by a cohort of "fellows" for the first of four training sessions in the Adaptive Mind, a project developed by social scientist and researcher Dr. Susanne Moser. This in-person training, which took place at The BTS Center office and in the garden of the Maine Jewish Museum, focused on grappling with our climate grief and understanding our roles as leaders in a rapidly changing world. As Dr. Moser writes:

"Unprecedented levels of uncertainty and transformation related to climate change is the outlook for human communities and ecosystems. Those who are called on to lead and support communities through this change – including spiritual leaders and religious professionals like yourselves – may benefit from insights, training, and support to do so well. The Adaptive Mind Project aims to understand what you and others may need to do so, and to develop tools and resources to support you in your work."

The same group will gather with Dr. Moser and her team three more times over the course of the next six months in order to continue building skills in leadership and resilience. We look forward to living more deeply into this work with honesty and vulnerability.

Photo credits: Dawn LaRochelle



PLEASE SAVE THE DATE FOR THESE UPCOMING PROGRAMS

EcoPreacher Cohort

- November 2022 – November 2023
- One Thursday per month
1:00 - 2:15 pm, Eastern (Online)
- First session: November 17, 2022

Lament with Earth

- Five seasonal gatherings for community in our eco-grief
- Next gathering: Thursday, December 1, 2022
7:00 - 8:15 pm, Eastern (Online)

Committed to Listen: MLK Day 2023

- Monday, January 16, 2023
12:15 pm, Eastern (Online)

Refugia Faith: A Public Conversation with author Debra Rienstra

- Thursday, February 16, 2023
7:00 - 8:30 pm, Eastern (Online)

For more information on any of these programs, please visit thebtscenter.org



THE **BTS** CENTER

97 India Street
Portland, ME 04101
207.774.5212
thebtscenter.org

Check out our new podcast!



Listen and subscribe at
climatechanged.podbean.com

You are invited.

As we continue to focus on spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world, we are grateful for our many friends, program participants, partners, and donors, and we extend a warm invitation to join in this work.

- Visit thebtscenter.org and explore Upcoming Programs.
- Check out our Leadership Commons, Video Library, and Earthbound Practices — all at thebtscenter.org — for resources you can use within your faith community or for your own personal growth.
- Support the work of The BTS Center with a financial gift.
- Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

Cover Illustration by David Bruggink, 2022

Our Mission — To catalyze spiritual imagination with enduring wisdom for transformative faith leadership.