

EXPANDING THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY

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HOW MIGHT WE unlock hope in an expansive spirit of democracy for present and future generations in this time of upheaval?

Can we own our past and create a more equitable society, just economics, and inclusive politics? May we ask forgiveness and restore compassion? Can we recognize that democracy rests on peace, not violence and bloated military budgets? In short, how can we rediscover and expand the spiritual roots of democracy?

As these roots lie in the hope of living with inclusive representation in government, with equitable participation in society, and with fairness of opportunity for education and jobs, our challenge is how to make this viable. This will be impossible without a recognition that **humans are interwoven with each other and with the larger kinship of life** – interconnected and interdependent. This is because **relationality is at the heart of life**. In this spirit, an authentic democracy affirms the inherent dignity of humans and the intrinsic worth of nature.

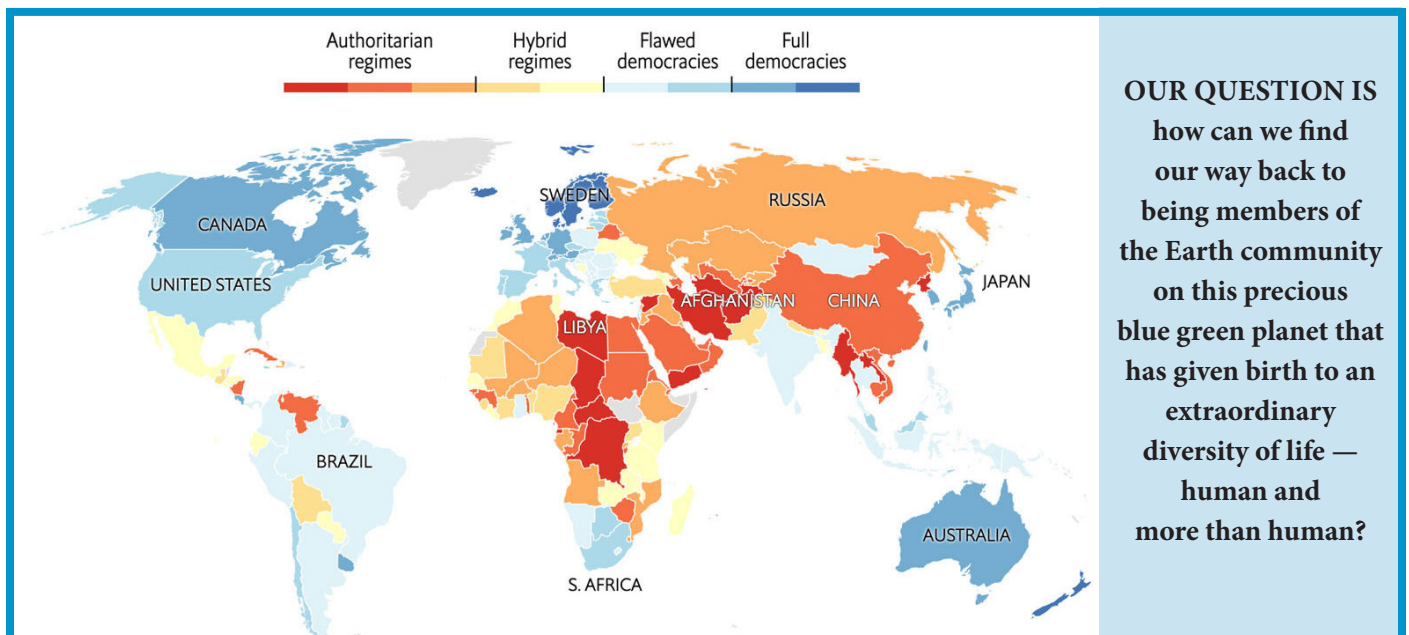
Our task, then, is to enhance the wellbeing of both humans and nature as a basis for a truly comprehensive democracy ... In this search to expand what community is, we might first examine some historic documents that led to our democracy today, imperfect as it is. These are noteworthy to build on, but we need to enlarge their potential.

* Greek democracy — limited decision-making to an elite and excluded others, such as enslaved people.

* *Magna Carta* (1215) — began to limit monarchical rule, but privileged the aristocracy

* *American Declaration of Independence* (1776) — says all men are created equal, but slavery was enshrined in the social code

* *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* — equality, liberty, and fraternity were noble aspirations but not realized in the colonial and post-colonial periods



Where do we look for aspiration and inspiration to be reunited with the spiritual roots of our democratic yearnings?

*We must **begin with indigenous traditions** that have strong cosmovisions celebrating the kinship of all life forms and communitarian social ethics that emphasize a shared common good

*We must **examine global statements of the last forty years** pointing to a broader spirit of democracy that includes both people and planet. We can **start with the UN World Charter of Nature (1982)**

*Another document we may cite is **the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (Earth Day 2010)**

What distinguishes the World Charter for Nature, the Earth Charter, and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth is that they are planetary in scope and involve the expansion of rights to include all people as well as nature itself

*The Papal encyclical **Laudato Si' (2010)** is a letter that calls for an integral ecology that brings together the “cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor”

*A broader context for these documents and movements is our growing recognition that **we have emerged as part of a universe story ...**

**“Humanity is part of a vast evolving Universe.
Earth, our home is alive, with a unique community of life.”**

This sensibility offers a narrative that illustrates how all life originated in the cosmic explosion of stars where the elements arose. Moreover, **we humans have a common origin arising out of Africa**, leading to migration around the planet, and the ongoing formation of unique cultures, complex societies and varied political systems .

Can we dream again amid such unraveling of life and communities?

Can we revive and expand the spirit of democracy for our time, for our challenges? **Can we draw on** the great movements that have preceded us, such as the abolition of slavery and the fight for civil rights, women’s rights, and gay rights?

Can we call on new spiritual

depths that acknowledge the great mystery of being that contains us all? **Can we awaken** a fresh reverence for the dynamic complexity of life in which we are embedded? **Such a dream may be our best hope.**

