

Story has the ability, if we observe and listen, to share with us a nearly 14 billion year old cosmic birthing, and to help us see where we fit into the fabric of that same unfolding Story. We are all a “part and parcel” of the cosmic essence, sharing the same DNA with every other living being, and thus sharing the same Story. Midrash Hane’elam offers this observation:

*Every human is comprised of the qualities of every other being on the planet. We are not made solely in the “Image of God” but just as much in the image of all that surrounds us, stones, plants, animals, the galactic beings, as well as in the image of all the chaos and ultimate clarity that went into creating our universe.<sup>1</sup>*

Story has reinforced my understanding of the cosmos as a single, continually unfolding multiform event, one that continues to manifest primordial energy in new and mysterious ways. What we must understand is that we are not here to control nature for our own benefit, but to engage co-operatively with nature in a compassionate manner.

In the Neolithic period,

*there was from the beginning a mystique of participation in the cosmological order of the universe thought of not as mechanism, but as a vast dramatic enterprise of interacting spiritual forces, all expressions of the abiding presence of the Great Mother deity. Humans were expected not simply to take from nature but to enter into the productive processes of nature.<sup>2</sup>*

Where some old theologies may have deemed that everything in the cosmos was produced by the hand of God, and that God's will is being done, newer theologies, have a different focus. Often drawing from ancient traditions, they invite us to serve as co-creators during our earthly stay, thus bringing more challenge and joy into our existence. In his book, *Wrestling with the Prophets*, Matthew Fox speaks of one remarkable scientist who knew the nature of our relationship with our cosmos and how *"Cosmology awakens our awe of being here."*<sup>3</sup> .

*In my opinion it is no accident that Einstein was a Jew and thus had imbibed the Jewish spirituality from Wisdom literature, which taught that the "spirit of the Lord fills the entire universe." Jewish cosmology teaches that the universe is one and that we are part of it and can know our place in it.*<sup>4</sup>

But just maybe we need to learn to rely not on any particular spiritual tradition, but on our own sense of what needs to be done, to listen *individually* to what our cosmos is telling us. As Kaballalist Eruvin in the Babylonian Talmud puts it, *"Religion is nice, but even without all that divine revelatory hullabaloo, the Creator left us enough information in the earth about how to live in balance."*<sup>5</sup>

I believe we are capable of sharing the cosmos and allowing creation to continue to unfold in an ordered, meaningful and noble fashion. Maybe we are indeed in the eighth day of the created order as one religionist wrote. *"What does God do all day long?"* Meister Eckhart asks.

He answers, “*God gives birth. From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.*”<sup>6</sup>

This process is called cosmogenesis. Brianne Swimme and Thomas Berry discuss this concept in “the Universe Story.”

*The most significant change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it seems, is our passage from a sense of cosmos to cosmogenesis. Only now do we begin to understand that this story of the Earth is also the story of the human, as well as the story of every being of Earth. The final benefit of this story might be to enable the human community to become present to the larger Earth community in a mutually enhancing manner. ...the goal is to read the story taking place all around us.*<sup>7</sup>

The fear is that most of us are still operating on far fewer spiritual cylinders than are needed to “read the story” and then be capable of motoring this universe in a compassionate manner. In Matthew’s account of the resurrection it is an earthquake and an angel that allows the women to see the opened tomb and to realize what had happened. Earthquakes are Mother Nature’s way of coming back to life in a way that grabs our attention with a display of “brute force.” She can also do it gently by insisting that a flower grow through a concrete sidewalk. Having experienced and survived the flood brought to North Carolina by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, I am acutely aware of the “brute force” doctrine, and more in touch with what our cosmos is trying to tell us. Ivan demonstrated in ways of a more personal nature that I am still processing “how Story has affected my life.”

In spite of a dam to send water away from our 4000 square foot warehouse apartment/studio, and a trench to guide water underground around the structure, the raging waters knocked down a 200 year old

hemlock tree to change the course of the “Big Ivy River,” normally a trickling creek. My wife Jini and I were inside with flashlights trying to save a few items when waters came rushing into the building.

I screamed at her to leave as the concrete foundation wall collapsed in my studio, and I ran out as the furniture crashed a few feet behind me. Jini went in water over her waist when she stepped in the now collapsed trench, and only the aging Lab Yosa swimming in front kept her from being swept down the river. I pulled her from the hole and pushed her on the bank as a tree limb crashed into my leg, and after spinning around, I fell toward the bank and she grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the swirling waters.

It didn't matter that meteorologists had predicted a crest the following evening, because at 1:00am, the cosmos decided that rain needed to be dumped in large quantity and move quickly down a mountain in North Carolina, and nothing man-made was going to stop it. As we sat and watched five feet of water spin around for an hour inside the warehouse destroying everything we had, until a bridge finally snapped in two to release the waters, the message from the cosmos was quite clear. And regardless of our attempts to manipulate our physical environments the message is always the same. “I will live.”

Sitting beside this scene in a driving rain storm, there was little to do but pray. For me, prayer is not asking for anything, it is seeking my place

in the unfolding mystery of the cosmic order. Gabriel Marcel “*suggests that we postindustrial adults become so programmed to solving problems that we lose our capacity to wonder and become ecstatic at mysteries. A mystery, on the other hand, is something in which I find myself caught up and whose essence is therefore not to be before me in its entirety.*”<sup>8</sup> I find myself, as I did sitting beside the river that night, caught up in the mystery of primordial energy unfolding the story of creation around me, and am at times in awe of its power, as I was during that time of the flood.

It would seem we may be cursed by our oft times myopic anthropocentrism —namely, the conviction that we humans are the center of the universe. Maybe it is still possible to promote primarily human matters as being of ultimate concern without arrogantly claiming to be the sole or even featured species in the cosmos. As members of an immense web of life, we are interconnected with all forms of life in the universe.

Like it or not, we must begin with our very human possibilities *and* limitations. Kaballistic teachings remind us that our task is great, too great for us as individuals, but not to be ignored:

*Don't take the burdens of the world's problems upon yourself. Don't ignore them either. As Rabbi Tar'fon put it: "The work is not upon you to complete, but neither are you exempt from trying."*<sup>9</sup>

We are indeed merely stewards of the gifts bequeathed us, be they spiritual, intellectual or economic resources. And as stewards we

are more than brokers. During our time of possession, we stewards have an opportunity to handle life with a more creative touch.

We are not sole and ultimate determiners of history, even though we like to think of ourselves in that way. But we are not pawns either. We are collaborators. Our role in the unfolding of the cosmos is to be not only “Takers,” as Ishmael referred to us, but “Leavers” in the spirit of a long ago people, participants and co-creators if you will of this “eighth day of creation.” For “Takers” to become “Leavers” will be difficult.

*But it's not going to be easy for the Takers. It's going to be hard as hell for them to give up, because what they're doing is right, and they have to go on doing it even if it means destroying the world and mankind with it. Giving it up would mean... It would mean all along they'd been wrong. It would mean they'd never known how to rule the world. It would mean... relinquishing their pretensions to godhood. It would mean spitting out the fruit of that tree and giving the rule of the world back to the gods.<sup>10</sup>*

It seems possible that our species indeed needs to come to quickly acknowledge and understand that it is part of an unfolding *spiritual* story, and that it must direct its energies toward a successful outcome for that story, to “enter into the productive processes of nature.” I believe we are all indispensable, that we are all part of “the plan.”

In “*The Universe Story*” we are told that,

*The vibrations and fluctuations in the universe are the music that drew forth the galaxies and stars and their powers of weaving elements into life. Our human responsibility as one voice among so many throughout the universe is to develop our capacities to listen as incessantly as the hovering hydrogen atoms, as profoundly as our primal ancestors and their*

*faithful descendents in today's indigenous peoples. The adventure of the universe depends on our capacity to listen.* <sup>11</sup>

I once heard a symphony orchestra perform a lengthy piece, and took note of the man sitting in the back simply turning page after page intently and not contributing. But twenty or so minutes into the piece, he adjusted his tuxedo and picked up a small triangle. As the orchestra reached a crescendo, he tapped the triangle once, and then sat back down, his “contribution” finished for the evening.

That “ping” may have seemed insignificant to many listeners, but in the mind of the composer, something would be lost without that moment. Each of us is that “ping,” and this world needs our imagination and attention and works to enable the unfolding story of creation to continue to manifest with our survival as a species. Hildegard of Bingen speaks of the music, “*God, I am your opus. Before the beginning of time, already then, I was in your mind.*”<sup>12</sup>

There was a story once in a Tennessee newspaper about a young girl about to step into the tub when the new hot water heater exploded behind a nearby wall. Without anything to cover her, she ran outside. Her parents gathered up the other children, then contacted help to battle the blaze. They didn't realize the older child was missing at first. When they could not find her, volunteers searched through the night until the hounds led them back to the charred ruins of the house. There, beneath the porch, the little girl was asleep, wrapped in an old grain sack.

*“Why did you run away?” her father asked. “I didn’t want to live where things like that can happen!” she replied, with tears in her eyes. “But you came back,” said her mother. “When I got to the top of the hills, I could see there was no place else to go,” said the girl, “Just now this is the only home I have.”*

We must come to the realization we, too, are approaching the top of a similar hill, and that Earth is “just now the only home we have,” and decide whether our home is one we will cherish and care for, or whether it will be destroyed, possibly along with us, by our continued neglect. But the earth and our entire cosmos is more than “just a home.” Matthew Fox reminds us, *“The universe and the ecosystems are not just our home; they are sources of delight and awe, of wonder and intoxication. Therefore, they are the matrix for a renewed mysticism, for to enter these mysteries, as cosmologists are now naming them, is a mystical experience.”*<sup>13</sup>

It must be our shared spiritual vision, and task, to cherish, humbly and gratefully, this home we have been given, and make ourselves more spiritually capable of living fully and responsibly in it. As we learn in *The Universe Story*, *“There is eventually only one story, the story of the universe.”*<sup>14</sup> And further, that *“The well-being of the Earth is primary. The well-being of the Human is derivative.”*<sup>15</sup>

There is an order of reality present—which calls for our trust and reverence, and for our faith and commitment. For those who would

listen, our cosmos has a solemn message, “listen to me and I will teach you.” Thomas Berry offers the following advice,

*Our best procedure might be to consider that we need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.*<sup>16</sup>

Whether we continue to survive as a species is open for debate, and it depends in large part on whether we are willing to listen, and to accept the teachings of our cosmos. In the most mundane portion of our daily schedule we can discover great wonder and unveil incredible mystery. We need to engage our exploding, evolving universe right now, and every day. We must investigate the process of becoming in all thoroughness, lest we mistake for primitive what is a natural and necessary unfolding of the cosmic mystery before us, and for natural what is actually part of the artificiality of what some would call “man-made progress.”

It has been said that “*The supreme reality of our time is the vulnerability of our planet.*”<sup>17</sup> We have the ability to postpone global extinction through the practice of compassion, both toward our cosmos and each other. This is the very essence of Via Transformativa. For what else were we created?

<sup>1</sup> Winkler, G. (2004). Kaballah 365: Daily Fruit From The Tree Of Life. Kansas City, MO, Andrews McMeel Publishing, p.61.

<sup>2</sup> Swimme, B. and T. Berry (1992). The Universe Story. New York, NY, HarperCollins Publishers, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, M. (2003). Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life. New York, New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Winkler, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Fox, M., Wrestling With The Prophets, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Swimme, B. and T. Berry, p. 2,3.

<sup>8</sup> Fox, M. (2001). Prayer: A Radical Response to Life. New York, NY, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Winkler, p. 228.

<sup>10</sup> , Quinn, D. (1992). Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit. New York, New York, Bantam / Turner, p. 168

<sup>11</sup> Swimme, B. and T. Berry, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Uhlein, G. (1983). Meditations With Hildegard of Bingen. Rochester, Vermont, Bear &Company, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Fox, M., Wrestling With The Prophets, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Swimme, B. and T. Berry, p. 268.

<sup>15</sup> Swimme, B. and T. Berry, p. 243

<sup>16</sup> Berry, T. (1998). The DREAM of the EARTH. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Shrager, E. F.-K. a. D. S. (2003). A Concise Encyclopedia of Legal Quotations. New York, Barnes and Noble Inc., p. 102.