

The New Cosmology

Since ancient times, people have gathered together under the stars and moon to contemplate their relationship with the cosmos and their place within the wider web of nature. Nowadays most people in the western world switch on their TV sets and push aside thoughts and reflections of the bigger questions of life. Even if one were to venture outside, the light pollution of most major cities drowns out the magnificence of the night sky and the full array of twinkling stars is replaced with a ubiquitous orange haze. As our connection with the Earth is being severed so too is our connection with the intergalactic world. But what, you may ask, is the importance of our interstellar connections? And what can we do to nurture this all important link?

Cosmology is the fusion of hardcore astro-sciences with disciplines as varied as theology, philosophy, art and geology. It is a dynamic discipline that gives us our place in the world with both reason and mystery. Each of our lives is made up of stories which play, intertwine and are affected by other stories. The new cosmology now highlights that the biggest and most all encompassing story of all is the story of the Universe. This is a blockbuster story of unity, complexity, thrills, excitement and an unknown ending. It is a story so impressive that it touches the lives of every single being on the planet and beyond. Father Thomas Berry calls this 'The Great Story' and together with mathematical cosmologist, Brian Swimme, has created an unfolding narrative of the universe since it was birthed into being about 15 billion years ago.

The ambiguity of what caused the initial explosion and the synchronicity of perfect timing and distance to ensure the formation of stars, planets, galaxies and life remain the territory of the Divine mystery and the new cosmology represents the most passionate marriage of science and spirituality to date. Physics becomes another language to move towards and commune with 'God' and knowing empirically that everything emerged from simple hydrogen atoms gives factual credence to the spiritual understanding that 'we are all one'. Certainly, cosmological understanding gives us a remarkable place to stand, a stunning perspective to view from and an awesome wonder for us to gaze in to. As Brian Swimme says "as we develop our own cosmological relationships with the powers of the universe, we will wake up one morning in an enchanted world in which we have a role to play and are able to speak to our children about the ultimate things"

Through holistic science and cosmology we learn that the Earth is not the machine that mechanistic science once had us believe, but a dynamic life giving process that has taken 15 billion years to evolve. *We, as humans evolving in consciousness, are the ability for the universe to reflect on itself.* By embracing the cosmic processes that created life, we are born into a new realm of intrigue and exhilaration and entering the story of the universe, in mind, body and spirit is nothing short of ecstatic.

Consider that the Milky Way Galaxy, of which we are a fractional speck, consists of over two hundred billion stars! The entire galaxy stretches 100,000 light years from side to side (a light year is how long it takes light to travel in one year at a speed of 186,000 miles per second). To make the mind boggle further, is the equation that there are approximately one hundred billion galaxies in the known universe. In the enormity of all that 'space' there is a significant probability that other intelligent life is out there 'somewhere'. However, whether or not we ever get to meet wild and distant life forms, there is a myriad of complex and fascinating life on this great spaceship satellite to keep us occupied for eternity and a day. Beholding the inexplicable phenomena of life on Earth and our unique identity in the grand scheme of the cosmos engenders a new respect, love, appreciation and care for all life living on this precious spinning globe.

Remembering that we each are one part of the miraculous Earth community, which in turn is part of this eight planet solar system revolving around a 864,938 mile wide sun, which is part of the unfathomably gigantic Milky Way, which in turn is part of a immense number of other galaxies in an ever-expanding Universe then our perspective on life tends to widen, deepen and enlarge, putting the minutiae of daily life in it's place. In the light of such revelations we can meditatively delve into the ocean of our soul and traverse vast inner-world landscapes in the quest of our meaningful life purpose with a magnificently enhanced context.

Facts, figures and great celestial distances aside, the purpose of the new cosmology is not to bring about the cerebral orgasms of physicists, promote the wholesale consumption of telescopes or merely offer tantalising trivia to impress our friends with at our next raw food luncheon. The primary purpose of the great story is to live it in way that permeates to our core and radiates, at least metaphorically speaking, as brightly as a supernova.

You see way back in the 16th century Nicolaus Copernicus announced and scientifically proved that the Earth was not the centre of the universe but a sphere that, along with other planets, revolved around the sun. This startling information shifted a 2 million year experience that humans had of knowing the world as a stable flat entity, at the centre of everything. Understandably it took a little time before people could get their heads around it all but today it's a no-brainer piece of information that most ten year olds could at least sketchily explain. But then again, although we have been able to assimilate this awareness into our conscious thinking brain, our perceptual habits still cause us to hold card-carrying membership for the 'Flat Earth society' as we constantly refer in our language to the 'sun-set' and 'sun-rise' and talk of watching the sun go up and down. When pushed to explain further we may describe that the Earth is rotating on its axis away from the sun, yet we rarely experience our sense of place, on a great revolving life form, in an embodied way. Whilst this may seem like splitting hairs over semantics these phrases actually reflect a far deeper split between our interpretation process of seeing and feeling the world and what is actually happening.

An activity that Swimme suggests is to find a place to watch the transition of light to dark, which works most favourably where you can see the horizon. Watching this daily event with new eyes we can begin to vividly observe and feel the Earth turning its massive body away from the sun. It's a simple yet transformative experience that reminds us of the exquisite features of existence. (I suggest that anyone that practices yoga fit in a few hearty 'sun salutations' at this point which now have a very tangible significance.) Once the sun's absence allows the darkness to reign we can again begin altering another basic pattern of consciousness. The oath of the Flat Earth cult makes us assume as we gaze towards the stars that we are looking 'up' at them. Living on a spherical planet we could also be looking down at the stars! So either standing, sitting or laying use your imagination to enter into this new concept and in looking out feel the sense of being suspended above the boundless space that surrounds you. Feel the sense of gravity that keeps you from floating into this limitless space and experience gravity as the love that the Earth has for the matter that makes up your body. Gazing down at the stars feel yourself as a part of this giant living planet swirling through space and experience what it is like to be an entire galaxy consciously reflecting upon itself.

These insights may only last a moment but they have lasting impact if we incorporate the realizations into our everyday world. Brian Swimme advises that "it is helpful to picture how, in the next millennium, each day might be filled with opportunities to experience the truth of our endlessly complexifying universe. As you walk through your day tomorrow, just imagine each advertisement you see replaced by a work of art or a ritual or an educational process designed to establish you in the creativity of an unfolding universe" Yes this is the potential and power of cosmology; to induct us into a mystical reality that can inspire us to live our days in bliss and create a whole new and cosmic future.

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