

The Silence in the Cosmos Isn't So Silent After All
A Sermon by the Rev. Terre Balof
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When I was a little girl I would wonder about the vastness of the universe. I was taught that out in space there were planets and stars and other heavenly bodies. And between all that--nothing. Our little Earth seemed to be just one little speck in the midst of some other grander universe that was really far away on the other side of empty space. It seemed rather lonesome. Once when I turned on a light, I worried that perhaps we might be only a tiny speck in another universe so much greater and that one day a being, beyond what I could conceive, would suddenly turn on a light in another universe. Would we then cease to exist when that greater, immense light infused our universe? Had I done a similar thing to a universe so small that I could not comprehend its existence? I was too young to really think about the reality of a higher power or about molecules and atoms. I just wondered--What is out there, and are we alone in the universe? Are we simply some minute particle in another grander universe?

During this time in human history I find another of my other childhood questions emerging: Are we isolated in the vastness of the cosmos with only nothingness between the physical realities of planets and stars and comets?

Somehow with all that is happening in our world, I wanted to know, even as a child, that we were somehow connected to something out there, as well as to something on this tiny, lovely planet we call Earth. Perhaps it was partly that need to understand my connection to the universe that led me to the International Science and Consciousness Conference, to hear from scientists about their latest understandings of our place in the universe. Here were scientists using language about the relationship of the cosmos to all things from the beginning. And as one lecturer proceeded with a talk about the beginning of the universe, he talked about, not a big bang, but the sound that emanated from the beginning. I thought, this scientist sounds like my teacher, a Biblical linguist, and then up on the huge screen was shown a quote from my teacher, Dr. Neil Douglas-Klotz. Here was a reaffirmation of the deep connection I had always felt that science and theology are not ultimately separate but rather express the need to find the language to explain our connection to creation.

Here were physicists speaking in terms that were familiar: All that evolves in our universe emerges from the beginning sound from the universe. This idea resonates both with

the service our choir led last year on sound and healing and the prologue to the Christian Gospel of John, which begins, “In the beginning was the word.” It is sound, vibration, that brought creation into being. And we experience that creation in the vibration of the molecules of our being that resonate with our connection to the universe. My inner child finally understood: we are not isolated in the vastness of space. Our very beings, on the most minute levels, vibrate and dance to the same pulses that flow through those spaces in the cosmos. The vastness of space that we once considered empty are filled with the vibrations of the stuff of the universe that brought us into being and connect us still.

In our day, we can no longer remain unaware and unconscious of the energy of the universe in the form of wave and particle that literally hold us together even when we work so diligently as a human family to deny our essence and connection. On the most basic level, molecules and atoms and elements of nature and matter that are neither created nor destroyed interact in a creation that is energetically connected and interwoven. Our unfolding understandings of creation tie together our sense of our sacred connection to all people and all nature.

We now know both how immense the cosmos is and how integrated all thought, form, and action are. We have discovered that there is no “empty” space, that the rhythm of the universe is in deepest space and in the atoms of our bodies. And, isn't it miraculous that we exist in the midst of all this? The early 20th century British biologist Julian Huxley wrote, “We are the universe becoming conscious of itself.”

Nowhere is this statement more illuminated than in the unfolding knowledge of science, of physics, and of the relationship between humanity and a universe that many scientists do indeed believe is conscious. The definition of what consciousness is and the theory of how that consciousness is shaped by human awareness and intention are some of the most fascinating areas of exploration between scientific research and theology. New theories, such as string theory and super string theory, point to the reality that knowledge, memory, and awareness are never lost but flow backwards and forwards in a flow that is just emerging into human awareness.

While all of this seems to be theory that does not really impact our lives, I believe, we need to understand our place in the cosmos. Even though we often have a hard time finding our place in Athens or in our personal family dynamic—we need to enlarge our understanding that we are part of a creation that is evolving. We need also to know in the core of our being that we exist in the midst of a greater whole that we help bring into being. We need to

comprehend that the rhythm of the universe is in part shaped by our intention and our conscious actions toward the creation of a more loving and just world that embraces all of creation—human, animal, plant, mineral. How appropriate that we who profess belief in the interdependent web of existence would produce the creator of the world wide web.

Brian Greene, author of The Elegant Universe and Fabric of the Cosmos beckons us into a deeper understanding of the universe. “The overarching lesson that has emerged from scientific inquiry over the last century is that human experience is often a misleading guide to the true nature of reality. Lying just beneath the surface of the everyday IS a world we'd hardly recognize. . . . By deepening our understanding of the true nature of physical reality, we profoundly reconfigure our sense of our selves and our experience of the Universe” (Fabric of the Universe).

In this day when we fear for our natural world and we fear for our human brothers and sisters, it is imperative that we truly understand our relationship both to the cosmos and to our brothers and sisters. Scientists like Brian Swimme, Wendell Berry, Teilhard de Chardin, and others remind us of earlier thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Hindu poet.

We are touched by this life, by the rhythms of stars and planets and moons. Our ancient brothers and sisters watched the stars and the rhythms of nature and animals. They did not discount our connection to the whole of the universe. And so ages and ages ago, people throughout the world looked to the rhythms of the moon to guide their festivals and their inner reflections, understanding that the inner life and the outer life must be in harmony.

I find it a note of cosmic irony or humor, or perhaps simply cosmic wisdom, that today we are in the midst of a three-year cycle in which the most sacred seasons of Judaism and Islam begin within days of each other and occur close to the feast of St. Francis. This convergence of religious holidays, after next year, will not happen again for many, many years.

Here we are in the midst of some of the most fearful days in humanity's history—a time when we have the ability to destroy all life. And yet if we use our thoughts, actions, and meditations for a higher good, we can use these sacred seasons to set our intention for a new way of being in the cosmos. This is a time when we have the capacity to heal old wounds and to live in new ways. All people in the human family, no matter our faith tradition or personal belief system, would do well to honor the intentions of this sacred time of year. During both Ramadan and Rosh Hashanah the faithful are called to open the book of their lives and to examine the essence of who they are. Through fasting and self-examination

each person, both Jew and Muslim, is called to look deep within to scour away all those actions, thoughts, and old beliefs that might lead the person away from righteous living. This is a time when human beings are called to step away from ordinary life and to create the space for self-examination—to ask the hard questions: How have my life and actions caused pain and injury to others?—to seek out those whom we have harmed by thought, word or deed, and then to make amends. It is the task of every person to cleanse their lives, to release or conquer that which keeps us from growing into our highest potential, living out of our higher selves rather than the ego-driven self that causes us so much mischief and pain. In this season of reflection, faithful Muslims and Jews are asked to recommit their lives to a deeper spiritual life connected to their brothers and sisters and to God.

The rhythms of the cosmos are reminding us that this year, of all years when religious calendars overlap, to turn away from our warring ways, to turn away from the tendency to judge others rather than to look at our own shortcomings, to turn away from our lack of love for those who are different from us, to turn away from our lack of compassion for our enemies and ourselves.

Now is the time when the universe offers us a message, reminding us that the rhythms of the cosmos connect us as creatures whose very essence is made of the stuff that emanated from the first sound of the creation. As descendants from that first beginning, we cannot avoid the world's continuing evolution that is around us and also within us. Many of us sitting here this morning have our roots in the family of Abraham, the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We are all called to begin anew. We, the children who have evolved from the stuff of the stars, are now called to harvest the fruits of our lives and to see what abundance is there.

Les McGuire wrote:

Many traditions speak of this time as one of turning in and deepening our individual relationship with God. It is a time when we harvest the fruits we have produced over the past year and, through inner examination, cultivate those that support us and weed out those that don't. We gather the seeds which we want to grow within us and hence manifest in our lives (i.e., compassion, generosity, kindness, etc.) and recognize and surrender those which separate us from our true nature (i.e., fears, old beliefs, behaviors that no longer serve us). That which we seed now will burrow deep within us and lay in wait until the Winter Solstice when the seeds are awakened to begin their journey into being—the great sprouting of Spring. We are truly blessed in that we can

live this process—consciously or unconsciously, it's our choice.

As we, who are created from the stuff of the stars, live in this life, we are asked to live it with intention that our actions in the world will not cause harm.

Meditation

To turn toward a new understanding of human possibility, of our relationship with each other and the universe might mean that we must, as our reading said, “revive our lives, as at the beginning”—not the Adam and Eve beginning as in the creation stories of Genesis, but at the *very* beginning. Remember we who are made of the particles of the original creation are the evolution of creation. The particles connect us to all that is. We are part of humanity and we are also beings who are wave and particle of the cosmos. If we are revived as at the beginning, then we must see ourselves as part of the “stuff” of creation. The rhythm of the universe resides in us, and it is that pattern of creation that connects us to everything and every single person. Our actions need to emerge from a clear sense that our thoughts, actions, and deeds must be in harmony with the continuing evolution of creation. Our life rhythms, our life music, must bring into being the peace and harmony that we would wish for all creatures.

We have only to look within to find that connection, that inner music that sings of our relatedness. The great Sufi poet, Kabir, wrote:

Inside this clay jug there are canyons and pine mountains, and the maker of canyons and pine mountains! All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds of millions of stars. The acid that tests gold is there, and the one who judges jewels. And the music from the strings no one touches, and the source of all water. If you want the truth, I will tell you the truth: Friend, listen: the God whom I love is inside.

In a similar vein the Nicaraguan Liberation theologian and priest, Ernesto Cardenal, wrote:

The music of the spheres. / A harmonious universe—like a harp. / Its rhythms are the equal, repeated seasons. / The beating of the heart. / Day/night. The going and returning of migratory birds. / The cycles of stars and corn. / The mimosa that unfolds by day and folds up again by night. / Rhythms of moon and tide. One single rhythm in planets, atoms, sea, / And apples that ripen and fall, / and in the mind of Newton. / Melody, accord, arpeggios / The harp of the universe. / Unity behind apparent multiplicity. / That is the music.

Let us not settle for less than we were created to be. Let us know that our beings are connected to the core of our inner, conscious lives AND at the same time connected to the whole of the creation. Annie Dillard wrote, "We are here to abet creation and to witness to it, to notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature, so that creation need not play to an empty house. It is the poets, the dreamers, the children, indeed all those who seek to embrace the universe who know that we must all, every single one of us, learn a new way of living and being in the world so that the hearts of all people will turn and a new day will emerge."