

Emergence of the Spirit

A reflection by the Rev. David M. Horst
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"Let's walk for a bit along the path as we continue," said the Sage....

"The Infinite is a container with no boundaries; it is the unspeakable source of everything, the indescribable setting for the Unfathomable Mystery ... a mysterious process that neither chance nor a supreme being can fully explain," she said, "and our Earth gave rise to life and the Web of Life."

"By 'Web of Life' you mean nature, right?" said the Seeker.

"... I use the term 'Web of Life' to recapture a greater reality," said the Sage.

"The Web of Life is bigger than nature," ventured the Seeker.

"More than 'bigger,' said the Sage. The Web of Life is a process of vast mysterious intelligence that includes us. The term evokes something that's bigger and greater than the concept that the Modern Mind holds when it says 'nature' ... and we are very much a part of its aliveness...."

A conversation of the Sage and the Seeker from "The Holy Universe"
by David Christopher (abridged and condensed)

I, too, took a walk along a path, the path that circles Spaulding Pond in Mohegan Park, on a day recently when clouds and drizzle came and went, allowing the sun at moments to spread warmth upon the landscape and me.

I imagined the Sage by my side, the two of us, Sage and Seeker, walking together, discussing infinite things, the Unfathomable Mystery, the wondrous emergence of life — in springtime on earth below and the universe above — within the Web of Life where no one is separated and all are, in equal and perfect proportion, in nature and of nature.

We looked for signs of the infinite before us, the heralds of spring along the path where we walked: We saw the daffodils blossoming and winking, forsythia bushes in lavish yellow, and a lily of the valley bush with its perfect rows of bell-like blossoms — and the humble skunk cabbage pushing up bright-green shoots through the marsh.

We were a part of the aliveness, on Spaulding Pond, simply living to be alive. Sage and Seeker pondering when and how life first emerged on our four-and-a-half billion year-old earth. We tried to imagine the first simple cells emerging 750 million years later and then another two billion years later, more complex cells, those with nuclei, beginning to appear. We thought about our human ancestors that were around for about six million years, the modern form of humans evolving about 200,000 years ago, and the civilization we now know existing for about 6,000 years.

And we asked ourselves, *How, then, can we be impatient for spring to emerge?*

Emerging life in Mohegan Park, on our earth, and throughout the universe is neither pre-determined nor haphazard, not an argument for God or against God, but an interplay of creative events from which forms of life emerge, each more complex and more wondrous than before. Life keeps inventing itself, combining and recombining, dying off and rising up, reaching down, reaching out, forming and reforming, embracing and pushing apart, ceaselessly, in a world and universe without end.

Yet here we are — a young humanity on this old earth in an ancient universe — with nations fighting for their existence again, humans fighting a deadly disease again, political parties in the

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U.S. and abroad fighting for ideologies again, a planet fighting against the next mass extinction again.

When will the fighting cease? *Someday? Never?*

Here's my existential dilemma: I believe with all my heart and mind that Nature and the Web of Life — encompassing all sentient beings and matter within the creative energy of the universe — will continue to evolve and complexify. And I believe, equally, that humankind, throughout our history and especially now, has taken every opportunity to pervert or destroy creation and the abundant creative energy that permeates and animates all life on this planet and throughout the universe.

So how shall we live? Do we live in the world as it may someday be? Or do we live in the world as it is now? Yes, *both*.

To live only in the here and now forecloses on the hope and possibility of a different future. To live only with vision and hope is to remove ourselves from the needs of the world right before us right now.

Rather, might here and now be married to vision and hope? We exist and we are emerging, we are evolved and we are evolving, we are created and we are creative, we are seekers and we are sages.

When we recognize, when we hold within our beating hearts and feel deep in our bones, that we are part of a wondrous, fabulous, beautiful interconnected planet and universe that has emerged and is emerging, that we ourselves and all sentient beings are made of star stuff and will return to star stuff, then we know we and all things are holy.

I learned recently that one of the most spectacular features of the observable universe is the perfection and elegance of its expansion. If the rate of expansion had been slower, even slightly, even one-millionth of one percent slower, the universe would have re-collapsed after the big bang. And if the universe had expanded a little more quickly, even one-millionth of one percent faster, the universe would have expanded too fast for structures to form — simply diffusing into dust (*Journey of the Universe*, pp. 10 and 11). One physicist, the late Freeman Dyson of Princeton University, wondered if the universe knew we were coming (pp. 11 and 12). From the moment of the great bursting forth, the conditions for life began to emerge.

And emerge we did, humankind and all life, eons later, in the not-too-slow, not-too-fast expansion of the holy universe of which are part and particle — and perhaps always were.

We are learning so much more about the expanding universe and, with it, the expanding realm of human knowledge. This year, scientists and science lovers are recognizing a January 1992 discovery of planets outside our solar system, a discovery that changed the course of scientific history. These planets, worlds that orbit other stars, are called exoplanets. Now, 30 years later, the list of known exoplanets has just topped 5,000, according to NASA. This dazzling abundance and variety of worlds has come into view with the aid of ever-more sophisticated space telescopes.

I also just learned that the most distant galaxy on record has been spotted by an international team of astronomers. Named HD1, the galaxy is some 13.5 billion light-years away, and scientists have begun to speculate exactly what the galaxy is. The team proposes two ideas: HD1 may be forming stars at an astounding rate and is possibly even home to the universe's very first stars — which, until now, have never been observed. Alternatively, HD1 may contain a supermassive black hole about 100 million times the mass of our sun. Using the James Webb Space Telescope, the research team will once again observe HD1 to verify its distance from Earth. If current

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calculations prove correct, HD1 will be the most distant — and oldest — galaxy ever recorded ("Scientists Have Spotted Farthest Galaxy on Record," *The Harvard Gazette*, April 7, 2022).

I believe human knowledge of the expanding universe also expands human consciousness. Consciousness of the expanding and wondrous universe was always with humankind, of course, as the ancient story of P'an Ku, a pre-scientific story of the bursting forth of the universe from a hen's egg, that we told today, a cosmic egg filled with "no thing" that created everything, cut into form by the chisel of the giant, horned and tusked P'an Ku, tells us in vivid and wondrous terms. The light, pure sky was yang and the heavy, dark weight of the earth was yin. P'an Ku filled the space between with rivers, mountains, and valleys; then he placed stars and moon into the night sky and the sun into the day; and then filled the seas. Upon P'an Ku's death the world was complete with soil, rocks, plant life, thunder and lightening, wind and clouds, rain, and humankind.

Yet, in this anthropocene age of wars, pandemics, and political strife, when human activity is the dominant influence on climate and the environment, we have created destruction and disorder, pain and suffering within the Web of Life. We are in a forbidding and deeply worrying time in human history. It's as if a collective darkness has overtaken us, the ugliness of humanity has emerged, the worst of our human spirit is prevailing.

Some modern-day seers and prophets say these dark times foretell an awakening, a new age, a renewed manifestation of the peaceable, cooperative, equitable, compassionate, respectful, and generous spirit of humankind. I want to believe this or maybe I have to believe this.

Might it be a positive and hopeful sign that major holidays and holy days of the three Western religious traditions are converging this week? Each is remembering and celebrating their times of emergence in their histories and mythic stories: During the upcoming time of Passover when Jews remember their great journey from slavery to freedom; in the Christian tradition the resurrection of Jesus the Christ on Easter morning; and in the Muslim faith, in this Holy Month of Ramadan, when the Prophet Muhammad received the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. Each religion, with their own particular stories and beliefs, offers a powerful and hopeful story of emerging truth and wisdom, assuring us of that which was may yet be, that freedom and peace will return to our world.

Will religion save us? Will the mythic narratives of old be the prophecies of today? Will the discoveries of science and technology save us? Will negotiation and an enlightened, freedom-loving political process solve our differences? Will history, literature, and the arts create the narrative for a more peaceable and sustainable future?

Yes, all these, but first we must awaken spiritually, attuning to the vast mysterious intelligence, noticing the unceasing emergence of the spirit, welcoming the light that overcomes the darkness, and giving praise and thanks for having a place in the cosmic Web of Life, always emerging, ever expanding.

Awakening, attuning, noticing, welcoming, praising, and expressing gratitude give us humans both the spiritual grounding and the cosmic vision we need to be a part of unfolding life and the expanding universe. Small spiritual practices, daily rituals, meditation and prayer, and mindful intentions awaken us to the wonder of creation and the potential for human good.

Let me return to where I started, a human being walking on earth, earth bound with cosmic consciousness, being aware of the changing season and the emergence of spring, being attuned to the vastness and wonder of the emerging universe. Join me on this journey of life and the cosmos. Join each other. Join all sentient beings. With feet on the earth and eyes to the sky, Seeker and Sage as one, let us live each day in awareness and wonder. We and all beings and

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all matter are still being created. Simply look around, look up, look within your hearts. Each day is a new creation.

As above, so below. Amen.