

Creation as Blessing
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One of the core principles of Unitarian Universalism is “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” That web of existence comprises the natural world, all that we know of it and all that we do not yet, or may never, know. We are part of that web, fully and irrevocably embedded within it, fully part of it. We have evolved as it evolved.

The journey we are embarking upon, a journey through Creation Spirituality, is one that can take us beyond a mere, distant, respect. We enter into the realm of relationship, of understanding where we fit into this intricate web, of falling in love anew with the beauty and wonder of the natural world of which we are a part.

Every culture has a central story – of who we are and how we came to be. For those who have faith in the findings of science, the central story of creation is the story of emergence and evolution. It begins with the Big Bang,

Carl Sagan tells it like this:

For unknown ages after the explosive outpouring of matter and energy of the Big Bang, the Cosmos was without form. There were no galaxies, no planets, no life. Deep, impenetrable darkness was everywhere, hydrogen atoms in the void.

Here and there denser accumulations of gas were imperceptibly growing, globes of matter were condensing – hydrogen raindrops more massive than suns. Within these globes of gas was first kindled the nuclear fire latent in matter. A first generation of stars was born, flooding the Cosmos with light. There were in those times not yet any planets to receive the light, no living creatures to admire the radiance of the heavens.

Deep in the stellar furnaces the alchemy of nuclear fusion created heavy elements, the ashes of hydrogen burning, the atomic building materials of future planets and lifeforms.

Massive stars soon exhausted their stores of nuclear fuel. Rocked by colossal explosions, they returned most of their substance back into the thin gas from which they had once condensed. Here in the dark lush clouds between the stars, new raindrops made of many elements were forming, later generations of stars being born. Nearby, smaller raindrops grew, bodies far too little to ignite the nuclear fire, droplets in the interstellar mist on their way to form the planets. Among them was a small world of stone and iron, the early Earth.

Congealing and warming, the Earth released the methane, ammonia, water and hydrogen gases that had been trapped within, forming the primitive atmosphere and the first oceans. Starlight from the Sun bathed and warmed the primeval Earth, drove storms, generated lightning and thunder. Volcanoes overflowed with lava. These processes disrupted molecules of the primitive atmosphere; the fragments fell back together again into more and more complex forms, which dissolved in the early oceans.

After a time, the seas achieved the consistency of a warm, dilute soup. Molecules were organized, and complex chemical reactions driven, on the surface of clays. And one day a molecule arose that quite by accident was able to make crude copies of itself out of the other molecules in the broth. As time passed, more elaborate and more accurate self-replicating molecules arose. Those combinations best suited to further replication were favored by the

sieve of natural selection. Those that copied better produced more copies. And the primitive oceanic broth gradually grew thin as it was consumed by and transformed into complex condensations of self-replicating organic molecules. Gradually, imperceptibly, life had begun.

Single-celled plants evolved, and life began to generate its own food. Photosynthesis transformed the atmosphere. Sex was invented. Once free-living forms banded together to make a complex cell with specialized functions. Chemical receptors evolved, and the Cosmos could taste and smell. One-celled organisms evolved into multicellular colonies, elaborating their various parts into specialized organ systems. Eyes and ears evolved, and now the Cosmos could see and hear.

Plants and animals dissolved that the land could support life. Organisms buzzed, crawled, scuttled, lumbered, glided, flapped, shimmied, climbed and soared. Colossal beasts thundered through the steaming jungles. Small creatures emerged, born live instead of in hard-shelled containers, with a fluid like the early oceans coursing through their veins. They survived by swiftness and cunning.

And then, only a moment ago, some small arboreal animals scampered down from the trees. They became upright and taught themselves the use of tools, domesticated other animals, plants, and fire and devised language. The ash of stellar alchemy was now emerging into consciousness. At an ever-accelerating pace, it invented writing, cities, art and science, and sent spaceships to the planets and the stars.

These are some of the things that hydrogen atoms do, given fifteen billion years of cosmic evolution. (*Carl Sagan, in Cosmos, 1985*)

This story shows us in the deepest possible sense that we are all sisters and brothers, siblings and cousins – fashioned from the same stellar dust, energized by the same star, nourished by the same planet, endowed with the same genetic code, and threatened by the same evils. This story, more than any other, humbles me before the magnitude and complexity of creation. Like no other story it bewilders us with the improbability of our existence, astonishes us with the interdependence of all things, and makes us feel grateful for the lives we have.

Are we not wondrously and marvelously made? Look at your hands, with their clever digits and opposable thumbs. Aren't they a thing of beauty?

The ability to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the earth, to feel wonder at the complexity of all its working parts, to be astonished, to be grateful, all of these capacities exist in us because at some point, as Sagan put it, the ash of stellar alchemy emerged into consciousness. So in a sense, it seems that we are the Universe, becoming conscious of itself.

The Universe, becoming conscious of *itself*. Not *us*, becoming conscious of the Universe. *We are* Universe, a vital and blessed part of *all that is*, the result of all that was, and inescapably part of what will be. Evolved with the consciousness, if we will pay attention, of how we affect not only other *parts* of the web, but how our actions pull, tug, strengthen or shake up that web as a whole. The more we open our eyes and observe the world, the more clearly we can see those intricate connections.

One who observes the world in this way is David George Haskell, an ecologist and evolutionary biologist, who studies the natural world with a scientist's attention to detail and a poet's eye for relationship. His widely acclaimed, Pulitzer-finalist book, "The Forest Unseen," chronicles the story of the whole universe in one square meter of forest ground in Tennessee. His follow-up book in 2017, "The Songs of Trees," is a study of humanity's varied roles within biological networks, as heard through the acoustics of a dozen trees around the world.

Haskell says, " I think we're all in a deep relationship with the natural world. We're learning these days from ecological and evolutionary science what philosophical traditions have been saying for thousands of years: that there isn't really a division between humans and the rest of life's communities."

We are one with this evolving and changing and amazing Universe. One with all that is and ever was. Part of all that is to be. We are one. We are part of Creation, and we are Blessed by this.

May we remember to notice, to stay present and conscious, to walk through this world letting its beauty and wonder keep us uplifted and filled.

May it be so.