

The Magic of the Universe

The word **magic** delights us when we are children and still mystifies us, as we grow older. We love magic all our lives. Magic, according to the dictionary, is, “an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source, something that seems to cast a spell”. All of the words used to define magic do not delineate anything that is specific or clearly understood and leaves us with mystery and awe. There seem to be no easy answers to our customary who, what, when, where, why and how questions in any of the fields of academia.

Myth & Mystery:

In the early history of humans there was little or no effort to make conclusive explanations for the heavens and the earth. **Myths** and **stories** were the best efforts of early humanity. Their observations and experience of all that surrounded them was often fear and confusion. When considering the meaning and value of myth I turn to Joseph Campbell of whom Newsweek said, “Campbell has become the rarest of intellectuals in American life: a serious thinker who has been embraced by the popular culture.” Joseph Campbell tells us that there are four things that myths do:

[“Thou Art That” – Transforming Religious Metaphor, by Joseph Campbell *edited and with a foreword by Eugene Kennedy, Ph.D.*, Pg. 2 – 5, Joseph Campbell Foundation, San Anselmo, California]

- “The first function is that of reconciling consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence – that is, of aligning waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum* of this universe, as it is.”
- “The second function of a traditional mythology is interpretive, to present a consistent image of the order of the cosmos. At about 3200 B.C. the concept of a cosmic order came into being, along with the notion that a society and men and women should participate in that cosmic order because it is, in fact, the basic order of one’s life.”
- “The third function of a traditional mythology is to validate and support a specific moral order, that order of the society out of which that mythology arose. Through this third function, mythology reinforces the moral order by shaping the person to the demands of a specific geographically and historically conditioned social group.”
- “The fourth function of traditional mythology is to carry the individual through the various stages and crises of life – that is, to help persons grasp the unfolding of life with integrity. This wholeness means that individuals will experience significant events, from birth through midlife to death, as in accord with, first, themselves, and, secondly, with their culture, as well as, thirdly, the universe, and, lastly, with that *mysterium tremendum* beyond themselves and all things.”

The dictionary says that myth comes from the Greek word Mythos, which is a traditional story that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people. Similarly Jesus told stories that were called **parables**. In this case the dictionary says that a parable is usually a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle. Easton’s Bible Dictionary defines a parable as: “*a placing beside; a comparison; equivalent to the Heb. mashal, a similitude. In the Old Testament this is used to denote (1) a proverb, (2) a prophetic utterance, (3) an enigmatic saying. In the New Testament, (1) a proverb, (2) a typical emblem, (3) a similitude or allegory; (4) ordinarily, in a more restricted sense, a comparison of earthly with heavenly things, “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning,” as in the parables of our Lord.*” When we are dealing with *mysterium tremendum*, a **very large mystery**, it is essential that we use myths and parables to try to explain our ever-growing knowledge in observing the Universe.

As Joseph Campbell sums it up, “*How, in the contemporary period, can we evoke the imagery that communicates the most profound and most richly developed sense of experiencing life? These images must point past themselves to that ultimate truth which must be told: that life does not have any one absolutely fixed meaning. These images must point past all meaning given, beyond all definitions and relationships, to*

that really ineffable mystery that is just the existence, the being of ourselves and of our world. If we give that mystery as exact meaning we diminish the experience of its real depth. But when a poet carries the mind into a context of meaning and then pitches it past those, one knows that marvelous rapture that comes from going, past all categories of definition. Here we sense the function of metaphor that allows us to make a journey we could not otherwise make, past all categories of definition.” [“Thou Art That” – pg. 9]

The magic of the Universe allows us to go beyond ourselves to stretch and grow as we acknowledge that we are a part of something greater than ourselves. Even though we may never be able to fully understand and comprehend our customary who, what, when, where, why and how questions in any conclusive finality, we would cheat ourselves out of a depth and value of life beyond the now. To attain this fullness in living we must lose our fear of mystery as if it is only conclusive facts that are essential to enable the fullness of our humanity.

We have spoken about **magic, mystery, myth, and parable** in an approach to understanding the Universe to bridge the gap of so many facts of which we remain unaware along with observations that we cannot fully explain. One of the most popular forms of enjoyment in reading, movie and theater is mystery. Why not let this enjoyment lead us forward to a more complete appreciation for living into this gift of a phenomenal Universe that is ours? To gain the same sense and pleasure in having finished a good book filled with all of these literary scenarios, can we not be similarly patient as we move along in the drama of Interstellar Space?

Order & Chaos:

There is another important mystery (something not understood or beyond understanding, profound or inexplicable) about our Universe; is the Universe **Orderly**, (regulated, methodic and peaceful), or **Chaotic** (unorganized, confused and unpredictable)? A professor of mathematical physics at the University of Adelaide, and author of *The Cosmic Blueprint*, Paul Davies, Opens his paper on “Chaos Frees the Universe” with this, “Chaos seems to provide a bridge between the deterministic laws of physics and the laws of chance, implying that the Universe is genuinely creative and that the notion of free will is real.” [<http://www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/freeuni.html>] He says that, “All science is founded on the assumption that the physical world is ordered.” This comes from the Laws of Physics as they are seen in the rhythm and pattern of planetary motions. Yet as others have observed, the unpredictable weather, earthquakes, fall of meteorites to name a few “acts of God”, there is variance with the underlying lawfulness of the Universe. While these observations of chaos were noted from the time of Greek philosophers, recent mathematicians, along with the advent of fast electronic computers have quantified the significance of a chaos theory. In a simplistic way perhaps these two, order and chaos, are just two sides of the same coin?

Toward the end of his paper, Dr. Davies continues, “So the study of chaos has revealed how it is possible to reconcile the complexity of a physical world displaying haphazard and capricious behaviour with the order and simplicity of underlying laws of nature. The indeterminism associated with quantum effects will intrude into the dynamics of all systems, chaotic or otherwise, at the atomic level. The physical world contains a wide range of both chaotic and non-chaotic systems. It seems, then, that the Universe is incapable of digitally computing the future behaviour of even a small part of itself, let alone all of itself. Expressed more dramatically, the Universe is its own fastest simulator. This conclusion is surely profound. It means that, even accepting a strictly deterministic account of nature the future states of the Universe are in some sense “open”. Some people have seized on this openness to argue for the reality of human free will. Others claim that it bestows upon nature an element of creativity, an ability to bring forth that which is genuinely new, something not already implicit in earlier states of the Universe, save in the idealized fiction of the real numbers.”

Theory & Reality:

One of the most mysterious and magical parts of our story of the Universe is in its beginning. “*The Big*

*Bang is the prevailing cosmological **theory** of the early development of the universe. The theory is supported by the most comprehensive and accurate explanations from current scientific evidence and observation. According to the best available measurements as of 2010, the initial conditions occurred around 13.3 to 13.9 billion years ago.* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang] Going back in time to the Singularity from which everything expanded in the Big Bang, we have two things that I would like to mention to demonstrate the unanimity and connectedness of this magnificent expansive space, **Elements** and **DNA**.

Elements: All matter in the Universe occurs in the form of atoms of a small number of elements. An atom is the fundamental unit of an element. For each element, it consists of a unique (fixed) number of positively charged protons in a central nucleus -- the atomic number for that element -- surrounded by a cloud of an equal number of negatively charged electrons. There are 92 naturally occurring chemical elements in the Universe. All substances in the Universe are formed through chemical reactions among combinations of atoms of these elements. Ten other elements have been formed in the laboratory, but they are very short-lived. These occur in nature only under very unusual conditions. [http://www.esse.ou.edu/fund_concepts/Fundamental_Concepts1/Elements/The_Elements.html - General]

DNA: All living organisms store genetic information using the same molecules – DNA and RNA. Written in the genetic code of these molecules is compelling evidence of the shared ancestry of all living things. Evolution of higher life forms requires the development of new genes to support different body plans and types of nutrition. Even so, complex organisms retain many genes that govern core metabolic functions carried over from their primitive past. [<http://dnaftb.org/40/concept/index.html>]

There is a very important fact that is clear from all of this that is still almost completely neglected by most people, that is that **Race is a misnomer** when it comes to human ancestry, DNA and biotechnology. [http://www.understandingrace.org/history/science/ancestry_dna.html] The categories of race that we consistently use so profusely in our time is so unscientific that it is clearly a false concept. Sadly we use such distinctions to separate, denigrate and cause unnecessary division among all people. This terminology is akin to saying that the earth is flat or that the Sun rises. When we use such slang in conversation we promote our propensity to rigid class distinctions that were never actually true. For an in depth study of the facts in these matters I would urge you to go to a website produced by a project of the American Anthropological Association. [<http://www.understandingrace.org/home.html>] Their thorough scientific study will demonstrate completely the facts, as we know them today. It may make you as embarrassed and or as angry as I am when asked to fill out a form that asks me for my “race”.

Before we go any further I think we might stop and check some of the language that we are using because it is not what many are used to in everyday life. Words like **magic**, **mystery**, **myth**, **parable**, and **theory** may not be clear in our minds as to their intended meaning. Many will say that it is just a theory in order to dismiss the findings of modern Physics and related sciences, but that does not solve much either. It may be important here to explain what is meant by a theory among the scientific community. “In common usage, the word theory is often used to signify a conjecture, an opinion, a speculation, or a hypothesis. In this usage, a theory is not necessarily based on facts; in other words, it is not required to be consistent with the true descriptions of reality.” “In science a theory is a testable model of the manner of interaction of a set of natural phenomena, capable of predicting future occurrences or observations of the same kind, and capable of being tested through experiment or otherwise verified through empirical observation.” [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory>] We have the notion today that we live in a world of fact but that is rather far from the truth. As the old saying goes, “the more we learn the more we realize how much more we have to learn”. Even things that we deemed a fact have had to change as we continue to grow in our learning and understanding.

How does Faith fit into all of this?

The dictionary defines faith as “confidence” and “belief”. Easton’s Bible Dictionary says, “*Faith is in general the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true. Its primary idea is trust. A thing is true,*

and therefore worthy of trust. It admits of many degrees up to full assurance of faith, in accordance with the evidence on which it rests." I like to use an acronym for FAITH (Finding Authenticity In Today's Happenings) to highlight the method for obtaining faith. Given that facts change as we move forward in time the acronym gives us the flexibility we need to make appropriate alterations in our confidence and belief. As Easton's Dictionary suggests, full assurance of faith is in accordance with the evidence on which it rests. This is why finding authenticity in today's happenings, knowledge and understanding is important because of the changes that will always occur over time.

The danger of certainty is what we often refer to as blind or miss-informed faith. Keep in mind that, for many years prior, the earth was considered to be flat and it was believed that the Sun rotated around the earth. When the Christian Church at the time heard that the earth rotated around the Sun, it was declared heresy and especially Galileo was extensively punished for his leadership in promoting this new idea. I have often heard people say, "don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up" or something to that effect. I believe this highlights the barrier that often exists between science and religion – science is open to consideration of new facts or alterations in existing facts while some in religion are certain that facts always remain fixed in time.

Another danger is the **lack of appreciation and respect** for other cultural myths. *"With respect to the mystical tradition, one can divide the world into two great groups: one to the west of Iran, which includes the Near East and Europe; and the other, to the east of Iran, which includes India and the Far East."* ["Thou Art That" – pg. 11] In the religions west of Iran, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God and the world are not the same as there is a distinction between creator and creature. In the religions east of Iran, this distinction is not made between the creator and the creature but with the identity of all things with the transcendent. *"In Buddhism — transcendence, by definition, belongs to the beings of the formless realms of existence. Transcendence is described and viewed from a number of diverse perspectives within Hinduism and its multi-faceted scriptural metaphysics. Other traditions, such as Bhakti yoga, view transcendence as God with attributes - Saguna Brahman, the Absolute being a personal deity (Ishvara), such as Vishnu or Shiva."* [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendence_\(religion\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendence_(religion))] *"The typical attitude of the Levant, of the Near East from which our religions come, is the submission of human judgment to that power conceived to be God."* ["Thou Art That" – pg 11]

The second of the two great groups in our western view and these words from Joseph Campbell seem to be the best summary of the duality of God and humanity: *The great world of the biblical tradition tells us that nature is corrupt and that a fall took place, whether you designate it as Original Sin or not. How in this tradition do you get related to God? The relationship is accomplished through an institution. The individual can only become associated with the divine through the social institution. In the Jewish tradition, God and His people have a covenant regarding their special relationship. In the Christian tradition, Christ is the center because He is true God and true Man. This is regarded as a mystery because of the unity of these two natures. It is no mystery at all in the Orient, where each of us is conceived to be precisely a piece of God."* ["Thou Art That" – pg. 12]

As the world grows smaller and we are more apt to share and care for this world by meeting and working with each other, we can no longer ignore these differences nor diminish the importance of traditions that are older and yet still vibrant to the larger segment of human population. In this 21st century we must learn from one another to integrate and harmonize our cultures to act peacefully in a global society. As we look at history it seems that religion, in most situations, has been the fuel that causes a lack of harmony and community. The tribal mentality of our past must be put aside if we are going to become a cooperative and productive worldwide community. This new century extends to all the privilege to become one people on a journey together in every aspect of life. This is not to say that we must all be absolutely alike in every way, but we can no longer afford to become anxious about our ability to be respectful and accepting of our differences. Unity never should require uniformity. *"The great pain of organized religion is that many people see religion not as the description of a journey into an ultimate*

mystery, but as a formula designed to keep human anxiety in check. That use of religion continues to repel me." [a quote from The Rt. Rev. John S. Spong in a letter of response dated July 22, 2010) in "A New Christianity For A New World"] Within the harmony of our Universe I would hope that religion could become less painful to us all.

What about God?

As a Christian and an Episcopalian I have no problem with God or the Universe except for the fact that I cannot adequately find words to express my relationship to either. My problems are more with those who seem to believe that they have the ability to speak comprehensively about either or both. I have no trouble speaking about and witnessing to a lively relationship with God most every day and my appreciation of what I am learning about the Universe. When you are in a living relationship it is never really about belief as much as an experience. I do believe in God as the Source of all that exists and, like the Psalmist, *"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"*. [Psalm 19 (NRSA)] In the Christian Scriptures it is said, *"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* [Colossians 1:27 (NRSA)] which briefly expresses my experiences. We often think of God as light [1 John 1:5] and Christ was said to be the light of the world. [John 9:5] I personally feel that in Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, God might just be the light referred to in the c^2 in $E = mc^2$. To help you understand my feeling this way you might want to read a paper on this in our website. [<http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/ArtRelativityofGodandPeople.pdf>]

In the Gospels Christ tells us that we are to be lights in the world. [Matthew 5:14-16] I walk in that light with those who gather at church in Great Thanksgiving around the Holy Table where Christ is our host. When we leave we go forward into the world and bring the grace of that light into the world in which we live.

What about the magic in you?

Here is this question from one of the Psalms, *"What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas."* [Psalm 8:4-8 (NRSA)] Our earliest stories tell us that we were created in the image of God and blessed to care for the earth and appreciate its resources for facility and nourishment. [Genesis 1:26-30] Each one of us as human beings is meant to be partners in the magic of the universe, not because we are better than any other part of creation but because of our abilities of memory, reason, and skill. How are the magic of your memory, reason, and skill flourishing and contributing to the whole of what is and what will be?

It is our **memory** that enables us to recall the past and learn from it, for good or ill. With the advantage of the past we are able to move forward to a better future. Living things have some form of this magic in simple or complex behavior enabling for a better and more advantage future. Humans are certainly among the highest species with this capability. How sad it is when we do not learn from our past and, rather than just repeating it, find ways to improve and develop.

Reason is perhaps our greatest asset in moving into the magic of the future. Reason is using our intellect as a basis for knowledge giving us the ability to think clearly and shape our powers of orderly thought. Reason is the magic that enables us to explain and think in logical ways using rational thought to resolve arguments and influence one another toward a better life.

Skill is our ability to do well by using our expertise and dexterity toward proficiency and competence. Everyone is skilled in some or many things and, as part of the Universe, is expected to utilize and share

those skills in a vital and faithful way. When we do not share we deprive ourselves of the joys of giving and diminish the completeness of life for others. Be sure to bring your magic to the world around you.

Composer Josef Haydn wrote, "The Heavens are Telling" whose music and words inspire us to pay attention and give thanks for the marvelous wonders of our Universe. I hope you begin to realize the wealth of the inheritance that is available to each person when they open their hearts and minds to the *mysterium tremendum*, a very large mystery that Joseph Campbell invites us to realize. When I was young we sang a hymn in our church that may summarize in poetry the opportunity we have to personally share this grandeur:

*Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear.*

*Open my mouth, and let me bear,
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;*

Open my heart and let me prepare Love with Thy children thus to share.

Refrain

*Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready my God, Thy will to see,*

Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

[Words & Music: **Clara H. Scott** - <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/o/p/openeyes.htm>]

In gratitude for everything that we have been given in this marvelous world called Earth and for our place among this vast and magical Universe, may we be full of LIFE – (Limitless Information Fermenting Existence), LOVE – (Limitless Offerings Veraciously Expended), and PEACE – (People Energizing Alternatives Causing Equality).

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.