

DUANE ELGIN

# HUMANITY'S JOURNEY HOME: WE ARE LEARNING TO LIVE IN A LIVING UNIVERSE<sup>1</sup>



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*We are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home. Father Giovanni (1513).*

## HUMANITY'S MOST URGENT CHALLENGE



HUMANITY IS EXPERIENCING A COLLECTIVE identity crisis. Critical challenges to our future confront us with fundamental questions: Who are we? What kind of universe do we live in? Where are we going? Do we continue our rapid march into materialism, grounded in the assumption that we

live in a universe that is indifferent to humanity and comprised mostly of dead matter and empty space? Or, do we open to transforming insight from the combined wisdom of science and the world's spiritual traditions: the universe is not dead at its foundations but is profoundly alive and we humans are an integral part of that larger aliveness. In the words of Plato, "The universe is a single living creature that contains all living creatures within it."

Our view of the universe profoundly impacts how we live in the world. If we think we live in a non-living universe without larger meaning and purpose, then it makes sense to exploit that which is dead on behalf of ourselves, the most visibly alive. Alternatively, if we have the direct experience of touching the aliveness of nature and the world around us, then it is natural to respect and care for the abundant expressions of aliveness. These are two radically different ways of looking the universe and, in turn, produce dramatically different views of our identity and evolutionary journey. This leads to a startling conclusion: The most urgent challenge facing humanity is not climate change, or species extinction, or unsustainable population growth; rather, it is how we understand the universe and our intimate relationship within it. Our deepest choices for the future emerge from this core understanding.

## AT THE EVOLUTIONARY CROSSROADS

How have we come to such a critical crossroads in our evolutionary journey? First, in the last several hundred years, we have been spectacularly successful in exploiting the abundance of the Earth's resources to create a short period of unprecedented material prosperity for a minority of the Earth's population. This burst of affluence emerged from a worldview described as "scientific materialism" which regards the universe as non-living at its foundations and comprised mostly of empty space and inanimate matter. Second, based on this worldview, we have been consuming the Earth's resources far beyond her rates of regeneration. Short-term material prosperity is being gained at the cost long-term ecological ruin. As Wendell Berry reminds us, nature "has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do." We are creating by our own hand a long-term future that is unforgivingly inhospitable for advancing human civilization.

We are being compelled by circumstances to come together – collectively and rapidly – to cope with climate disruption, massive human migrations, unsustainable population growth, critical shortages of key resources such as water, the threatened extinction of nearly half of all animal and plant species, and

much more. As world changing trends of enormous magnitude converge and amplify one another, the people of Earth will confront the unyielding reality that, unless we wake up and work together, we have only the legacy of a grievously wounded Earth and impoverished future to leave to our children and grandchildren. We require a new pathway ahead and are reminded of Einstein's famous words that "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them."

We are moving through a perilous phase of planetary transition. Hopefully we will have the wisdom to make deep, structural changes in our manner of living and turn toward a more sustainable and promising future. The alternative is the collapse, and even extinction, of human civilizations. It is unwise to be complacent about our future as collapse has happened numerous times. More than 20 major civilizations have collapsed over the millennia, including the empires of the Romans, Mayans, Aztecs, Easter Islanders, Anasazi, Mesopotamians, and the Soviets. Importantly, many examples of collapse involve climate change as a key, contributing factor.

Although collapse is nothing new, today is different in one crucial respect: There are no frontiers left. *The circle has closed.* The entire world has become a single, integrated system – economically, ecologically and socially. Never before has the entire planet been at risk of collapse – taking all the world's civilizations down at the same time. Our time of planetary transition is truly a great transition, unprecedented in human history and deeply formative in shaping the long-range future.

To move swiftly through this perilous time of planetary transition requires unprecedented breakthroughs in how we live and relate to one another. Yet, cooperation is difficult and slow in a world that is unravelling and where most people are coping with chronic, planetary-scale, traumatic stress. A natural tendency is for people to separate and seek islands of safety to ride out the disruptive storms of transition that are beginning to blow through the world. However, if we pull apart and seek only our personal security by retreating from the world and isolating ourselves, then systemic problems are certain to escalate and produce the very future of ruinous collapse we most fear.

Immense suffering can be a positive force for evolution *if* it burns through our denial and distraction and awakens humanity to our collective task of transition. The unrelenting suffering of millions, even billions, of human beings could penetrate through our complacency and isolation and awaken us to engaged action. Needless suffering could become a psychological and psychic fire

that burns away surface differences to reveal a collective identity that is big enough and strong enough to provide the foundation for a sustainable global civilization.

#### THE REMARKABLE INVITATION

Being unflinchingly realistic, it does not seem likely we will turn away from our current path of separation—with its growing inequities, over-consumption of resources and deep injury to the Earth—unless we discover, *together*, a pathway into the future that is so truly remarkable, transformative, and welcoming that we are drawn ahead by the scope and intimacy of its invitation. Just in time, that pathway is being revealed by insights converging from science and the world's wisdom traditions. In a sentence: *We are discovering that, instead of struggling for meaning and a miracle of survival in a dead universe, we are being invited to learn and grow forever in the deep ecologies of a living universe.* To step into the invitation of learning to live in a living universe represents a journey so extraordinary that it transcends the wounds of our past and invites us to begin a process of healing and reconciliation to realize a remarkable future we can only reach together.

#### THE NATURE OF OUR COSMIC HOME

In contemplating a great turn toward this new pathway of development, it is important to ask: Is the universe truly as Plato described – "a single living creature" that contains all living creatures within it? Seeing the universe as a super-organism with a permeating aliveness is not new – this was humanity's basic understanding for thousands of years until gradually replaced by the worldview of scientific materialism roughly 300 years ago. Since then, the scientific community has been employing its ever more powerful tools to explore the nature of reality and has discovered a universe of astonishing depth and subtlety. In turn, the ancient intuition of a living universe is now being reconsidered as science cuts away superstition to reveal the cosmos as a place of unexpected wonder, depth, and sophistication. Here are six key attributes emerging from science that point toward a living universe:

- 1 - A UNIFIED WHOLE: In the last several decades, scientific experiments have repeatedly confirmed "non-locality" and the discovery that the universe is a deeply unified system at the quantum level that communicates with itself *instantly*, across impossibly vast distances. To illustrate: At the speed of light, it takes more than eight minutes for a photon to travel from the sun to the Earth, and

more than 14 billion years to travel across our visible universe. Yet, quantum physics demonstrates these unimaginably vast distances are traversed and transcended, *instantaneously*, in the quantum realm. Science no longer views the universe as a disconnected collection of planets, stars, and fragments of matter. Instead, at the quantum level, the universe is fully unified and connected with itself at every moment. In the words of the physicist David Bohm, the universe is “an undivided wholeness in flowing movement.”

2 - IMMENSE BACKGROUND ENERGY: For centuries, scientists thought empty space was “empty.” Recently, scientists have discovered that an extraordinary amount of background energy permeates the universe. This invisible energy accounts for an estimated 96 percent of the known universe! In turn, the entire visible universe – atoms, people, planets, stars, and galaxies – constitutes 4 percent of the overall cosmos. Two kinds of invisible energy are known to exist: *dark matter* (a contractive force) accounts for roughly 23 percent of the invisible universe, and *dark energy* (an expansive force) accounts for approximately 73 percent of the universe. Empty space is not empty but is filled with titanic energies. David Bohm calculated that a single cubic inch of seemingly empty space contains the energy equivalent of millions of atomic bombs. We are immersed within a vast sea of subtle but astonishingly powerful energies with an array of capacities we are only beginning to discover.

3 - CONTINUOUSLY CO-ARISING: While an evolving universe provides a stunning narrative of “horizontal” unfolding *across* time, the insight of an emerging universe adds the “vertical” dimension of the universe continuously arising *in* time. The vertical dynamic of continuous creation slices through all that exists and presents everything as a single orchestration happening all at once. Despite outward appearances of solidity and stability, the universe is a completely dynamic system. Nothing endures. All is flow. Max Born, a physicist who was instrumental in the development of quantum mechanics wrote, “We have sought for firm ground and found none. The deeper we penetrate, the more restless becomes the universe; all is rushing about and vibrating in a wild dance<sup>2</sup>.” In the words of the cosmologist Brian Swimme, “The universe emerges out of an all-nourishing abyss not only fourteen billion years ago but in every moment<sup>3</sup>.” At every moment, the entire universe is being regenerated as a singular orchestration of manifestation –

a cosmic hologram being continuously projected into existence. There is one grand symphony in which we are all players, a single creative expression at each moment – a uni-verse.

4 - CONSCIOUSNESS AT EVERY SCALE: Scientists are finding evidence for consciousness or a knowing capacity throughout the universe. From the atomic level to the galactic scale, a self-organizing, centering capacity is at work that is fitting for each scale. In turn, the capacity for centering self-organization points to the presence of some level of knowing consciousness. The physicist and cosmologist Freeman Dyson writes that, at the atomic level, “Matter in quantum mechanics is not an inert substance but an active agent, constantly making choices between alternative possibilities. [...] It appears that mind, as manifested by the capacity to make choices, is to some extent inherent in every electron<sup>4</sup>.” This does not mean that an atom has the same consciousness as a human being but rather that an atom has a reflective capacity appropriate to its form and function. Max Planck, developer of quantum theory, stated, “I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness<sup>5</sup>.” An ecology of consciousness permeates the universe.

5 - FREEDOM AT THE FOUNDATIONS: Quantum physics describes reality in terms of probabilities, not certainties. This means that uncertainty and freedom are built into the very foundations of existence. No individual part of the cosmos determines the functioning of the whole; rather, everything is interconnected with everything else, weaving the cosmos into one, vast interacting system. In turn, it is the consistency of interrelations of all the parts that determines the condition of the continuously emerging whole. We therefore have great freedom to act within the limits established by the larger web of life.

6 - ABLE TO REPRODUCE ITSELF: A vital capacity for any living system is the ability to reproduce itself. A stunning hypothesis emerging from cosmology is the idea that our universe reproduces itself through the functioning of black holes. In this view, a black hole represents the seed from which a new universe can blossom and grow. Physicist John Gribbin writes, “Instead of a black hole representing a one-way journey to nowhere, many researchers now believe that it is a one-way journey to somewhere—to a new expanding universe in its own set of dimensions<sup>6</sup>.” Given the presence of billions of black holes in

our universe, there could be countless other cosmic systems continuously being born by “budding off” from our universe through the birth canal of black holes. Gribbin writes that universes are not only alive; they also evolve as do other living systems: “Universes that are ‘successful’ are the ones that leave the most offspring<sup>7</sup>.” The idea that there have been countless universes evolving through time is not new. A precursor can be found from 1779 when David Hume wrote, “Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out; much labour lost, many fruitless trials made; and a slow, but continued improvement carried on during infinite ages in the art of world-making<sup>8</sup>.”

When we bring these attributes together, a clearer picture of our remarkable universe comes into focus: The universe is a completely unified system that is continuously regenerated by the flow-through of phenomenal quantities of life energy whose essential nature includes consciousness, or a knowing capacity, that enables systems at every scale of existence to centre themselves and exercise some measure of freedom of choice. In addition, the universe appears able to reproduce itself via black holes within a vastly larger cosmic garden or multi-verse, where our universe is but one among countless others. Overall, the vision of the universe emerging from science is that of a magnificent, evolving super-organism.

#### HOW WISDOM TRADITIONS REGARD THE UNIVERSE

How does the emerging, scientific view of a living universe fit with the originating insights of the world’s major wisdom traditions? Is there a place of meeting in their respective views? Despite their many differences, when we penetrate the depths of the world’s major spiritual traditions, a stunning understanding about the universe emerges that is in accord with insights from the frontiers of science: We live within a living universe that arises, moment-by-moment, as an undivided whole in an unutterably vast process of awesome precision and power. The following quotes illustrate how this remarkable understanding is expressed across the world’s major religions (excerpted from my book, *The Living Universe*):

- ~ CHRISTIAN: “God is creating the entire universe, fully and totally, in this present now. Everything God created . . . God creates now all at once<sup>9</sup>.” Meister Eckhart, Christian mystic.
- ~ ISLAM: “You have a death and a return in every moment. . . Every moment the world is

renewed but we, in seeing its continuity of appearance, are unaware of its being renewed<sup>10</sup>.” Rumi, 13th century Sufi teacher and poet.

- ~ BUDDHIST: “My solemn proclamation is that a new universe is created every moment<sup>11</sup>.” D.T. Suzuki, Zen teacher and scholar.
- ~ HINDU: “The entire universe contributes incessantly to your existence. Hence the entire universe is your body<sup>12</sup>.” Sri Nisargadatta, Hindu teacher.
- ~ TAOIST: “The Tao is the sustaining Life-force and the mother of all things; from it, all things rise and fall without cease<sup>13</sup>.” *Tao Te Ching*.
- ~ INDIGENOUS: “[...] there was no such thing as emptiness in the world. Even in the sky there were no vacant places. Everywhere there was life, visible and invisible [...]<sup>14</sup>” Luther Standing Bear, Lakota elder.

Beneath the differences in language, a common vision is being described—the universe is continuously emerging as a fresh creation at every moment. All point to this same, extraordinary insight: the universe is not static, nor is its continuation assured. Instead, the universe is like a cosmic hologram that is being continuously upheld and renewed at every instant. A universal encouragement found across the world’s wisdom traditions is to *live in the “NOW.”* This core insight has a clear basis in physics: The present moment is the place of direct connection with the entire universe as it arises continuously. Each moment is a fresh formation of the universe, emerging seamlessly and flawlessly. When we are in the present moment, we are literally riding the wave of continuous creation of the cosmos – reality surfing.

#### A LIVING UNIVERSE IN EVERYDAY HUMAN EXPERIENCE

How does a living universe perspective fit with our everyday human experience? If the unity of existence is not an experience to be created but an always-manifesting condition waiting to be appreciated, then how wide-spread is this experience in people’s lives? Do many people experience the everyday world around ourselves as “alive”? Scientific surveys give us insight into this key question:

- ~ A global survey involving 7,000 youths in 17 countries was taken in 2008. It found that 75 percent believe in a “higher power,” a majority say they have had a transcendent experience, believe in life after death and think it is “probably true” that all living things are connected<sup>15</sup>. These views are in accord with a paradigm of aliveness.



We can secure further insight from scientific surveys conducted in the United States that show a measurable transformation in mainstream consciousness is underway.

~ In 1962 a survey of the adult population in the US found that 22 percent reported having a profound experience of communion with the universe. By 2009, the percentage of the population reporting a “mystical experience” had grown dramatically to 49 percent of the adult population<sup>16</sup>.

~ In a national survey of the US in 2014, nearly 60 percent of adults reported they regularly feel a deep sense of “spiritual peace and well-being,” and 46 percent say they experience a deep sense of “wonder about the universe” at least once a week<sup>17</sup>.

~ A 2002, national Gallup survey asked respondents to rate the statement, “I have had a profound religious experience or awakening that changed the direction of my life.” A stunning 41 percent of Americans (about 80 million adults at the time), said the statement *completely* applies to them<sup>18</sup>.

~ A 2009 Pew survey of a national sample of Americans found that roughly three-in-ten Americans (29 percent) say they have felt in touch with someone who has died and a quarter say they believe in reincarnation<sup>19</sup>.

~ Another trend indicative of cultural awakening is the growing use of psychedelics such as mushrooms, ayahuasca and LSD. In a US survey published in 2013, an estimated 32 million adults or just over 10 percent of the adult population said they have used psychedelics<sup>20</sup>. These drugs can awaken mystical experiences marked by feelings of unity with the universe, a sacred sense of reality, and an expanded sense of self. Psychedelics are being used to treat depression and post-traumatic stress in war veterans, so the healing potential of the experiences they facilitate is well established.

These surveys show that experiences of spiritual communion with the aliveness of the universe are not a fringe phenomenon but, instead, are familiar encounters for a large portion of the public. Humanity is measurably waking up to a larger view of ourselves and the universe.

Awakening to the unity and intelligent aliveness of the universe is often accompanied by feelings of great joy, boundless love and the presence of a subtle, radiant light. To illustrate, below is a classic account of a spontaneous awakening experience. While an undergraduate student, F.C. Happold had this experience of communion with the permeating aliveness of the universe:

“There was just the room, with its shabby furniture and the fire burning in the grate and the red-shaded

lamp on the table. But the room was filled by a Presence, which in a strange way was both about me and within me, like light or warmth. I was overwhelmingly possessed by Someone who was not myself, and yet I felt I was more myself than I had ever been before. I was filled with an intense happiness, and almost unbearable joy, such as I had never known before and have never known since. And over all was a deep sense of peace and security and certainty<sup>21</sup>.”

Turning from spontaneous awakening to the intentional exploration of consciousness, for more than two thousand years, pioneering individuals have been investing years in solitude and sustained meditation to directly investigate the nature of reality. What these explorers of consciousness have discovered is not a grey, machine-like hum of a non-living universe but, instead, an ocean of unbounded love, light and creative intelligence whose nature is beyond the reach of words<sup>22</sup>. When our personal aliveness becomes transparent to the aliveness of the living universe, transformational experiences of wonder and awe emerge naturally. As we open into the cosmic dimensions of our being, we feel more at home, less self-absorbed, more empathy for others and an increased desire to be of service to life. These shifts in perspective are immensely valuable for building a sustainable future.

Given the psychological and social benefits of meditation, it is understandable that as people are confronted with an unraveling outer world, a growing number are turning inward in search of a more direct and felt connection with life – and this has helped produce a rising wave of interest in meditation around the planet. For example, a 2012 study in the US found that 8 percent of adults or roughly 18 million persons meditate regularly<sup>23</sup>. Ancient wisdom traditions are being rediscovered and adapted to modern conditions. People are developing a new literacy of consciousness in their everyday lives. For example, the elevated experience of “flow consciousness” is now recognized, not only by meditators, but also by high-performance sports teams, jazz ensembles, business-project teams, farm workers, classrooms, community groups, and more<sup>24</sup>. Humanity is developing a basic literacy of consciousness.

Humanity’s awakening is being further accelerated by virtual reality technologies that immerse people in alternative worlds of experience and expand how we view, and think about, the “ordinary world” around us. Inexpensive headsets with a computer interface are making immersive experiences in alternative realities widely available for education, medicine, games, urban planning, and much more. In a simulation, nothing real “really” exists – except as a computer program and

yet, when we put on a VR headset, within seconds our sensory experiences and reactions feel incredibly real. What is “reality”? By directly experiencing our immersion within an alternative reality that feels real to our senses, our curiosity can be awakened regarding the reality of our everyday experience. Because virtual reality so vividly creates the felt-experience of entering alternative worlds, it loosens our attachment to a singular view. Virtual reality technologies are an evolutionary catalyst, awakening mainstream cultures to viewing the universe as a continuously refreshed, cosmic hologram that can be known consciously and directly because we are an integral expression of it. As these diverse streams of awakening converge, they are forming a river of wisdom that is transforming global consciousness and culture.

#### OUR BIO-COSMIC IDENTITY AND EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY

Summarizing: Powerful trends are converging to awaken the paradigm of a living universe in mainstream global culture: astonishing new attributes of the universe from scientific discoveries, confirming insights from the world’s wisdom traditions, measurable growth in awakening experiences from around the world, accelerated learning through virtual reality technologies, and much more. What does this combined wisdom tell us about our identity and evolutionary journey?

1 - BIO-COSMIC IDENTITY: From a living universe perspective, our identity is immeasurably larger than our purely biological self. We are vastly more than a skin-encapsulated bundle of chemical and neurological interactions. Our physical existence is permeated and sustained by an aliveness that is inseparable from the larger universe. Seeing ourselves as part of the fabric of creation awakens our sense of connection with, and compassion for, the totality of life. Cosmologist Brian Swimme explains that the intimate sense of self-awareness we experience bubbling up at each moment, “is rooted in the originating activity of the universe. We are all of us arising together at the centre of the cosmos.” We once thought that we were no bigger than our physical bodies, but now we are discovering that we are deeply connected participants in the continuous arising of the entire universe. Awakening to our larger identity as both unique and inseparably connected with a co-arising universe transforms feelings of existential separation into experiences of subtle communion as bio-cosmic beings. We are far richer, deeper, more complex and more alive than we ever thought. To discover this in our direct experience is to enter a new age of exploration and discovery.

2 - COSMIC PURPOSE: It is a precious gift to be born as a human being. Our bodies are biodegradable vehicles for acquiring soul-growing experiences. As compostable conduits for channelling learning experiences, our bodies are the current expressions of a creative aliveness that, after nearly 14 billion years, enable the universe to look back and reflect upon itself. While we have the gift of a body to anchor our experience, it is important to recognize our bio-cosmic nature. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, “Take heed of the Living One while you’re alive, lest you die and seek to see Him and be unable to do so.” An ancient Greek saying speaks even more directly, “Light your candle before night overtakes you.” If the universe were non-living at its foundations, it would take a miracle to save us from extinction at the time of death, and then to take us from here to a heaven (or promised land) of continuing aliveness. However, if the universe is alive, then we are already nested and growing within its aliveness. When our physical body dies, the life-stream that we are will move into the larger aliveness. We don’t need a miracle to save us—we are already inside the miracle of sustaining aliveness. Instead of being saved from death, our job is to bring mindful attention to our ever-emerging aliveness in the here and now.

We are moving from seeing ourselves as accidents of creation wandering through a lifeless cosmos without meaning or purpose, to seeing ourselves consciously engaged in a sacred journey of discovery in a universe of vast depth and richness. An old saying goes, “A dead man tells no stories.” In a similar way, “A dead universe tells no stories.” In contrast, a living universe is itself a vast story continuously unfolding with countless characters playing out gripping dramas of awakening, inseparable from the artistry of world-making. The universe is a living, unfolding creation. Saint Teresa of Avila saw this when she wrote, “The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too.” If we see ourselves as participants in a cosmic garden of life that has been growing patiently over billions of years, then we feel invited to shift from feelings of indifference, fear and separation to feelings of curiosity, love, and participation. In the words of Annamarie Schimmel, “Once the journey to God is finished, the infinite journey in God begins.”

3 - NATURAL ETHICS: If we are no more than biological entities, then it makes sense to think we could disconnect ourselves from the suffering of the rest of life. However, if we are all swimming in the same ocean of subtle aliveness, then it is understandable that we each have some measure of direct experience of being in communion with the larger fabric

of life. Because we share the same matrix of existence, the totality of life is already touching each of us and co-creating the field of aliveness within which we exist. A felt ethics emerges from our intuitive connection with the living universe in the form of a “moral tuning fork.” We can each tune into the non-local field of life and sense what is in harmony with the well-being of the whole. When we are in alignment, we experience a warm, positive hum of well-being as a kinesthetic sense that we may call “compassion.” In a similar way, we can also experience the dissonant hum of discordance. When we are centered in the life current flowing through us, we tend to act in ways that promote the wellbeing of the whole. In recognizing we are partners in the unfolding story of cosmic evolution, we shift from a sense of existential isolation to feelings of intimate communion. With life is nested within life, we treat everything that exists as alive and worthy of great respect. We recognize that every action has ethical consequences that cascade instantly throughout quantum-linked cosmos.

4 - SUSTAINABLE LIVING: The Earth cannot sustain humanity’s current levels and patterns of resource consumption. We are moving rapidly beyond the long-term carrying capacity of the planet. The paradigm of materialism is leaving a devastated Earth as our legacy to our children. The perspective of a living universe offers a very different understanding and future: *Aliveness is the only true wealth*. Nothing is more precious than learning to live in the deep ecology of the living universe. If we focus our attention on growing our experience of aliveness, it is only natural for us to choose simpler ways of living that afford greater time and opportunity to develop the areas of our lives where we feel most alive—investing our time in nature, nurturing relationships, caring communities, creative expressions, and service to others. In seeing the universe as alive, we naturally shift our priorities from an “ego economy” based upon consuming deadness to an “living economy” based upon growing aliveness. An aliveness economy seeks to touch life more lightly while generating an abundance of meaning and satisfaction.

5- ECO-VILLAGES & NEW COMMUNITIES: A deep change in perspective finds natural expression in how we construct our everyday lives. As we learn to live sustainably while creating lives of greater satisfaction and fulfillment, new forms of community will be a natural outcome. As the world unravels, smaller communities can provide lifeboats of resilience to weather the storms of transition. Communities of the scale of a “village” (roughly one or two hundred people) are small enough to support a rich array of personal relationships and large enough to support a vibrant

micro-economy and diverse social activities. Large-scale breakdowns will produce local breakthroughs in patterns of living. Cities could be decentralized rapidly into thousands of relatively self-reliant and highly resilient “eco-villages,” each with distinctive adaptations of architecture, culture, and expressions of sustainability. Common to most would be a child-care facility and play area, a common house of some kind (for community meetings, celebrations, and regular meals together), a community garden, a recycling and composting area, solar energy systems, a bit of open space, and a workshop. Each could offer a variety of services to the surrounding eco-villages as well; for example, organic gardening, green building, conflict resolution, health care, home schooling, elder care, and so on. Ecovillages could replace the alienating and insecure landscape of massive urban regions with countless, small islands of sanity, security and resilient community. Ecovillage living would offer a path of separation and retreat from the world were it not for the internet and social media creating an intensely interconnected and interdependent planet that is ever-more transparent to itself.

Awakening to our conscious connection with the living universe naturally expands our scope of concern and compassion—and brightens the prospect of working together to build a sustainable future. However, making the turn from separation to connection does not end our journey of learning. As we discover the astonishing depths and subtlety of the universe, we recognize we have as much to learn on our journey of return as we have acquired on our long journey of separation. This is humbling news. Instead of the current era representing the pinnacle of human evolution, we appear to be approaching a midway point in the journey of awakening. We still have far to go and much to learn to reach our initial maturity as a dynamically stable, species-civilization.

#### HUMANITY’S CHOICE

Our first task as a human community is to recognize the remarkable choice directly before us. On the one hand, if we regard the universe as dead at its foundations, then feelings of existential alienation, anxiety, dread, and fear are understandable. Why seek communion with the cold indifference of lifeless matter and empty space? If we relax into a dead universe, we will simply sink into existential despair, so better to live on the surface of life. On the other hand, if we live in a living universe, then feelings of subtle connection, curiosity, and gratitude are natural. When we see ourselves as participants in a cosmic garden of life that has been developing patiently over billions of

years, we shift from indifference, fear, and cynicism to curiosity, love, and awe. Humanity's future pivots on which understanding prevails and the choices that naturally follow.

The well-being of humanity and the Earth depends upon this generation waking up, growing up, and moving from our adolescence into our early adulthood as a species, and thereby establishing a new relationship with nature, other humans, and the living universe. If we do not welcome the miracle of life around us and within us, the alternative seems likely to be our effective extinction as a species. Climate chaos, sea level rise, mass migrations, species extinction and more are accelerating and moving past critical tipping points, producing irreversible changes to the Earth, and making humanity's turn toward a sustainable future immensely more difficult. Would we choose ruin over life? As unthinkable as it may be, it seems painfully realistic to conclude that, *unless the great diversity of humanity can find an awe-inspiring bridge to the future that is grounded in a commonly felt experience of tremendous, untapped evolutionary potential, we will not have the soulful motivation needed for turning from separation and survival to community and co-evolution.*

Our situation is unprecedented: *We are being pushed by Earth-sized ecological necessity and pulled by Universe-sized evolutionary opportunity.* If we lose sight of where we are (living within a living universe), we profoundly diminish our understanding of who we are (beings of both biological and cosmic dimensions), and the journey we are on (learning to live within the depths of cosmic aliveness). *Ultimately, in learning to live in a living universe, we are learning to live in the deep ecology of existence – in eternity. This is such an astonishing call to our soulful nature from the deep compassion of a living universe that we would be spiritual fools to ignore such a precious invitation.*

We are in an early, “establishing phase” of conscious evolution where we are just beginning to recognize ourselves in the mirror of reflective consciousness. Although the universe has been growing us through countless lifetimes, only now are we waking up to who and what we truly are. As we use the internet and social media to collectively witness our planetary journey, it is helpful to view the path as a reflexive loop that turns back upon itself. We are in the process of realizing our self-given name as a species: *homo sapiens sapiens* or the being that “knows that it knows.” In becoming “doubly wise,” we turn the knowing faculty back upon itself and, ultimately, become aware that we are awareness itself—an invisible knowing-presence at the foundations of the living universe.

As the push of outer necessity meets the pull of untapped inner capacity, humanity is beginning to awaken. And yet, adversity trends such as climate change are accelerating so rapidly there is a real danger that humanity's responses could prove to be too little and too late—and we may veer off into a new dark age. If we are distracted and in denial, and overlook the urgency and importance of the great transition now underway, we will miss a unique, never to be repeated, evolutionary opportunity. Each generation is asked to make sacrifices for the next, to be a caretaker for the future. This generation is being pushed by an injured Earth and pulled by a welcoming universe to make a monumental gift to humanity's future: working together with equanimity and maturity to consciously realize our evolutionary potential and purpose of learning to live in a living universe.



<sup>1</sup> From a forthcoming volume published by the Global Purpose Movement (November, 2017) <<http://bit.ly/2qzgwBK>>.

<sup>2</sup> Max Born, *The Restless Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1936: 277).

<sup>3</sup> Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* (New York: Orbis, 1996: 100).

<sup>4</sup> Freeman Dyson, *Infinite In All Directions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988: 297).

<sup>5</sup> Max Planck, *The Observer*, January 25, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> John Gribbin, *In the Beginning: The Birth of the Living Universe* (New York: Little Brown, 1993: 244).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: 252.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, “Critique of the Design Argument,” <http://bit.ly/2r3xYse>.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Fox, *Meditations With Meister Eckhart* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1983: 24).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970: 364).

<sup>12</sup> Sri Nisargadatta Majaraj, *I Am That*, Part I (trans., Maurice Frydman) (Bombay, Chetana, 1973: 289).

<sup>13</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English), (New York: Vintage, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Luther Standing Bear, quoted in Joseph Epes Brown, “Modes of Contemplation Through Actions: North American Indians,” *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, New York, November-December, 1973: 194.

<sup>15</sup> *With Their Own Voices: A Global Exploration of How Today's Young People Experience and Think About Spiritual Development*, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Lisa Kimball, and Pamela Ebstyn King, 2008 by Search Institute, <http://bit.ly/2reuDXN>. Also, see article by Jane Lampman in the November 6, 2008 edition of the *Christian Science Monitor*.

<sup>16</sup> See: Andrew Greeley and William McCready, “Are We a Nation of Mystics,” in *New York Times Magazine*, January 26, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious,” November 3, 2015, <http://pewrsr.ch/2rbzVBu>.

<sup>18</sup> George Gallup Jr, “Religious Awakenings Bolster Americans' Faith,” Gallup Organization, January 14, 2003. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/7582/>.



<sup>19</sup> <http://pewrsr.ch/2s60yaT>.

<sup>20</sup> “Over 30 million psychedelic users in the United States,” Published online March 28, 2013; <http://bit.ly/2rbTp8V>.

<sup>21</sup> F.C. Happold quoted in: Greeley and McCready, *op. cit.*, January 26, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, descriptions of the generative source of the universe; *The Living Universe, op. cit.*: 86-89.

<sup>23</sup> “Use of Complementary Health Approaches in the U.S.,” National Health Interview Survey, See 2012 study, <http://bit.ly/2rwJazd>.

<sup>24</sup> Duane Elgin, “*Collective Consciousness and Cultural Healing*,” a report to the Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, MI, October 1997; <http://bit.ly/2qu7Kwg>.





*One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light,  
but by making the darkness conscious.*

CARL G. JUNG

*Our brains are so conditioned through education, religion, and all the rest  
to think we are separate entities with separate souls and so on.  
We are no individuals at all, we are the result of thousand of years of human  
experience, endeavours and struggles.*

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

*Enlightenment is when a wave realises it is the ocean.*

THICH NATH HANH

