

Our Cosmic Inheritance, Our Cosmic Destiny:

"We Are Truly Meant To Be Here"

For Rosh Hashanah Morning

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Rabbi Stuart Weinberg Gershon

Temple Sinai

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Words cannot express my appreciation to you for all your love and concern after my recent surgery. Your prayers, cards, flowers, meals, and books bolstered my spirit when I needed it most.

I heard from the rumor mill that I've lost my voice forever. I also heard that I will not be present to lead high holy days services this year. Well, I am so pleased to be here! And thankful that I still have my voice.

You know, there is nothing like not feeling yourself. There is nothing quite like feeling yourself again. I am blessed. With gratitude to God, I say: barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh haolam hagomel lechayavim tovot she gemalani kol tov.

Praised are you, dear God, life force of the universe who grants kindnesses to the undeserving, just as you have bestowed such a kindness on me."

It seems the Epstein family wanted to give their precious son, Joshua, a very special bar mitzvah.

So they checked into having a safari bar mitzvah...but that had been done. Then they looked into an expedition to the South Pole...but that would be too cold. Finally, they found out that a space ship to mars was available on Joshua's date and they booked it.

They got the dj, the party favors, the family and friends, and loaded everything onto the space ship and took off for mars.

Upon arrival back to earth, Grandma Sadie quickly returned to her condo in Florida. Her

friends peppered her with questions:

"How was your grandson's *davar torah*? "it was okay," she replied. How was the food? "okay," she said. Then Sadie's best friend piped up, "Sadie, what's the matter? You seem so disappointed about your grandson's *bar mitzvah* reception."

Finally Sadie admitted, "the reception was nice...but mars...the planet had no atmosphere!"

Now, as long as we are on the subject of atmosphere....

According to Jewish tradition, Rosh Hashanah celebrates yom harat olam, the birthday of the universe. This is our sacred time to ponder its mystery.

What is our place in this universe? Are we important to it or just a cosmic accident? And if we are a fundamental feature of a divine plan, what is our true and ultimate purpose?

This morning, I would like to approach this question from a different angle. I don't want to discuss what the theologians say. I want to share with you what some contemporary cosmologists and physicists say about these questions. Why? Because I think contemporary scientists are actually doing the job of addressing these metaphysical questions, better than the theologians. And I want to show you how their scientific, empirical observations dovetail with Jewish mystical insights.

Now if I were to ask you, "what does contemporary science teach about the universe?" I think many of us would answer that science "proves" our existence is nothing more than a cosmic accident. But this conclusion is not thought of as certain by any means. Nor is it what all of science teaches.

In fact, what contemporary science does teach is that there is abounding evidence in nature that we have been built into the universe and that the universe reveals purpose.

Back in the 1970's, physicists began to notice an astonishing pattern within the fundamental laws of nature. Called anthropic coincidences, they discovered that twenty or so of nature's most critical constants -- such as the numerical values given to specific cosmic forces, the size and overall texture of the universe, and the properties of space itself -- coincide exactly with what is required to produce human life.

Even the vast size of the universe, on the order of 10 billion light years across, which seems at first to point to how insignificant we are, turns out to be the necessary size to make possible our arrival on the scene.

For humanity to come into being, all the control dials governing the universe had to be

set precisely at the right frequency -- and they were! Against astronomically unfavorable odds, we have surely won the cosmological lottery many times over.

Our universe displays features of intelligent design. These anthropic coincidences present tantalizing evidence that the laws of our universe have been designed with us in mind.

Is it possible that this universe could be so "finely tuned" and still merely arbitrary? Our universe cries out for far deeper explanation than mere chance.

"I cannot believe," writes famed mathematical astrophysicist Paul Davies, "that our existence in this universe is a mere quirk of fate, an accident of history, an incidental blip in the great cosmic drama. Our involvement is too intimate. The physical species *Homo sapiens* may count for nothing, but the existence of mind in some organism on some planet in the universe is surely a fact of fundamental significance. Through conscious beings the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor byproduct of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here."

The designer universe in which we dwell points to having been created for the express purpose of creating consciousness, of transforming initially inanimate matter into conscious, sentient, rational beings.

But why? Why has the universe transformed matter into thought? Why has the universe purposely sought out the emergence of a self-reflective human consciousness?

We need to look no further than a mother's love for her baby. Cosmologist Brian Swimme observes, "you have molten rock, and then all by itself, it transforms into a human mother caring for her child. That's a rather astounding transformation. Of course, it takes four billion years. You've got silica, You've got magnesium. You've got all the elements of rock, and it becomes the translucent blue eye and beautiful brown hair and this deep sense of love and concern and even sacrifice for a child.

That is a deep transfiguration..." so the purpose of human consciousness is to bring more love and more compassion into the universe. The purpose of human consciousness is to take responsibility for all life. The purpose of human consciousness is to make us aware of the interdependence of all human beings and our interconnection with the spiritual force in the universe that "inclines the world toward goodness, toward generosity, toward compassion, and toward an alleviation of unnecessary suffering."

As an advanced life form, we possess the potential to bring to bear the significant power of conscious intellect upon the universe for good. Indeed, humanity is the only species on this planet with the unique capacity to care about all other species. Through the power of human consciousness we have the capacity to exponentially expand mind and extend heart throughout the universe.

Humanity, writes physicist Steven Barr, "is perched at the halfway point between the very largest and the very smallest things in nature, and between the longest and shortest times." thus, human life is lived out "in between." from the point of view of scales of time and distance, humanity is in the middle – in the thick of things, where the action is.

But, according to Rabbi Michael Lerner, it is our failure to understand our true spiritual nature -- to perceive ourselves as interdependent and connected --that is bringing our planet to the brink of self-destruction and is the root cause of the rampant narcissism and materialism that characterizes the western world. With the gift of our conscious minds, we can truly

Enhance this planet -- or plunder it and degrade it.

For centuries, our Jewish mystics taught that you and I are vessels of divine light. It is no myth. It is no bubba meisa. It is true.

You see, the Milky Way, our sun, this earth, were brought into being by the atoms of ancient exploding stars just 4.5 billion years ago. Quite literally, you could say that we are made of stardust. We are created out of the fuel, the stuff that makes stars shine. In a very scientific way, we are "heavenly" beings.

Perhaps deep within the recesses of humanity's collective unconscious mind, we have known this all along. Could it be that the classic concept of "angels," known to all three of the major western religions, reflects a deep awareness of our true origins in the stars?

Historically, science and religion have been frequent antagonists. Hopefully, in the 21st century, they will become mutually supportive. As Albert Einstein once quipped, "religion without science is blind. But science without religion is lame."

Both religion and cosmology teach of the deep connections between the universe and ourselves. We may very well be one of the universe's most grand experiments. "for you see," writes Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, "we are the result of the desire of awareness, and the prayer of the creator, to comprehend itself. We are the reification of the inexorable divine urge to create consciousness and thereby fulfill itself. For consciousness –and you and I – and god—live to create more light."

God is not done. God is still evolving.

The universe is not done. The universe is still unfolding.

We are not done. Humanity is only beginning to awaken to its true nature. For we are stardust – animated stardust! Each and every one of us possesses the energy to make light, to shimmer, to shine. This is our cosmic inheritance.

This is our cosmic destiny. This offers us a life of dignity and purpose.

And this grand experiment of manifesting God's energies in the world through human consciousness has another five billion years to run before our sun expires.

"The day will come," writes Teilhard De Chardin, "when after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history, of the world, man will have discovered fire."

My friends, when the sun goes down tonight, please take a moment to look up and gaze at the stars. For the stars speak to us saying: the universe summons you and me to be instruments for the ongoing process of loving, healing, and transforming ourselves and the world.

Yes, it's written in the stars. "We are truly meant to be here."