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The Challenge of the Deep Truth:

A Book Review of *the Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*

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Deep truths challenge us profoundly.

Brian Swimme

The universe reveals itself to us even if we are not ready to receive its deep truth. On one sunny morning, I was hit by such a truth. The TV screen was showing an image of the Earth that was captured by a satellite. The stunning blue of the Earth took up three quarters of the screen. From the upper left corner of the screen, a beam of light was making its way towards the surface of the planet. The soundless and almost motionless picture was hypnotic. I forgot where I was. The warm sunlight from the window brought me back to the living room. While seeing the Earth being lit up by the beam from the Sun on the TV screen, sitting in a pool of sunlight in the living room, I was feeling the heat of the sun on my back. A double vision. I felt as if I were floating in a dark space like the Earth.

My experience of the warmth of the sunlight was directly related to the Earth's relationship with the Sun. In the quiet morning, this simple truth hit me. Of course, I knew that the Earth rotates and revolves around the Sun, and this relationship between the Sun and the Earth creates "days" and "nights" as well as seasonal changes. But still, I say that the Sun "rises" and "goes" down. There is a gap between what I know intellectually and how I perceive the world in my daily life. My experience of that morning bridged the two. It also brought confusion

to my ordinary perception.

In general, there is a split between what we know about the truth of the world and how we experience the world. *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* is an attempt to heal this split. The author, Brian Swimme, warns that in this healing process, the willingness to be confused is mandatory. He challenges our consciousness. At the same time, his careful guidance takes us to a deeper truth of the universe step by step.

For instance, Swimme discusses Einstein's confusion. Einstein discovered that the universe is expanding. He trembled from his own discovery that contradicted an unquestioned assumption that the universe was an "unchanging infinite space." Not only did Einstein decide not to publish his discovery, he denied it altogether. Until he had a dialogue with Edwin Hubble who had observed through a telescope that clusters of galaxies were moving away from each other, the truth of the expanding universe was buried deep in his heart.

The universe is expanding in every direction. Clusters of galaxies are moving away from us. This implies that we are at the center of the universe. At the same time, we are moving away from other galactic systems, too. At a first glance these two facts look contradictory, Swimme explains that the universe is omni centered, implying that every single point in the universe is the center of the universe.

How can we fully digest such a deep truth? How can we bring this discovery into our everyday consciousness? How can we find the meaning of such a discovery for humanity? Swimme asserts that even if we know such a great scientific discovery, if we cannot change our consciousness, action, and relation to the world accordingly, the discovery is meaningless. In his words:

What is needed here is a transformative process where one can learn to see and to feel the world in a way congruent with what is actually happening. Such a transformation would enable one to transcend the split modern condition of experiencing the world one way, while knowing the truth of the world is otherwise. (p. 24)

It is overwhelming even just to imagine the Earth floating in the expanding space. We are so accustomed to separating what we know and how we live. As a result, our actions have been out of touch with cosmological reality, and our knowledge without a cosmological ethics

has been causing tremendous damage to the Earth and its community. In order to heal the Earth, we need to heal this split between "knowledge" and "experience." To do so requires us to transform our consciousness which, Swimme believes, is precisely the aim of cosmology.

Like Einstein, we may experience confusion in the process of transformation our consciousness. Like any kind of transformative learning, this transformation of consciousness is not easy, but Swimme convinces me that it will be rewarding. By integrating "knowledge" and "experience," we actually begin to live "in" the universe. Beginning to experience sunrises and sunsets as Earth's rotation, we become "a very small number of people who actually live in the solar system," instead of living in a "fantasy that regards the Earth as a fixed place" (pp. 29-30). Through the transformation of consciousness, Swimme believes, our ways of living would be more congruent with the ways of the universe, and embody the deep truth of the universe, we become alive in the unfolding universe. When the universe enters into our consciousness, we begin to participate in the self-organizing dynamics of the universe that possesses tremendous beauty and creativity.

How can we begin this process? How can we change our consciousness? "There is no reaching out. Rather we reach into our immediate experience" (p. 65), says Swimme. One of the most immediate cosmological experiences of ours is that of gravity. We tend to associate gravity with weight. Challenging this common understanding of gravity, Swimme states, "[I]n a strictly scientific sense, no being has any intrinsic weight. Rather, all bodies are capable of entering into gravitational interactions..." (p. 52). We are all invited to interact with this gravitational attraction. In other words, we exist in "radical relational mutuality." Swimme argues:

[I]solation and alienation are profoundly false states of mind. We were born out of the Earth Community and its infinite creativity and delight and adventure. Our natural state is intimacy within the encompassing community.... Any ultimate separation from this larger and enveloping community is impossible, and any ideology that proposes that the universe is nothing but a collection of pre-consumer items is going to be maintained only at a terrible price. (p. 34)

We use instrumental knowledge that excludes cosmological ethics in

order to make a living, while regarding the search for the meaning of life as something to be dealt with in our leisure time. We are conditioned to accept this way of living as "normal." The meaning of life can only be found with the recognition of mutual connections. We cannot find the meaning in the "profoundly false consciousness" in which we justify "separation" as our normal state.

Swimme critiques consumerism that covers up the pervasive "meaninglessness" in the industrial and post-industrial societies. He reveals how we, modern humans, are imprisoned by our own desire to acquire newer and fancier consumer goods. In our time, the cosmology through which we situate ourselves in a larger context has been taken over by the consumer culture that has become the most successful "cult" on this planet. If we dare to find the meaning of life and feel alive, we first need to examine our destructive behavior that has brought tremendous suffering to other species, many of which have been pushed to extinction and indigenous people whose livelihood has been profoundly affected by the profit driven economic systems that constitute consumerism. We need to depart from the vicious cycle of consumerism in which "humans exist to work at jobs, to earn money, to get stuff" (p. 18). We need to be aware of the process of lobotomization of humans and have to wake up from the false consciousness that regards "separation" as the norm.

When I saw how the beam of the sun shone on the surface of the Earth on the TV screen, I felt as if I were falling into deep space. In the midst of the experience, I realized that the gravity of the Earth was holding me as it had been. In a similar way, the Sun's gravitational power holds the Earth. If there were insignificant gravitational interactions between the Sun and the Earth, the Earth would sail off to deep space. Our existence is held in its place by the bond between the two. All of our thinking, understanding, feeling, and experiences takes place in the middle of this massive cosmic interaction. *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* tells us that we are a part of this cosmic attraction, and we are always blessed by this cosmic love. This very idea brings us to deep meditation. In this meditation, we reflect upon what it means to be humans in this vast universe. Through the renewed understanding of our existence, we may be able to touch the hidden heart of the universe of which creativity and love has made the existence of all beings on this planet possible. We are all at the center of the

universe, and our task is to live this truth.

Bibliography

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