



INTRODUCTION

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Every being has a story. A time when they came into existence; a time when they were moulded and transformed through circumstance and experience; a time when they begin to age and decay. Cultures, too, have their stories. Many of these we know as myths, as ancient ways of explaining how our world came to be. For the human, story helps us to create meaning and to understand events. Story contextualises. In a world where we have constant and immediate access only to our own thoughts, words and deeds, we need story to locate ourselves within the larger context of life of which we are just a part.

Throughout history each cultural group has had a creation story or myth. This was the story within which they oriented their lives. It acted as a guide by which to navigate through life's uncertainties and difficulties. Using analogy, it sought to explain such phenomenon as human suffering and death. It was a mythical answer to the fundamental existential human questions such as why are we here, do we matter, is there a God? Our creation stories are important because they reflect the beliefs and value systems that a culture holds and in turn help to shape the beliefs and values of individuals. For a long time, much of the Western world has been without an effective creation story. This has led to a disorientation in the human condition, to whole cultures not knowing who they are or where they have come from, to mindless destruction of the ecosystems that sustain us on this planet, our only home, the creation.

A new creation story is needed, one that is both mythical and based on fact, that transcends religion but can incorporate it, that enunciates scientifically but with the vision of the poet, one that speaks to people with the power to awe them back into life. The story being told in this book is that story. It is the story of that which is the ultimate context. It too, has its own story, a story that the people of our times are the first to be able to tell. This is the story of the Universe. It is also the story of Earth, of life, of the human and of the power of conscious thought.

Thomas Berry once wrote how Earth is primary and the human is derivative. By extension it can be said that the Universe is primary and that Earth is derivative. The Universe does not exist 'out there' in space, it is in us, part of us, as we are for our short lives, part of it. But this is knowledge that we are only newly acquiring and it is the people of this century who, with the information from the sciences, can speak for the first time in history about the Universe in which we live. We are now able to know certain things about it, such as how it began, how old it is currently estimated to be, how it evolved and transformed through time, and the structures and dynamics that govern it. We also have greater knowledge of Earth, the part of the Universe that we are most intimate with, that we have direct access to, and the part of the Universe that physically formed us.

The story of the Universe is the epic unfolding of the world, an evolutionary tale of awesome scope. It speaks of unity and diversity, of desire and curiosity, of wonder and awe. It speaks of creativity and imagination, of death, destruction and transformation. It is the story of science. It is the story of spirit. It is the story of all beings, extinct, present and yet to be born. It is a sacred story of magical unfolding, a story that is still being born and told in you and me, now. It is a story, once known, that has the power to inspire our species into becoming the species we were born to be.