

Daily Meditation Transcript 08/14/2021  
Shamanism and the "Ultimate Powers of the Universe"

Good morning.

Today we are celebrating what Thomas Berry calls the "ultimate powers of the universe." And this very much has to do with our discussion this week about shamanism too: our becoming initiated into a deeper and fuller mode of seeing the world.

And as medieval mystics talk about and indigenous people everywhere know, the human consciousness really begins by being triggered by the awe and wonder of the universe. Rabbi Heschel says that awe is the experience of the human mind encountering the universe. So all our experiences of awe are a cosmic experience, a cosmic trigger, that begins the road of wisdom.

Heschel also says that awe is the beginning of wisdom, awe is the beginning of wisdom. But Thomas Berry in his wonderful book *Dream of the Earth* -- I cite his teaching here and I'd like to spend more time with you exegeting it if you will:

"In moments of confusion such as the present---" now, he wrote this 30 years ago; things were not nearly as confused and chaotic as they are now in any sphere whatsoever, so he was being prophetic. He was anticipating the compounding of confusion that we're now in across the board!

"-- in these moments we are not left simply to our own rational contrivances--" I like that phrase, "our rational contrivances." Another way of saying that is that we're not going to get out of this chaos just by rationality; we're not going to think our way out of this.

"-- we are supported by the ultimate powers of the universe, as they make themselves present to us through the spontaneities within our own beings." Being present to the ultimate powers of the universe that reveal themselves to us -- how? "Through the spontaneities of our own beings." So he's saying that we're all open, we all have the capacity to be open to the powers of the universe.

And you can call these powers what you will. Traditionally we've called them angels or spirits; indigenous people call them spirits; maybe in scientific language you might call it the ecosystem or the ocean system.

The point is that we have to open ourselves up to these ultimate powers, powers that make the earth go around, even. So gravity, sun, electromagnetic energy -- these are powers too.

"We need only become sensitized to these spontaneities. Not with a naive simplicity, but with a critical appreciation."

So it's not a time for naive take and it's not a time to ditch our left brain, our rational brain, our intellectual brain, our science. It's not a time to ditch science but it is a time to supplement it: to bring together what I would call the right and left hemisphere of the brain, the intuition and the rational. Bring them together so we're not naively simplistic but do have a critical appreciation in the larger context of awe and wonder, reverence, and gratitude.

"This intimacy with our genetic endowment and through this endowment with a larger cosmic process," the larger cosmic process.

You see why I emphasize how the medieval mystics like the indigenous people everywhere address first the larger cosmic process. Because if you begin with the human, which we've been doing for hundreds of years in the West, you end up as we are today: confused, isolated, and lonely... and also very selfish.

So through this endowment with the larger cosmic process this does not happen primarily in "the role of the philosopher, the priest, the prophet, or the professor." These professions are not going to save us. Philosophy, priest, prophet, professor: they have a role to play in society, but at this critical time of confusion and chaos they're not going to give us what we need.

And he ends his paragraph with a powerful sentence: "It is the role of the shamanic personality, a type that is emerging once again in our society."

So I ask: are you encountering the shamanic personality within yourself arising or within others? I find it in a lot of young people: that they have walked away from institutional religion but they are seeking a more shamanic, which is to say a more cosmic approach to life and to spirituality.

This raises deeper questions about whether we're doing education right, therefore our professorships. Whether we're doing religion right, therefore the priest. Whether we're doing philosophy right, and of course whether we're doing politics and economics right.

So I think this teaching from Thomas Berry is very profound and very needed at this time of confusion and chaos.

Thank you; we'll see you tomorrow.