

## Daily Meditations 01/14/22

### Father Sky among Indigenous Pacific Islanders and Africans

Good Morning.

Today we're talking about Father Sky as understood in Polynesian and Micronesian traditions and also in Africa.

John Mbiti, an African scholar, tells us that among African tribes the universe is often seen as divisible into two parts, the visible and the invisible: the heavens or sky, and the earth. And he says,

*The heavenly part of the universe is the home of the stars, sun, moon, meteorites, sky, wind, and rain, with all the phenomena connected with them, such as thunder and lightning, storms, eclipses of the sun and the moon, falling stars and so on. It is also thought to be the home of God, although people cannot quite locate where he dwells, other than saying that he lives in 'the sky,' in 'heaven,' or 'beyond the clouds.' Or they simply say that 'god does not live on the earth like man.'*

So while the heavenly part of the universe is the father, many Africans understand the earth to be the mother, and refer to her as a living being: Mother Earth, the goddess Earth, or the divinity of the Earth. Earth is sacred. And she is honored by ceremonies and other expressions of respect, as are her parts, such as mountains, waterfalls, rocks, forests, trees, birds, animals, and insects.

So it's interesting that he talks about ceremonies. And I also end this meditation with the theme of ceremony: that, as I say, the circles are important in ceremonies and rituals, because they symbolize the continuity of the universe and its unendingness.

Now in all this discussion we have in these days about Father Sky, I'm reminded of what the great psychologist and cultural historian Otto Rank said in the 20th century. He said that for ritual to be effective, it must be, it always is, a connection of the microcosm -- that would be the human -- to the macrocosm, to the big picture, to the cosmos, to the sky. That if we anthropocentrize, if we shrink down, if we commit reductionism in ceremony or ritual, the ritual will not have power to it.

And I think that's a very important observation, because I think the modern era has shrunk down everything. It left the universe out so regularly. And the result was that a lot of ritual, I think, was dumbed down. And it became a matter of reading things from pages, rather than connecting to the bigger reality that we call the universe, as well as the reality that we call divinity.

So I think that the recovery of the bigness of the universe, of celebrating that when we do ceremony, is extremely important.

And it's one reason I have this wonderful picture behind me, a painting done in 1993, by a young African American artist in Oakland, and of course, it's the celebration of Miles Davis's life and work in various -- I'll get out of the way here -- various moments and eras in his work. But again, it's a beautiful naming, I think, of

celebration, of the importance of ritual, and ceremony therefore, and how music, and dance, and art in general bring things alive in ceremony, but all of it within context of the universe itself. That is key.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.