



To Be and How To Be

Transforming Your Life through the Nine Powers of Sacred Theatre

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EXCERPT

—THE POWER OF STORY—

God made man because He loved stories.

—Elie Wiesel

“What are you doing here?” As we just discussed in the chapter on Incarnation, you are here to offer your gift and fulfill your purpose. The way to do that, as we shall now explore, is to enact a story. In this chapter we seek out the strands of the story that only you can play. You are the one who gets to decide how your story begins, or whether it is a myth with no beginning and no end. As a Sacred Player, you also can choose what story you wish to enact from now on.

¹THE LIFE ON EARTH STORY

Life begins (we don't know how) through some efficacious and munificently elegant combination of DNA and proteins. Some precise mixture of elements combined to form a new union, even as our own lives began with the egg coming through the body of our mother and the sperm from the body of our father.

Life creates itself into billions of expressions and possibilities, each of which seems to enjoy a process of what looks like growth and expansion, definition and precision, and each of which usually combines with other elements to create more of itself (or something better). An individual living entity does that for as long as it can. If it is a redwood tree, it could go on and on for a millennium unless struck down by winds or lightning, fire or a volcanic eruption.

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Apparently, all life forms carry an information technology that gives way after a time. Individual forms of life (a daisy, a mollusk, a human being) ultimately stop producing and reproducing, wither, deplete, and die—to who knows what new forms. Life as a whole goes on, though, on and on.

Your own individual life is part of this great story entitled “Life on Planet Earth.” Your role occupies only a tiny piece of this huge story, which is itself a tiny part of the story of the immense universe.

An individual human story, like yours or mine, is thus a small part of the whole. Nevertheless, it is an important piece, and it is the job of each of us to enact the story we were meant to play with courage and with gusto. By tapping into the vast story and finding ways of relating to it, we provide ourselves with a splendid source of ideas, creativity, freshness, and vigor.

If we live and die without becoming aware of how our own story fits into, augments, challenges, denies, upsets, or celebrates the immense story of Life on Earth, we will have failed. We will have failed because we will not have made the connection to the Source of life—that sacred power from which we draw our presence and energy, and we will not have connected to the other forms of life that in effect are elements of ourselves.

PAUSE, PLEASE

As Sacred Players living our life story, we are asked to invest thought, energy, and time into these considerations:

What do I believe about the nature of the story of Life on Earth?

What is the nature of my own life story?

How does my story interact with and participate in the Life-on-Earth story?

At the moment, we will concentrate on the first question. Take your pen and paper and write a heading: “I believe that life on earth tells a story about _____.” Write as much as

you can about the life that swirls and tumbles all around you. Make it a song or a saga; try not to leave anything out.

IN THE BEGINNING

The Hindus speak of all life as an ocean of Story. As such, great stories extend into an indefinable territory beyond any clearly marked beginning and any known end. We can, however, pick up our ideas of the Earth Story pretty much anywhere or any time we want. We can begin, as some astrophysicists do, with a variation of the Big Bang as the birth of the universe. Then we can follow the dramatic story of the creation of stars, the intersections of stars with explosions of stars, and the creation of our solar system, our sun, our earth—and, mysteriously, a couple of billion years ago—life. And we can search, as some scientists do, for the evolutionary guidance that led to our becoming human, or what we recognize as human.

Human beings seek to understand beginnings and to know endings; this seeking is one of our species' most endearing characteristics. And the stories we have invented—and continue to invent—about the creation of Life on Earth amaze and enchant us. They also teach us about the richness of the process of creation itself. Studying the creation stories of astrophysics as well as of cultures worldwide can help us relate our individual life stories to the big story of Life on Earth.

For example, some of us experience life the Big Bang way, with sudden, unexpected flashes of illumination that spill out in waves to affect all aspects of our lives. Others of us seem to travel at evolution's pace, slowly adjusting, trimming, clearing, until at last we find ourselves made new, only to begin again the same slow process.

Some of us follow the example given in the beautiful opening chapter of the Hebrew Bible, when God hovered over the deep darkness, breathed upon it, and then said, "Let there be light." We create our lives through first imagining what light (for example) might be and then using the power of words to bring it into being.

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Another origin story, this one from ancient Egypt, tells of Amun, who as the great goose awoke the cosmic energies of creation by cackling. This delightful image says to me that we can experience the universe as made of every kind of laughter, and when we do so we are helping to enhance the process of joyful creation. The Sufi mystic Rumi says, “The soul is here for its own joy.”

Stories from Japan tell of a goddess who crafted the universe by weaving. Ancient Egyptians, again, tell of a potter god, who created human beings by molding them from Nile mud on his potter’s wheel. Early Indian scriptures say the whole of creation came through the sounding of the holy syllable, *Om*. Other traditions say it is all made of music. The most poignant tales involve the sacrifice of an enormous, generous-hearted being, whose body is given to form the physical earth: In China, the being is a male figure, Panku. In Mesopotamia, it is the primordial mother, Tiamat. In India, it is Purusha; and in Native America, it is the Corn Mother. Another story, from the Iroquois people, speaks of Sky Woman who fell (through a series of unhappy circumstances in the heavenly world) into this world, guided to the back of a giant turtle by birds whose wings cradled her falling. The turtle swam in the middle of a vast ocean. Various animals offered to provide a place for her, and finally the humblest (some versions of the story say the muskrat) succeeded, diving so deep to the bottom of the ocean that he captured a piece of earth under his claw and brought it back to the turtle. This tiny piece of earth grew and multiplied for Falling [OR “SKY WOMAN,” FOR CONSISTENCY?] Woman so that she could have a home. Thus the earth is called Turtle Island.

An exquisite version of creation comes from the aboriginal people of Australia. For them there is a place of power, beyond our sense of place, called The Dreaming, and from that place all life emerged. They tell us of the process of ancestral beings coming forth and creating the physical landscape and all living things and then allowing themselves to go back into the land. The people know their own ancestral stories and how they relate to those of the creatures and rocks, trees, and water holes their ancestors created. They know and treat with great respect their

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ancestral beings' places, both of where they emerged from the landscape and of where they went back into it.

One of my favorite stories is from ancient Greece. It tells of the mother of all things who emerged from chaos and created the sea and the shore because she needed room to dance. Dance she did, until she created a wind, and from the wind a great serpent. She transformed herself into a bird and mated with the serpent, then laid an egg, around which the serpent wrapped himself until the egg was ready to split apart and allow everything to be born. This story combines many elements of the creative process, but the essential one is the dance.

Each aspect of these creation stories can reflect to us the ways in which we live and create. Our ancestors invented them or revealed them from the deepest places in their awareness to help them make sense of existence. Even now, these stories can inspire us, answer our questions, and teach us about the process of living.

PAUSE, PLEASE

An important part of living into your life story is in understanding how you create. Think about the times you have felt and known yourself as most inventive. Can you trace a relationship from those moments to a traditional creation story that appeals to you? Do you relate best to the dancer, the diver, the weaver, the potter, the sound maker, the one who emerges from The Dreaming, or the visionary who speaks, "Let there be light"? Or is your primary story a way of creating new life—through lovemaking and childbirth, for example.

Take paper and pencil and make a list starting with the words, "I feel most creative when I am _____." Trust what comes, and be aware that you are finding your way into the essence of the story you are here to enact. I believe that all of our plays are about creating and that our ways of creating provide the essence of the story. You might say, for instance: I am here to create through laughter; I am here to dance creation; I am here to weave (or create through my

hands); I am here to create through words (to write, teach, or inspire); I am here to dive deep; I am here to create space for others; I am here to love, to offer myself in service to creation.

If, when linked with our incarnational gift and our primary verb, we become conscious of the ways in which we approach life creatively, we will gain clues about the name and nature of our story. For example, I myself know that I am here to sing praise and to celebrate on the path of wisdom; this statement comprises my essential gift and my primary purpose. Now, as I braid this knowledge into my favorite creation story of the cackling goose god, I begin to sense the nature of the story I am here to enact. My basic verb *to celebrate* joins with laughter as an element of creation, and my story becomes one of a person who imbibes life through joy.

As you begin to look for this creative essence in your own story, it will unfold in its unique way as only you can play it. A true and wonderful thing is that your unique telling of your exclusive story contributes to the vigor of all the stories of Life on Earth. In addition, your tapping into the Life-on-Earth stories supports your own vitality. When you participate in life, you add to the general joy of the whole world, and the world adds to your joy in reciprocal kindness.

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