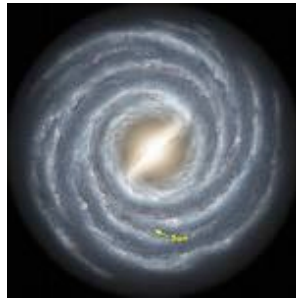


Eco-Exercises for the Soul - Knowing our Place in the Universe



“We now need to experiment with altering basic patterns of consciousness that have been set down in the primate line for seventy million years at least. As you lie on your back viewing the Milky Way, notice that an implicit assumption framing the experience is that of “looking up at the stars.” This unconscious attitude is biologically rooted, for primates have had the up-down direction carefully coded into their organismic functioning. A chimpanzee awakening in the night in its nest in the trees needs to be instantly oriented by the up-down axis. Put another way, all the ancestral chimpanzees that needed more than a couple of seconds to figure out which way was up have long since met their demise by falling down.

Further strengthening our sense of up-down is the cultural coding worked out over millennia in terms of which the stars and heaven and God are up and Earth is “below.”

As you lie on your back beholding the Milky Way see if you can imaginatively free yourself from seventy million years of conditioning regarding our place in the universe. Such imaginative work is one of the great joys of being human is at the core of all great achievements in art, science, or civilization as a whole. Imagine the Earth floating in space, and instead of picturing your own place on the “top” part of “Earth, arrange the picture in your mind so that you are on the “bottom” of this visualized Earth.

Now as you lie there, imagine yourself peering down into the great chasm of the night sky...it might take some time, but the moment will come, in a rapid reorganization of phenomena, when all those stars will be experienced as down below, far, far below, and the amazing feeling accompanying this experience is a sense of surprise that you are not falling down there to join them. “but of course you don’t fall. You hover in space, gazing down into the vault of stars, suspended there in your bond with Earth.

As you lie there feeling yourself hovering within this gravitational bond while peering down at the billions of stars drifting in the infinite chasm of space, you will have entered an experience of the universe that is not just human and not just biological. You will have entered a relationship from a galactic perspective, becoming for a moment a part of the Milky Way Galaxy.”

~Swimme, Brian. The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos