



Easter And The Universe Story

By Niamh Brennan

Part of being human is our ability to reflect on why there is suffering. We seek to understand it and explain it. We seek to rationalise it, even to transcend it and yet there is no life, no being that has not been touched by sorrow or by grief or by loss; that has not felt the pain of the spirit or the death of somebody or some part of oneself. Suffering flows through life like a tapestry, silent and deep, penetrating, colouring our actions and thoughts and defining our experience, in some mysterious way holding life together. Easter, a time of hope, a time of awakening and re-birth, provides us with an example of what suffering is for. We can see through Christ's death and resurrection the way in which suffering is ultimately transformative; how the withered, clutch of death is transitory and that right at the centre, at the core of what it means to die, lie the seeds and promise of birth. We see this in Christ's resurrection. We can also see this in how the Universe unfolds itself and how it has elegantly evolved over eons and eons, each death, each transformation, marking the emergence of another phase of its being.

Since the beginning 13.7 billion years ago, when the Universe first began to unfurl itself, began to take shape and form amidst the darkness that

it had created, began to quietly declare through quark and atom and particle that God's great adventure had begun, there has always been sacrifice and because there has always been sacrifice, there has always been suffering. It has been and is intrinsic to its nature. Violence and destruction are also intrinsic to its nature, foundational to its becoming, to its creativity. It is through this sacrificial aspect that the Universe transforms itself and births itself anew, the sacrifice of a part enabling some astounding new creation, some astounding new beauty or further complexity of the whole.

The primordial flaring forth an example, when the Universe ignited in a flash of light and matter and anti-matter particles rushed across space, colliding with and annihilating each other. A fight for existence resulting in the beginning of the physical manifestations of the world, the sacrifice of some of these particles enabling this great and mysterious Universe to begin on its journey. And it is mysterious. We do not know why it must be through suffering that transformation occurs or why only through some form of death or denial that life can be brought forward and yet this example is everywhere.

It is through the violent and explosive, sacrificial death of a star that we are given the elements, the death of the star enabling further development of the Universe, laying down the foundations for life and people to come. We know this because all the elements which make up our planet and our own bodies were created in the fiery belly of the stars and could only be released through the death of the star. In their death, the Universe is transformed and developed.

Or the life of the sun - our own sacrificial sun, roaring from its blazing haze, giving off 4 million tonnes of energy per second, lighting our planet, feeding us, nourishing us. Her being, one of total sacrifice, expending herself so that Earth may have life. Or consider the looming and magnificent Himalayas or the proud and noble Mt. Kilimanjaro, formed through the turbulent and violent activity of the Earth, the crash of the plates of the Earth

causing one plate to buckle and fold, to surrender and in that surrender was created those mountains that we stand in awe of, that leave us breathless at the sheer, naked, beauty of life.

Closer to home, we can see the part that sacrifice and death play in the extinction of the dinosaur which, no longer terrified of being eaten, enabled mammals to come down from their trees, to flourish and to eventually bring forth the human.

Does the sun suffer during this constant self-sacrifice? Do the stars suffer as they extinguish their light and disseminate their being? Does our Earth suffer as its body goes through change from molten rock to mountain ranges and continents? Does a mother suffer as she births her child? Death and life, sacrifice and creation, suffering and transformation. It is the ambiguity and paradox of existence that none of these are present without the other. Suffering is the medium through which change occurs, it is the dying of one thing in order for another to be born; an indication that life is greater than the individual, an indication that life is a Whole and that we are all of us, connected and participating in it, enabling it to evolve. But change can only occur when we allow our pain and suffering to transform us, when we allow something to be born from them. To do this we need to experience them, to experience the desolation of grief, the empty heartache of loss, the bitterness of rejection, to experience and make these experiences part of us, not to deny them or try to transcend them but to use our uniquely human gift of self-reflection to ponder on what we may have to learn from them and how we might grow from them – where do they want to bring us?

And what of Christ's death, his the ultimate sacrifice one can make, what do we gain from Christ's death? Christ's death leaves us with the greatest lesson yet of how to be human, of how to carry ourselves through this world in the brief time that we are here; of how to be a loving, compassionate, forgiving people. He teaches us to look for the mystery in

life, the unseen workings of the Divine that pervade it, to trust in forces that are beyond us. Christ's death teaches us to be human, knowing that we are not the whole and that life will continue without us but seeking to contribute something greater than what was there before us, seeking to unveil through our actions a God that lives and loves and is present in each being only waiting to be revealed. Christ's gift to us, through his sacrifice and suffering, is a chance to transform our humanity.

Suffering is an intrinsic part of life, but it is not all of life. It plays its role, helping the Universe to evolve, transforming it, making it more complex, more beautiful and in some way, revealing its mysterious nature. Christ's death does the same, it illustrates the beauty of his life, the beauty of his person, the possibility of what we can also become. He died because with his suffering comes the possibility of our transformation, with his sacrifice, a human gain. Christ's life was beautiful, life too is beautiful, indeed this very Universe wherein we have our being is profoundly beautiful, the context of all beauty. Its beauty does not exist independently of its sacrificial element but rather through its sacrifices, beauty is born. This is the hope of Easter.

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