



RELIGIOUS NATURALIST ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

created by religious naturalists for religious naturalists

July 2024

photo by [Vincent van Zalinge](#)

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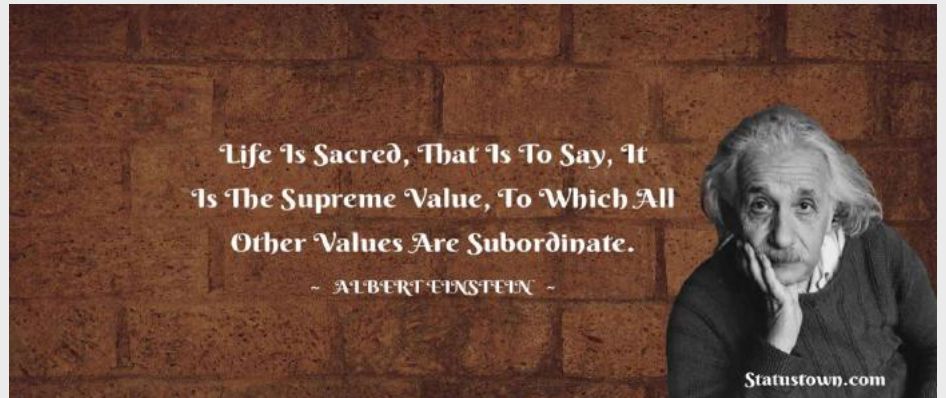
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Feature Article - July 2024

Why I Think Life is Sacred by Terry Findlay



I think that many Religious Naturalists would agree with this statement by Albert Einstein. In the following article, I will attempt to explain why life is sacred to me and why I also think it is the supreme value.

Sacred: that which is of the highest esteem; highly valued and important

The main facet of life that has led me to think of it as sacred and of supreme value is the meaning that life brings to an otherwise pointless universe. Prior to the advent of life in the cosmos there was a lot going on but none of it mattered because there was nothing at stake. The appearance of life around 3.7 billion years ago changed that. Now lives were at stake and, because living things evolved to continue living, things mattered relative to that goal.

To survive, living things must meet specific needs. For example, meeting one such need, the ingestion of nutrients, requires sensing and responding to the presence of nutrients in the environment. The necessity of meeting survival needs like this introduces a

primitive sort of meaning in the cosmos. Of course, early life forms had no conscious awareness of the life and death drama in which they participated, but, importantly, a primitive basis for a value system was present. These organisms developed systems that automatically moved them toward detected nutrients and away from toxins. Processes within these life forms treated nutrients as good and toxins as bad, creating a foundation for more complex systems of evaluation. Such processes evolved because they enhanced the ability of life forms to survive and reproduce.

Over time increasingly effective ways of detecting and responding to various aspects of the environments of organisms emerged. Organisms developed mechanisms to sense in their environment such qualities as brightness, warmth, colour, pressure, sound, taste, and odour. Over the course of billions of years, life forms evolved capacities to experience a tremendous range of physically embodied states such as hope, fear, love, hate, curiosity, appreciation, loneliness, and friendship. Although these qualities evolved to enhance individual organisms' ability to survive and reproduce, they serve also to provide more complex organisms with an astonishingly rich variety of possible life experiences.

It is sobering to think that if life is ever extinguished all of these wondrous aspects of existence will be simultaneously extinguished, leaving behind a dead universe devoid of sound, light, thought, and feeling — just as it was before life emerged. This is the essence of what, to me, makes Life sacred. As such it provides the ultimate standard by which to measure good and bad and all other moral and practical evaluations. (I am capitalizing Life to signify its status as supreme value.) Because Life and its astonishing attendant attributes matter to me, I understand the meaning of my life to be relative to the degree to which I contribute to the continuation of Life, its quality, and the conditions that support it.

Given that living things must meet their survival needs, how they go about doing so will determine whether or not they are contributing to or threatening the continued existence of Life. Valuing Life-supporting things and processes is an inherent and necessary characteristic of living things from the most primitive organisms to the most complex. Living forms bestow value, positive or negative, on things like food, temperature, water, pain, safety, friendship, beauty, desire, anger, feelings, ideas, intentions, scarcity, love, etc. This is because these things directly or indirectly impact their survival. Meaning itself is a consequence of the emergence of living things because it is only to living things that anything matters.

Does adopting the notion that the relative meaning of your life depends on whether or not you support the continued existence of Life make any difference to how you live your life? I think it does. Seeing ourselves and others as significant to the continuance of Life (in a world that would be dead and meaningless without it) could lead to people taking more than just personal satisfaction into account when making choices. Seeing ourselves as living beings who are dependent on other living beings and the environment for our wellbeing, we might behave more compassionately and cooperatively in our daily lives. Things like the creation and maintenance of sustainable practices and contributing to our communities might take on greater importance. Thus valuing Life as the ultimate good in our relative world establishes the possibility for a system of morality that not only supports the continuance and quality of Life on our planet but also gives meaning and purpose to our individual lives.

If an individual subscribes to the idea that Life in the universe is something precious and worth preserving, this can provide a purpose to that individual's existence, realizing that s/he has the capacity to contribute energy, knowledge, skills, talents, creativity, ideas, and understandings to the continuance and quality of Life on this planet. And, happily, anyone can live this purpose whenever they wish, in any one of a multitude of ways, and in almost any situation. Any act of kindness, caring, or compassion can realize this purpose. In this view the purpose of an individual life is to live for the continuance and quality of Life whenever and wherever possible. And, in so doing, s/he can contribute to enhancing the lives of other individual and every living thing.

I don't know if Albert Einstein would agree with this interpretation of the "supreme value" of life. But he did agree that Life is sacred and that "all other values are subordinate". After all, without Life there is not a shred of meaning in the universe. Thus, without Life, nothing is or can be considered sacred. As living human systems understanding what things mean or appear to mean is fundamental to our existence as individuals and as a species. To me, Life and the meaning embodied in all its forms are as sacred as it gets.

Terry Findlay

News and Events

New podcast on the RNA YouTube channel: "Reverence for Reality".



Discussions with people who identify as religious naturalist or otherwise derive their spiritual inspiration from the natural world.

First Episode: An interview conducted by Andrew Howard with a UU minister, regarding a sermon he gave on religious naturalism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-L9MedYX3g>



Islands of Sanity: How to Persevere in the Face of Collapse
Global Kinship Webinar
Thursday, August 1
4p EST, 1p PST
Register [HERE](#)

IRAS Webinar: Will Modern Civilization be the Death of Us?

Reflections on the Earth's Future

Tuesday, July 23, 2024, 5 PM EST; 4 PM CST.

[Register](#)



Regular Events:

Deep Transformation Network Monthly Meeting

Attend the live monthly network meeting on the **first Tuesday of every month at 1:00 pm Pacific** (check your time zones carefully!) <https://deeptransformation.network/spaces/10286307/feed>

Sacred Depths of Nature Presentations and Podcasts

Follow this link for the latest presentations and podcasts on *The Sacred Depths of Nature* with Ursula Goodenough. <http://sacreddepthsofnature.com/conferences/>

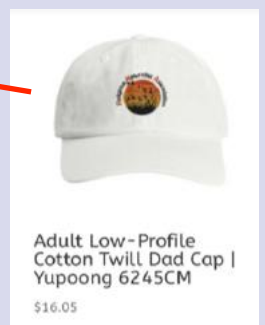
RNA Store



RNA "Swag" Now Available!

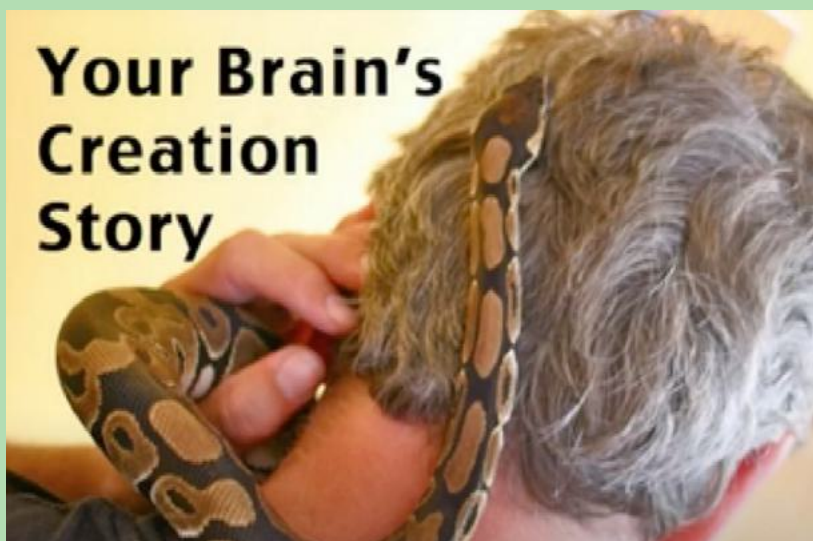
We are now offering RNA branded merchandise on our website.

Get yours here: <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/shop/>



Adult Low-Profile
Cotton Twill Dad Cap |
Yupoong 6245CM
\$16.05

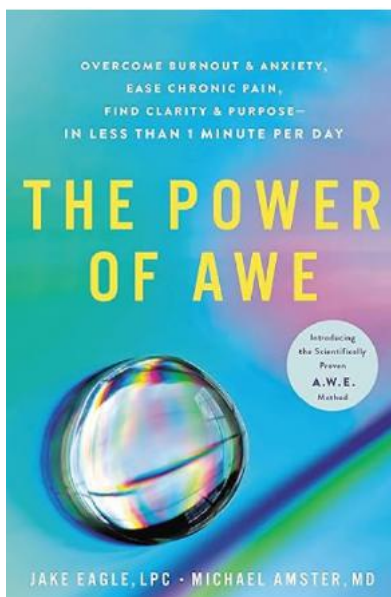
RNA YouTube Channel Video of the Month Evolutionize Your Life 2



Connie Barlow explains the evolutionary history of the human brain, and how understanding that history helps shed light on our own struggles.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

[Visit Our YouTube Channel](#)



Book of the Month

The Power of Awe by Jake G. Eagle

Research has proven that mindfulness improves well-being and reduces stress, anxiety, and pain. But for some, the practice itself feels challenging and inaccessible. That's where the A.W.E. Method comes in. In *The Power of Awe*, therapist Jake Eagle and chronic pain specialist Michael Amster, MD, share their extraordinary yet simple mindfulness practice that turns ordinary moments into awe-inducing experiences, helping you effortlessly achieve a heightened state of consciousness usually reserved for seasoned practitioners of mindfulness—all within a matter of seconds.

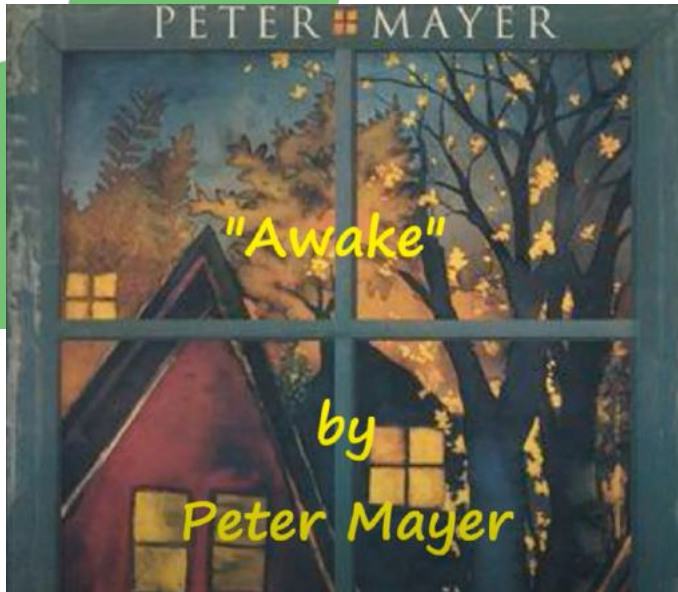
[View on Amazon](#)

Help Wanted! RNA is looking for volunteers with abilities in Accounting, Volunteer Coordinating, Spotify, Google Workspace, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Grant-Writing. Do any of those sound like fun to you? [Say so here](#) and we'll get you started!



Music of the Month

Awake by Peter Mayer



Listen and view the lyrics on YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9JuuXagqBQ

Suggest Music

Help Build Our RNA Songbook

Do you know of a song or poem that we could add to our songbook? Click this link to nominate your item.

[Song Nomination Form](#)

[View Songbook](#)

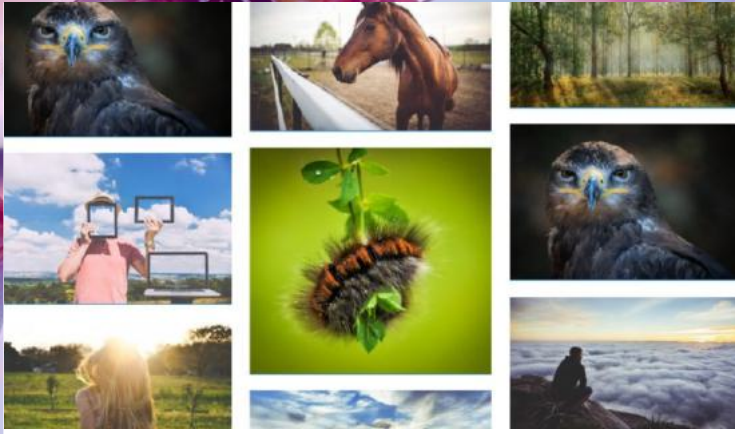
Natural Wonder of the Month

Sleeping Whales



Their sleeping habits are among the most surprising and visually unusual behaviors of sperm whales. The indescribable experience of floating among these gentle giants while they slumber is best depicted through imagery. We have been fortunate to observe and document some of the resident social units during their sleep cycles.

<https://spermwhalesdominica.com/sleeping/>



RNA Photo Gallery
add your photos

[Visit the Gallery](#)

Visit us on Social Media



Facebook



YouTube



Reddit



Mastodon

Letters to the Editor:

Please send your comments, suggestions, questions, and submissions to newsletter@religious-naturalist-association.org.

If your letter has content that we would like to publish in a future newsletter we will contact you for permission.

Website of the Month

**GLOBAL
COMPASSION
COALITION**

Choose change.
Choose compassion.
Together we'll build a world where
people and planet are valued and cared
for.

[https://
www.globalcompassioncoalition.org](https://www.globalcompassioncoalition.org)

RNA Links

Members Contributions: Our members contribute sermons, articles, videos, music and other material related to the Religious Naturalist orientation. Go to <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/members-contributions/> to check them out. Please consider contributing your own material. There is a link on the page for submitting items.

Members' Projects:

The RNA website has a section called [Members' Projects](#). This page provides links to projects of RNA members. If you have a project related to RN that you would like included on this webpage please email a description to projects@religious-naturalist-association.org.

Recent RNA Blog Post - What is Value?

We need to move past the value of something being measured only in productivity and that value be found in presence and participation as is the way of the Life's sacred Living System.

[Go to Post](#)





New Member Books and Member Poems Sections

Two new sections have been added to the page that was previously called RNA Book Reviews. The new page is called Member Books, Poems, and Book Reviews and it's now a place to showcase Books and Poems written by RNA members.

The page is now called Member Books, Poems, & Book Reviews.

If you would like to submit a book, poem, or book review please let us know by sending email to newsletter@religious-naturalist-association.org.

Expansion of Religious Naturalist Voices

Our website includes a link called RN Voices <https://religiousnaturalism.org/rn-voices/> that I compiled a few years ago and describe thusly: The writers highlighted in these Religious Naturalist Voices postings may or may not self-identify as religious naturalists. They're included because their writings speak in various ways to the religious naturalist orientation as I understand it.

It would be wonderful to expand this site by including profiles of additional writers who have spoken to you. Please send me your suggestions goodenough@wustl.edu

Visit the RNA Website