

## Stories we live by

You name your God, I name mine. This has been going on since we first wondered why the sun rises, why there are stars in the night sky, why the wind blows and water flows, why we are here, why we die. It was a time long before science and human awakening. When people could not find the right answers for such things, they tell stories about it.

Some thinkers say that the kind of God that a tribe or group worships reflects their common struggles and hopes, and this story holds them together. But now our various communities throughout the world are becoming more globalized. We keep bumping into one other's Gods.

In our global community, we can see a few interesting reactions to the God stories. Firstly, there are those who claim "my God" is better than yours: they are like selfish children; it is best to leave them alone. One great weakness of such a story-group is that their lives are moulded and guided by differences rather than by similarities. They live in a black-and-white world where "friends" are those who think and live like them; those who are different are "enemies"; those who fit into neither category are "strangers" to be converted, appropriated. There is a lot of measuring of humanity here, as if it is a measurable commodity.

Then, there are some God story tellers who see a commonality in our need for a higher purpose: it does not really matter which God, they are wont to say. The story matters more than the story-teller, even the story-maker. Let us walk humbly with our God, they preach. This is a more empowering approach, as it allows everyone of us to be truly friendly to everyone else. There is much less measuring of humanity here. The main problem, however, is that there can be a lot of superficiality here, like a nicely packaged box, or one with layers of nice wrappings, but the content is really paltry, or nothing really.

The third group simply says, hey, these are just stories, great stories, but please look for their meanings. Stories may divide us, their spirit brings our hearts closer together. Let us live by the spirit, what the stories are really trying to tell us. The fact is that we cannot live by stories alone: we must live life as it comes. Stories may be about what the world can be or should be, but life is what things really are. So we need a reality check.

If we are truly honest with ourselves, we are likely to notice that no matter how "perfect" the story we live by may be, the ending is not always what we expect it to be. The thing about stories is that once we know their ending, it becomes boring; we then forget what the story is really about. Or we invent our own ending to the story; in which case, we don't really need the story, after all.

There is something much better than any story, even better than all the stories that can ever be told. That is, to look deep into ourselves. What do we notice? We might notice, if we look deeply enough, that we have a lot of thoughts rushing through our minds—these are our great story tellers.

Our minds are the greatest story tellers. They are often very self-centred story tellers, for the simple reason our minds are, as a rule, unaware of other minds. If we look even deeper, we will see that our minds or hearts have lives of their own. We really have no control over them, and this is what the stories are about. They are our attempts at harnessing the wildness and wildness that are our hearts. The God story seems the best story to do so.

But let us look deeper into ourselves. While our minds differentiate us with our stories, there is something that is intimately “us” from day one, something that runs the same way in all of us, whether we are human, beast, or alien. No matter which universe or multiverse we are in: we breathe, and we all breathe the same way. To breathe is to live, to live is to breathe.

Our perspective of life is inextricably and essentially linked to the way we breathe. The more violent we are, the heavier we tend to breathe. To breathe is also to slow-burn ourselves up, as it were. As such, the more violently we breathe, the faster is the burning, the more violent our lives become.

Even in physical exercise, there comes a time when our breathing flows harmoniously with our bodies. Then body and mind act as one. Yet, there are times when we need to simply sit comfortably still and forget about the body for a while. There is just the breath, getting ever more peaceful. It comes to such still point, a radiant stillness, that the joy is unspeakable.

This is the well-spring of religion: it is the realizing of our true selves. We seem to be just a blink in the vast moonless cloudless night sky, amongst billions of other twinkling stars. What beautiful stars, what blissful space! This is the religion that needs no converts, that can never have followers. For we have come to the journey’s joyful end. We’re truly home.

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