

The Dance of Chaos and Creation

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The aftermath of a landslide in Kerala's Idukki district on August 16

The current state of the world is frequently named as a global dark night. There is certainly great darkness: the ongoing Covid pandemic, the situation in Afghanistan, the millions of displaced people whom no country seems willing to welcome, the impact of fires, floods, droughts and extreme weather events on people and all living beings in many parts of the world.... It all seems hopelessly chaotic, and, it seems, no one has a vision large enough to make sense of it, let alone see a way through the Darkness.

For many people, the chaos of our times, generates great fear at what appears to be the dissolution of order, of being. We are powerless in the face of such chaos. By its very nature chaos is beyond our control. Our media feeds that fear in its 24/7 news bulletins, constantly broadcasting the threats our world faces. Governments desperately try to reassure the population with ever stricter security measures, border control, restrictions on movement, and so on. People are terrified that the chaos might become totally uncontrollable. Where do people find hope in such a world?



But I wonder: is chaos really the problem? Or might our problem be the fear it generates? Scientists are discovering that chaos pervades the Cosmos at all levels. Rather than disastrous, its unpredictability is the fertile field of its creativity. All new developments in the evolutionary process have come out of some level of chaos. And, as all mystical traditions know so well, every new birth involves a process of dying.

Several times over the past weeks I have returned to Robyn's reflection on Nicodemus' visit to Jesus by night. I take heart from the richness of the night encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus described by Robyn. In the context of the darkness of our times I am particularly drawn to her third way of understanding darkness - the darkness of the womb and birth. As I focus on that, I find my thoughts turning to the first verses of Genesis:

In the beginning... the earth was a formless void (Tohu wa-bohu) and there was darkness over the deep (Tehom).

Scripture scholars tell us that *Tohu wa-bohu* is a description *chaos*. In the Babylonian creation myth, the *deep* was called *Tihamat*, the terrifying monster of chaos in the primordial waters. The author of Genesis 1 sees *Tehom*, the *deep* of primordial waters, quite differently. He ponders on what was *in the beginning*, or perhaps *before* the beginning: the image or words that arose in that pondering were *Tohu wa-bohu*, chaos, non-existence, the earth before it became Earth (itself a statement of something beyond comprehension). **And** he saw something more: the spirit of God sweeping over the waters of *Tehom*. Some translations say, the spirit of God brooded over the waters, evoking the image of a bird brooding on her eggs, the promise of something coming to birth.

Andre Rabe, in his commentary on Genesis 1, has a poetic and an evocative reflection on this sweeping of the spirit of God:

Creation begins... with a
wordless hovering.
In this contemplative silence
the possibilities within chaos
begin to dance.
Tohu wa-bohu – a poetic
echo in the silence:
Elusive messages drifting;
unlikely possibilities
awakening...
With each repetition of Tohu
wa-bohu
the surface grows more unstable.
Within the formless, patterns emerge.
A breath, a whisper –
and the Depth begins to pulsate.
Suddenly the murmur finds its voice.
The surface of the concealment opens.
Light was hidden within the darkness,
but is now revealed....
There is a deep, deep pattern within the chaos
and with each differentiating echo
the background noise finds a rhythm.
This primordial drum-beat might yet be a symphony.
And God said... and it was so....¹



Gary Butterfield, Unsplash

Might these opening verses of Genesis hold the key to how to be with chaos? Scientists are discovering that chaos permeates the Cosmos everywhere. They also see that, paradoxically, the seething dance of chaos forms its own patterns of convergence and from these patterns,

¹ From Andre Rabe, *Tohu wa-bohu – God's relationship to Chaos*, <https://alwaysloved.net/2020/03/30/tohu-wa-bohu-gods-relationship-to-chaos/>

new births occur, new stars and galaxies form. The chaos of the Cosmos is the womb from which ever new beings emerge.

The chaos in our world is part of this cosmic chaos. It too has potential to birth new forms of being, bringing about new patterns of convergence forming new creation. What might such new creation be? It seems to me that the new creation the world longs for at this stage of its history is not new individual beings, but new forms of *being in communion* with one another and with Earth itself, a communion in which we come to breathe as one. Such communion dissolves the chasms of fears and phobias. *Us* and *them* become *we*.

Could it be that, in our daily contemplative silence, the Spirit of God is sweeping over the *Deep*, the *Tehom* of the chaos of our suffering planet, whispering anew *tohu wa-bohu*? Could it be that our contemplative silence sends out the same whisper of the Spirit that stirred the primordial chaos of the beginning, but today stirs our chaos until a new creation bursts through the surface of Darkness?

My heart-knowing says "Yes, this is what CEN is about, together with all deeply contemplative people of whatever culture and tradition." The Spirit of God breathes over the chaos of our world in and through our collective contemplative hour, stirring imperceptibly, yet unfailingly. As we breathe the Spirit, we wait for the moment when, what is already stirring, bursts forth in all its newness. We do not know the day nor the hour. But that it will come *is as certain as the dawn* (cf Hosea 6:3).

Aboriginal Elder, artist, writer, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr of Nauiyu Country NT, invites us:

To know me
is to breathe with me,
to breathe with me
is to listen deeply,
to listen deeply is to connect.
Listen for the sound of deep calling to deep:
Dadirri:
the deep inner spring inside us.
We call on it and it calls on us...²

Together we breathe and watch and wait, holding our suffering world in tender compassion as the Spirit sweeps over its chaos whispering *Tohu wa-bohu*, stirring as yet undreamt possibilities into life.

Images:

Landslide in Kerala: <https://scroll.in/article/974734/human-triggered-fatal-landslides-are-becoming-frequent-in-the-himalayas-and-western-ghats>

Mystic Mountain of Carina Nebula. Deep space look. Science fiction wallpaper. Elements of this image were furnished by NASA. AdobeStock_305573430. Licenced to Ann-Maree O'Beirne rsm

The bird Over the Water: by Gary Butterfield on [Unsplash](#)

² Miriam Rose Ungunmerr, Dadirri, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tow2tR_ezL8