


THE
HOLY
UNIVERSE

A NEW STORY OF CREATION
FOR THE HEART, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

DAVID CHRISTOPHER



“For those of us who call ourselves ‘spiritual but not religious’ . . . Christopher has done a marvelous job in helping us reclaim the word ‘Holy.’”

—JOHN ROBBINS, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Diet for a New America*, *The Food Revolution*, and others

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PRIVILEGE

The Sage took in a breath, and let it out as she looked up and watched the bees as they worked from blossom to blossom.

“Let’s start with privilege, specifically as it relates to a person’s ethnicity and gender.

The story, at least in our culture, is that, fundamentally, racism and sexism are pretty much over; yes, a lot of problems linger that we need to attend to, but deep down, there’s a story that, even though there are racist and sexist people, we are not a racist or sexist culture.

“Yet this is far from the case.

Racism and sexism are still alive and everywhere in our culture, are *endemic* to our culture.”

The Seeker shifted in his chair.

“Not the most comfortable of topics, yes?”

The Seeker gave a nervous laugh and nodded. “Yeah, that’s for sure.” He thought for a moment. “I guess I see the sexist part, but not so much of the racist part. I mean, yeah, there’s still a lot of racism, I guess, but I just don’t see how it’s that pervasive in the whole system.”

“Largely because you don’t *have* to see it—

that's part of your privilege,
 not having to see
 what doesn't immediately affect you.
 But just start with looking, really *looking*
 at advertisements,
 television shows,
 movies,
 and pictures of CEOs
 from the perspective of someone
 who isn't white or male.
 Look at the evidence around you
 and listen—don't just *talk*—
 to women and people of color.
 You'll start to see it
 everywhere.”

“Really.”

“Yes, really.”

The Sage thought for a moment.

“Let's do this—think back
 to a time in your life
 when you felt judged,
 when you felt like you didn't fit in,
 because of your appearance
 or your background.”

The Seeker looked at his coffee cup in front of him, thinking. “Yeah, okay, there was this one time, when I was dating a girl who was in a private school way back when. I remember going to a party with her, and how out of place I felt. The way the other kids were dressed, the way they talked about their vacations and cars and everything . . . I mean, my folks were not really wealthy, but it wasn't like I was dressed in rags or anything.

“Even so, I really felt out of my element. At one point, I overheard one kid say to another, ‘Dude, let’s blow off school tomorrow and head out to my parents’ beach house.’”

The Seeker shook his head. “I remember thinking something like, ‘Man, this place sure ain’t *my* place.’”

“The weird thing is, nobody said anything, nobody asked me to leave or was mean or anything, but it was just something in the air, something unsaid, that felt like ‘*You don’t belong.*’”

The Sage nodded.

“It must have been quite painful, yes?”

“It was a long time ago, but . . .” He stopped and looked away, remembering. Then he looked down. “Yeah, it was a little painful. I sometimes wonder if that’s why we broke up, not over that particular night, but because I was just . . . different, I guess.”

The Sage sat quietly.

“Most everyone alive has had similar experiences,” she continued after a moment.

She sighed.

“Even this morning, a white woman came up and stood next to me as I was waiting to be served at a delicatessen.

The server behind the counter

finished with the customer
 in front of me and said,
 ‘Who’s next?’ He looked at me,
 then looked at her and raised his
 eyebrows and tilted his head up
 toward her, expecting her order.
 It happened so fast, I’m *sure*
 he was not conscious of it.
 To the woman’s credit, she motioned
 toward me and said, ‘She’s next.’

“So as he takes my order and prepares the food,
 I silently ask ‘the questions’:

What just happened?
 What’s going on here?
 Am I just seeing things?
 Should I say something?
 What should I say?
 Do I really want to deal
 with whatever reaction
 he’ll come up with?
 Am I being overly sensitive?
 Did he make an honest mistake?
 But is that mistake ever honest,
 if it truly was something
 that was based on
 the color of my skin?

“On and on. I can’t help but ask
 these question whenever these
 micro-moments happen.”

“Good God . . . I had no idea,” said the
 Seeker. He looked down at his hands,
 absent-mindedly rubbing his thumb against
 his forefinger. “How do you let that not . . .
 how do you deal with it?”

She smiled and shook her head.

She picked up her tea,
took a sip, and sighed
as she set it down.

“Sometimes it’s not easy.

If I say nothing as it is happening,

I get to deal with my anger
for staying quiet;

if I *do* say something,

I get to deal with whatever
spinout might happen.

Either option is challenging.

But whatever I do, well . . . I breathe,
try to not let it continue to wound,
and try to see the humanity
of the person.

“And here’s something really important:

remember that feeling of

‘You don’t belong’?

Notice that you had to reach back

a number of years to find
a time when you felt this.

A lot of people of color—

and women, for that matter—

have that feeling *every day*,

as they face small and large indignities
every day.

“*That’s* the difference,” she said quietly.

“*That’s* what people

who enjoy privilege

really need to know

if they want to help change things.”

The two of them sat silently, listening to the
hum of the bees above.

“I don’t know what to say,” said the Seeker, finally.

“There’s nothing you need
to say right now.
What’s important to me
is that you’re simply listening.”

“Okay. I can at least do that.”

The Sage leaned back, sighed,
and smiled again.
“Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome.”

They sat together quietly.

After a few moments, the Seeker said, “Um, I have a couple of questions, but . . . well, I guess I’m afraid of saying something stupid.”

The Sage laughed.
“Oh, at some point,
you probably will,
but don’t make a big deal
out of it if you do.
Just apologize and move on.”

The Seeker let out a breath. “Okay, here’s the first: back in the story of Ancient Mind, you said some clans looked down on people in other clans, that they saw them as less than human. So this is more than a matter of Modern Mind’s story, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes, all human cultures
are subject to this shadow side,
of how we create stories
about the ‘other.’”

“However, Modern Mind
 put a new twist
 on seeing and dealing with the other:
 it institutionalized its prejudices
 on a large scale,
 canonized them in its laws and societies.

“Now, as we struggle
 to rid ourselves of these structures,
 we still face insidious, unintentional,
 and unexamined racism
 that continues in spite of our efforts,
 and this is as big an issue
 as overt bigotry, sexism or snobbery.
 People often don’t *mean*
 to behave this way,
 yet it’s still lodged
 deep within our institutions
 as well as ourselves.”

“So even though the written law changed,
 our behavior hasn’t.”

“Not fully, nor have the *systemic*
 behaviors fully changed.”

“Systemic, meaning what?”

“For example, there’s a private school
 where a friend of mine works.
 She and the staff are kind
 and wonderful people.
 Nobody in this school
 of primarily white kids
 overtly sets out to exclude
 minority children,
 yet it still happens,
 even with the best of intentions.
 No master plan of any city

overtly looks for poor neighborhoods
 to put polluting industries next to,
 yet it still happens,
 even with the best of intentions.

No one sets out to deprive
 those same poor neighborhoods
 of stores selling fresh food,
 yet it still happens,
 even with the best of intentions.

And so on.

Part of the work we need to do
 includes changing
 these larger meta-structures
 that create these kinds
 of systemic problems.”

“Well, that leads to my next question that
 I’m kind of afraid to ask. I mean, when I
 think about the Sixth Extinction . . . I don’t
 know . . . I think I’m getting what you’re
 saying, but how big is the issue of privilege
 compared to the collapse of the Web of Life?
 To me, that sort of trumps everything.”

He shifted in his chair. “Although I suppose
 if I were poor and lived next to a power
 plant, I’d see it differently.”

“You most certainly would.

This again reflects the essential
 sense of separation
 in the story of Modern Mind:
 that these issues are unrelated.

But as we’ve seen before
 it’s not that addressing issues
 of social justice
 are more or less critical
 than ecological sustainability;

they're the same.

They're not just related:
they're *inseparable*.

In much the same way that
Modern Mind sees
a planet full of 'resources'
that can be used and thrown away,
it sees people that can be used
and thrown away.

"Working on issues of privilege
is *not* a distraction or a side road—
this work instead cuts deeply into
the same story of separation
that is at the core of Modern Mind's
assault on the Web of Life."

"My God." The Seeker sat back in his chair
and stared past the fence into the street. "I
never thought of it that way."

He sat silently, thinking. "Okay, so how do
you go about working on privilege?"

"You and I are doing it—or rather,
we've *started* it.
Simply naming it, talking about it,
acknowledging that privilege exists
is a big step.
But it *is* only the first step,
and there's more
that I can suggest for you to do.
But remember that it *does* fall on you
to do this work.
The 'problem' of privilege
is as much yours to confront
as it is mine."

The Seeker pondered. “I guess . . . Well, I’m still afraid that I’ll say or do something that just confirms that . . . that I’m racist, or whatever.”

“Well, you can’t have been raised
 in this culture
 and not have such proclivities,
 so you can let go of *that* worry.
 The work is *not* about
 determining if you’re racist
 or sexist or classist,
 but is instead about recognizing
 these proclivities in yourself
 and changing how you respond.
 But more important,
 your fear could hold you back
 from doing this work—
 and part of your privilege
 is that you *can* choose to ignore it,
 simply because incidents
 like the one in the delicatessen
 seldom happen to you.
 You don’t *have* to confront
 this reality within you,
 within our culture.

“This raises the question, then;
 if you don’t *have* to do this work,
 why do it?
 Why explore this uncharted
 and uncomfortable territory?”

The Seeker looked down, thinking. “Well, like you just said, it’s related to the ecological crisis. You deal with one, and you’re dealing with the other, too. And I guess . . . it’s just the right thing to do,

especially if we want to change, to help people who have to deal with being put down day in and day out.”

“Yes, and it’s more than just the right thing to do for people of color or poor people or women— for your wife and daughter, for that matter. The rewards are potentially enormous for all people, even beyond changing the way things are set up. Just as rewarding is this: as we engage in these dialogues, we see past the identities we’ve been given and that we’ve taken on; we see through them to our common humanity. Amazing connections between people can happen, in spite of the atrocities of the past. Maybe it’ll take a long time to fully heal those wounds, if they ever can be healed, but we *can* begin to see through them, see one another more deeply *right now*.”

“Even this small conversation has allowed us to see one another a little more clearly, yes?”

The Seeker smiled and nodded. “Yes, it has.”

“In a sense, *your* liberation is tied in with this work, too.

Privilege binds not only
those who are put down,
but also those who are privileged.

“As we change our story
to acknowledge
that these issues of class, gender, and race
do exist in a systematic way—
that they’ve been instilled into
our neurology by our cultures,
that they’re things that people
who enjoy privilege
need to work on as much
as everyone else, if not more—
that will help to bring the spirit of our laws
more fully into fruition
as we address these issues.

“The story of Planetary Mind
includes this:
we have work to do—
learning how to talk about
racism, sexism, and classism
in ways that heal
and bring us together
in the common humanity
that lies underneath
our superficial identities.
But it is powerful work,
both for those of us with privilege
and those without.

“And there are even greater rewards.
When people passionate
for their smaller causes
see past their comfortable boundaries
and begin to bridge these
painful divides,

to the point where they realize
they're all working
on the same core crises,
what happens then?"

"Huh. Wow. So instead of fighting one
another, they can join together. They're
stronger."

"It is a momentous day indeed
when people let go
of their prejudices, suspicions,
habits, and hatreds
and discover the astonishing power
that is forged
when they meet one another
as humans who are connected,
rather than identities that are separate.

"As we bridge these divides,
we pave the way
for greater cooperation and resilience
and also discover just how much power
we can have together.

"Let's next look at how
changing this story of separation
changes another story
we have about the Web of Life."

FURTHER EXPLORATION

VIDEO

The Promise: A Lesson in White Privilege by Phyllis Unterschuetz. YouTube, July 15, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=A89xhMV63rQ.

The future of race in America: Michelle Alexander at TEDxColumbus. YouTube, Oct 16, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hgw.

How Studying Privilege Systems Can Strengthen Compassion: Peggy McIntosh at TEDxTimberlaneSchools. YouTube, Nov 15, 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-BY9UEewHw.

Mirrors of Privilege: Beyond Guilt to Responsibility, a Film by Shakti Butler. Oct 23, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdHJtyf7TB0.

READING

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack by Peggy McIntosh. 1989, www.isr.umich.edu/home/diversity/resources/white-privilege.pdf.

“This story of the Universe,” said the Sage,
“is a young story; it is changing as we discover and rediscover more
about ourselves, our planet, our galaxy, and our Universe . . .”

—from *THE HOLY UNIVERSE*

With this, the Sage then guides the Seeker into a powerful new narrative—one that translates the scientific facts of the Universe into a soulful story of creation that is reminiscent of humanity’s stories of the ages.

The two explore the unfolding of the Universe, from the Beginning of All Beginnings, to the emergence of Earth and human beings, all the way to the “Great Transformation” brought on by the global crises that we now face. Through these dialogues, the Seeker finds his path in the midst of the turbulence of our times. He learns how this evolutionary story can inform us all as we face the crises of the Great Transformation—and why these crises just might be the best thing that ever happened to humanity.

“Insightful and thought-provoking.”

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“A remarkable synthesis of modern and ancient wisdom.”

—ANGELES ARRIEN, author of *The Four-Fold Way*

“David Christopher has done a brilliant job of explaining the new science of the evolution of life and the universe.” —PAUL RAY, coauthor of *The Cultural Creatives*

“A Kahlil Gibran for the 21st century . . . [using] the venerable tradition of the teaching-story.” —RICHARD HEINBERG, author of *The End of Growth* and *The Party’s Over*



DAVID CHRISTOPHER left behind corporate and aviation careers to pursue his passion for helping to bring forth a new story for our challenging times. The dialogues within *The Holy Universe* are the result of his fifteen-year immersion in the works of Swimme, Berry, Sahtouris, Lovelock, and many others, including “Big Historians” such as Christian and Brown. David lives in Northern California.

A portion of the proceeds will be donated to The Pachamama Alliance, a rainforest preservation and educational organization working to bring forth a thriving, just, and sustainable world.



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