

There is a theory, some call it JUST a theory, that the universe, our universe is 13.798 billion years old, give or take a few days. This theory says that the universe came into being as a bi-product of the Big Bang.

But there are alternate theories that exist about the origin of the universe. Virtually every culture has a creation story.

Some say the world was born from an egg. Others say it came from the union of male and female deities. Still another version is that the world was created from fundamental principles like yin and yang. And a very popular conception—it may or may not be fair to call it a theory-- is that the world emanated from a single entity. Such a concept of creation exists in Tibetan Buddhism, the ancient Greek story of Gaia (Mother Earth) and the seven day creation story told in the book of Genesis.

Whatever it's origin, the universe is said to include all of space-time, the galaxies and the space between them, planets, stars, subatomic particles and all form of matter and energy. It's an amazing concept this thing called the universe. And just to think, it's pushing close to 14 Billion years in age. That's older than our friend Marty!

The earth is said to have been formed 4.6 billion years ago. Modern humans are said to have emerged from the evolutionary tree some 200,000 years ago. The arc of time is an amazing thing. It befuddles my mind. I've never been a numbers guy but I find it absolutely fascinating.

I'm amazed not only by the size of the numbers but by how many ways we can segment the arc of time. From billions and millions of years, to months, days, seconds, even nanoseconds, a billionth of a second. Who can count that fast?

It's easy to get lost in all these numbers, in all these ways of slicing and dicing time. There are so many ways that we can segment existence. This includes what we hold as significant, important, worthy of note. We talk in terms of civilizations, the existence of language, wars, plagues and famines.

We can think in terms of nations, culture, and economic structures. Philosophies and world views, the emergence of religions and their sacred books. And we can talk in terms of ancestors and family trees.

With such things, we get closer to home, closer to the here and now, closer to our lived experience and beliefs. What is it, that we hold dear? What are the ways we segment existence that we hold in high regard... OR that hold us in constraints?

The way we segment time, the way we construe existence can be healthy and nurturing, or it can be burdensome and constraining. The way we grew up, where we grew up, how we experienced or remember our early time on this earth, matters. Was it nurturing, rewarding, comforting or was it otherwise?

What are the events in the lives of our ancestors that have left footprints, a trail, across generations? What are the beacons they have shown into the future? What are the events in our own lives that mark us? What are those things that we refer back to, that hold a prominent place in our psyches?

Many no doubt are positive, some likely are not. But for good or bad, we are tied to our history. We are products of what has come before. We do not spring into existence out of whole cloth.

Even as we, like in the process of evolution, may be becoming bigger and better, smarter and faster, we are a product of what has come before. I believe we are wise not to lose sight of that truth. We are wise, not to lose sight of the implications of that truth. We would be wise not to delude ourselves into thinking we are fully self-made.

Today, I want to bring focus to what has come before. I want to shine a light on a particular part of the history of this Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie. We've already done a part of that work as we bestowed the title and honor of Minister Emerita on the Rev. Kay Greenleaf.

But a short ceremony feels insufficient. I want the day to be a celebration of a particular chunk of time in the life of this congregation. That segment of time is the time and years that coincides with the years of Kay's ministry here.

In many ways, your time here was a proud time, a unique time, never to be repeated, ever. Your time here, Kay, represents a stamp, an identifiable mark in the arc of time, both for the Fellowship and for the larger community.

The courage, determination and no doubt a bit of fierceness, that you and Rev. Dawn Sangrey demonstrated in support of Gay rights and the right to marry is admirable. You were so ahead of the times, ahead of so many, ahead of most of the country. Some parts of the country still have not caught up with the sense of dignity and equality you sought to bestow and engender. You were a wonderful public face of deeply held Unitarian Universalist beliefs, values and principles.

Now on the downside, in terms of social justice work, you set a rather high bar for the ministers who have and will follow you. But I'll accept that, because of all the good it did. You showed this congregation what it means to truly live your values and principles. You demonstrated what it means to have a faith in action, a faith and belief system that is visible.

You communicated to the larger community what Unitarian Universalism stands for, supports and encourages. You were living a principled life in full view. It was great press for the denomination. People came to know who we are and what we stand for. For that you deserve a great deal praise and appreciation.

There was an arc of time that preceded you here at the Fellowship. There was an arc of time you shared with this community. And there will be an arc of time that considers those years history.

My hope is that we can be guided by the beacons that still shine into our future, beacons held by those who have come before. My hope is that we have learned the lessons wrought by the experiences of our collective past. My hope is that we will have heroes that emerge from our community and worker bees that fertilize the fruit of our days to come.

We are now in November. The theme for this month is maturity. We will have four full weeks to explore what maturity means for us as individuals and what it means for us as a community. It will provide and opportunity for us to pay attention to how maturity can or does operate in our lives.

If it means anything, maturity must include some awareness of that which has come before. Maturity is about perspective. Maturity denotes prior growth and development. With maturity comes the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff.

May the arc of time bring us to a bright future. May the arc of time fuel our learning, feed our desire to grow, aide us in the development of wisdom. And may the actions we take, the work we do, lay a fertile pathway for those who follow.