

January Monthly Theme: Origins

Where do we come from? Answering this question can lead us to those who helped care for us as children, to the sources of our DNA from our biological parents or beyond, to our ethnic origins and cultural patterns that shaped us, as well as to the very beginning of the human species or life itself. At times, looking for origins—for “the original”—can be a search from what is presumed to be the most authentic, true, and unadulterated version. Yet, in other ways, origins seem to only mark the beginning—a starting point to move beyond, to leave behind, or even to forget. We love stories about origins. We ask a couple, “How did you meet?” Or, we share the stories of our children’s birth or how evidence of a particular trait was present from the beginning. On a cosmic level, religions have sought for millennia to answer questions of our origins as a key to our ultimate nature and destiny. Likewise, modern science has offered alternative understandings for how the universe and human life began. In these ways and more, stories of origins shape our sense of ourselves and the world in which we live.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment

on your own, in small groups, or informally with each other:

- What stories about your origins are most important to you?
- In what ways do origins determine destiny? In what ways do we transcend our origins?
- Why can searching for the origins of an idea, a person, a motivation, an interpretation, etc. feel so important? (eg. the original meaning of a religious text, work of art, or political constitution)
- Can we ever be free from our origins?
- What value is there in being rooted in our origins?
- Why does the origin story of the universe matter so much to so many?

Quotes and Short Readings:

- “We are all creatures of the stars.” — Doris Lessing
- “When we remember that the energy of our lives comes from the original flaring forth of the universe, and that the atoms of our bodies come from the explosion of ancient stars, and that the patterns of our lives come from many ancestors over billions of years, we begin to appreciate the intricate manner in which life remembers the past and brings it into fresh form today. Life adapts. Life remembers. Life learns.” –Brian Swimme and Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe*
- “All our knowledge has its origins in our perceptions.” –Leonardo da Vinci

- “... the pursuit of origins is a way of rescuing territory from death and oblivion, a reconquest that ought to be patient, devoted, relentless and faithful.” – Amin Maalouf, *Orígenes*
- “For Man to tell how human life began is hard; for who himself beginning knew?” – John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
- “Consider your origins: you were not made to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.” –Dante Alighieri
- “Our animal origins are constantly lurking behind, even if they are filtered through complicated social evolution.” – Richard Dawkins
- “We are all regionalists in our origins, however 'universal' our themes and characters, and without our cherished hometowns and childhood landscapes to nourish us, we would be like plants set in shallow soil. Our souls must take root - almost literally.” – Joyce Carol Oates
- “Religion has nothing to do with God. It's a fundamental attitude of human beings, who ask about the origins of life and what happens after death. For many, the answer is a personal god. In my opinion, it's religion that produces God, not the other way round.” – Umberto Eco
- “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” – T.S. Eliot
- “When we look out into space, we are looking into our own origins, because we are truly children of stars.” –Carl Sagan
- “He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin....will maintain the clearest view of them.” –Aristotle
- “In educating women like men, have we done something disastrous to both men and women alike, or have we only taken one further step in the recurrent task of building more and better on our original human nature?” – Margaret Mead