



Cosmology - Definitions

1. The way we interpret what is going on around us through the lens of how we see the origins of life. (Shamanic practitioner Christina Pratt)
2. One's beliefs about the origin and general structure of the universe, with its parts, elements, and laws, and especially with such of its characteristics as space, time, causality, and freedom. (Dictionary.com)
3. Our perceptions of ourselves, the universe, and everything in it; how it all came to be; and the nature of our relationships. (Mary Rooker)
4. The way we explain the nature, origin and development of the universe; a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world; the way the world is viewed (worldview).

The power of words, thoughts, stories, beliefs, and their vibrations infuse the Middle World. Your cosmology or worldview is a complete story containing your thoughts and beliefs. Shamanic practitioner Christina Pratt defines stories as *the organizing principles of our lives*.

Why Look at Cosmology?

Knowing the origins of our cosmology reveals by whose laws we really live. Questioning assumptions and norms allows us to see these laws more clearly. Once these sources are uncovered, we can

- consciously and more freely choose the laws we want to live by;
- define what physical/material success would look like to our true soul-self because we ...
 - have assessed whether we are living in right relationship with all other beings; and
 - know our rightful place in the food web and larger whole; and then
- live accordingly, continuing to amend our beliefs over time as deeper understanding advises.

The Shaman's Role in Cosmology

New Age tends to focus on being happy, finding the perfect soul mate, having creature comforts and wealth, and avoiding unpleasant or painful experiences. New Age and some modern Western worldviews often deny reality of “the dark” and even the reality that it’s an eating world. We think it’s “positive” when we get to eat but “negative” when another being is eating, esp. when we’re on their menu. But in shamanism, wholeness and existence require the eating reality to go both ways—the eater and the eaten, birth and death. Being eaten and dying maintains the cycles of all existence.

Alberto Villoldo critiques the movie “The Secret”¹ by observing that shamanism is not about you or me. The #1 focus is on Earth and a sustainable system for the planet; then your local ecosystem, then your village, then your family, then you. He asserts that holding those priorities incurs no karma, no debt for the next 7 generations, and so no generational curse. Peruvian shamans maintain the whole by having an altar, a mesa bundle. Everything the Peruvian shaman owned would fit into one of Villoldo’s closets. When Villoldo asked how he lived with so little, such poverty, the shaman led him outside the hut and waved to the snow-capped mountains, saying “Now who’s the poor one?” “The shamans’ job is to see the big picture, to assess whether the “dream” that the people dream and the way people live every day brings them into right relationship with the rest of Nature and thus in alignment with the Great

¹ [The Shaman's Secret](#), Alberto Villoldo, July 10, 2020. (21 min. video)

Wheel or Web. Shamanically, it's understood that illness comes from not being in right relationship. Shamans then point out where we are "dreaming the wrong dream" and coach us back into alignment.

People and cultures are vulnerable to coming out of alignment because whatever the person or culture deems to be "normal, natural, and necessary" is a blind spot. Cultures and people collectively can experience cultural or collective soul loss, just like we can as individuals. Cultures can also forget who their collective true soul-self is, just as individuals can. Shamanic practitioners coming together to compare notes is also helpful, because blind spots are inherent to this task, and we have them, too. We can help each other see our blind spots.

Basic Shared Shamanic Principles

1. Everything starts in the spiritual realm and exists there before manifesting physically.
2. Everything is alive and has a spirit and a gift/purpose.
3. As without, so within; as within, so without; what we do to other beings, we do to ourselves; when one is harmed, all are harmed; one weak link in a chain makes the chain break; when one heals, we all heal; if our thoughts are toxic, the Earth will be polluted.
4. Live and especially work from a place of connection to the rest of Nature and Oneness. Sandra Ingerman calls this "drawing power from the Land," like we do when we go to a power spot.
5. Oneness matters most, not the individual person or species or community. This is not "either/or" but "both-and," as the wholeness of individuals and species and communities feeds wholeness within the larger Oneness; one being or species is not more important than another.
6. The individual persons & species live and die by the law of reciprocity and right relationship.
7. The key is oneness and how we fit into it for the sake of Oneness, not for our own sake. The question is "what is our proper place in the cosmos?"

Scientist Fritjof Capra² has a scientific way of explaining how we are all connected: Every molecule in our body was once part of previous bodies and will be part of future bodies. In this sense, our bodies will live on again and again. We share not only life's molecules but it's organizing principles: the metabolic pathways of all beings are the same.

“Everything Is Connected” and “Evil”

We often hear the phrase “everything is connected” and “All my relatives or relations.” But what do these phrases mean? The following concepts are among the implications for cosmology.

1. Oneness is implied, which means everything belongs.
2. If everything belongs, they are here because they serve some function.
3. If everything serves some function, it's important that they be able to serve that function.
4. Beings (including “things”) not in their rightful place cannot serve their proper function for the whole.
5. Nothing should be excluded, even “evil,” in their rightful place.

² [Fritjof Capra: Science and Spirituality](#), California Institute of Integral Studies, Feb. 9, 2019 (80 min. video). The quoted portion is about 39 minutes into the video.

The implications of shamanic cosmology profoundly affect our daily life. It's not *our* planet; it belongs to everyone. The mosquitos and ticks have just as much a right to live here as we do. As Richard Powers eloquently states in his book, "[The Overstory](#)": "This is not our world with trees in it. It's a world of trees, where humans have just arrived. People aren't the apex species they think they are. Other creatures—bigger, smaller, slower, faster, older, younger, more powerful—call the shots, make the air, and eat sunlight. Without them, nothing." "You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes."

Humans as the "Youngest Sibling"

Richard Powers also relays the story of life on Earth as follows. It is our current scientific understanding, yet it matches the shamanic worldview.

Say the planet is born at midnight and it runs for one day. First there is nothing. Two hours are lost to lava and meteors. Life doesn't show up until three or four a.m. Even then, it's just the barest self-copying bits and pieces. From dawn to late morning—a million million years of branching—nothing more exists than lean and simple cells.

Then there is everything. Something wild happens, not long after noon. One kind of simple cell enslaves a couple of others. Nuclei get membranes. Cells evolve organelles. What was once a solo campsite grows into a town. The day is two-thirds done when animals and plants part ways. And still life is only single cells. Dusk falls before compound life takes hold.

Every large living thing is a latecomer, showing up after dark. Nine p.m. brings jellyfish and worms. Later that hour comes the breakout—backbones, cartilage, an explosion of body forms. From one instant to the next, countless new stems and twigs in the spreading crown burst open and run.

Plants make it up on land just before ten. Then insects, who instantly take to the air. Moments later, tetrapods crawl up from the tidal muck, carrying around on their skin and in their guts whole worlds of earlier creatures. By eleven, dinosaurs have shot their bolt, leaving the mammals and birds in charge for an hour. Somewhere in that last sixty minutes, high up in the phylogenetic canopy, life grows aware. Creatures start to speculate. Animals start teaching their children about the past and the future. Animals learn to hold rituals.

Anatomically modern humans show up four seconds before midnight. The first cave paintings appear three seconds later. And in a thousandth of a click of the second hand, life solves the mystery of DNA and starts to map the tree of life itself. By midnight, most of the globe is converted to row crops for the care and feeding of one species. And that's when the tree of life becomes something else again. That's when the giant trunk starts to teeter.

"No one sees trees. We see fruit, we see nuts, we see wood, we see shade. We see ornaments or pretty fall foliage. Obstacles blocking the road or wrecking the ski slope. Dark, threatening places that must be cleared. We see branches about to crush our roof. We see a cash crop. But trees - trees are invisible."
— Richard Powers, [The Overstory](#)

What Do Shamanic Cosmologies Look Like?

Big-picture cosmology and distinctions often made in contemporary shamanism are two forms of dualism, both oppositional and complementary, and a unity approach (described in *Tables 1* and *2*, below). I believe that the non-gendered, all-life-forms-encompassing view of Unity Consciousness is the appropriate, inclusive one that most closely aligns with shamanism's other relational aspects and may have been the original, pre-dualistic shamanic model.

In Shamanic Unity, the Whole is a spiral, not a circle. Over time, it is ever-shifting, changing shape, evolving—but evolving indicating a morphing, not evolving in a linear sense. The change isn't better or

"higher"; it's just different to fit the changes happening in the other parts of the Whole. The Whole needs the parts, relies on each part fulfilling its place to sustain the Whole. Each form is perfectly designed to fulfill its place in the ecosystem or whole or Great Web at that moment. Some beings, like humans, can choose from more possibilities, including ones that can permanently alter the Whole.

Table 1. Shamanic Unity Cosmology

Issue	Shamanic Unity Consciousness
1. Where do people and all beings come from? Did they evolve or originate from some other source?	Everything starts in the spiritual realm before it can manifest in the material world.
2. What beings are in this realm?	All beings and non-beings in all forms are in Unity. All perform some function for the whole, and all are sacred, whether they are labeled "good" or "bad."
3. What Is "God/Spirit/Source"? Describe it and its power.	"God" is the energy or breath or song that runs through the Whole of Creation— all animals (including humans), plants, elements, planets, galaxies, the known and unknown and unknowable. It moves ("enlivens") everything.
4. Do "Good" and "Evil" or "Heaven" & "Hell" Exist?	Everything is connected, oneness means that any "evil" is contained within oneness, just like "good" is; Heaven and Hell do not exist
5. What is your relationship to "God/Spirit/Source"? (e.g., parent-child, partner, none, un/caring, etc.)	The relationship with Source is collaborative, not hierarchical; "Source" is neither caring nor uncaring, simply has its own agenda and ever-changing journey/path.
6. Is self-worth inherent or acquired?	All beings are born with inherent self-worth, with "original blessing," all are an inherent part of and expression of the "divine" Oneness; "God" does not punish; unity excludes no one
7. What is your relationship to other beings (people, plants, animals, elements, etc.)?	(a) Equality: we need to share with other life forms (b) Reciprocity: don't take without asking and without giving back
8. What is your reality map and what's at the center (e.g., human-centric, Earth-centric, etc.)	Cosmos-centric; humans have their appropriate place, but it's not the top; Planet Earth has its place in the Cosmos, but it's not the sum total; humans and Planet Earth are small components of the known and unknown cosmos
9. How do you categorize sexuality and gender for all beings? What system of thinking applies (yin-yang, masculine-feminine, non-sexual, etc.)	All life forms represented, including non-sexual beings; domination/power & violence are not connected to sexual expression
10. What is the function of humans (as physical beings, not as souls per se) in the ecosystem?	Purpose is to serve the ecosystem/food chain; it's an "eating world", all eat and are eaten in turn; this is magical, sacred, and essential to the whole. Like all orders of beings, humans collectively have a gift, power, or "medicine" that they give to the Whole; perhaps that's the capacity for complex language, which allows them to rapidly expand on the knowledge base of previous generations.
11. Why are plants, animals, the rest of Nature here?	They are here to serve the ecosystem/food chain and also for their own reasons, to hold their own rightful place in the cosmos, to fulfill their own role in the Whole. Each order of species, like humans, collectively has a gift, power, or "medicine" that they give to the Whole.
12. How do you view aging and death?	Wise elders are revered. Death is seen as an ally. It is necessary, in that all life depends on someone's death to exist (if only plants for vegans like me, and I consider plants equal to animals). The world cannot regenerate itself without death, deconstruction, or decomposition as part of the cycle--think of decaying leaves or downed trees that provide habitat and feed the forest floor.
13. How do people, beings, and things come to be, and how do we make things happen?	Everything starts in the spiritual realm (dreams, thoughts, intentions, journeys, etc.) before it can manifest in the physical. The physical manifestations interact with and affect the spiritual realms, creating an endless feedback loop. (See #16)

Issue	Shamanic Unity Consciousness
14. Is the "spiritual" world a better place to be than the mundane, material world?	No. The goal while we are in a human form is to be "a body fully ensouled, and a soul fully embodied."
15. What are the source(s) of power that should drive one's life choices?	The source of power is Oneness. Choices should ideally be driven by your gifts and how they and you fit into the Whole.
16. Are our lives pre-determined or random? Something else? Explain.	All life is intertwined and ever-changing, not pre-determined. Existence is a spiral that is ever both dropping and keeping some of what came before and folding in something "new." The constant is change.

Table 2. Comparison of Duality and Unity Approaches

	Oppositional Duality	Complementary Duality ("Non-Duality")	Shamanic Unity
Nature of the Whole	Everything is in one of two categories, or some combination of the two, that are polar opposites, conflicting or antagonistic in some way. Examples include masculine-feminine, active-passive, birth-death.	Everything is in one of two categories, or some combination of the two, that are polar opposites, but complement each other rather than conflict. Examples include masculine-feminine, active-passive, yin-yang, birth-death.	Everything is diverse and rich; the whole depends on the diversity of the parts and the maintaining of those relationships, which are ever-changing. Examples include the diversity of gender: male, female, intersex, androgyne, cis, trans, nongender, etc., and life forms that reproduce asexually plus those from other planets.
Nature of the Parts	Each is incomplete; both are needed to make a whole	Each is incomplete; both are needed to make a whole, even when both "halves" are within one being	Complete and holographic; everything has the Whole within it and reflects that diversity
Color Equivalent	Black or white, good or evil are separate and at war	Black and white, good and evil	Rainbow; neither good nor evil; judgment/place is relative to some standard (such as maintaining ecosystems or the Great Wheel)
Geometric Equivalent	Finite line with ends repelling	Circle or finite line with ends that meet and magnetize	Spiral
Status	Unchanging	Unchanging	Ever-changing

Both oppositional and complementary belief systems are binary or dualities. To say that a circle can have multiple points, be divided into more than just two halves, does not expand binary systems because they still hold that all the points in each half are part of that half, not different or outside that polarity but part of it. In geometry, "opposite" refers simply to position or location; there is no added value that applies in masculine/feminine oppositional or complementary dualism. In dualism, each "polar opposite" is somehow incomplete without the other, a value that does not apply in geometry.

Unity perceives a multi-dimensional circle or pie, and everything inside the pie is neither oppositional nor complementary. Each is holographic, a tiny but complete reflection of the whole. Unity also includes everything "outside" the pie, if an "outside the pie" even exists. Everything is part of the One. So "evil" cannot be outside Oneness. Both good and evil are part of the One and need not battle each other. Unity isn't waiting for the "good" to win over "evil" and would not seek to banish either, rather is in a completely different system and so labels both within a different context and with other weights or factors attending. The deciding issue isn't whether an aspect delivers pleasure or produces a child but whether it maintains the ever-changing spiral, serves "the Whole."

Evaluating Cosmology & Culture

We are a society and dominant culture that has both good and bad, strengths and weaknesses. The sick and dysfunctional aspects arise from significant cultural soul loss. Many of the values and beliefs that emanate from our cosmologies are simply what we've been taught by that society and dominant culture, plus our own ethnic/familial culture(s). Some of that we will want to keep, some not, and we likely will not all reach the same conclusions! My own have evolved greatly and, I hope, will continue to evolve. As with most of the material in this program, we will not complete our task today; rather, this is the stuff of ongoing, life-long awakening. We do what we can with what's before us now, and keep questioning and awakening.

Questioning What is "Normal, Natural, and Necessary"

Most of us find it difficult to question something when everybody's doing it. What is "normal" is usually presumed to be natural and necessary. Does the cultural cosmology align with your spiritual principles? Where do they agree and disagree? What comes up for you as you read the following quotes? The first one is from Jack Forbes, a professor of Native American Studies and himself of Powhatan-Renápe, Delaware-Lenápe, and non-Indian background.

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do ... twenty-four hours a day. One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived.

Religion is not prayer, it is not a church, it is not theistic, it is not atheistic, it has little to do with what white people call "religion." It is our every act. If we tromp on a bug, that is our religion; if we experiment on living animals, that is our religion; if we cheat at cards, that is our religion; if we dream of being famous, that is our religion; if we gossip maliciously, that is our religion; if we are rude and aggressive, that is our religion. All that we do, and are, is our religion.

The "norm" for humanity is love. Brutality is an aberration. We are not sinners by nature. We learn to be bad. We are taught to stray from our good paths. We are made to be crazy by other people who are also crazy and who draw for us a map of the world which is ugly, negative, fearful, and crazy."

—Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Imperialism, Exploitation, and Terrorism*

It's not good to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society. —Philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti

From a shamanic perspective, attachment causes suffering because we have corded our energy into an object, person, habit, emotion, or idea and invested it with our life force and soul's essence.³ We also often cord our energy into our cosmology, and that causes suffering if it isn't a healthy shamanic cosmology.

Core Shamanism Needs Shamanic Cosmology

As Arith Härger has observed: *Core shamanism got Westerners into the habit of lying on the floor listening to a recording of drumming or, best-case scenario, other people drumming for them. Core shamanism is a re-creation of shamanic activity solely for Western people. We have adapted shamanism to our modern needs and daily lives within the Western society. When what we should have done was reshape our minds and adapt our lives to shamanism, itself, and not the other way around. Michael Harner did an outstanding job, and now it's time for us to take the leap from core shamanism into shamanism and reshape our society once again.⁴*

³ Mary Courtis, PhD, "Offering Odin's Eye: Sacrifice as an Act of Self-Empowerment," *Journal of Shamanic Practice*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, Fall 2011, p. 43.

⁴ [Sami Neo-Shamanism in Norway](#), Arith Härger, Jan. 9, 2019, 25 mins. Quote is about 6:00-7:00 minutes into the video.