

1. Think about a time in your life when you felt a strong sense of something greater than yourself. This could have occurred when you were observing a beautiful sunset, in the presence of someone you love, listening to or playing music, hiking on a trail in the woods, part of a religious gathering, painting, or sitting in quiet contemplation. Spend a couple of minutes remembering exactly what was happening, what things looked like, the thoughts and feelings you had. Now write a paragraph to describe exactly what this experience was like for you, where you were, how it felt, what things looked like, and **the nature of the transcendent moment you were experiencing.** ***** 1 PARAGRAPH*

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2. Briefly describe why this story is a "parable" and what you think the meaning is of this parable.. ***** 1 PARAGRAPH*

"A small frog lived in a well, and had all of its needs met by the surroundings of the well. It had been born in that well, raised there by its frog parents, and thought that the well was the entire world. One day, a frog that lived in the sea was hopping nearby and fell into the well.

The little well frog asked the newcomer "Where did you come from?"

The new frog answered "I am from the sea."

The frog of the well followed up with "The sea? What is the sea? Is the sea big?"

The frog from the sea replied, "Yes, the sea is very big."

The frog of the well leapt from one side of the well to the other and asked, "Is the sea as big as my well?"

The frog of the sea answered with, "The sea is much bigger than your well."

The frog of the well got irritated and said, "There is nothing bigger than my well. You are wrong. Leave here at once!" (2)

3. In this parable, what do you think Jesus is saying about the social hierarchy of the time, and what is the main message of this story? ***** 1 PARAGRAPH*

"One day, a law scholar tested Jesus by asking, 'Teacher, what must one do to inherit eternal life?'

Jesus replied, 'What is written in the Law? How do you understand this?'

The Law Scholar answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Jesus replied, 'You have answered correctly, now do this and you will live.'

The law scholar followed up with 'But who is my neighbor?'

*Jesus responded with a **parable**: 'A man was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and left him dying. A priest happened to be traveling the same road, but when he saw the man, he crossed to the other side of the road and left him. Then, a Levite came by, saw the man dying, and also crossed to the other side of the road, leaving the man to die. Then, a Samaritan (the lower social class) came upon the dying man, and when he saw him, felt pity for him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day when the Samaritan had to leave, he paid the innkeeper, saying 'Please look after this man, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.'*

Jesus then asked, 'Which of these three men do you think was a 'neighbor' to the dying man?'

'The one who had mercy on him and helped him,' the law expert replied.

Then Jesus told him, 'Go, and do likewise.' (3)

4. Please expound on your perspective on the moral lesson in the fable of The Hare and the Tortoise. ***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***

A fable is a story used to pass on a moral lesson, often using personified animals for illustrating the life lesson. Aesop, a Greek slave who lived in the 6th century BCE, is perhaps the most well-known writer of fables, and is thought to have written over seven hundred fables during his lifetime.

An example of one of Aesop's fables which many of us know is called The Hare and the Tortoise. The fable goes like this:

"There was a hare (large type of rabbit) bragging about how fast he was to all the other animals. 'I have never been beaten! I challenge any one of you to try to beat me,' he said.

The Tortoise (land turtle) quietly replied, 'I accept your challenge.'

The Hare laughed, and said 'That is very funny. I can run laps around you while you creep along.'

The Tortoise said, 'Don't brag until you have beaten me. Are you ready to race?'

So, they established the race course with starting and finish lines. At the start of the race, the Hare bolted past the starting line and was quickly out of sight. In his arrogance, he stopped at some point to sit down and rest, and fell asleep.

The Tortoise slowly but steadily kept moving forward at his pace, and eventually passed the sleeping Hare, who woke up just in time to see the Tortoise approaching the finish line. The Hare ran his fastest, but the Tortoise crossed the finish line first to win the race.

5. What do these creation myths reveal about the understanding of the world of the early Israelites (for the Jewish/Christian myth) or the early Greeks at the time these myths became sacred narratives for their communities? With all of the knowledge of the scientific basis for life that most of us currently have, what is your perspective on creation myths? Which creation myth is part of your own world view? Please respond with a couple of sentences.

***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***

*An important type of sacred myth, called a creation myth, deals with an understanding of the source of all things. **Where did we come from? How did we get here?** We find evidence of creation myths in almost every early culture in the world. This makes sense. When humankind evolved past the point of complete focus on physical survival, we began to think about our existence. How DID we get here? We then began to ascribe the existence of all things to an outside Source from which all things came.*

*There are similarities among the different creation stories, especially in cultures originating in similar parts of the world. For example, the creation myth shared by **Judaism and Christianity** is found in Genesis, the first book of both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Below is a translation of this story found in the New International Version of the Christian Bible.*

Genesis 1: "1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. 6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. 9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. 14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening,

and there was morning—the fourth day. **20** And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” **21** So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” **23** And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. **24** And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. **25** God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. **26** Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” **27** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. **28** God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” **29** Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. **30** And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. **31** God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. **Genesis 2:1-41** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. **2** By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. **3** Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. **4** This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” (5)

Now, compare this very detailed Biblical creation myth to a version of the **Greek creation myth**.

“In the beginning, there was only Chaos, the gaping emptiness. Then, either all by themselves or out of the formless void, sprang forth three primordial deities: Gaea (Earth), Tartarus (the Underworld), and Eros (Love). Once Love was there, Gaea and Chaos – two female deities – were able to procreate and shape everything known and unknown in the universe.

Even so, Hesiod imagines Chaos as something much more tangible than a bottomless chasm. At one point during the Titanomachy, Zeus casts his thunderbolts at the Titans, and, in the words of the poet, Chaos is “seized by an astounding heat.” Moreover, Hesiod seems even to suggest soon after that Chaos is some kind of a dwelling place, beyond which the Titans live. If so, Chaos would have to be the gloomy middle ground located between Earth and Tartarus – which is where the Titans are banished. Some even say that this is the most sensible cosmological vision of all, since, in addition to Eros, these are the first three deities ever created in Hesiodic cosmogony. If so, they represent the initial way in which Space was split (completed when Gaea gave birth to Uranus, the Sky), with Eros being the driving force of creation.

However, many others claim that, in the beginning, Chaos was all that there was, the dark majesty and mystery of creation incarnate. And that it was from Chaos that the first three primordial gods sprang forth: the wide-bosomed Gaea (Earth), Tartarus (the Underworld), and Eros (Love), the fairest among the deathless gods. Gaea would go on to become the Mother of Everything Beautiful in the world; Chaos would not be as fortunate. Out of herself, she would give birth to two more children: Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night). True, their sexual union would produce luminous offspring – Aether (the Divine Air) and Hemera (the Day). However, the progeny of Night – Chaos' daughter feared by Zeus himself – would end up being a string of sinister, ill-starred children.” (6)

6. Please briefly describe the difference in oral and scriptural writings, including the problems that can occur with each. ***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***
7. Briefly describe the difference in rational thinking and mythology, understood by Karen Armstrong as our two sources of knowledge. ***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***
8. Identify a character in a film or book that you see as a hero or heroine figure. How were they first identified as a hero/heroine, what were they tasked with accomplishing, and how were they thrust into the "hero's/heroine's journey"? What types of trials did they go through during their transition phase? How did they achieve their goal? ***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***
9. What are some of the rituals from your own community and family that have been important in your life? Which rituals - religious or cultural - do you practice at this point in your life and what is their meaning for you? ***** 1 **PARAGRAPH***