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I'm going to talk about the religion of economics and that's not what I usually talk about, but I've been learning some things recently that have caused me to basically take a new direction in.

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You know what?

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I think it's important to share.

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And so I'm not.

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It's not as, how to say, fluent and at my fingertips, as if I were just talking about deep ecology or about rainforest conservation or the things that I'm normally involved with.

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So the religion of economics, the fact that economics, the most pious religion that the world has ever known, has managed to audaciously disguise itself as secular is the real key to its unprecedented success.

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Not only secular, but a science.

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Not just a science, but.

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But the only one of the social sciences hard enough to have its own Nobel Prize.

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I propose that the first step to killing this false God and freeing the earth from its thrall is to unmask it, to name it, to say it like it is.

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So here I will tell the storey of this strange religion, one whose Sabbath lasts five days out of seven, while for the truly devout, maybe six or even seven days are spent worshipping in huge complexes of temples that scrape the sky, foul the waters and scorch the earth.

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When not in their office temples, the pious congregate in malls to shop unto exhaustion of the spirit and of the Earth itself.

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I've spent over 40 years working on the conservation of nature and have long been troubled by the irrationality, indeed insanity, that destroys the biological fabric from which our own lives are woven.

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Although our actions to protect the Australian rainforests between 1979 and 1986 led to a stream of national parks in New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland.

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For every forest protected in those years worldwide, a thousand were lost.

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And it quickly became clear that there was no way to save the planet one forest at a time, unless we could address the underlying psychological or spiritual disease that allows modern humans to imagine that we can somehow profit from the destruction of our own life support system.

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Clearly these actions would make no difference to the progress of the sixth mass extinction which we find ourselves in the middle of.

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I believe that the best understanding of the psycho spiritual dimension of the environmental crisis is to be found in a philosophy called deep ecology.

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The term was coined by the late Arnie Ness, professor of philosophy at Oslo University.

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And according to Ness, underlying all of the symptoms of the environmental crisis is the illusion of separation between human beings and the rest of the natural world.

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And this illusion of separation is itself the result of anthropocentrism or Human centeredness, the idea that human beings are at the centre of everything.

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So we are the crown of creation.

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We are the measure of all being.

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The world consists of human beings on the one hand, and resources for human beings on the other.

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The strongest root of this anthropocentrism is the Judeo Christian tradition, where we learn that only humans were created in God's image and that man is to subdue and dominate nature.

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Nature is to be in fear and trembling of us.

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If we dig at the foundations of classical economics, we discover its Judeo Christian roots.

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We learn that nothing has any value till human beings add their labour and intelligence to it.

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The earth itself is just dirt till we dig it up and turn it into our toys.

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Only then, when the miracle that is man transforms lowly earth into products, does it acquire any value.

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Contemporary economics is an utterly anthropocentric project.

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Value is created by human beings and the only thing with intrinsic value are humans.

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Anything else may have instrumental value if it is useful for humans, if it is a resource.

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Just as Christianity and Islam usurped the sacred sites and holy days of the pagan religions, they overthrew.

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Now Christianity has been overthrown by its own offspring.

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A case in point is the transformation of St Nicholas, a 4th century Christian saint, into Santa Claus, a modern and postmodern God of consumerism.

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What used to be the solstice was subsumed by Christmas and this in turn has been swallowed by shopping.

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Harvey Cox, professor of Divinity at Harvard University, writes that disagreements among the traditional religions are trivial in comparison to with the fundamental difference they all have with the religion of the market.

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He points out that the market religion has maintained the sacrament while reversing it.

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Sacred things like land, water, air and even the human body are transformed into profane ones so that they can be commodified and put up for sale.

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That is transubstantiation.

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The willed but not yet achieved omnipotence of the market means there is no conceivable limit to its inevitable ability to convert creation into commodities.

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In the mass of the market, a reverse process occurs.

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Things that have been held sacred transmute into interchangeable items for sale.

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Land is transformed from the sacred into mere real estate.

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We are shocked at the ancient east islanders who cut down every last tree to build and transport their lifeless gods of stone.

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Yet in our blind devotion to the God of economy, we repeat their insanity on a truly planetary scale.

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Only a deeply religious faith allows us to ignore the absurdity of perpetual growth on a finite planet.

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Most students of the religious phenomenon of economics.

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See neoclassical economics as a false theology, and I'll provide more excerpts from some of their analyses.

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But first I will introduce the curious case of economics professor Robert Nelson of the University of Maryland, who celebrates the religious aspect of his discipline.

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Nelson disagrees with his profession's wish to think of itself as a science, claiming rather that economists are really more like theologians, which gives them a much more important role in society.

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Economic efficiency has been the greatest source of social legitimacy in the United States for the past century, he writes, and economists have been the priesthood.

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Defending this core social value of our era, Nelson acknowledges many flaws in classical economics and concludes that whatever one might say today of the genuine truth value of economics as a body of scientific understanding, the practical reality is that the economics profession for many years was successful in asserting its scientific

status.

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The economic priesthood could effectively police the theological territory of America.

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While, as we shall see, many scholars agree wholeheartedly with his claim that without certain theological assumptions, some of the most important conclusions of economic theory could not be sustained, Unlike Nelson, most of these scholars use this conclusion to debunk economics rather than exalted.

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David Loy gives us the most compelling of the many critiques of economic religion in his Religion of the Market.

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He sensibly warns us that Nelson could be said to have overlooked the market religion's sacrificial aspects of worsening global poverty and environmental degradation, and points out that in 1960 countries of the north were about 20 times richer than those of the south.

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In 1990, after vast amounts of aid, trade, loans and catch up industrialization by the south north countries had become 50 times richer than the countries of the south.

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The richest 20% of the world's population now have an income and about 150 times that of the poorest 20%, a gap that continues to grow.

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In 2020, the world's 2,100 billionaires had more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60% of the planet's population.

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According to Oxfam, in 2022 the richest 1% bagged nearly twice as much wealth as the rest of the world Put together a tax of up to 5% on the world's multimillionaires and billionaires could raise \$1.7 trillion a year, enough to lift 2 billion people out of poverty.

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The market religion's sacrificial aspects we might imagine that this situation arises somehow accidentally, an unanticipated contingent effect of the economic religious

structures that rule the world.

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A closer inspection, however, reveals a much more Sinister picture.

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It turns out that in order to generate obscene profits, Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank, Merrill Lynch and others have caused the starvation of some of the poorest people in the world.

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In 2007, staple food prices started inexplicably rising and another 200 million people, mostly children, couldn't afford to get food anymore and sank into malnutrition or starvation.

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There were riots in more than 30 countries and at least one government was violently overthrown.

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It wasn't through a fall in supply.

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Wheat production actually rose globally that year.

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Then in spring 2008, prices just as mysteriously fell back to their previous level.

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In April 2008, Gene Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to food, called it a silent mass murder entirely due to man made actions where a herd of market traders, speculators and financial bandits turned wild and constructed a world of inequality and horror.

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The God of the market's hunger for sacrifice would put the God of the Aztecs to shame.

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Here's how it works.

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Throughout the 20th century, farmers have had mechanisms, futures markets, whereby they could ensure themselves against crop failure or the collapse of prices.

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Throughout the 90s, Wall street traders lobbied for the abolition of the regulations that had hitherto restricted these mechanisms so that only those directly involved in food production could use them.

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And suddenly these contracts were transformed into food speculation derivatives that could be traded without reference to the foodstuffs themselves.

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Previously, the economic system of supply and demand ensured that only a billion people went to bed hungry.

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After this deregulation, the cost of food was determined by the value of speculative food contracts, not by the availability of food itself.

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Jayati Ghosh is a professor of economics at the JNU in New Delhi.

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Asked if this is another bubble that's being deliberately created by finance, she replied, yes, absolutely.

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There is no other way to put it.

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You have a massive expansion.

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It sounds incredible, but world rice prices increased by 320% between January 2007 and June 2008.

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In just 18 months, you have a tripling of world rice prices.

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World wheat prices go up by 240%, maize prices by 218%.



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Crazy increases in these trading prices of these commodities.

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Professor Gosch points out that the price of other worldwide crops which are not traded on the futures market, like millet and cassava, rose very little.

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Her research shows that speculation was the main cause of the rise.

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John Harry explains it.

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In 2006, financial speculators like Goldman's pull out of the collapsing US real estate market.

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They reckoned food prices would stay steady or rise while the rest of the economy tanked, so they switched their funds there.

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Suddenly, the world's investors stampeded onto this ground.

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So while the supply and demand of food stayed pretty much the same, the supply and demand for derivatives based on food massively rose, which meant the oil rolled into one, price shot up, and the starvation began.

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The bubble only burst in March 2008, when the situation got so bad in the US that the speculators had to slash their spending to cover their losses.

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Back home, the world's wealthiest speculators set up a casino where the chips were the stomachs of hundreds of millions of innocent people.

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They gambled on increasing starvation and won their wasteland moment created a real wasteland.

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What does it say about our political and economic system that we can so casually inflict so much pain?

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Perhaps this is the kind of thing that Loy was pointing out when he cautioned, in his understated way, that Nelson could be said to have overlooked the market religion's sacrificial aspects.

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When we see economics as a religion, then advertising becomes religious education.

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And I believe that a critique of advertising is a strategic place to begin a campaign to undermine the religion.

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One often hears the argument that there's nothing we can do about greed, about the constant desire to purchase more and more stuff to fill the gaping hole in our souls, because this is only human nature.

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But if this is so, why the need to spend more money worldwide on the hypnotic deluge of religious indoctrination to reinforce this sickness than on all our other education combined, more than \$800 billion a year to reinforce greed and placate the economic God?

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Arnie Ness says that ecological ideas aren't enough to save us.

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We need ecological identity, ecological self.

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He proposes that community therapies will help dissolve the illusion of separation from the rest of the natural world and allow us to feel our rootedness in the living earth.

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He says that a sense of responsibility, of altruism, is a treacherous basis for conservation.

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Alter is the other.

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As long as nature is other than our very self, as long as the environment, we are good, responsible, altruistic.

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When our life is suffused with ongoing experience of connectedness, when the work that reconnects becomes our spiritual practise, then we no longer need to be good to stand up for the other.

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Defence of nature becomes merely self defence.

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And this is a lot easier for us than being good or responsible.

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Arne Ness says the requisite care flows naturally.

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If the self is widened and deepened so that the protection of nature is felt and conceived of as protection of our very selves, that is.

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It's no use sacrificing our desire for ever more material junk.

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We have to stop wanting these things, stop finding them pleasurable rather than bravely foregoing their pleasures.

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Like with any addiction, we must ask what is the real underlying problem?

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What is it we are not facing up to and avoiding by our consumption habits?

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So so far, this presentation is largely based on my research for a chapter I wrote in 2011 for the University of Western Sydney's book Social Ecology.

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The reason that I chose to make economics the subject for my presentation tonight is that the issues have been brought to the fore for me of late as I learn of the machinations of the Atlas Network corrupting our current information landscape.

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The Atlas foundation and the five or six hundred think tanks which it has spawned, George Monbiot calls them junk tanks, are funded to the tune of about \$800 million a year by Exxon Mobil, the Koch Brothers, Gina Rinehart, Rupert Murdoch and the usual suspects to keep their obscene profits flowing as our world slides to oblivion.

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Their purpose is to corrupt the information landscape, to make it look as though there is climate science, that it's still controversial, to drown the signal in noise.

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Jeremy Walker from the University of Technology in Sydney, who's done some of the most important research exposing Atlas, wrote an important book chapter titled Silencing the the Fossil Fueled Atlas Network's Campaign Against Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australia.

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He shows the same puppeteers using the same playbook disinformation campaigns manipulating opinion against Canadian Indigenous radio resurgence as that which caused the plummeting of support for YES in Australia from over 60% to less than 40% in the year leading up to the referendum and the same playbook pushing for the criminalization of climate protest.

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So these are some slides from the Melbourne Atlas Lies, Planet Dies.

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I'll just finish up by saying the lesson that we need to learn, I believe, is that unless we can expose their machinations and restore a level information playing field, it'll be impossible for public opinion to fall into line with the science.

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Impossible for a people's movement to emerge strong enough to sweep away the vested interest driving our world to extinction.

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Any of you who'd like to research this further?

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I would.

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While there's a discussion taking place, I'll hand around a sign up sheet for Helena and myself and I'll send out a link to where there are references that will support all of the accusations or claims that I've been making.

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I exhort you to include exposing Atlas and educating the community about them with whatever other activism you may engage in.

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And I just like to, I guess, thank Regen, Sydney and Cook's river alliance for organising this and all of you, your donations tonight are supporting Local Futures and supporting a project that I've been working on for 30 years, which is the Los Cedros Biological Reserve in Ecuador.

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I'll just say a few words about that.

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That we recently were able to eject multinational Canadian mining company from Los Cedros, perhaps the most biologically diverse region in the whole world, as a result of the first successful use of the Ecuadorian Constitution, was the first in the world that included the rights of nature.

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And we used the rights of nature in our court case and took it up to the Supreme Court in Ecuador and we won.

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And so the rights of nature.

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And so that's where your donations tonight are going to that and I'd like.

00:19:54

To share the universe jam the flame has lit up the world from within.

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All things, individually and collectively are interpenetrated and flooded by it.

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You who mould the manifold so as to breathe your life into it, I pray to you.

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The first verse of the Universe.

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Universe pours forth like a sea of mystery out of the void Unmanifest silence Space time comes into existence unseen shaping, swirling, unfurling Hydrogen, helium divine is revealed within galactic whirlpools as energy flows in a star collapses Supernova explosion A cloud of cosmic debris Drawn together by gravity by the mystery of attraction Primordial bonding Universe action Stardust swirling swirling gases organising and forming masses See the sun is the one that spun the nine others Gifted to mother Earth and her sisters and brothers Mercury, Venus, Mars and Jupiter Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto Everyone is the sun the sun is the one.

00:21:11

Everyone, everybody better wake up.

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And the Earth gave birth to continents and oceans Shaping and shaking in waves of emotion Crashes of lightning bombarding and striking Exposing the globes that glows like a strobe and setting the stage for the first cell of life so signal so basic soprano that I listened to the top of the chain from which all life sprang More forms adorn the Earth as they ring Diversity dispersing the song of creation Ring in the dawn Sing along in celebration I just wanna celebrate Celebrate life I just wanna celebrate Celebrate Earth I just want to celebrate Celebrate the cosmos I just want to celebrate.

00:22:12

The sea comes alive Starts to thrive with new life forms Storms swept the planet Plants crept on granite Enchanted by the sun's solar power the Earth gave birth to green leaves and flowers Lava flows Mountains rose Tropical islands, forests and meadows.

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Fed by the freshwater streams.

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The veins heavenly rain.

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Straying back to the sea, the fish is set free.

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As they swim onto sand, Fins turn to limbs and they limp onto land.

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Amphibious reptiles.

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New styles of creatures Seeing through new being.

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The range of her features.

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The earth your mother gave birth to Eyesight looking within as she spins in the sunlight.

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On to the dawn, to the day of the dinosaur.

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Pterodactyl sauce.

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Tyrannosaurus rex.

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Towering, devouring.

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So who's up next?

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Mammals and primates.

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All life interrelated, divinely created.

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So don't you think it's time we celebrate it?

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I just want to celebrate Celebrate life I just want to celebrate Celebrate Earth?

00:23:28

I just want to celebrate Celebrate the cosmos?

00:23:34

I just want to celebrate.