

Star Guide: Perceptions of the Cosmos

By Tony Berendsen

As the star guide for Tahoe Star Tours, I spend countless hours under the stars. My passion for helping people understand what they see while looking up on a starry evening is my purpose, and this mission statement sums up my intention, "One day everyone will walk out under a starry sky they understand."

I tell people when they hear the mission statement, "I know it's a tall order, but you have to set your sights high. The understanding of the starry sky begins with one little bit of knowledge: the sun is a star." We all know that it's a star, but when we take a minute to think about it, while looking at other stars in the night at distances so great they are just points of light, we start to gain a sense of the immensity of the Cosmos.

It is at that moment, looking at the stars in the distance, we begin to ask questions about our place in the Cosmos. In the last Star Guide, I asked the question: "How do you define your Cosmos?" Here are some of the answers:

- "So, do you think there is life up there?"

Male, United States

- "You know who made the moon. Yes, you do"

Female, Italy

- "I don't need to ask questions about the Cosmos, the creator tells me what I need to know."

Female, Korea

· My venue is the dome of the night,

The master works I have trained myself to know are nothing less than the star patterns that populate our lives, all lives, everywhere the world over,

And not only these here in the sky above my head,

But in the books and stories and buildings and fields and wishes and ceremonies and sciences of ages.

It is good work.

It is human being at the center work,

It is truth.”

Mary Stewart Adams, director Headlands, International Dark Sky Park

· “Thinking about the cosmos, and my place in it, expands my vision beyond my life on earth. I feel a part of a vast continuum beyond my comprehension that is somehow reassuring.”

Sally Jacob, Reno

· “My Cosmos is a bucket that I fill with love, peace and forgiveness. When it’s full I pour it all over the Galaxy”

Linda Kovalcheck, San Diego

· “Why am I me?”

Kathleen Berendsen, Reno

· “The Cosmos is such a large collection of stars I can’t imagine the size. They are beautiful to look at!”

Chad Carvin, Reno

We are all so different in our interpretation of the Cosmos.

The questions we ask, and thoughts we share, will help us understand the starry sky above and our place in the Cosmos.



NASA Hubble Space Telescope – Pillars of Creation.

A poem I wrote several years ago after giving a talk at Great Basin National Park describes how I feel:

The Milky Way

Above as we walk hand in hand in the darkness

She has wrapped her silver band upon us

A motion so gentle we hardly notice

As a nest sways in an earthly breeze

Caressing the beginnings of an endless cycle

We see from inside and beyond

To the realm of other kindred souls

*She wonders about us so
Our existence in such a small space
Thinking of ourselves as masters
Holding on to each other till
We accept the inevitability of it all
And her arms release us to roam this place.*

Next Star Guide: What is a molecular gas cloud, and where can I see one?

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