

The Voice of the Secular World

Secular World Magazine

Blasphemy Laws

The Real Creation Story – Part 5

Beyond GDP

The Global Healthcare Worker Shortage

**LEVERAGING SCIENCE AND
REASON TO ADVANCE HUMANITY
FOR A BETTER WORLD**

MARCH/APRIL 2026

- 3 **Global Secular Events**
- 4 **Blasphemy Laws**
- 6 **Understanding the Corruption Perceptions Index**
- 9 **Beyond GDP**
- 12 **The Quiet Grazer of the Tropics**
- 14 **The Global Healthcare Worker Shortage**
- 17 **The Real Creation Story – Part 5**
- 20 **Celebrating Culture: Nepal**
- 23 **Book Review: The Power of Ritual**
- 25 **Secular Snapshots**



EDITOR'S STATEMENT

As publishers of *Secular World Magazine*, The Secular Community thesecccommunity.org is proud to offer a space for voices committed to reason, evidence, and human progress. We believe in the power of open inquiry, constructive debate, and global solidarity to overcome the challenges facing humanity today.

This magazine is more than a publication—it's a platform for visionaries, reformers, skeptics, scientists, artists, activists, and everyday citizens who understand that the future must be shaped not by ancient dogma, but by our shared responsibility to one another and to the Earth.

In each issue, you'll find articles that challenge assumptions, celebrate cultural diversity, highlight science-based innovations, and offer practical pathways to a better way of living—free from superstition, grounded in reality, and driven by hope.

Whether you're a lifelong secularist or just beginning to question the frameworks handed to you, we welcome you into a growing global conversation. Together, let's explore what it means to live well, live justly, and live freely in a secular world.

— *The Editors*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I strongly believe that, on balance, the world would be a much better place if we could banish all religious beliefs to being nothing more than historical curiosities, or at least nothing more than the odd beliefs of some individuals with no influence over anybody else's life.

A big part of me wants to adopt a hard, loud stance: doing everything I can to help 'spread the word'. But...

As I get older - deeply frustrated by all that is wrong in the world, yet more tolerant of each individual's foibles - I find myself more and more conflicted by my wish to help in the spread of Secularism and Humanism, without causing deep distress to many good people (including close family members) whose faith brings them so much comfort.

I want to shout out at the world, without being heard by individuals. The rational, enthusiastic debater in me wants to tell them that their beliefs are ludicrous, but...

I feel sure that you and many of your readers share this frustration. But I don't think anyone has an easy solution at the individual level.

So, thank you for your good work with this magazine.

Anything and everything which helps people see that non-belief is a good (in both senses of the word) option needs to be encouraged. The Good Word must be spread!

Yours faithfully,
Giles Scott

To share your thoughts, please write to us at editor@secularworldmagazine.org.

Declaration of Policy and Aims

Human civilization has reached a crossroads. Our remarkable advancements in science, technology, and economic development have brought undeniable benefits, but they have also produced complex systems that now threaten the very ecosystems upon which we depend. Climate change, inequality, political instability, and widespread misinformation are symptoms of a world out of balance.

One of the most persistent barriers to lasting, rational solutions is the continued dominance of religious ideologies rooted in ancient texts and traditions. While often claiming moral authority, these belief systems too often divide us, suppress critical thinking, and obstruct evidence-based approaches to the pressing challenges of our time.

Now more than ever, it is essential that we embrace a worldview grounded in reality—not one shaped by supernaturalism, dogma, or blind faith. We must reclaim

our shared human agency and face the future with courage, clarity, and compassion.

Secular World Magazine promotes a reason-based path forward, built upon these core principles:

- Democratic and secular governance that protects freedom of thought and expression
- Universal human rights and dignity for all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or belief
- A just economic system that rewards contribution, ensures opportunity, and prioritizes well-being over profit
- Environmental restoration and stewardship, honoring our role as caretakers of the planet

Through thoughtful analysis, storytelling, and global perspectives, *Secular World Magazine* is committed to showcasing solutions, advancing secular values, and inspiring a more enlightened, sustainable, and compassionate world. ♦

Celebrating Nature's Wonders



Global Secular Events

March - April 2026

March 2026

March 3 – Total Lunar Eclipse

Visible across parts of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. During totality, Earth's shadow turns the Moon a deep copper-red - a reminder of celestial mechanics at work.

March 8 – International Women's Day

Organized by the United Nations, it is a worldwide call for gender equality, education access, and evidence-based policy supporting women's rights and health.



March 20 – March Equinox

Day and night are nearly equal worldwide. Spring begins in the Northern Hemisphere; autumn in the Southern Hemisphere - all driven by the Earth's axial tilt.

March 20 – International Day of Happiness

Established by the UN, the International Day of Happiness recognizes well-being as a legitimate public policy goal - aligning with secular efforts to measure social progress beyond growth alone.

March 22 – World Water Day

Established by the UN to highlight freshwater protection, sanitation, and climate resilience as shared global responsibilities.



April 2026

April 21-22 - Lyrid Meteor Shower

Best viewed **in the Northern Hemisphere**, it is one of the oldest recorded meteor showers, producing 10-20 meteors per hour under dark skies.

April 22 – Earth Day

First celebrated on April 22, 1970, Earth Day began as a nationwide environmental teach-in in the United States and quickly grew into a global movement. The inaugural event mobilized an estimated 20 million Americans and is widely credited with helping spur landmark environmental legislation, including the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and passage of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act.

Today, Earth Day engages more than one billion people across nearly 200 countries.

While themes vary from year to year, core priorities typically include:

- Climate change mitigation
- Biodiversity protection
- Renewable energy transition
- Plastic reduction
- Environmental justice
- Sustainable food systems
- Youth climate activism

Earth Day has evolved from a protest movement into a global civic platform — combining public demonstrations, educational programming, corporate sustainability pledges, and local volunteer initiatives. ◆

Blasphemy Laws: A Threat to Free Expression and Human Rights

Blasphe­my laws—statutes that criminalize speech or actions deemed insulting to religion, religious figures, or sacred objects—exist in dozens of countries worldwide. Often justified as protecting public order or religious harmony, these laws are increasingly recognized as a violation of basic human rights, especially freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and freedom of belief.

What Are Blasphemy Laws?

Blasphemy laws vary widely but share a common goal: prohibiting criticism, satire, or perceived disrespect toward religion. In some countries, blasphemy is punished with fines or short jail sentences; in others, it carries life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

- **Strict enforcement:** Countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have severe penalties, including capital punishment, often used disproportionately against religious minorities and dissidents.
- **Symbolic but dormant:** In nations such as Ireland (repealed in 2020) and Denmark (repealed in 2017), blasphemy laws were rarely enforced and eventually abolished.
- **Western democracies:** Until recently, some European countries like Greece, Poland, and Germany still maintained blasphemy statutes, though enforcement has been sporadic.

Blasphemy laws don't protect people — they protect ideas.

International human rights standards allow limits on speech to prevent violence or direct harm. But shielding beliefs from criticism places religious doctrine above open debate. In practice, these laws are most often used against minorities, reformers, and dissenters — not to preserve harmony, but to silence it.



Why Are They Still in Force?

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Humanists International:

- 84 countries worldwide retain laws against blasphemy.
- 6 countries (including Iran and Pakistan) maintain the death penalty for blasphemy.
- The Middle East and North Africa have the highest concentration of strict blasphemy statutes, often integrated into Sharia-based legal systems.
- Asia (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, India) often applies blasphemy laws in ways that disproportionately impact religious minorities.
- Even Western democracies have remnants, such as Poland's "offending religious feelings" law, under which artists and activists have faced prosecution.

How Blasphemy Laws Violate Human Rights

1. **Freedom of Expression:** Blasphemy laws restrict open debate, satire, and dissent. They often prevent journalists, artists, and academics from questioning dominant religious views.

2. **Freedom of Religion or Belief:** These laws typically favor one faith over others, violating the principle of state neutrality in religious matters.
3. **Disproportionate Impact on Minorities:** Religious minorities, atheists, secularists, and reform-minded believers are often targeted.
4. **Misuse for Personal and Political Gain:** In many countries, blasphemy accusations are used to settle personal disputes or suppress political opponents.
5. **Climate of Fear:** The mere existence of such laws fosters self-censorship and fear of persecution.
6. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has explicitly stated that blasphemy laws are incompatible with the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which protects freedom of expression.

Examples of Abuse

- **Asia Bibi Case (Pakistan):** A Christian farmworker sentenced to death in 2010 for alleged blasphemy; she spent eight years on death row before being acquitted.
- **Avijit Roy (Bangladesh):** A secular blogger murdered in 2015 after speaking out against religious extremism; blasphemy accusations were used to justify attacks.
- **Artists and Musicians (Europe):** In Greece and Poland, performers have faced charges for satire or art considered offensive by religious groups, highlighting how these laws chill creativity even in democratic societies.

Progress Toward Abolition

Despite persistent challenges, there has been significant momentum toward repealing or weakening blasphemy laws:

- **Ireland:** In 2018, a national referendum overwhelmingly supported removing blasphemy from the constitution, leading to repeal in 2020.
- **Denmark & Norway:** Repealed their blasphemy laws in 2017 and 2015, respectively, arguing they were outdated and contrary to free expression.
- **Greece:** Abolished its blasphemy laws in 2019 following pressure from human rights advocates.
- **Canada:** Repealed its blasphemy law (Section 296 of the Criminal Code) in 2018.
- **International Advocacy:** Humanists International's End Blasphemy Laws Campaign has coordinated global pressure, supported by organizations like Amnesty International and Freedom House.

Why Are Blasphemy Laws So Hard to Remove?

1. **Political Sensitivity:** Politicians fear backlash from religious institutions or conservative voters.
2. **Social Pressure:** In countries with deeply religious populations, repealing blasphemy laws is seen as endorsing “immorality” or “disrespect.”
3. **Authoritarian Leverage:** Some governments use these laws as tools to control opposition and silence dissent.

A Human Rights Perspective

The UN Human Rights Council emphasizes that freedom of expression protects even speech that shocks, offends, or disturbs. Restricting speech to protect religious feelings effectively enforces religious orthodoxy through law—a direct conflict with democratic and pluralistic values.

The Rabat Plan of Action (2012), developed by UN experts, recommends replacing blasphemy laws with laws addressing incitement to violence, which focus on harm rather than belief. This approach shifts the legal standard from protecting ideas to protecting people—especially vulnerable minorities.

The Way Forward

- **Repeal Outdated Laws:** Push for outright repeal of blasphemy statutes in democratic countries where they remain symbolic but unenforced.
- **Reform and Narrow Scope:** In countries where immediate repeal isn't feasible, advocate for narrowing laws to address only incitement to violence.
- **Support Victims:** Provide legal aid and asylum for those persecuted under blasphemy laws.
- **Raise Awareness:** Public education campaigns can reframe the issue as a question of equality, free expression, and universal human rights—not disrespect for faith.

Conclusion

Blasphemy laws belong to an era when questioning religious authority was seen as a threat to social order. Today, they undermine human rights, stifle progress, and are often wielded as weapons against minorities and reformers. Encouragingly, progress is being made: more countries are repealing these laws, international bodies are calling them incompatible with human rights, and grassroots campaigns are gaining momentum. ♦



Understanding the Corruption Perceptions Index: What It Means and Why It Matters for Democracy

In recent years, renewed attention has been paid to global corruption trends as democratic norms face mounting pressure across multiple regions. At the center of that discussion is the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the world's most widely cited measure of public sector corruption. Compiled annually by Transparency International, the CPI has become a benchmark for assessing governance quality, institutional trust, and democratic resilience.

But what exactly is the CPI? What does it measure — and what does it not measure? And perhaps most importantly, what are the implications of its findings for democratic systems of government?

What Is the Corruption Perceptions Index?

The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. It scores them on a scale from 0 to 100, where:

- 0 = Highly corrupt
- 100 = Very clean

Each year, the CPI evaluates around 180 countries.

The index does not measure corruption directly — that would be nearly impossible given corruption's hidden nature. Instead, it aggregates data from multiple expert

assessments and business surveys conducted by reputable institutions. These include sources such as:

- The World Bank
- The World Economic Forum
- The African Development Bank
- Economist Intelligence Unit
- Various risk and governance assessment firms

By synthesizing these independent sources, Transparency International generates a composite score that reflects perceived levels of bribery, misuse of public office, diversion of public funds, favoritism in public services, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption frameworks.

Who Compiles It?

The CPI is compiled by Transparency International, a Berlin-based non-governmental organization founded in 1993. Transparency International's mission is to combat corruption globally through research, advocacy, and reform initiatives.



The organization operates through national chapters around the world and collaborates with governments, civil society groups, journalists, and international institutions. Its annual CPI release typically generates significant media coverage and policy debate, as rankings can affect investment flows, diplomatic relationships, and public confidence in government institutions.

What Does the CPI Measure?

The CPI focuses specifically on public sector corruption. That includes:

- Bribery of public officials
- Embezzlement of public funds
- Corruption in procurement processes

- Judicial corruption
- State capture by private interests
- Lack of effective prosecution of corrupt officials

Importantly, it does not measure:

- Private-sector corruption (unless it intersects with public office)
- Petty corruption experienced by citizens directly
- Money laundering flows per se
- Inequality or policy outcomes directly

However, corruption is often deeply intertwined with all of these.

Recent Trends and Findings

Recent CPI reports have highlighted troubling patterns:

- Democratic backsliding is frequently accompanied by rising corruption perceptions.
- Autocratic or hybrid regimes often score poorly, but some electoral democracies also show deterioration.
- Countries with strong rule-of-law institutions, independent judiciaries, and free media tend to score highest.

Nordic countries such as Denmark and Finland consistently rank near the top. At the lower end of the scale are fragile states experiencing conflict, authoritarian rule, or severe institutional breakdown.

One consistent finding: there is a strong correlation between corruption levels and the health of democratic institutions.

Corruption and Democratic Governance

Corruption undermines democracy in several critical ways:

1. Erosion of Public Trust

Democracy depends on citizen trust in institutions. When corruption becomes systemic, voters may lose faith in the fairness of elections, courts, and public administration. This cynicism can lead to lower voter turnout, political disengagement, or support for populist strongmen who promise to "clean house" but often consolidate power instead.

2. Weakening of Rule of Law

A functioning democracy requires impartial enforcement of laws. Corruption distorts this principle by allowing political allies or wealthy interests to evade accountability. When courts are compromised or prosecutors are politicized, checks and balances collapse.

3. Policy Distortion

Corruption skews public policy toward narrow interests rather than the public good. Infrastructure contracts may go to politically connected firms rather than the most qualified bidders. Environmental regulations may be weakened in exchange for bribes. Social services may be underfunded while elites benefit.

This distortion undermines economic fairness and fuels inequality – both of which destabilize democratic societies.

4. State Capture

In extreme cases, corruption leads to “state capture,” where private actors effectively control legislative, executive, and regulatory functions. Democratic institutions may still exist formally, but decision-making serves oligarchic or partisan interests rather than citizens.

Corruption, Climate Policy, and Global Challenges

The implications extend beyond governance theory. Corruption directly affects a country’s ability to address global crises, including:

- Climate change
- Public health emergencies
- Infrastructure modernization
- Education reform

When public funds are siphoned off, climate adaptation projects stall, healthcare systems weaken, and disaster preparedness suffers. In this sense, corruption is not merely a moral issue – it is a structural obstacle to solving planetary-scale problems.

For countries attempting to transition toward sustainable economic models, weak anti-corruption frameworks can derail reform efforts. Investments in renewable energy, green infrastructure, and social safety nets require institutional integrity.

Limitations and Critiques of the CPI

While influential, the CPI has limitations:

1. Perceptions vs. Reality

Because it relies on expert surveys, the index measures perceived corruption rather than documented corruption cases. Perceptions can lag reforms or be influenced by media coverage.

2. Elite Focus

Much of the data comes from business and governance experts, which may not fully capture everyday citizen experiences.

3. Comparability Issues

Cross-national comparisons can oversimplify complex governance contexts.

Transparency International acknowledges these limitations and emphasizes that the CPI should be viewed as an indicator of risk and institutional health, not a precise corruption meter.

Implications for Democratic Reform

The CPI’s findings suggest that strengthening democracy requires more than holding elections. It requires:

- Independent judicial systems
- Transparent procurement processes
- Robust investigative journalism
- Strong civil society organizations
- Clear conflict-of-interest laws
- Whistleblower protections

Countries that score highly on the CPI tend to combine these features with open government practices and strong accountability mechanisms.

Conversely, declining CPI scores often accompany attacks on media freedom, politicization of courts, and concentration of executive power.

The Broader Democratic Question

At its core, the CPI highlights a central truth: corruption is both a symptom and a driver of democratic weakness.

Democracy is not self-sustaining. It depends on institutional integrity, civic culture, and enforcement mechanisms that prevent power from being abused. When corruption flourishes, democratic forms may remain on paper, but their substance erodes.

For citizens, the index offers both warning signs and benchmarks for improvement. For policymakers, it underscores the need for structural reforms that prioritize transparency and accountability.

In a world facing climate instability, economic inequality, and geopolitical tension, the relationship between corruption and democracy has become increasingly consequential. The CPI serves as an annual reminder that clean governance is not merely an ethical aspiration – it is foundational to democratic resilience and effective public problem-solving. ♦



Beyond GDP: Why the World Must Rethink Economic Success to Avoid Planetary Crisis

In recent years, a striking message has come from the highest levels of global governance: the way we measure economic success is actively undermining the future of life on Earth. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has repeatedly warned that the global economy's fixation on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is pushing humanity toward climate chaos and ecological collapse. His argument is blunt: an economic system obsessed with growth at any cost is incompatible with a finite planet.

GDP has shaped global priorities for nearly a century. It determines what governments reward, what corporations pursue, and what societies call "progress." Yet as climate change accelerates, biodiversity declines, and inequality widens, GDP increasingly looks less like a neutral measure and more like a driver of planetary risk.

This article explores why GDP is fundamentally flawed, how it contributes to climate and environmental damage,

and what credible alternatives exist to replace—or at least radically demote—it.

What GDP Measures - and What It Ignores

GDP measures the total monetary value of goods and services produced within a country over a given period. On the surface, it seems sensible: more production equals a stronger economy.

But GDP has three core blind spots that make it dangerously misleading:

1. It Counts Costs as Benefits

GDP increases after oil spills, wildfires, floods, and hurricanes—because cleanup, reconstruction, and medical care all involve spending. Environmental destruction becomes "economic growth," even when it represents irreversible loss.

2. It Ignores Environmental Depletion

When forests are cut down, fisheries depleted, or fossil fuels extracted, GDP records the sale—but not the loss of natural capital. Nature is treated as infinite and free, even as ecosystems collapse.

3. It Is Blind to Well-Being

GDP says nothing about health, education, happiness, community cohesion, or environmental safety. A society with soaring GDP and rising depression, pollution, and inequality still appears “successful.”

These flaws were acknowledged even by GDP’s original architects, who warned it was never meant to measure social progress. Yet over time, GDP became the dominant scoreboard for governments and markets alike.

How GDP Drives Climate Change and Ecological Damage

GDP’s most dangerous impact lies not just in what it measures—but in how it shapes behavior.

Growth as a Political Imperative

Governments are judged on GDP growth. When growth slows, leaders face political backlash, regardless of whether people’s actual lives improve. This creates constant pressure to:

- Expand fossil fuel extraction
- Promote resource-intensive consumption
- Delay environmental regulations seen as “anti-growth”

Climate action, under a GDP-first framework, becomes a perceived threat rather than a necessity.

Consumption Without Limits

GDP rises when people buy more—regardless of whether those purchases meet real needs or fuel wasteful over-consumption. Planned obsolescence, fast fashion, and disposable plastics are economically rewarded, even as they accelerate emissions and pollution.

Externalizing Environmental Costs

Under GDP logic, companies are incentivized to push environmental costs—carbon emissions, toxic runoff, habitat destruction—onto the public and future generations. Because these harms don’t reduce GDP, they remain invisible in national accounts.

Lock-In of Fossil Fuel Dependence

Fossil fuels remain attractive precisely because they boost GDP quickly. The long-term climate costs—sea-level rise, extreme weather, food insecurity—are excluded from the metric that guides decision-making.

The result is an economic system that treats planetary stability as expendable.

Why Efficiency Alone Isn’t Enough

Some argue that “green growth” can solve the problem: keep GDP rising while decoupling growth from environmental harm through clean technology and efficiency.

While efficiency is essential, evidence shows absolute decoupling at the speed and scale required has not occurred globally. Efficiency gains are often offset by rebound effects—lower costs lead to higher consumption. In a GDP-driven system, efficiency becomes a tool to grow faster, not to reduce overall impact.

This is why the UN Secretary-General has argued that growth cannot remain the primary goal in a world already exceeding planetary boundaries.

Viable Alternatives to GDP

Replacing GDP does not mean abandoning economics—it means measuring what actually matters.

1. Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)

The GPI starts with economic activity but adjusts for:

- Income inequality
- Environmental damage
- Resource depletion
- Unpaid work (such as caregiving)

In many countries, GPI has stagnated or declined even as GDP has risen—revealing a widening gap between economic growth and real well-being.

2. Doughnut Economics

Popularized by economist Kate Raworth, this framework defines a “safe and just space” for humanity:

- A social foundation ensuring basic needs
- An ecological ceiling respecting planetary limits

Economic success is measured by staying within both—not by endless expansion.

3. Human Development Index (HDI)

Already used by the UN, HDI combines:

- Life expectancy
- Education
- Income

While still imperfect, it shifts focus toward human outcomes rather than raw output.

4. Well-Being and Beyond-GDP Dashboards

Several countries now use multi-indicator dashboards tracking:

- Health and mental well-being
- Environmental quality
- Social trust
- Time use and work-life balance

These systems avoid the false simplicity of a single number while offering far better guidance for policy.

What Moving Beyond GDP Enables

Abandoning GDP as the primary goal changes everything:

- Climate action becomes central, not optional
- Regenerative and circular economies become rational choices
- Preventive healthcare and education gain priority
- Quality of life matters more than quantity of consumption

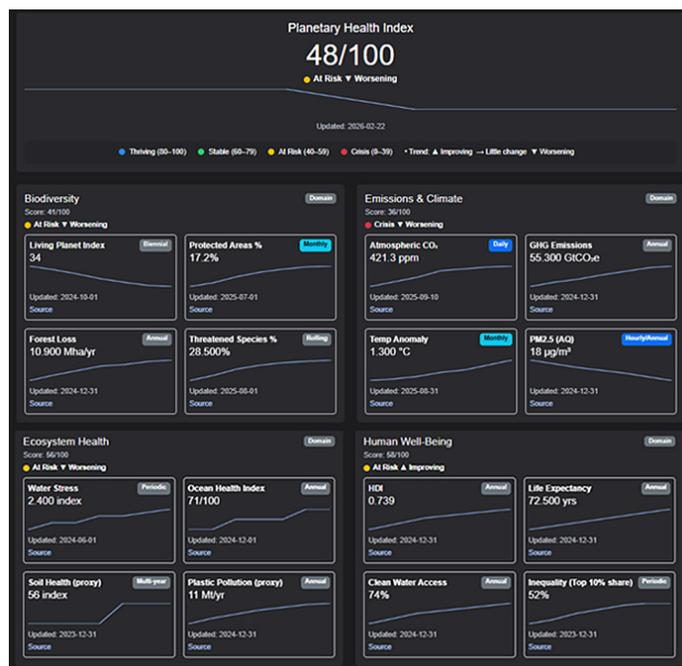
Most importantly, it aligns economics with physical reality: there is no economy on a dead planet.

A Practical Step Forward: The Planetary Health Dashboard

One response to the limits of GDP is not merely theoretical—it is practical and measurable. The Secular Community has begun developing a prototype Planetary Health Dashboard (planetaryhealthdashboard.org) designed to help move public attention away from single-number economic growth and toward a more comprehensive understanding of global well-being.

The dashboard is structured around a composite Planetary Health Index, supported by four core domains: Biodiversity, Emissions & Climate, Ecosystem Health, and Human Well-Being. Rather than focusing on production alone, it aggregates widely respected indicators such as species abundance, forest loss, atmospheric CO₂ levels, global temperature trends, freshwater availability, inequality measures, and life expectancy.

Importantly, it is designed to be transparent. Indicators will be sourced from established international datasets and updated as new data becomes available. The aim is not to create a new opaque metric, but to provide a public-facing tool that makes planetary and human well-being visible in one integrated framework.



By combining ecological boundaries with social outcomes, the Planetary Health Dashboard will reflect a fundamental shift in priorities: success defined not by how fast economies expand, but by whether human societies are thriving within environmental limits.

If GDP tells us how much we are producing, the Planetary Health Dashboard is intended for a more urgent question: Are we sustaining the conditions that make production—and civilization itself—possible?

A Turning Point for Global Economics

The UN Secretary-General's warning reflects a growing consensus among scientists, economists, and policy-makers: GDP is no longer fit for purpose. In an era of climate emergency and ecological overshoot, clinging to this 20th-century metric is not conservative—it is reckless.

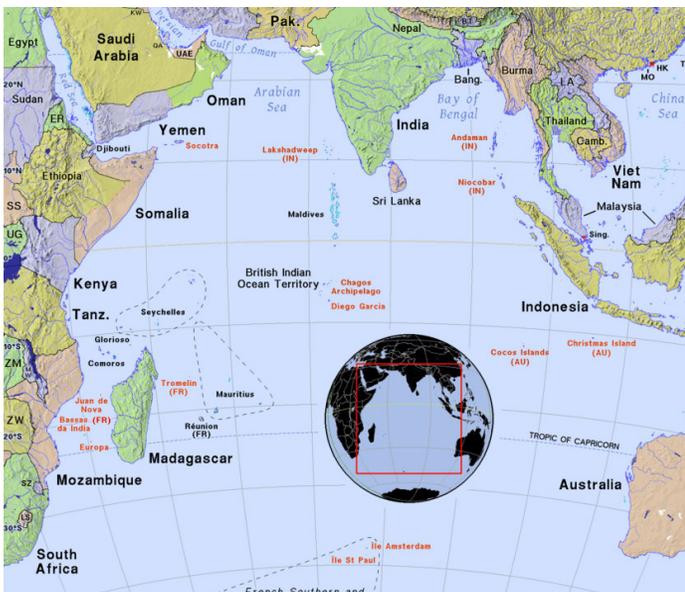
Moving beyond GDP does not require abandoning prosperity. It requires redefining it. A thriving future will be measured not by how fast economies grow, but by how well people live—within the limits of the only planet we have.

If humanity is serious about avoiding planetary disaster, changing how we measure success is not a side issue. It is the starting point. ♦

The Quiet Grazer of the Tropics: The Dugong

When people think of vulnerable marine animals, they often picture whales, dolphins, or sea turtles. Far fewer think of the dugong - a gentle, slow-moving marine mammal that has quietly grazed tropical waters for millions of years.

The Dugong, (scientific name *Dugong dugon*) is sometimes called a “sea cow,” a nickname it shares with its freshwater cousin, the Manatee. But unlike manatees, dugongs live exclusively in saltwater, inhabiting warm coastal regions from East Africa across the Indian Ocean to northern Australia and parts of Southeast Asia.



A Specialist in Seagrass

Dugongs are unique among marine mammals because they are strict herbivores. Their entire diet consists of seagrass – underwater flowering plants that form vast meadows in shallow coastal waters. Using their bristled snouts, dugongs root through the sediment to uproot whole plants, leaving visible feeding trails behind.

This highly specialized diet makes them especially vulnerable. If seagrass meadows decline, dugongs have nowhere else to turn. Coastal development, pollution, sediment runoff, and climate-driven marine heatwaves can all devastate seagrass habitats. Because dugongs

depend so completely on these ecosystems, they are often considered a “sentinel species” for coastal health.

Slow Lives in a Fast-Changing World

One of the challenges facing dugongs is simply their biology. They reproduce slowly. Females typically give birth to a single calf after a year-long pregnancy and may wait several years before having another. Calves remain close to their mothers for extended periods, learning migration routes and feeding grounds.

This slow life history means populations recover very slowly after declines. Accidental entanglement in fishing nets, boat strikes, illegal hunting in some regions, and habitat degradation all take a heavy toll.

The dugong is currently listed as “Vulnerable” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. In some local areas, populations have already disappeared entirely.

Cultural Echoes and Myths

Dugongs have long held cultural significance in parts of Southeast Asia, Australia, and the western Pacific. Some historians even speculate that early sailors’ sightings of dugongs and manatees may have inspired legends of mermaids – a testament to their human-like silhouettes when glimpsed at the water’s surface.



For Indigenous communities in northern Australia, dugongs have deep cultural and subsistence importance. In some regions, traditional hunting practices are regulated to balance cultural continuity with conservation.

Why the Dugong Matters

Although it lacks the fame of whales or pandas, the dugong plays a crucial ecological role. By grazing on sea-grass, it helps maintain healthy, productive meadows that support fish, crustaceans, and countless other marine species. These same meadows store significant amounts of “blue carbon,” helping to buffer climate change.

Protecting dugongs therefore means protecting coastal ecosystems that support biodiversity, fisheries, and climate stability.

In a world where conservation attention often gravitates toward the most charismatic species, the dugong reminds us that quiet, lesser-known animals are equally vital. Their survival depends not on spectacle, but on sustained protection of the fragile habitats they call home.

The dugong may move slowly, but the urgency of its conservation does not. ♦

Celebrating Human Creativity



The Tower Bridge, London



The Global Healthcare Worker Shortage: Why It's Getting Worse — and How Technology Can Help

Across the world, health systems are running into the same hard constraint: there aren't enough trained people to deliver care at the scale populations need. The World Health Organization estimates a projected global shortfall of around 11 million healthcare workers by 2030, with the most severe gaps concentrated in low- and lower-middle-income countries. That figure is not just a statistic; it is a warning that access to timely, safe healthcare is becoming one of the defining equity challenges of the coming decade.

What makes this shortage especially challenging is that it is not driven by a single cause. It is the combined result of aging populations, chronic disease growth, workforce burnout, uneven training capacity, migration dynamics, and underinvestment in primary care and

public health. And while some countries can mitigate shortages by recruiting internationally or paying more, many cannot—creating a global “pull” that risks worsening shortages in the places that are already underserved.

Why the Shortage is Happening

Demand is rising faster than workforce growth.

Populations are aging in many regions, and chronic conditions (diabetes, heart disease, cancer, dementia) require long-term management rather than one-time treatment. That shifts healthcare toward more labor-intensive work: monitoring, coaching, medication management, prevention, and coordination. Even where head-count grows, it may not keep pace with the intensity and complexity of care.

Burnout and attrition accelerated after COVID-19.

Many systems entered the pandemic already stretched. COVID-19 added trauma, risk, overtime, moral injury, and waves of staff exits. The result is not only fewer workers today, but also reduced willingness among clinicians to stay in high-stress roles, work night shifts, or remain in under-resourced settings. (OECD and others have warned that retention is as important as recruitment.)

Training pipelines are slow and expensive.

Doctors, nurses, and many allied health professionals require years of education and supervised practice. Expanding capacity means expanding faculty, clinical placements, and funding—not just opening more seats. This is why “we’ll train our way out of it” often fails as a near-term strategy, even when it’s essential long-term.

Shortages are uneven—by geography and by specialty.

Urban tertiary hospitals can often attract staff; rural areas and poorer districts frequently cannot. Even within a country that looks “adequately staffed” on average, shortages can be acute in primary care, geriatrics, mental health, emergency medicine, and critical care.

Projections: Why the Pressure Is Expected to Intensify

WHO has tracked global workforce trends and, despite improvements in some places, continues to project a large shortfall by 2030 and emphasizes that averages hide diverging regional realities. Nursing is a particularly constrained bottleneck: WHO estimates a 2030 shortage of nurses and midwives that would still leave millions missing even if current progress continues, and the distribution of nurses remains heavily skewed away from the highest-need settings.

Even high-income regions anticipate significant gaps. A commonly cited set of projections for OECD countries estimates shortages by 2030 of hundreds of thousands of doctors and millions of nurses across the countries analyzed. These are not “collapse” scenarios—but they imply longer waits, reduced coverage, staff stress, and greater risk of quality problems unless systems change how care is delivered.

The Role Technology Can Play – and Its Limits

Technology cannot “replace” healthcare workers at scale; care is fundamentally human, relational, and often hands-on. But technology can make scarce clinicians dramatically more effective—by reducing administrative load, extending reach, and shifting some monitoring and education out of clinics and hospitals.

Here are the biggest, most realistic levers:

1. Telehealth and virtual-first pathways

Telehealth can expand access, especially for follow-ups, chronic disease management, and behavioral health—provided broadband, reimbursement, and workflows support it. The most important benefit is often capacity: fewer travel barriers, more flexible scheduling, and less time lost to logistics.

The key is redesign: if telehealth simply adds extra channels without changing staffing models, it can increase complexity instead of relieving it.

2. Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) to prevent avoidable admissions

RPM (via wearables, home devices, and apps) can enable earlier intervention—catching deterioration before it becomes an ER visit. A 2024 systematic review found RPM interventions were associated with improvements in safety/adherence and a downward trend in utilization outcomes such as hospital admissions/readmissions and length of stay across included studies, suggesting a pathway to reduce workload pressure in acute settings.

RPM works best when paired with:

- clear escalation thresholds,
- dedicated care teams (often nurses or pharmacists),
- and automation that filters “signal” from “noise.”

3. AI for documentation and decision support (the “time back” effect)

A major driver of clinician burnout is administrative burden—notes, forms, coding, inbox messages, prior authorizations. Tools that draft documentation, summarize visits, and automate routine communications can return hours per week to clinicians. The risk is real (errors, bias, privacy, overreliance), so the highest-value implementations are those that:

- keep a human in the loop,
- show sources/justifications,
- and start with narrow, auditable tasks (documentation, summarization, triage support).

4. Smarter triage and task routing

Not every patient question needs a physician. Systems can use structured symptom checkers, nurse lines, and asynchronous messaging to route work to the right level:

- self-care guidance when appropriate,
- nurse/pharmacist protocols for common issues,
- rapid escalation to physicians for red-flag symptoms.

This aligns with OECD guidance that shortages can be alleviated through task sharing and new models of care—especially when supported by modern service delivery innovations.

5. Automation in hospitals and long-term care

Robotics and automation won't "staff a ward," but they can reduce non-clinical workload:

- medication dispensing systems,
- supply delivery,
- patient transport,
- smart scheduling and bed management,
- fall detection and safety monitoring.

These improvements reduce friction and overtime—small wins that compound.

The Biggest Caveat: Technology Only Helps if Systems Change

A consistent pattern in healthcare is that new tools are added on top of old workflows. That produces "digital busywork" rather than relief. To turn tech into real capacity, health systems usually need:

- workflow redesign (who does what, when, and why),
- scope-of-practice modernization (so teams can share tasks safely),

- interoperability (so data flows without manual copying),
- training and change management (so tools actually get used well),
- and equity protections (so remote care doesn't leave behind those without devices, data plans, or digital literacy).

A Realistic Outlook

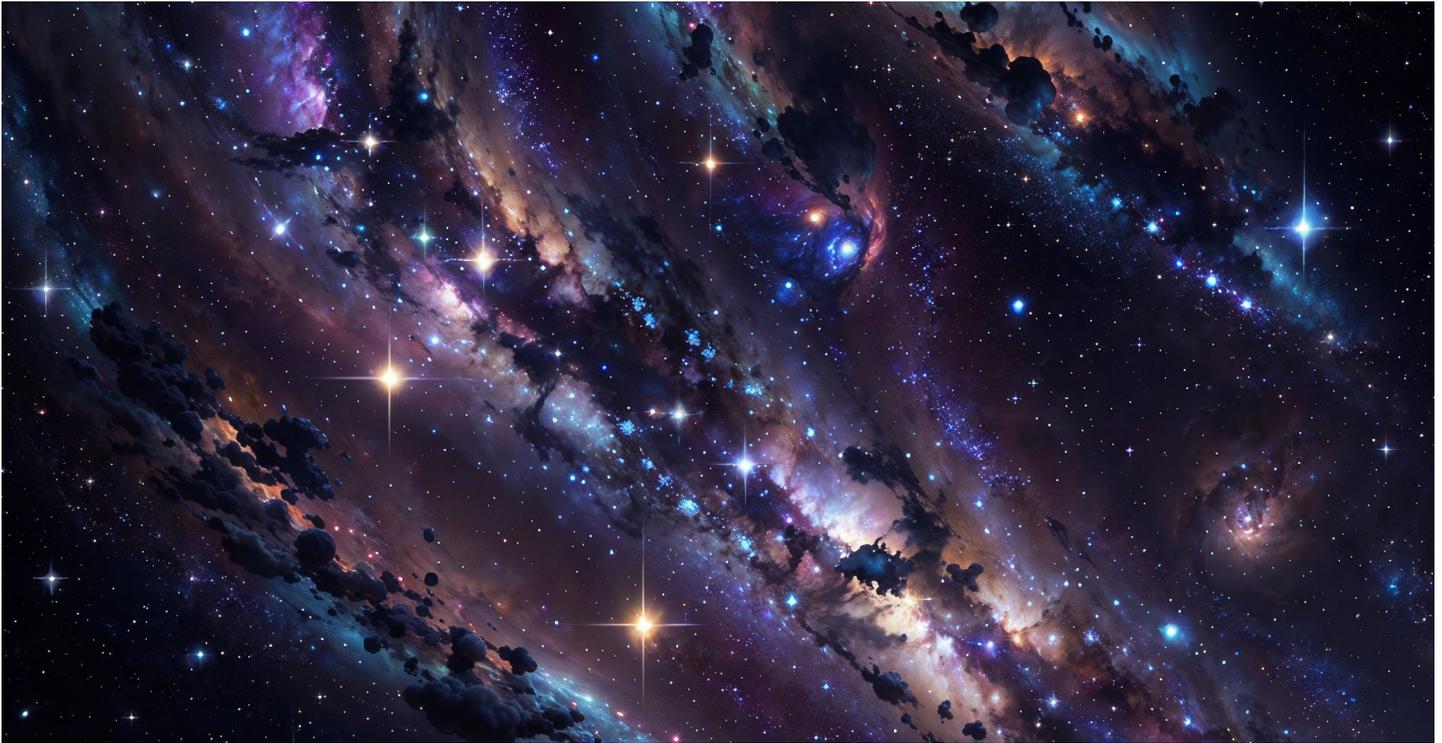
The healthcare worker shortage is not a temporary blip; it is a structural challenge shaped by demographics, economics, and policy. But the future is not predetermined. The countries and regions that do best will likely combine four strategies:

1. retain workers (improve conditions and reduce burnout),
2. expand and modernize training pipelines,
3. redesign care around teams (task sharing), and
4. deploy technology that gives clinicians "time back," not more clicks.

If that mix becomes the norm, the shortage won't vanish—but its worst impacts can be contained, and access can expand even under constraint. ♦

Inspiring Awe





The Real Creation Story – Part 5

Epilogue: What It Means to Be Stardust

Every culture has told stories about how the world began, how life arose, and how we came to be. These stories were our first attempts to understand the universe—a universe that felt immense, mysterious, and often frightening. Today, thanks to science, we know more about our origins than any generation before us. And far from diminishing our sense of wonder, this knowledge deepens it.

The real creation story is not a single moment frozen in time. It is a journey: a long, unfolding narrative written across billions of years. It begins in darkness and heat, moves through the birth of stars and planets, continues through oceans of chemistry and ages of evolution, and arrives—briefly—in the present moment, where a species called *Homo sapiens* has gained the ability to look back and ask how it all happened. This epilogue is a reflection on what that story means for us.

A Universe That Creates

The universe did not need magic or miracles to produce life. It needed only matter, energy, and time—and the

laws that guide them. From the first seconds after the Big Bang, particles assembled into atoms. Atoms fused into elements in the hearts of stars. When those stars died, they scattered their creations across space, seeding the galaxy with carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and iron.

Those elements drifted, coalesced, heated, and collapsed again into new stars with swirling disks of debris—debris that formed planets. One of those planets had oceans, continents, clouds, and storms. It had active volcanoes and crashing tides. It had energy flowing through every crack and crevice.

On that world, chemistry found a foothold. Molecules began to build upon themselves, responding to the forces around them. Eventually, some of them learned to copy themselves. Some found ways to protect themselves. Some discovered how to harness sunlight or chemical gradients for fuel.

Life was not an accident—it was a natural expression of the universe’s tendency to generate complexity whenever conditions allow.

In this sense, creation is not something that ended long ago. Creation is ongoing. It is happening now, in every living cell on Earth and perhaps on countless worlds still unknown to us.

From Simplicity to Consciousness



The path from single-celled organisms to thinking minds was neither straight nor inevitable. It was shaped by countless small changes—mutations, adaptations, environmental shifts, extinctions, and recoveries. Every species alive today carries the imprint of this long evolutionary journey.

The eyes that read these words trace their ancestry to cells that sensed light in shallow seas. Your bones evolved from fins. Your heartbeat echoes rhythms that preceded vertebrates. The emotions you feel—love, fear, joy, curiosity—have deep evolutionary roots. Even consciousness, our most cherished trait, did not appear suddenly. It emerged gradually as nervous systems grew more complex and as creatures benefited from awareness.

In this way, we are not separate from the rest of life. We are its continuation. Our bodies hold the history of Earth, written in DNA and bone. Our minds carry the legacy of a planet that learned to think.

A Story That Connects Us

Religious creation stories were never really about physics or biology. They were about connection—giving people a place in the world, linking them to past generations, and offering a sense of belonging. The real creation story gives us those things too, but in a broader and more profound way.

It tells us that:

- We are connected to every person on Earth through shared ancestry.

- We are connected to all living beings, from trees to turtles to bacteria, through the branching tree of evolution.
- We are connected to the planet itself, made of materials forged in long-dead stars.
- We are connected to the universe, not by divine decree, but by physics, chemistry, and the unbroken chain of natural processes.

These connections do not diminish our individuality. Instead, they ground it. They help us understand that our personal story is part of something vastly larger.

A Responsibility Born of Awareness

The universe has become aware of itself through us. That is not poetry—it is a literal description of what has happened. At some point in Earth’s history, a species evolved the ability to reflect, imagine, and ask questions about its origins. We are that species.

With awareness comes responsibility.

Life on Earth is delicate. Many species have vanished. Ecosystems can be disrupted quickly. Climate, which once changed over millennia, is now changing within a single lifetime. Our actions, informed by our understanding of the world, now carry planetary consequences.



The real creation story shows us how rare and precious life is. It teaches us humility, because we are just one twig on an ancient tree. But it also inspires a sense of guardianship. If we understand how extraordinary the emergence of life and consciousness has been, we are more likely to protect the world that made it possible.

A New Kind of Meaning

Some people fear that a scientific view of creation strips

life of meaning. But the opposite is true. Meaning is not lessened by understanding—it is strengthened.

When we recognize that we are made of stardust, that our atoms once lit the sky as part of ancient suns, and that the universe had to go through nearly 14 billion years of change to produce beings capable of love, creativity, and wonder—how could that not inspire awe? We do not need to invent a supernatural story to feel connected to something greater. We are already part of the greatest story ever told: the story of a universe that began in simplicity and grew into complexity, consciousness, and compassion.

The Story Continues

The creation story does not end with us. Future generations will live chapters we can only imagine. New discoveries await—on Earth, in the oceans, in space, in microbiology, in neuroscience, in technology, and in the search for life beyond our planet.

The universe is still creating. Still evolving. Still surprising us.

And as long as there are minds capable of wondering, the story will continue to unfold. ♦

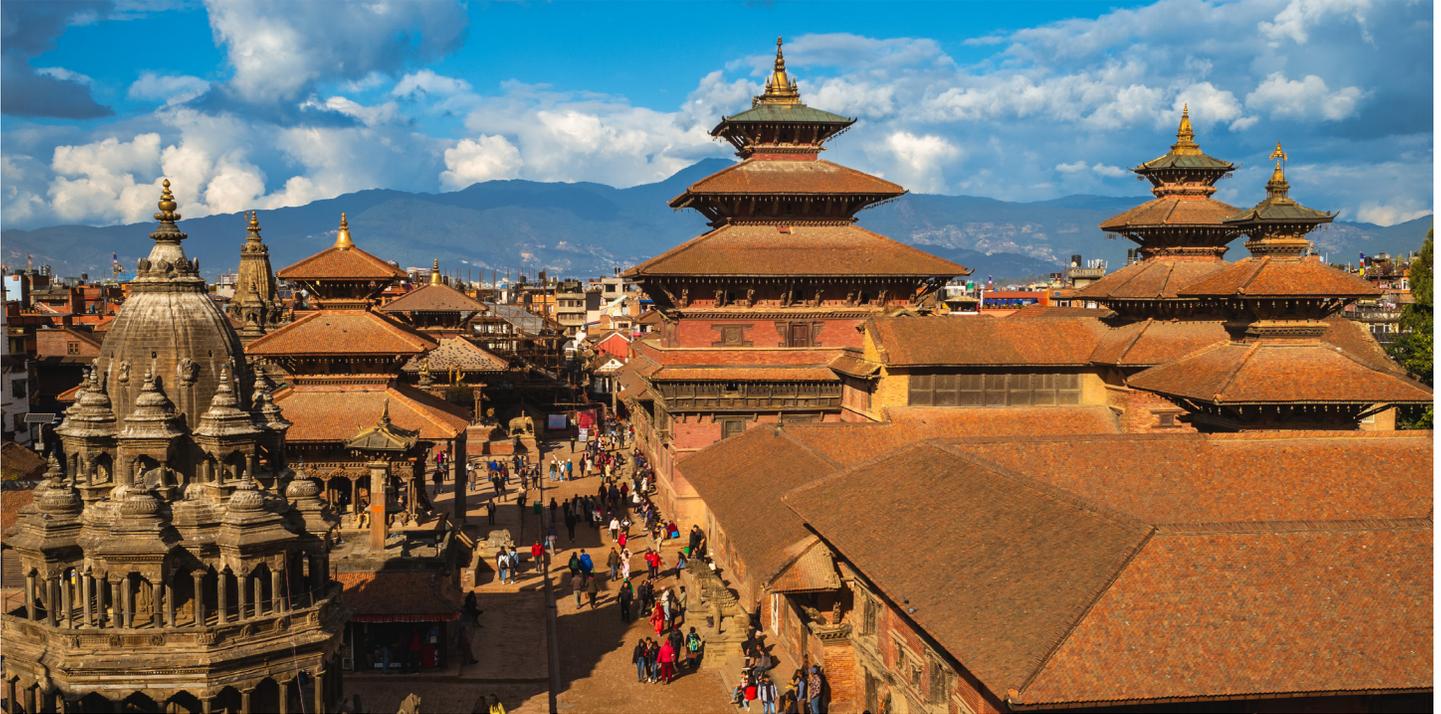


“We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims.”

— R. Buckminster Fuller

Reflection:

In a time of climate instability, democratic strain, and widening global inequities, resignation is the easiest posture to adopt. Fuller reminds us that the future is not something that simply happens to humanity—it is something we design through our values, institutions, and collective choices. The question is not whether change is coming, but whether we will shape it with intention, reason, and compassion.



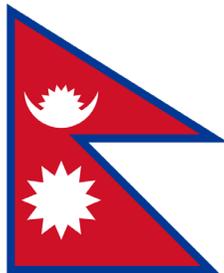
Nepal: Grounded in the Mountains, Moving Toward the Future

Cradled between the soaring Himalayas and the lush lowlands of the Terai, Nepal is a country where geography and culture intertwine in extraordinary ways. Though small in size, it holds a vast diversity of languages, religions, landscapes, and traditions—all woven together by a spirit of resilience and quiet warmth.

Nepal is a land of living heritage: ancient temples still crowded with worshippers, mountain trails lined with prayer flags, and communities where hospitality is considered a sacred duty. From the chaotic beauty of Kathmandu's old quarters to the peaceful villages perched along terraced hillsides, Nepal feels timeless yet perpetually alive.

A TAPESTRY OF PEOPLE AND LANGUAGES

Nepal's population includes more than 120 distinct ethnic groups, each contributing its own customs,



festivals, and histories. Nepali is the official language and widely spoken across the country, but dozens of mother tongues—Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tamang, Newari, Tharu, Sherpa, and many more—give Nepal a remarkable linguistic richness.

Identity in Nepal is layered: caste, ethnicity, region, and religion all shape community life. Yet diversity is embraced as part of the national fabric, reflected in shared celebrations, daily rituals, and a long tradition of coexistence among peoples of the hills, mountains, and plains.

FAITH AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Nepal is one of the few nations where Hinduism and Buddhism blend seamlessly. While Hindus form the majority, Buddhist philosophy and imagery flow through Nepali life, creating a spiritual landscape where traditions overlap rather than compete.

Temples, stupas, shrines, and sacred natural sites are everywhere—places where worship is informal, continuous, and woven into the rhythm of daily life. Morning pujas fill the air with incense; monks circumambulate stupas spinning prayer wheels; and pilgrims trek for days to reach mountain temples like Muktinath or Gosainkunda.

Festivals punctuate the year with energy and color:

- Dashain – The longest and most important festival, celebrating the victory of good over evil.
- Tihar – The festival of lights honoring crows, dogs, cows, and the goddess Laxmi.
- Buddha Jayanti – Marking the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, celebrated across Buddhist and Hindu communities alike.

This rhythm of ritual and celebration reinforces the bonds that hold Nepali society together.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND THE MOUNTAIN WAY OF LIFE

Family ties are central to Nepali culture. Households often include three or more generations, and social life revolves around shared meals, festivals, and collective responsibilities. Respect for elders is deeply ingrained, as is the expectation that extended family members support one another.

In rural areas, life follows the demands of the land—planting, harvesting, tending livestock, gathering in the courtyard for shared meals or local gatherings. Even in cities, neighborhoods function like villages, with strong social networks, shared childcare, and communal celebrations.

Hospitality is a core virtue: visitors are welcomed with tea, snacks, and sincere warmth—sometimes even by strangers who simply want to share conversation.

CUISINE: NOURISHMENT FROM THE HILLS AND PLAINS

Nepali food is humble, flavorful, and grounded in local ingredients. While regional variations abound, a few staples shape the culinary identity:

- Dal Bhat – Lentil soup with rice, vegetables, pickles, and sometimes meat. More than a dish—it's an everyday ritual.
- Momos – Steamed or fried dumplings filled with vegetables, chicken, or buffalo meat; a beloved street food found everywhere.
- Gundruk – Fermented leafy greens, reflecting age-old preservation techniques.
- Sel Roti – A sweet, crispy rice-batter bread traditionally prepared during festivals.

- Thukpa – A hearty noodle soup with Tibetan roots, especially loved in the mountains.

Tea (chiya) is indispensable—milky, spiced, and shared throughout the day, from mountain teahouses to city cafés.

ARTS, CRAFTS, AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Nepal's artistic heritage is both ancient and vibrant. Traditional crafts—woodcarving, metal sculpture, paubha painting, weaving, and pottery—continue to thrive, particularly in Kathmandu Valley where artisans trace their lineage back centuries.



Architecture, too, is distinctive: tiered pagoda temples, carved lattice windows, and courtyards that host both sacred rituals and neighborhood life. The Kathmandu Valley's historic squares in Bhaktapur, Patan, and Kathmandu remain some of South Asia's most iconic cultural landscapes.

Music and dance vary widely across communities—from the devotional hymns of the Newars to the highland folk songs of Sherpa, Tamang, and Gurung villages. Contemporary Nepali art and film are gaining international recognition, building on this legacy with modern perspectives.

LANDSCAPES OF IMMENSE BEAUTY AND SPIRIT

Nepal's geography defines its character. The Himalayas—home to eight of the world's ten highest peaks—shape everything from agriculture to spirituality. Mountains are revered as the abodes of gods and ancestors, and trekking routes have become pathways not just of adventure, but of cultural encounter.

The middle hills are dotted with terraces carved over centuries, while the southern plains (Terai) host majestic national parks where tigers, rhinos, elephants, and diverse birdlife still roam.

Nature is inseparable from Nepali identity. The sound of rivers, the sight of prayer flags snapping in mountain

winds, the glow of sunrise on snow-capped peaks—these are deeply emotional landscapes that anchor the national soul.

CHALLENGES AND THE SPIRIT OF RENEWAL

Nepal faces significant challenges: economic constraints, political instability, and the devastating impacts of natural disasters, including earthquakes and climate-driven landslides. Yet its people are renowned for their resilience and optimism.

Following the major 2015 earthquake, communities rebuilt temples, homes, and public squares through collective effort. Young Nepalis are revitalizing arts, launching tech startups, and advocating for social change. Throughout cities and villages, a quiet determination drives progress without severing the bond to heritage.

A LIVING CULTURE

Nepal's cultural identity is dynamic—rooted in ancient traditions yet open to new possibilities. Its strength lies in balance: between Hinduism and Buddhism, mountains and plains, tradition and modernity.

From the gentle hospitality of a village family to the thunder of temple drums during a festival night, Nepal embodies a culture both deeply grounded and endlessly inspiring.

A common Nepali blessing captures this spirit: “May your path be clear, and may the mountains protect you.”

In Nepal, that sense of guidance and belonging endures—living, evolving, and profoundly human. ♦



UNESCO Treasures of Nepal
Where sacred landscapes, living heritage, and ancient history converge

Kathmandu Valley

A constellation of seven historic sights - Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bankapur; Swayambhunath and Boudhanath stupas; and the temples of Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan. Together, they showcase Nepal's masterful wood-carving, stone sculpture, and religious architecture spanning over a thousand years.

Lumbini - The Birthplace of the Buddha

A serene sanctuary where Siddhartha Gautama was born in 623 BCE. Monasteries built by nations around the world, the sacred Maya Devi Temple, and peaceful gardens create a living symbol of compassion and global pilgrimage.

Sagarmatha National Park

Home to Mount Everest (Sagarmatha) and the Sherpa communities who have lived in these highlands for centuries. Monasteries, glaciers, and dramatic rock faces form one of the world's most awe-inspiring natural landscapes.

Chitwan National Park

Once royal hunting grounds, now one of Asia's great conservation success stories. Bengal tigers, one-horned rhinos, gharials, and elephants thrive in the grasslands and forests.

Book Review: *The Power of Ritual* by Casper ter Kuile

In our last issue, we explored the science and psychology of gratitude - how a simple, intentional practice can improve mental health, strengthen relationships, and reorient our attention toward what is meaningful. Gratitude, we argued, is not merely a fleeting emotion but something that can be cultivated as a habit.

In *The Power of Ritual*, Casper ter Kuile broadens that lens. If gratitude is one doorway into a more intentional life, ritual is the architecture that makes such practices sustainable. Ter Kuile's central claim is both simple and profound: human beings hunger for meaning, connection, and depth—and ritual is one of the most powerful tools we have to create those experiences, even outside traditional religious frameworks.

Ritual Beyond Religion

For many readers of a secular publication, the word "ritual" may evoke images of formal ceremonies, religious observances, or inherited traditions. Ter Kuile invites us to rethink the term. Ritual, he argues, is not defined by theology but by attention. It is what happens when we infuse an ordinary activity with intention, symbolism, and reflection.

In this sense, ritual is not something limited to temples, churches, or mosques. It can be as simple as a weekly dinner with friends, a morning walk without a phone, or reading a favorite novel slowly and reflectively. What transforms routine into ritual is not the action itself, but the depth of presence we bring to it.

This framing will resonate with readers who, like many in our community, are seeking ways to cultivate meaning without relying on supernatural beliefs. Ter Kuile's work affirms that the human need for structure, reflection, and shared experience does not disappear when one

steps away from religion. Instead, it invites creative reimagining.

From Gratitude to Ritual Life

Our previous article on gratitude focused on evidence-based practices: keeping a gratitude journal, expressing appreciation directly, and noticing small positives in daily life. Ter Kuile does not reject such practices; rather, he places them within a broader ecosystem.

Gratitude, in his view, becomes more powerful when embedded in ritual. For example:

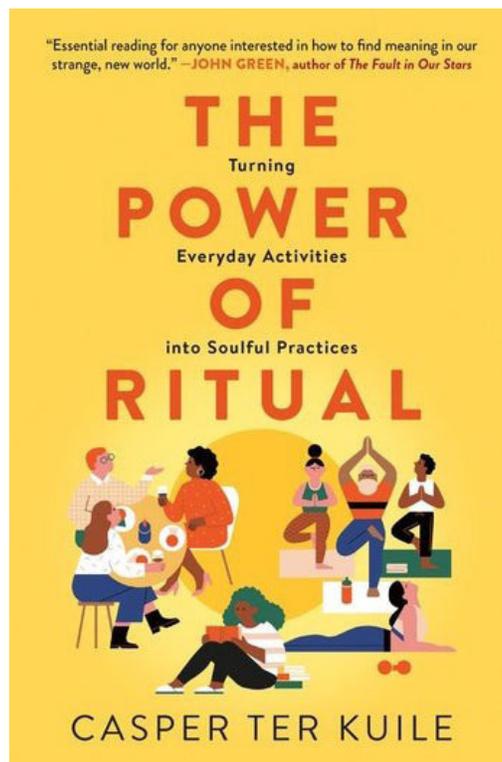
- A weekly gratitude circle with friends.
- A structured reflection before meals.
- An annual "gratitude letter" ritual marking a life transition.

By anchoring gratitude within time-bound, repeated structures, it shifts from a helpful exercise to a defining feature of one's life. This is one of the book's most compelling contributions: it demonstrates how isolated self-improvement habits can evolve into shared, meaningful traditions.

The Four Elements of Ritual

Ter Kuile identifies core ingredients that distinguish ritual from routine. While he does not present them as rigid formulas, several themes recur throughout the book:

1. **Attention** – Ritual requires us to slow down and notice.
2. **Intention** – We act with purpose, not autopilot.
3. **Repetition** – Ritual gains power through return.
4. **Community (or Witness)** – Shared experience deepens meaning.



These elements can be applied almost anywhere. A book club can become a ritual if members open with a moment of reflection. A workout can become a ritual if it is framed as an act of self-respect. Even a daily cup of tea can take on symbolic resonance if it is consistently paired with contemplation or gratitude.

The emphasis on repetition is particularly important. In a culture of constant novelty, we often overlook the power of returning to the same meaningful acts. Ter Kuile reminds us that depth frequently emerges not from variety but from revisiting.

Emotional Well-Being and Secular Belonging

One of the most thoughtful aspects of *The Power of Ritual* is its recognition of loneliness and fragmentation in modern life. Many people who leave religious traditions report missing the sense of belonging, shared rhythms, and communal milestones those traditions once provided.

Ter Kuile does not advocate recreating dogma. Instead, he suggests reconstructing the scaffolding: shared meals, seasonal gatherings, rites of passage, and intentional friendships. In doing so, he offers a blueprint for secular communities seeking cohesion without creed.

This aligns closely with the broader mission of many contemporary secular initiatives—including efforts within our own community—to create structures that support flourishing. Whether through shared service projects, educational gatherings, or reflective discussion groups, ritual can act as the glue that holds such efforts together.

Reading as Ritual

One of the book's more intriguing suggestions is the idea of "sacred reading" without sacred texts. Ter Kuile describes reading beloved works of literature with the same care and repetition traditionally reserved for scripture. By revisiting passages, journaling reflections, or reading aloud in community, a novel or essay can become a source of personal formation.

For secular readers, this approach opens rich possibilities. Great works of philosophy, science writing, poetry, and even contemporary nonfiction can function as guides for reflection. In this way, ritual becomes not a relic of the past but a creative act of reinterpretation.

Strengths of the Book

- **Accessible Language:** Ter Kuile writes in a conversational tone, avoiding jargon while remaining thoughtful.

- **Practical Suggestions:** The book offers concrete examples rather than abstract theory.
- **Inclusive Vision:** Readers from various backgrounds—religious, spiritual, or secular—can find something applicable.

Perhaps most importantly, the book is hopeful without being naïve. It does not promise instant transformation. Instead, it suggests that meaning is built gradually, through repeated acts of attention.

Points of Consideration

Some readers may wish for more engagement with empirical research. While the book gestures toward psychological benefits, it is more reflective than data-driven. Readers who prefer heavy citation may find it light on academic backing.

Additionally, those who already maintain robust community traditions may feel less urgency in its proposals. The book is most powerful for individuals experiencing a sense of drift or disconnection.

Why This Book Matters Now

In a time of digital distraction, social polarization, and declining institutional affiliation, the question is not whether people need ritual—it is whether we will consciously shape it or unconsciously drift into hollow routines.

Our previous exploration of gratitude highlighted one path toward emotional resilience. *The Power of Ritual* suggests a larger framework: a way of structuring life so that practices like gratitude, reflection, and connection are not occasional experiments but embedded patterns.

For secular readers seeking depth without dogma, this book offers a practical and imaginative guide. It affirms that the human longing for meaning is not evidence of superstition—it is evidence of our nature. Ritual, when reclaimed thoughtfully, can become one of the most powerful tools for emotional well-being, community cohesion, and intentional living.

In short, if gratitude was our starting point, ritual may be the next step. ♦

Secular Snapshots:

Short facts to spark big thoughts

EARTH'S DEEPEST SECRET

No human has ever drilled deeper than about 7.6 miles (12 km)—barely scratching Earth's crust. The mantle below, where rock behaves like warm taffy, remains one of the least explored regions in the solar system.

LUNAR ECHOES

Apollo seismometers revealed that the Moon “rings” like a bell for up to an hour after a meteor strike or moonquake. With no atmosphere or water to dampen vibrations, lunar geology hums with long, ghostly echoes.

NIGHT WITHOUT DARKNESS

On nights of a strong full moon, the Earth's surface is lit at roughly 0.25 lux—bright enough for predators to hunt more successfully and for prey animals to alter their entire behavior. Even moonlight shapes life.

THE GREAT OXYGEN MIRACLE

For the first half of Earth's history, oxygen was nearly absent. Cyanobacteria slowly transformed the atmosphere in the “Great Oxygenation Event,” paving the way for complex life—and unintentionally causing a mass extinction.

THE INVISIBLE INTERNET

Less than 5% of ocean species have been formally described. Coral reefs, seafloor vents, and deep-sea plains hold life as diverse and interconnected as a biological Internet just waiting to be discovered.

THE STARS AS MAPS

For thousands of years, Polynesian navigators crossed the open Pacific without instruments—using only stars, swells, winds, and bird behavior. Their mental maps spanned thousands of miles of open ocean.



HUMANITY'S OLDEST STRUCTURES

The oldest known temples—Göbekli Tepe's stone circles in Turkey—predate writing, pottery, and agriculture by millennia. People gathered to create meaning long before they grew crops.

MICROBES RULE THE PLANET

If you weighed every living thing on Earth, 15% of the total mass would be bacteria alone—more than all animals combined. The planet's real rulers are microscopic.

A COMMON ANCESTOR

All humans share a common ancestor who lived roughly 200,000–300,000 years ago in Africa. Our differences are surface-level; genetically, humanity is one closely related family.



THE STILL CENTER

Inside the eye of a hurricane, winds can drop to near zero and skies may clear. A moment of calm exists in the heart of chaos—a reminder of nature's strange contrasts.

GALACTIC MOTION

Our solar system orbits the center of the Milky Way at about 500,000 mph (800,000 km/h). Yet the journey around the galaxy takes roughly 230 million years—so humans have existed for only a tiny fraction of a single orbit.

PLANTS THAT COUNT

Experiments show that some plants can “count” light flashes to decide when to bloom, and even remember previous stress. Intelligence in nature comes in many forms. ♦

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