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COURTESY A. LEVINE

This past summer, I had the opportunity to travel to Uluru—a lone, bare, massive red sandstone formation in the outback of Australia's Northern Territory desert. It seems to rise out of nowhere. The aboriginal Anangu say it is a place forever connected to Dreamtime, the time before creation. My wife and I, camping at Uluru's base, viewed the rock at all hours of daylight; it was especially memorable to behold at twilight, as the rock glowed a brilliant crimson and the wind hummed along its fissures. And although I am not a follower of any structured religious beliefs, it became abundantly clear to me why the Anangu consider this monolith a sacred place: Uluru is an invitation to consider the unanswerable, the great mystery of our existence.

Often when scientists discover answers about our world's grand intellectual challenges, as Einstein imagined and theorized the continuum of space and time, the answers provoke further questions, adding another layer of wonder to it all. Not long after my return from Australia, I read about the DESI (Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument) project, in which 200 physicists and astronomers, including scientists from our University, will be probing the nature of dark matter and dark energy. They will start by mapping 30 million galaxies. *Thirty million galaxies*—that's just a handful of the number that's out there. If you place a grain of sand between your fingers and lift it toward the night sky, you'll cover about 10,000 galaxies with that grain. Astronomers estimate there are at least 100 billion galaxies. When I try to grasp this, I have the same profound feeling and awe that I had at Uluru.

Much as the findings of today's astrophysics seize my imagination and stir my thoughts, human biology seems even more extravagant to me. I have spent many of my years and days reflecting on the mysteries and enigmas of the molecular world: how you and I, and our cells and molecular events, came to be—and also the ways in which we will fade away. This improbable existence that we share, as the Anangu might say, is *wiru*, beautiful and grand.

So the scientists, including me at an albeit modest level, will go on plying away at how creation and destruction happen—in my case, how DNA is built, damaged, and repaired with fidelity or infidelity. But there are some larger things we each need to answer for ourselves. Namely, what to do with this gift of being? Or, as the poet Mary Oliver put it, *what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?* Oliver wrote further:

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

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