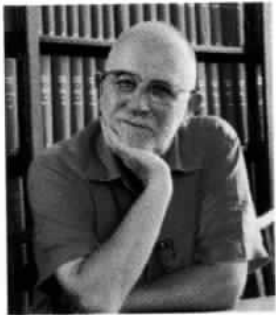


OUR HERO: HOW EINSTEIN SHAPED OUR LIVES

We asked three people who have been inspired by Einstein in their own lives to tell us why the scientist and his work is still so significant today



"To my parents, and to me by osmosis, Einstein was not only the inscrutable genius: he was a Jew ("One of us!") who showed that, notwithstanding prejudice, it is possible to change humanity's understanding of the world, albeit in ways mysterious to most individual humans.

When Einstein died, I was a teenager. Several years later, I entered university, and our very first lecture course, in a deliberate break from school, was: Einstein's 'special' relativity – his original 1905 version, linking space and time but ignoring gravity. But it wasn't mysterious! It was simple, elegant, naturally identifying and solving previously barely recognized problems with the older physics of Newton.

The first lectures that I gave myself were on Einstein's 'general' relativity: the definitive 1915 version that explains gravity. The mathematics is arcane, but again the basic idea is both simple and revolutionary: gravity is the curvature of the space and time in which things (such as planets or light) move.

The clarity of his approach inspired me. Someone wrote, "physics melted in his mouth", and I, toiling on the lower slopes of science, look up and dream of that.

I remain fascinated by him as a person of contrasts: he was simultaneously emotionally remote and earthy, committed to Israel yet harshly critical, religiously unobservant while deeply spiritual."

Favourite book on Einstein? Einstein Lived Here by Abraham Pais, Oxford University Press, 1994, "This differs from many other Einstein books in its detailed treatment of his personal and political life, especially Jewish issues and his relation to Israel."

> **MICHAEL BERRY**, Professor of Physics (Emeritus), University of Bristol

