

## The Wisdom of the Inward Parts

*Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?*

*Can you bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or guide Arcturus with his sons?*

*Do you know the ordinances of heaven? Can you establish their rule on earth?*

*Can you lift up you voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover may?*

*Can you send forth lightnings that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?*

*Who has put wisdom in the inward parts? or who has given understanding to the mind?*

Job 38:31-36

In Chapter 38 of Job, God appears out of a whirlwind and asks Job: “*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*” We then see a series of questions from God – mainly rhetorical. These are more than statements of the limits of Job’s knowledge; they call out the connection between Job and the larger world, of which Job is only a part. The natural wonders that are named in the verses are with us today, as they were when the book was written. If we look into the sky after dark on a cloudless night, we see Orion, hovering high, now as then.

In this passage, Job is asked, “*Can you bring forth the Mazzaroth in his season?*” The word *Mazzaroth* is a curious example of a *hapax legomenon*: a word that appears only once. From its context, and probable cognates, the passage likely refers to the passage of the sun through the zodiac as a way of marking the passage of the year in a celestial calendar. For farmers in the Neolithic era, this was the only way to determine the times of the year to sow and to reap. It was essential to their livelihood and connected the heavens, the earth, and the people. With all of our modern conveniences, we often lose touch with this connection, and yet when this passage was written, it was vital.

We may never know precisely the meaning of the “wisdom of the inward parts”. It is often interpreted as “intellect” – and, as such, is a way of saying that the very intellect of Job doesn’t belong to him, as one might own a possession; rather, it exists beyond him. God seems to be broadening not only Job’s, but also our own narrow perspective of an elegant, if sometimes hostile universe. We should keep in mind that Job had lost what he found dear in life and was questioning his belief, when God appears to him and the wonders of the world, of which Job is part, are enumerated in this lyrical fashion.

The term ‘inward parts’ is *tuchah* in Hebrew. The only other occurrence of *tuchah* in the Hebrew Bible is in Psalm 51:6, “Behold, You delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.” Taken with the passage in Job, this

acts as a counterpoint to God's words to Job, where the speaker in this case praises Him for the gift of *tuchah*.

The passage in Job has a special significance for me. At age sixteen, I was first learning about quantum mechanics. I read that atoms hummed and rang like bells, with beautiful patterns of vibration which dictated how they would bond with other atoms. In my mind's eye, I would visualize surfaces and materials made up of these microscopic bells. When I read the phrase in Job, "Who made the wisdom of the Inward Parts", I associated it with the internal workings of nature – molecules and atoms. In many ways, this sense of awe at the intelligence inside nature has been a source of passion in my life as a scientist.

For a long time, I never strayed into discussions about the relation between science and religion; however ten years ago, I found myself in a position where I had to say something. My physics collaboration had just discovered a new particle: the top quark. I won't bore you with details about quarks, but this discovery represented the last major building block predicted by the theory that unifies the fundamental forces of nature. My colleague and I were asked to sit in as guests on WBUR's "The Connection" when Christopher Lydon was the host. We talked about the discovery, its implications, and then fielded listeners' questions in the familiar talk-radio format.

One person came on the line and said, "*You know, you guys are great. You've made the new creation myth. You've come up with the new Genesis, replacing the old one.*" I shuddered, hoping I could duck the topic. The host immediately seized it and said "*What about science and religion? What's your view?*" I swallowed hard and had a go at it. I said that I feel a sense of awe and reverence toward the natural world, and that I don't feel that I'm in a position to dictate what is out there in the universe. My role as a scientist is to try to find new things and describe them to others. My colleague's response couldn't have been more different: she felt that science and religion just don't mix, that they are totally separate things and one shouldn't speak of them in the same sentence.

Why do we see science and religion as related, or as even as opposing each other?

In the west, this perception can be traced to the early Roman Catholic Church. It wholly embraced the works of Aristotle as part of doctrinal canon. This included Aristotle's erroneous pronouncements on nature. One familiar example is the description of the heavens. In the medieval Catholic doctrine, the earth was the center of the universe. All celestial objects were perfect spheres and revolved around the earth in perfect circles. The Catholic Church connected pieces of scripture with its canons of science – for example, in Chapter 9 in the book of Job, the 6<sup>th</sup> verse says, "*Which shakes the earth out of her place, and the pillars tremble*". During the middle Ages, some clergy used this to bolster the concept of the earth as the center of the universe. The meaning of this verse is so vague that one could easily construe this to support the modern theory of plate tectonics, but nonetheless it was an element of Papal dogma supporting geocentrism.

Unfortunately for the Church, the doctrine didn't match what was out there in the cosmos. As science progressed, it became clear that the earth wasn't the center of the universe and that celestial objects weren't perfect spheres moving in perfect circles. The church fought back, and scientists were obliged to invoke the word "God" in practically every other sentence of their treatises to appease the papacy.

Over time, science was seen as a threat to religion. The battle over evolution has been going on ever since Darwin published "The Origin of the Species", and shows no signs of abating. It seemed that the Church was in retreat, ceding more and more ground to science.

Recently, there have been attempts to employ concepts of science to reinforce religion. I've heard religiously-inclined colleagues say things like "God must be in the Big Bang, I just know it." This view has become widespread. I was speaking with Jean Alexander [incoming minister at the United Parish of Auburndale] at her welcoming reception, and she asked me whether she should learn quantum mechanics because all of her ministerial friends are learning it. Again, I shuddered and said, "*No, I think you're safe with what you've got.*"

I have trouble with the notion that God is hiding behind the next unexplained scientific mystery, be it the Big Bang, quantum mechanics or the nature of altruism. Such a view invites trouble. People often invoke science or the frontiers of science as a way of saying that God is something remote, like the creator pushing a button in some remote corner of space and then they 'mystery' lies there, and is only accessible to the Stephen Hawkings of the world. However that the sense of mystery and awe is manifest in the every day workings around us. Is one to say that God isn't here, in this room, but is hiding somewhere else; behind the Big Bang, for example? I think this only invites disappointment. Rather than approach natural mysteries with the sense that God is hiding, perhaps we should instead recognize that they testify to a inner wisdom that far surpasses our capacity to ever fully know the intricate workings of the world around us.

Perhaps the ultimate battle turf can be found in the so-called "God Gene". On one side, philosophers like Daniel Dennett at Tufts, and some evolutionary psychologists have speculated that the institution of religion is the result of human adaptation over a hundred thousand years. The concept is that belief in God is merely a mechanism in our brain to ensure social order through a shared, ritual behavior. On the other side, we have the continual attempt by fundamentalists to force the acceptance of Creationism as science in public schools through political action.

I cannot help but feel that there is more than a hint of a power struggle going on here: a battle over who controls the truth. If we look at the extremes of these two opposing viewpoints, we might think that they couldn't be farther apart. Yet they share one very important characteristic: they sever the connection between the individual and the world. In the case of the evolutionary psychologists, they objectify people of religion, in effect, denying the reality of their experience. The creationists tend to ignore the evidence in the world around them. They are like a man who is driving down an old

gravel path, telling his wife that they're really on the interstate highway, ignoring his surroundings, and trying to warp the roadmap to fit his need of ego gratification.

In crass terms, both the evolutionary psychologists and the creationists may be standing on the same side of a totally different kind of fence. I'm referring to the dichotomy Jesus speaks of in Chapter 3 of John.

*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

*Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

*Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

*Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

#### *John 3:1-12*

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the dead of the night and begs for insight. Jesus says to him that a person must be born from above in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus speaks of two ways: one of the flesh and one of the spirit.

What are we to make of this dichotomy? What does it mean? To me, a critical part of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus is the reference to the standing of Nicodemus as a man of religion. Jesus says (in a more modern translation) "*Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'*"<sup>3:8</sup> *The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

When Nicodemus further questions him, Jesus does not relent. He asks: “*Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things?*” he asks. Clearly this schism of the flesh and the spirit should not surprise Nicodemus, nor should it surprise us.

Thomas Brown Junior is a white man, who received training in the ways of the Apache scout from one of the last tribal scouts. In his book, “The Way of the Scout”, he writes:

*It became obvious that to operate only in the flesh would be a liability and one could never hope to achieve the powers of the scout only through physical practices. Without the spiritual abilities, there could be no scout, and we could not do most of what being a scout required. While studying tracking we also studied people intensely. We had to learn every quirk, not just the ways that are general to most people, but each little idiosyncrasy. We learned to look for people's patterns and ruts, what they observed and what they did not. We watched their actions and reactions, and learned to identify their level of awareness as well as their blind spots. We learned how people would look yet not see how they became so focused on the flesh and out of touch with the reality of the earth, spirit and other beings.*

Indeed, one does not have to be a Christian to recognize the juxtaposition of flesh and spirit; it is a common theme in many of the world's religions. The theme appears in Buddhist scriptures over and over again. In many native North American tribes, there is a ritual called a “Vision Quest”. In this quest, a young Indian scout in search of spiritual enlightenment ventures into the wilderness and sits inside a circle drawn around him for days on end. Pain and hunger eventually give way to a vision of connection to the universe, where the scout sees himself as an inseparable part of the world. The inside and the outside are one. The old ways of the flesh give way to a new way of the spirit. This spiritual awareness is not something that we're born with, but rather, it comes to us later in life. Many times it comes to us under times of great stress, and is viewed as a gift; a kind of watershed is crossed where one reaches a greater awareness of connection. Even though we, in our flesh, cannot fully comprehend and understand the wisdom expressed in the workings of the world, we are capable of experiencing it fully. As Jesus suggests to Nicodemus, we should not be surprised, but rather celebrate.

In his book, *Deep Survival*, author Laurence Gonzales analyzes the psychological characteristics of the survivors of dire situations. He finds that the most crucial element that determines whether a person lives or dies is their attitude. Frequently people in survival situations will experience one of two reactions: panic or an opening of their mind. Those who panic tend to cling to preconceived notions. Like the man who thinks the dirt road is really an interstate highway, they twist the map to suit the way they think things should be. In the process, they shut themselves off from reality and the very clues that can help them survive. In other cases, there are people in survival situations who report that their senses open up, that time seems to stand still and they seem to have an effortless perception of the beauty and profoundness of their surroundings that opens up.

Gonzales describes a large number of situations, but two in particular are compelling: the experiences of Lauren Elder and Steve Callahan.

Lauren Elder is a painter and performance artist who lived in Oakland, California. In the 70's, she was invited to fly over the Sierra Nevada Mountains in a Cessna to see Death Valley from the air. The plane crashed on Mount Bradley at 12,000 feet. The pilot died instantly. The pilot's girlfriend died the next day, leaving Lauren alone and stranded on the edge of a cliff with a broken arm, wearing high-heeled boots, a torn blouse, and a skirt. She managed to climb down the cliff and, after 36 hours, walk out to safety on her own. She reported that the thing that kept her moving was a sudden reverence for her surroundings – as if she belonged in the moment in that situation. She says of her experience, *“I kept stopping to appreciate how beautiful the place I was in was. There I was in this amazing wilderness and I had the whole place to myself.”*

Steve Callahan was a sailor attempting a solo crossing of the Atlantic from the Canary Islands to a landfall in the Caribbean. Several days into his passage, his boat sunk in a storm and he was forced into a life raft for what seemed like an impossible crossing of 1800 miles. He tried not to think about the direness of his situation, but rather concentrated on the world around him in the moment: living life one minute to the next. He experienced the expanded consciousness I've been describing. In writing about a particular moment, he says:

*In these moments of peace, deprivation seems a strange sort of gift....My plight has given me a strange kind of wealth, the most important kind. I value each moment that is not spent in pain, desperation, hunger, thirst, or loneliness. Even here, there is richness all around me. As I look out of the raft, I see God's face in the smooth waves, His grace in the dorado's swim; feel His breath against my cheek as it sweeps down from the sky. I am constantly surrounded by a display of natural wonders...It is beauty surrounded by ugly fear. I write in my log that it is a view of heaven from a seat in hell.*

These survival stories seem to echo the tale of Job. Steve Calahan cursed God for his misfortune and went through a stage of denial, and yet, his ultimate salvation was to let go of his preconceived notions. Lauren Elder found herself surrounded by tragedy. Perhaps we won't be cast adrift at sea or be left alive and alone after an airplane crash, or wake up to find that everything we had was taken from us; yet none of us can escape tragedy or suffering. We cannot escape hardships; but we can choose how to react. We, like Job, are left to compare our ignorance with this “inner wisdom.” We can choose to step out our isolated circumstance, and realize that we are part of greater work of creation; we are created as part of a world that constantly reminds us that we are related to the people around us. We can choose to objectify the people around us and to ignore the world that beckons our acknowledgement; or we can choose to recognize the connection that transcends our individual being. The choice is ours.

A scientist fakes data for personal fame and severs the connection.

A politician punishes a scientist for delivering the uncomfortable news about global warming and severs the connection.

A school board member insists on imposing a warning label against evolution and severs the connection.

A pedestrian walks past a homeless person and severs the connection.

We can choose to accept the fact that we do not own our lives, or we can cling to the perception that we own it as if we could sue God for damages in a court of law. Our ability to act as part of a larger whole is a gift that comes from within. It is the wisdom of the inward parts.