

Closed Minds and Martian Rocks

In early August of 1996 fragments of a meteor, the science community tells us that came to earth from Mars, were closely examined for any sign of earlier life forms. It seems that some scientists believe they have discovered fossilized remains of bacteria contained within the Martian meteor. Within hours of a press release regarding the subject, the world was a buzz with the implications of the pronouncement. Controversy raged.

Directly after the initial announcement, letters were being received by newspaper editors berating the shoddy science and highly speculative conclusions presented by the scientists who claimed quasi proof of prior life on Mars. It quickly became obvious that what many refer to as the "religious-right" was traumatized by the belief that there could have actually been life on Mars in an earlier time.

There does not appear to be any real biblical reason why life could not exist off world, but the majority of those interpreting scripture have historically taught that the earth was, in effect, the center of the Universe. In fact, in an earlier time, historical icons such as Galileo were placed under arrest and incarcerated for claiming something so outlandish as the earth was revolving around the sun. The Church of that era taught that our planet was the literal center of the universe and notwithstanding Galileo's telescope and the mounting information to the contrary, it was heresy to think otherwise.

Up until about thirty years ago anyone who seriously considered the possibility of life on other planets was scorned. (I clearly remember the put-downs I received from my 8th grade science teacher for even suggesting the possibility.) Nevertheless, about 160 years ago, a backwoods farm boy from upper state New York claimed to have seen an angel, said he spoke with God, translated a major work of scripture, formed a new church, assumed the mantle of "Prophet," and asserted without hesitation that there were worlds without number that contained life. Ministers of the time were scandalized, scientists were amused. Religious teachers of the period taught that Prophets were no longer available to mankind. And, there were literally no scientific minds willing to concede that there might be life on other worlds in the 1830's. The backwoods farm boy was Joseph Smith, Jr.; it was he who founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly referred to as the "Mormons."

Curiously, and notwithstanding incredible opposition, the Mormons have prospered, their church has grown beyond almost anyone's expectations, and their adherents boast some of the most educated and successful people in the world. Mormon philosophy is having a significant impact among the religious community all over the globe. It has become an almost undisputed force for good in society at large. But, what about all those unusual and controversial claims. A Prophet? Life on other planets?

An announcement at the beginning of a document entitled "The Pearl of Great Price" sets forth that it is "an extract from the translation of the Bible as revealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet, June 1830 - February 1831." Contained within this short and absolutely fascinating work are the following verses related to an experience Moses had in vision:

"And it came to pass that Moses looked, and beheld the world upon which he was created; and Moses beheld the world and the ends thereof, and all the children of men which are, and which were created; of the same he greatly marveled and wondered. "

"...and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed."

"And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me. And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth. And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten. And the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many. But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you. For behold, there are many worlds that have passed away by the word of my power. And there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them."

Current mainstream scientific thought claims that there are approximately 200 billion stars contained within our local galactic system better known as the Milky Way Galaxy. Further, that any one these, or possibly all 200 billion suns could have planets circling them perhaps similar in structure to our own solar system. In addition, it is now believed that there are something like 400 billion star systems, each of an average magnitude of possibly 200 billion suns which in turn are likely accompanied by their planets, moons, asteroids, comets, and meteors. The distance across our galaxy, and the number of stars and star systems, is simply beyond our capacity to comprehend. Estimates suggest 400 million light-years may be the diameter of our galaxy alone.

Cosmologists tell us that the entire galactic process is one of stars, and their probable local systems, being birthed in what they're calling "stellar nurseries," maturing through many phases of evolution and eventually, over unbelievably long periods of time, either exploding into space or shrinking into black holes. In either case matter becomes chaotic and disorganized and is eventually reprocessed into new stars, planets, or other stellar objects. ---- Joseph Smith records Moses as having this to say:

" And the Lord God spake unto Moses, saying: The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine. And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens

thereof, even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works,
neither to my words.

You may recall from school that a light year is simply the distance light will travel in a year calculated at the constant speed of 186,248 per second times 60 seconds times 60 minutes times 24 hours times 365 days. The sum is 6 million million, or 6 trillion miles. So, 6 trillion times 400 million is the rough diameter of the Milky Way galaxy, but it's farther yet to the nearest galaxy in our local galactic neighborhood. Interestingly, scientists tell us there is another structure larger than the galaxy, what they are now calling the meta-galactic system, which is a group of galaxies all circling one another in one area of the universe. Okay, the numbers are large --- so what?

Well with all these potential planets circling all these billions upon billions of suns, simple mathematical logic tells us there must be life in other areas of the universe, which is exactly what Joseph Smith claimed Moses told us in the first place. Astronomy teaches us today that the universe is approximately 20 billion years old and that our local solar system is a mere 4.5 billion years old. Whether the numbers are right or wrong hardly matters, but the concept that our earth is much younger than other areas of the universe seems important. And again, this is a precept that was taught by Joseph Smith.

The "Drake Equation" presented to the world by astronomer Frank Drake in 1961 still holds sway in terms of a mechanism for predicting the potentially observable civilizations in the Milky Way. Astronomer's best estimates, at present, are that 10,000 civilizations exist in our Galaxy Sea alone. Assuming that both current scientific theory and the Prophet Joseph are correct, then it should come as no surprise to us that there must be civilizations on other planets much older than ours. And there is a logical reason to hope that a much older civilization that continued to exist, would of necessity be more mature and enjoy greater wisdom than do we.

Admittedly the age of a person is not a great indicator of wisdom because many people, having reached about 20 years of age, tend to stop growing and learning and therefore by the time they've reached the age of sixty it could easily be argued that they'd really only experienced one more year 40 times. However, in the case of a technologically advanced civilization there is a strong case for greater maturity. Why?

Assuming the laws of mathematics and physics are universal, and at least at this point we have no particular reason to think otherwise, then any civilization that is advancing will ultimately discover similar realities. This should be true regardless of the biological environment. For example, we know that spectral light and sound waves, x-rays, and gamma rays are prevalent throughout the known universe. The basic building blocks of stuff, the elemental properties, seem to be everywhere observable. It's more than possible that a number of elements exist of which we are not yet aware but every meteor that falls to earth contains the same things of which we are familiar, iron, magnesium, gold, etc. This suggests that if the basic building blocks of matter are everywhere present then the basic scientific truths are actually universal laws. So... if the older civilization that we speculate, has survived, it has done so having had to cope with a number of things on a

relative basis with which we are now familiar, such as life and death, heat and cold, light and darkness, pleasure and pain. And, as this older civilization continued to discover the essential universal laws and apply them to technological development, at some point they would have discovered and evolved a nuclear world.

A few years ago, it was announced that science was delivering newfound knowledge at a 100% growth rate every five years. If that's not incredible enough, they're now telling us we're almost doubling our collective scientific knowledge every two years. And, by the year 2000 mankind's total knowledge base is projected to double every ten months. Things are happening so fast that given time it's easy to believe that humankind can accomplish almost anything. It brings to mind a favorite and rather famous saying of the late Napoleon Hill:

"Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

It also stirs memories of biblical scripture that claim:

"Oh ye of little faith, if ye had but the faith of this grain of mustard seed you could say to yonder mountain remove thee hence and it would obey."

Could it be that the ancient mystics and the modern-day prophet Joseph Smith have it right? That anything we pursue with an absolute determination combined with sufficient faith can be accomplished?

Recent advances in the mapping of DNA, coupled with improvements in medicine, almost assure that at least some humans will have considerably longer lives than those of our predecessors. Gene specialists believe that it is only a matter of time until they are able to turn on and off various genes in humans the way they are already doing in plants and some animals. They are already touting their likely ability to "fix" or "replace" faulty pieces of DNA thereby allowing us to regenerate lost limbs like a crab, renew skin like a snake, hibernate like a bear, and live longer like a parrot or an oak tree. Gene splicing and genetic restructuring promises huge changes in the near future. In fact, it is not hard to believe that within the next fifty years we could extend human life to two hundred years or more. And, if we are able to do this, and scientific discovery continues to proceed at its current rate, by the time those humans have lived up their 200 or so years, the likelihood that they could become virtually immortal because of continuing advances seems not so impossible.

I've heard it argued, and over time been smitten with the basic logic of it, that the probable bottleneck of all advancing civilization is likely the nuclear age. At this point in the evolution of an advancing society, the power to destroy the many can be controlled by the few. Today the world's superpowers are trying desperately to control the proliferation of nuclear arms, yet they are still in great abundance. It may not be long until wealthy individuals, or perhaps even criminals, will have access to nuclear destruction capabilities.

What we are now experiencing is absolutely incredible technological advances with only sporadic improvement in our emotional/spiritual development. This does not bode well for civilization at large and it is the very reason why many futurists worry about nuclear capability. Can society collectively mature to the point that individuals can be trusted with a power so awesome that any person by their own actions could unleash a holocaust so terrible it could virtually destroy everyone else?

Mathematicians are now suggesting that there must be some form of life on at least ten million worlds within our galaxy alone, and as mentioned earlier 10,000 of those should be observable from a vast distance due to their use of advanced technology such as radio waves, television and the like. Is it so hard for us then to believe that somewhere there is civilization well in advance of us? And, if this is so, is it so hard for us to believe that those advanced beings are essentially immortal and that they have learned to live in peace and harmony? Were they not able to do so the chances are they would cease to exist simply because of the raw power that would eventually become available to the individual. It seems reasonable to assume that any civilization that passes through the nuclear age and graduates to a new understanding of the laws of nature would reject destruction and honor life. It would take an immense effort for an entire society to focus only on the good and reject the negative in order to overcome the dark side of sentient beings.

Are we able to project forward and consider a society so accomplished that its citizens are all advanced theologians? Why do I say theologians? Because theology is the study of God, and the study of God is supposed to be the relentless pursuit of truth and enlightenment. The scientific method is a process by which truth is revealed. Therefore, theology should openly embrace the scientific process as simply another method of revealing truth. True theology, by this definition, would embrace all of the sciences and accept truth wherever and however it is found.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to go back say 300 years and try and explain television, or even a stereo, to the most advanced humans on the planet. Frankly they would probably have you committed. Computer chips made from sand, laser technology, cellular phones, fax machines, even microwave ovens, would all appear to be magic. And, any person able to travel back in time and take such things with him or her would literally appear as godlike. Put yourself in that era, would it not be terrifying to know a person with the power of a microwave, the incredible ability of a telephone, the knowledge of a computer? How would or could you, integrate this newcomer with your known world of experience?

Over the years it has been interesting to watch children teach one another. A five-year-old knows so much more than a two-year-old. A ten-year-old has a completely different worldview than a five-year-old does. Obviously, a teenager sees things very differently than does the ten-year-old and a married person in their middle twenties does not normally think the way of a teenager, and so it goes. Nevertheless, a teenager is generally quite sure that their personal view of things is "right" and older folks are simply behind the times. Does a two-year-old understand the world? Does a ten-year-old? Does a teenager? Do we? Why is it then that almost every religionist I know, while admitting we are but God's

children and that we are barely infants in our overall development, turn right around and insist that God must fit into the philosophical template with which we feel the most comfortable? A child knows something of the emotions of its parent, but how much about the parent does it really know when it is yet in infancy? Sometimes I think we religionists are very much like a couple of adolescent children arguing about what daddy does at work. We both know he exists, we know he goes to work, we may even have a name for his job, but do four and five year old children really have any idea what dad is doing at work?

The Judeo-Christian scriptures constantly refer to man as God's children. In fact, God is referred to by Jesus Christ as "Our Father who art in heaven." Many people believe that the term Father refers to the relationship God has to man's spirit, i.e.: "He is the Father of our spirits," etc. If we were to accept that concept at face value, then what of our bodies? And why is it that so many people are thoroughly scandalized by the very thought that biological evolution could be the Lord's way of preparing bodies that our spirits might inhabit? Is it because God's plan may not fit into our particular view of the way things should be? Whether Darwinian evolution is largely correct or not isn't really the issue, the question I'm raising is why do we believe that God must fit into our image of him? Another quote from Moses:

"I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh."

Today, many people give little thought to the environment that their children may be forced to endure due to the choices they make. But were we all to live to experience the absolute effect of all of our choices it would surely modify our thoughts and actions. I believe we can assume that a society that grows through the nuclear age and develops itself biologically and emotionally to the point that they are able to live essentially forever will be extremely careful about the long-term effects of their every choice and action. These beings would manifest godlike qualities, being immortal, having of necessity eliminated war, as we understand it, and living rightly. Do I dare say living righteously?

But what about an advanced society's children, how would they learn the immutable laws of the universe, and experience the downside of seemingly good short-term decisions that might be devastating in the long run? How would they achieve the same maturity, making only correct decisions from the very beginning if they were not permitted to make poor choices in their infancy and learn first hand the natural consequences of wrong living? Might these children be sent off to another world, a nursery of sorts, where they can live and grow independently for a time with a veil drawn against their previous existence so they could more easily gain knowledge through experience? Might there be many nurseries begun as needed with a biological first man and first woman placed there to prepare bodies for these spirits?

"And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living; for thus have I, the Lord God, called the first of all women, which are many."

"And the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many."

Recently my oldest son was teaching his two-year-old about emotional pain. He referred to this aching inside as "pain in his heart." His son got the picture fairly quickly but I couldn't help but think that were he to grow up never changing his paradigm that when he was feeling sorrowful he might think that the organ which is his heart was actually being harmed. What we learn as children must be expanded upon in order for us to grow in understanding and true knowledge. Is it not logical to believe the same is true in our understanding of what God is and what our relationship to him might be?

Many years ago a friend presented an interesting concept. He said that traditional Christians were in deep philosophical trouble because,

"If God is good, he is not God, and if God is God, he is not good."

You need to let this quote work on you for a while to gather the full significance of what he said. Because traditional Christians believe God is all-powerful, the dilemma is that if God is all-powerful and there is evil and immense unfairness in the world, and of course there is, then God must not be good. On the other hand if God is always good and there continues to be evil done to his children, then he either doesn't care or he can't do much about it. Neither of these explanations feels good, but there is a truckload of fundamental logic in the argument. Moses says this:

"...but there is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all.:

What if God is all good, and has perfect knowledge which yields unimaginable power, but is bound by the same universal laws, as are all things? If God were of the character described by Christian Orthodoxy then he would be God whether or not he chose to do rightly. The Book of Mormon, introduced to us by Joseph Smith, teaches that God is God because he always acts in complete harmony with the universe. He is always righteous. A very interesting set of quotes in the Book of Mormon has an American Prophet named Alma saying to his son:

"Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God."

"But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted: which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God."

"But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth

back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice."

"What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. *If so, God would cease to be God.*"

One of the most interesting concepts presented to the world by Joseph Smith was his doctrine of free agency. In my interpretation, he argued quite convincingly that "imagination" and its counterpart, the "power to choose," was that which separated man from other living things. Joseph Smith reports Moses has recording some interesting insight to the Garden of Eden story:

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

"...man is become as one of us to know good and evil;"

God calls us his children and then says that when we are able to discern the difference between good and evil and make thoughtful, independent choices between them, then we are acting as gods ourselves. We appear to be the only living creatures on this planet that can imagine something clearly in our mind and then do it. For example, stop reading and look around. If you're indoors consider that everything in the room you are now seeing was first a thought in someone's mind. Whatever the object, assuming man constructed it, it was thought about and then produced. First it was created in the mind, then it was created out of materials. What other living creature has imagined and chose to do something new, something none of its predecessors had done? What has a chipmunk done for this generation of chipmunks?

Remember the Moses quote?:

"World's without number have I created" "...there are many worlds that have passed away...and there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they unto man;"

Also from the Pearl of Great Price Abraham records the Lord as saying:

"We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell."

"So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them."

"And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones; and

the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God; I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest."

Fascinating material this, but did you know that Joseph Smith was not the only Christian to believe such things? What scholars are now calling "primitive Christians," are those that lived prior to the organized Church of Rome in 350 CE (AD). In a number of ancient documents of the first and second centuries after Christ that have been recently translated, there is talk of "worlds without number" "multiple heavens," "matter unorganized," and the reprocessing of the materials of which worlds are made. There is even discussion of archons and demigods and their responsibilities in the management of other worlds, evidently beings that had previously matured to higher levels of sentience.

Hugh Nibley, one of the world's most accomplished historians, has translated several early Christian writings, which date back to the 2nd century after Christ. This means that they were written almost a 150 years before Emperor Constantine established the Catholic Church at Rome. With 26 languages on the tip of his tongue Nibley is a formidable scholar. A few quotes from his critical analysis of very early religious texts:

"Though matter is replaced through an endless cycle of creations and dissolution, only spirit retains conscious identity, so that strictly speaking "only progeny is immortal," each "mounting up from world to world" acquiring ever more "treasure" while "progressing towards His perfection which awaits them all."

"It is that "light stream" which no power is able to hold down and no matter is able to control in any way."

""...it is this light which imposes form and order on all else; it is the spark by which Melchizedek organizes new worlds."

"...it is Michael and Gabriel who direct the outpouring of light to those parts of chaos where it is needed."

"In each world is a gathering of light (synergy?) and as each is the product of a drive towards expansion, each becomes a source of new expansion, having its part in the expansion of the universe."

"For the making of a world the first requirements are a segment of empty space, pure and unencumbered, and a supply of primordial matter to work with." --- ("Here is matter unorganized")

"Thanks to the vivifying and organizing power of the Spark, we find throughout the cosmos an infinity of dwelling-places, either occupied or awaiting tenants. These are colonized by migrants from previously

established worlds, all going back ultimately to a single original center. The colonizing process is called "planting."

"Every planting goes out from a Treasure-house, either as the essential material elements or as the colonizers themselves, who come from a mustering-area called the "Treasure-house of Souls."

"We on earth are not aware of all this because we comprehend only what we are like. Not only is God rendered invisible by the impenetrable veil of light that surrounds him, but he has purposely "placed veils between the worlds," that all treasures may be hid from those who do not seek them in the proper way. On the other side of the veil of the temple lay "the secrets of heaven."

"The veil quarantines this polluted world mercifully from the rest."

"Only Jesus has passed through all the veils and all the degrees of glory and authority. As one grows in faith more and more is revealed, until finally "the Watchers move the veils aside and you enter into the Presence of the "Father, who gives you His name and His seal..."

Pretty amazing stuff, sounds like science fiction, or should I say Mormon doctrine? So, do we dare think deeply about the Universe and our role within it?

For behold, this is my work and my glory ---to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

"Man is as God once was. God is as man may become."

The great philosophical questions that have intrigued all societies on earth, during all periods of time, seem to be these: **Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?**

All religious institutions seem to be centered on their respective attempts at answering the GREAT questions. Unfortunately, most religious thought is unable to provide adequate answers leaving a nagging fear that we really do not know who we are, where we came from, why we're here, and where we are going.

The study of world religions has been something of a hobby of mine for most of my life. However, the consumption of historical information has done little to give me greater confidence that mankind has much of a grip on the Great Questions. The study of the Judeo-Christian scriptures and other religious works have brought me to the intellectual point at different times in my life where I felt faced with the need to seek a different way to the fount of knowledge. That way is the oft-repeated counsel by Prophets, Seers, and Revelators, to fast, study, pray, and meditate. In other words, seek counsel from a spiritual source and stay alert for a spiritual response. Listen for "the still small voice."

At the close of the Book of Mormon, Moroni has this to say: "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts."

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost."

"And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things." And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is."

"And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever."

What the above says to me is that by the power of the Holy Ghost, which I interpret to mean "personal revelation," we can know the truthfulness of all things. To explore what it means to "know" something would take a good deal more reflection and mental energy than I suspect you might want to expend right now, so let me simply say that to "know" in this sense means to have spiritual and emotional confidence in, or a strong feeling of confirmation. Therefore, at first blush, and examining only the concept of the confirmation of truth, I believe these verses are telling us that we should seek and feel confident in, revealed truth. The process has been described by the righteous throughout history, i.e.: study, pray, and meditate... then seek spiritual confirmation and allow the Spirit to expand on the truthfulness of the conclusions to which you've arrived. This is a decidedly non-intellectual process, but a process that really does work, given focus and sincere commitment.

Some of the conclusions which I've reached through this process are not particularly unique, but in my heart of hearts I have felt powerful and undeniable spiritual confirmation of their truthfulness.

- I believe that we have Heavenly Parents who probably reside on a world close to the center of this Galaxy who love us more than we could ever imagine. The Patriarch of our Heavenly Family we call God, Elohim, or our Heavenly Father. Our celestial family is large, intelligent, and deeply cares about us. We are literally the children of deities.
- I believe that the first principal of enlightenment is Free Agency, which is the power to choose.

- I believe that we are here on earth for a celestial purpose that transcends anything we could even begin to understand at this level of our development. No matter what our age, or level of maturity here on earth, we are but children in a galactic sense. We simply do not know enough to even ask the right questions, much less begin to understand complete answers.
- I know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, our older brother that special one prophesied by righteous men and women throughout ancient history. It is HE that is both our Eternal Father, (the father of this world and we in it), and the Savior of mankind. It is HE that sacrificed his mortal life for us and spiritually suffered beyond our possible imaginings whereby HE paid the price for each of our personal sins.
- I believe that repentance is the way back home. We must set our course for perfection and endeavor to keep the commandments. We must prove our worthiness through good work and humble service.
- I believe that justice, mercy, and righteousness are eternal principals, well defined in the Scriptures, and consistent throughout the Universe.
- I know that we grow through exposure to opposition in all things and as a consequence of our making correct choices and prudently acting upon them. The power to choose, and to choose correctly, is the essence of Godhood.
- I know that there is something absolutely fundamental about families throughout eternity, and that it is up to each one of us to **decide** whether or not we want to be part of our eternal family. Families can be forever.
- I believe in Prophecy, Revelation, and in the power of Faith. And I believe that Faith coupled with Love, is the ultimate organizing power of the Universe.
- I believe in Love.

Dad