

Daily Meditation 01/20/22

Is More Awe on its Way?

Good morning.

We're talking this morning, meditating on the subject of whether more awe is coming our way, thanks to the Webb telescope. And I think we need awe, because as Heschel says, "Awe is the encounter of the human mind with the universe." And "an awareness of the Divine begins with wonder." Wonder and awe being, I think, synonyms.

But he also tells us that we need to "stand still and behold," and "behold, not only in order to explain, to fit what we see into our notions; behold, in order to stand face to face with the beauty and grandeur of the universe."

Marvelous telling of the invitation to expand our souls. Now, it's interesting that Meister Eckhart also talks about this kind of standing and beholding. He says, "The word 'behold' implies three things: something great, something marvelous, or something rare."

...something great, marvelous or rare. That's what catches us up to behold.

And this very much parallels another phrase from Rabbi Heschel, who talks about "radical amazement." He says, "The silent allusion of things to a meaning greater than are themselves."

That is what the sublime is all about. "The silent allusion of things to a meaning greater than themselves." You're carried to encounter with transcendence and meaning, an awareness, as he puts it, "that the world and its grandeur is full of a spiritual radiance."

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I think many of us have experienced this, with the new creation story from the universe, from science, and with the Hubble Telescope, which introduced us to so much grandeur and radiance in the universe. And now, the Webb telescope is going to even increase that four times. But notice, that Heschel says standing still is part of this beholding of awe and wonder.

Eckhart, too, talks about the need to be still to find silence. He says,

We cannot be of greater service to this Word than through stillness and silence. There we can hear it, and understand it correctly, in that state of unknowing--

...that state of unknowing...

...where we know nothing, it becomes apparent and reveals itself.

So revelation comes in this context of learning to let go, and to be still and to be silent. This is where contemplation comes into the picture.

Now, Heschel also proposes that we have to learn to develop "a sense for the inexpedient"

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that our culture is so busy being expedient, being pragmatic, practical, five year plans and all that. But he says, we also need to make room for the inexpedient. And Eckhart says something along those lines also. For example, he says,

Some people want to love God in the same way as you love a cow. You love it for the milk and the cheese and for your own profit.

Isn't that true?

So do all people who love God for the sake of outward riches, or for inward consolation.

Wanting to get something from God, like you get cheese and milk from a cow.

But they do not love correctly. They merely love for their own advantage.

So he says,

We have to learn to work without a why and love without a why, to live without a why.

And that is when the fuller dimension of our lives comes pouring down to us.

And he has a commentary on Psalm 8, which is very much about the heavens, very much about Father Sky. The Psalm says,

*Yahweh our Lord, how great is your name throughout the earth....
I look up at your heavens, made by your fingers,
At the moon and stars you set in place--
Ah, what is man that you should spare a thought for him,
The son of man that you should care for him?
Yet you have made humanity little less than a god.
You've crowned her with glory and splendor,
made her lord over the works of your hands...
Yahweh our Lord, how great is your name throughout the earth.*

And Eckhart comments on this:

The Psalmist marveled at two things -- first, what God did with the stars, the moon and the sun. The second marvel concerns the soul, that God has done and does such great things with it and for its sake... he has made it ...like his essence...and like the ground where he subsists in himself, where he is always bearing his only-begotten Son, there where the Holy Spirit blossoms forth. This work [of forming the soul] is a pouring out, yet a staying within.

So much to enrich our responses to the wonders of the universe, to our own experiences of awe encountering the universe, to our being still in learning to behold.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.