

# Let There Be Light

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"Let There Be Light" Genesis Chapter I, verse 3. In that sentence, eons of time are covered and the forces of nature which brought about the galaxies, the "world" as we know it, were set in motion. Other writers, the philosophers, the Phoenicians, the Greek myth-makers, the modern scientists fill in the details in differing theories, but man's most active imagination falls short of understanding the void before the beginning. Before "Light Was".

So the story of the Creation begins in the Bible and the sequence, like a narrative, spans time in a few brief sentences; man is the climax of the creation process. Man, too, is allotted a sequence of time. For man there is no turning back - or negating that which has been. We must begin where we are: in this place, in this time, in the present. We are single persons with interwoven experiences. We have the privilege of intelligence and we can use it in ways of creativity, cooperating with the forces of nature to bring about great changes in our "world". We take pride in our inventions of communication, transportation; all of the things that are called civilization. Such terms as zoology, botany, astrology, ecology, these are products of man's knack for understanding nature.

With the privilege of intelligence - perhaps even a part of it - is the privilege of choice. It is that particular facet of man's nature that I would emphasize today.

When an artist begins a picture, he has to choose the materials with which to work - add talent - and inspiration. He expects to devote a given amount of time to the project. His brushes and his palette become the tools with which his skill converts the selected oils into a painting on a canvas. The canvas is blank before he begins - before that first brush stroke. And then when the artist has satisfied himself with his work and has set judgment for himself, he will then go on to another canvas, another subject.

The experienced eye of the critic may view his work and find no flaw in the professional treatment of the subject, the attention to detail, or the technique of the craftsman. The popular success of that painting depends on whether the viewer catches that intangible inspiration, the quality that makes it my picture when I view it. Is the finished product more than just a plain canvas covered with many colors of paint?

The artist, the critic, the passerby - each one sees the painting in a different way and with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Our life's span began as though with a blank canvas; each day we add to the mural and the whole picture is ours to do. No one else, but me, can do my so-called "mural of life."

Let me examine the attitude each of us has toward this, our personal "life-mural."

My responsibility? Yes, if you like the word.

My duty? No, Life is not a "duty".

My privilege? I think so, how else can you define Life if not a privilege?

My burden? Only if I make it so.

We could go on and on, but it seems to me, it ought to be a joy. Each day met with a zest and vitality for the new dawn.

Henry Ward Beecher wrote: "God asks no man whether he will accept life. That is not the choice. You must take it. The only choice is how!"

There is a fable I'd like to share with you: Once there were two little girls who had everything they wanted. And then one day they were given one thing more. They were given the privilege of rejecting every day that didn't seem a good day. It came to pass, that when these two little girls grew up to be adults, they lived in two houses just across the road from each other. One little girl had really taken advantage of her privilege, and whenever anything went wrong - even such trifles as when she 'got out of bed on the wrong side' she would pout and say, "Oh dear, this is the kind of a day I'd like to skip". And she would - she'd pass right on to the next day. And so, by the time it came for her to have her very own house by the side of the road, she had the habit of finding fault with almost every day - and suddenly she had spent all the days Father Time had given her. Now, the other little girl noticed how much easier and better each day seemed when she could find the courage to wear a smile. When it came time for her to have her house by the side of the road, she had learned a great many things. She had seen that after the hot drying winds of summer, a lovely bouquet could be made of the dried flowers and grasses. When the rains came, she chose a hot cup of tea by her cozy hearth; and when the winter winds blew, she opened her quilting frame and lovingly put together the scraps of fabric, and her children cherished her handiwork. She had forgotten that special privilege she might have used - and she had savored each of the days Father Time had given her. There was time for her neighbors to know and love her.

Just by being, we make selections of omission or commission. We do or we don't do! The days are drab if *we* let them be; if we only "watch" the activities of others. That mural of ourselves can be lived with a vibrant enthusiasm, if we but choose to do so. Each day of the past is an experience preparing us for today, but yet there is no guarantee that the pattern we paint today can be continued tomorrow. And so, we must choose our design well, and if it has to be altered, let us do so with a clarity of spirit, using all the tools at our disposal.

One color in my mural will be my voice: sometimes loud and strident with impatience; sometimes soft and tender perhaps with sympathy; almost always with inflection for emphasis. My vocal greeting quite possibly is the first glimpse the "you" of the outside world has of the "me" I want you to see. Often the tone of my outpouring creates a more permanent impression than my actual words. Whether my voice is musically pleasant or grating with discord, it is the voice that I use. How very special is the "Happy" voice - or the gentle touch - or the confident smile - or the understanding love shining in our eyes.

The artist assembles his brushes - from where have we assembled our mannerisms? Such habits as the shrug of a shoulder, or the turning on our heels; the way we "look over" or "stare down" a stranger; the set of our jaw or the loud guffaw of a laugh. These become real mechanics of communication about ourselves that the "you" world observes about "me". When do these superficial mannerisms reflect our inner selves and when are they just habitual selections of the choices we do have? Though serious students of social behavior will affirm that to change a habit is difficult, the continuing of the habits and attitudes we may have learned by observing our elders when we were children - or the mimicry of one of our heroes - they are our actions when we do them; we do them by choice and as such they merit our self-appraisal.

Another ingredient that we have at our disposal, is an elusive quality called talent. We each have our own individual supply of the quality. An easy definition, for our discussion today, is: that special fitness for a particular occupation. The use - the misuse - the lack of use of our talents is reflected in many facets of our daily life. For instance, the talent for preparing food is such a joy at meal time, if the cook has used it well. Administrative talents lend themselves well to public life; the talent for working with numbers is probably an accountant's asset ... and so the list goes on as long as man's imagination. When we discuss this particular quality, let us review the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was talking about the kingdom of Heaven and he said, "It is like a man going abroad, who called his servants and put his capital in their hands; to one he gave five bags of gold, to another two, to another one, each according to his capacity. Then he left the country. The man who had been given the five bags of gold went at once and employed them in business, and he made a profit of five bags, and the man who had the two bags made a profit of two. But the man who had been given one bag of gold went off and dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money." Now eventually the master returned. To each of the first two he said, "Well done, my good and trusty servant! ... Come and share your master's delight." But to the man who had been given one bag, the man who had reported, "I was afraid and I went and hid your gold in the ground. Here it is - just as you gave it to me - you have what belongs to you," the Master responded, "You lazy rascal!" Each of the servants had been given the latitude of choice. They

had not been endowed with equal amounts, but the positive responses (those who had made use of their talents) had met with approval.

So, as this "mural of life" unfolds for each of us, we have at our disposal a wide variety of personality traits and skills, a list too long to enumerate.

Now, let us take a few moments to appraise it using the eyes of human evaluation!

To the "critic" the measure of our professional success may be in wide acclaim, or public recognition, sometimes even material or financial success or an aura of security. To the "casual observer", many and beloved friends may be the measure of success. But what about me? What about my appraisal? What gives me inner satisfaction? Does my standard for my goals and aspirations have anything to do with my day-by-day activity? Scott Crom, in *The Trusting Agnostic*, says "We all choose, or will, to live the good life, and the only real question therefore is how to know what the good life is." <sup>2</sup>

Behavior scientists, psychologists, students of human relations can give us a lot of advice in the field of human activity, all aimed at helping us find and attain our goals. What then about that other force - that force we spoke of at the beginning - that force that brought about the creation of man.

"That of God in every man", "the Holy Spirit", "the Inner Light" are phrases used so often in Quaker circles. We must take care that they do have meaning for each of us. That this "Seed" is part and parcel of every one of us is central to our profession. Randolph Miller pointed out in 1962 in his Rufus Jones Lecture: "The holy Spirit provides the gift of Illumination. This may be the inner light of the Friends; the warmth of heart of John Wesley; the intuition granted to a scientist; the moment of truth which comes to all of us when we see clearly what the truth is for us. We ascribe this gift to the Holy Spirit because we never can predict the moment when the light will dawn. Our common speech indicates that this is something which comes over a man, it captures his mind and his will, it leads to conclusions which he did not previously hold." <sup>3</sup>

Isaiah used these descriptive words, "the Spirit of Wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." <sup>4</sup> Elihu told Job, "It is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand." <sup>5</sup>

Just parenthetically, we might pursue the question: If we go through the motions of living acceptably with our community - what, of our actions, are motivated by the reasonings of good psychology to "win friends" and what is motivated by the Inner Light? Is my personal lack of reign on my temper and my impatience more than human frailty and a selfish characteristic - is it a reflection of inner "darkness"? We seldom use the phrase, but Howard Brinton wrote in *The Quaker Doctrine of Inner Peace*, "It is not through a struggle to possess the Light, but rather by permitting the Light to possess us that inner darkness is overcome."

Each of us has personal guidelines we use to judge our own conduct: the scriptures, the direct teachings of Jesus, other writings of revelations through the ages and the insight of the Inner Light.

A recommendation to use the Bible is taken from the Preface of a recent translation, and in that preface, the editor wrote: "God tells us what we need to know for successful living through a variety of formats: people-stories, poetry, direct messages or prophecies, and most clearly of all, the Earth-visit of Jesus. And whatever the style, it has an undeniable ring of truth. But it's up to us to absorb great truths, far-reaching concepts, overall perspectives - and allow God to work out their meanings in our lives." <sup>6</sup>

And then there is another side we must remember. Sometimes some of our actions, especially if we assert them forcefully, assume a leadership quality. At such times, I refer you to Paul's admonition when he says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." <sup>7</sup>

Shaw wrote: the worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them - but to be indifferent to them. That is the essence of inhumanity.

What about the influence of other people on me? What about all these conditions not of our making - disaster, weather, community events? Often these external influences exert so strong a pull, we find ourselves saying, "I couldn't resist - it was beyond my will to face this in a manner different than was expected of me ... I just couldn't help myself." How much more honest we would be if we would say: I chose my response to that outside influence. It may be that my choice is a popular one because it is the same as a lot of other people have made. To make a choice that is different, maybe even contrary to that which is made by others makes us the individuals we are - humans with choices to make - but just to be different it does not make us right or wrong. Sometimes we tend to forget that just because many people do a thing, doesn't make it right - and conversely, just because I decline to do what you do doesn't make me (the rebel in this case) right! Substance isn't measured by who does it!

These are all age-old dilemmas; man has had to reckon with problems of decision as long as there have been men. In the currently new play, "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope", is a song, the title of which is expressive: "It Takes a Lot of Human Feelings to Be a Human Being". It is not a unique situation to find ourselves in this dilemma of decision - everyone has problems with which they have to cope. One psychologist said that there is always a need for inner integrity. The human privilege of examining our frustrations and choosing the manner that we face them is part of our reflection of the Inner Light. To translate that spiritual insight to our intellect and on to our daily living is what Life is all about.

We build on the visions of insight or the leadings of the inner Light; there will be plateaus in our progress if we do not seek continued inspiration. Our commitment is to that sequence of seeking and finding. The seeker continually seeks. Someone asked me, "Don't you wish Quakers would preach 'We Found'?".

I think the 'Source' George Fox spoke of is the finding - the experiencing. But we humans are prone to let intellect and a myriad of distractions claim our attention so the listening ear hears that inner voice only when we become sensitive to it. Sometimes we lose it and once again the seeking process has to be activated. We should not be discouraged with the word "Seeker". It does not imply a never-ending blind alley. The glimpses of the illumined truth are real

experiences and a oneness with the force called God. One of the greatest tragedies of man(kind) is when he has lost his inspiration and he doesn't even miss it!

It seems illogical that the force (God) that brought about, the creation of each man becomes non-existent when the physical man changes form at death. The ongoing spirit is beyond our comprehension, and yet is part of the process ... You know the quotation and it comes in so many different wordings in every translation of the Bible. "Now I know in part, then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." <sup>8</sup> And it all began in that 3rd verse in Genesis, "Let There Be Light".

If this had been written in good old-fashioned Quaker terminology, I would certainly have told you that mine is a plea to you - each of you - to make use of that God-given privilege of choice to unite your spirit with that of the Everlasting God. In other words ...

Make sure "your thing" isn't headstrong or willful; isn't selfish or thoughtless; take the advantage that is yours to be at one with the Eternal Voice.

Paul wrote the Corinthians, "This precious treasure - this light and power that shine within us - is held in a perishable container, that is, our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own." <sup>9</sup>

So it began, it was present in Life and in our lives yesterday; it is now and will be tomorrow. It has changed men's lives, but is of itself unchanging. If we do not resist it, we can know it experientially. With so much to gain, dare we not have a life-mural in which we can say ...

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

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## REFERENCES

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