

The Harmony of Science and Religion
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On my computer desktop, I have a picture of the Eagle Nebula taken from the Hubble telescope. It is a famous picture that shows three monstrous pillars expanding and growing over six thousand light-years away. The towers themselves are light-years in length. You can find these photos at www.hubblesite.org. The majesty of the Hubble photos are recent revelations, but awe of our endless universe is as old as humankind.

There have been many theories over the course of history as to who we are and why we're here. It isn't surprising that we feel so strongly. The scientist and writer Carl Sagan, in the introduction to his book Cosmos, wrote: "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be. Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us—there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a height. We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries."

So why is there a legendary rift between the peoples of science and religion? Throughout history, people of faith have denounced scientists as deceivers and heretics. And many scientists, believing that logic, reason, and empirical evidence are the only true measure of our physical reality, have disdained the idea of a loving God, or an omnipotent creator.

One of the guiding principles of the Baha'i Faith is that the scientific and religious worlds must harmonize to assure the oneness of humankind, and to spur universal brotherhood. Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the central figures of the Baha'i faith wrote and spoke extensively on the subject. He said that our common welfare is rooted in the "unity of science and religion, and the independent investigation of truth." Furthermore, he wrote that "If a man engages with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping. The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all...It is a bestowal of God; it is not material; it is divine."

The world is laid out in abundant glory—the Earth rotates on its axis, the volcano spews molten rock, the tiniest ladybug crawls on an intricate leaf, the atoms whirl within a grain of sand. This is God's creation. For some, the idea of revealing any inner-workings behind our physical world threatens to tarnish their luster. And for some, contemplating the underlying, mystical forces of the universe is a laughable offense; they see the world as governed by strict natural laws, mathematics, and physics. But there is no mutually exclusive decree that says because we understand how a flower blooms, we cannot admire the divine in its blossom.

The beauty of our natural world and the splendor of the heavens are things we cannot deny. The men and women of science and faith are bound together in a quest to better understand our place in the world. Those early members of our species, gazing into the sky, understood the divine before they had the words to profess this understanding. They felt the tug of the infinite. That tug is still alive today, in our deepest selves—what the scientists call our consciousness, and what the religious call our soul. It does not matter by what name you address that inner voice that calls you toward "the greatest of mysteries"; it is tough to deny its eternal whisperings. Carl Sagan, wrote that "the enterprise of knowledge is consistent with both science and religion, and is essential for the welfare of the human species."

Again, I turn to the photograph on my computer screen. I am moved by these beautiful, unimaginably immense pillars of star-stuff. They stir my sense of God and of science. I wonder about the fantastic natural laws that cause something like this to happen and that allow a few

members of a tiny planet to see and understand those pillars. Albert Einstein once said that "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is at all comprehensible." Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "If we say religion is opposed to science , we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test." After all, the universe is a vast place. There is room to explore both the laws that govern the Eagle Nebula, and to acknowledge that our journey toward understanding is a mystical, celestial endeavor.

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