

Staying Awake

Please note that this article is parked under the heading Essays Related to the Early Church simply because it's less crowned,

Staying Awake is divided into two parts. The first is longer, starting off with the difficulty of staying awake and then leading into two basic ways most humans perceive the world, the cyclic and linear models. Once that has been dealt with, the second part follows, a take-off from the first. It concerns the revelation to Moses in Exodus 3.15: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" This revelation serves not so much as an alternate model to the cyclic and linear ones but perhaps as an initial step working toward one at some future time.

When you get older...say from around sixty-five and beyond...it's more difficult to get a good night's sleep. Falling asleep isn't the problem. It's getting up about two hours later, sometimes for a pee or from a dry throat, the result of snoring. Then back to sleep, this process repeating itself multiple times during the course of a given night. A whole bunch of reasons are out there as to why this is so—actually oodles of information—some good and some not so good. When I began experiencing this broken sleep (for lack of a better way of putting it) a few years ago, I was quite concerned. In other words, what's wrong? Then I made a number of inquiries, preferring one-on-one conversations with people of the same age group instead of what a lot of us do nowadays, going online although I had done that as well. Virtually everyone gave a chuckle, concurring that they have the same problem coupled with frequent trips to the bathroom. Then a nurse practitioner friend whom I haven't seen a while chimed in and backed up this common experience. The bottom line in his opinion? Suck up and get used to it.

Although the problem continues, it's a great relief having identified it, especially knowing that I'm not alone. The more you think of it, you realize that you're in greater touch with a large segment of humanity at some basic level, even though you might be alone physically speaking. Often when tossing and turning at night it's worth comforting yourself with this fact. As for the night, there's another thing with which you have to contend. It's a time when all kinds of thoughts—many of them bizarre—come flooding in totally uninvited. This cuts across all age groups. You feel completely helpless as they stream before your eyes with an intensity and vividness that's frightening, just as much if not more so than they were happening in real life. Artificial means to relieve the lack of sleep exist, to be sure, but that's a route I'd rather not take. A better option is settling for a nap late morning or early afternoon to relieve the chronic fatigue. Thus the passage of time has evolved into learning how to adjust to this *novus ordo rerum*.

This leads to a chief point of the article at hand, namely, the mystery of being awake, pure and simple. It covers one's entire life time, not specific phases we go through though the one at hand differs from the others insofar as it's closer to the end of life. The inevitability of death ;looming up ahead becomes more real than before simply because you're closer to it. That compels one to ponder so-called Last Things, and tied in with this is how we maintain a certain spiritual attentiveness. And that attentiveness is tied in with being awake. If we haven't put effort into it thus far, time to buckle down and get down to business. The urgency is more pressing yet fraught with the decline in attentiveness, of nodding off involuntarily. That's the real rub. How do you balance the two when you're predisposed to fall asleep despite your best intentions to stay awake? Here is precisely the point where you become more aware that being awake is a gift in and by itself, and that's high time to give it some consideration.

As we all know, when asleep we have all sorts of dreams which work independently of the real world. We're completely helpless at this point and at the same time we're as close to being dead as the real thing. Then there's the so-called waking state when we're occupied with the demands of daily life. They assault us relentlessly and must be dealt with. There's something about their incessant onslaught that wears us down or more accurately, precludes closer attention to what we'd really like to focus upon. Most people don't have the luxury of time to ponder such matters because they work relatively late in life or beyond the usual retirement age. Even if they have time, most lack the educative experience as to know how to handle it properly. Everyone comes to a point when they know that awareness as just mentioned is so incredibly precarious. Dealing with it seems to be a major fear if not *the* major fear, pretty much on a par with death as we get older. However, this doesn't have to be the case.

Also the lack of sleep which tires you during the day plays a big role in making you ill-disposed in a general way. "General sort of way" is a fairly accurate expression. You can't say with exactness or certitude where the problem lays even though you know it exists. Another feature is that you're more cranky and are upset by insignificant things. We can throw in the increasing pains...not the debilitating variety...but overall discomforts and slowness as, for example, in climbing up a flight of stairs. To be sure, these pains are bound to increase, so might as well get used to it. However, there is a bright side. When looking back at your own life and observing others who are younger just starting out in their careers, you're grateful for where you are now instead of being in their shoes. This is true even if they might overtake us wealth-wise or in some other area. So many uncertainties await younger persons. Now you've got the bulk of them behind you and can, despite it all, pretty much sit back and relax in the midst of your aches and pains. Time now to muster your strength and focus upon the mystery of awareness, for time is short, and the invitation is all the more pressing.

Although it may be painful to acknowledge the way our attention jumps around from one thing to another without ceasing, there's another side to us—one below it, if you will—which in essence is basically silent, free from thoughts. Most people are ignorant of this which makes living with themselves a genuine ordeal. At the same time they have an inkling of its presence which may burst forth here or there, however fleeting. The problem is they don't know how to identify it let alone take steps to allow this larger reality inform their lives. So one of the first distinctions we have to make is to realize that the two are separate entities living under one roof, as it were. Essentially they may be one, but that insight comes much later. At this juncture it can be more confusing than helpful figuring this out. We have to refrain from pretending to be at this later stage, a temptation that's more common than we may admit. We may project ourselves there intellectually but certainly not to lay claim to it as our own.

Making the distinction between the activity of our minds and the underlying, unchanging silence turns out to be something we can really get a handle on and is not some fanciful pie-in-the-sky phenomenon. There comes to mind the familiar image of the ocean surface with its turbulence and the calm of the deep just below it. Both are comprised of the same substance (water) which is important to keep in mind. However, the two are in different states. The question is how do we comport ourselves with regard to these two states? Our tendency is not to see them comprised of the same substance even though we recognize this substance under the two different forms. At first the difference seems incompatible, but as with anything else, practice makes perfect, and we pick up the distinction. The trick is shifting our predisposition from form in general and onto the less visible reality beneath. However, first we need to get comfortable holding the two in balance before we make the shift or displacement we're to make with regard to our attention. Another way of putting it is that we live too much on the ocean surface and look around horizontally instead of looking vertically, that is, down.

Indeed, modern society loves to keep our minds racing at full tilt all the time or keeping us upon the surface of the ocean. The faster the pace, the stronger the temptation to think there's something almost conspiratorial behind such turmoil. That happens when people aren't able to wrap their heads around the distinction between surface and depth (of the ocean). It's the easy way out, giving a false sense of security by simply dismissing the problem. In essence everyone wants to free themselves from the incessant machinations of their minds but haven't a clue as to going about it. So we have to take the plunge all by ourselves by first recognizing the problem, "plunge" fitting in nicely with this inner ocean. However, as it turns out later, support does come from unexpected places and people. The task at hand begins with engaging in a process of watching things emerge and allowing them to resolve themselves without interference. It's a paradox. Very hard on one level yet the easiest thing in the world to do.

Just above I mentioned the fact that it's impossible, if not downright undesirable, to resolve this dilemma except by observing it pure and simple. This is the easiest gesture imaginable yet so difficult for many to comprehend. It would be common to view this as a temptation (and on the surface it may be called that), but we can take another tack which is to consider the commotion swirling about us as so much noise. Let's try to spell this out. Verse seven of the first chapter of Job paints a pretty good picture of what's going on today when the Lord asks Satan somewhat humorously, "Whence have you come?" The response: "From going to and fro on the earth and walking up and down on it." The Hebrew verb for the former is *shut* which fundamentally means to scourge, whip as well as to lash the water with an oar. The general idea? That Satan loves to make a lot of noise—not unlike uncoordinated rowing—which gets you nowhere except drawing a lot of attention by reason of the noise that's made. And so Satan prefers not to engage in temptation (that's common or straight-forward enough) but to stir things up unnecessarily by this *shut*. Actually it's far easier for him (or for anyone else, for that matter) to make a whole lot of noise. Nowadays there's plenty of *shut* as with the political situation both domestic and international and more recently with the spread of Covid 19 or the now infamous corona virus. Resistance to all this *shut* seems impossible. However, recognizing it for what it is and not interfering is the first step to a resolution.

In addition to *shut*, vs. 7 has the hithpael form of the common verb *halak* (to go) meaning an intense type of action with a reflexive voice. That is to say, the subject of the verb (*halak*) does the verbal action upon itself. Thus Satan's "walking up and down" upon the earth suggests going this way and then that. In other words, uncoordinated action which in this instance produces more noise. We could say that both Satan's *shut* and *halak* spill over to Job's so-called friends. With good intentions they visit him and blab on for the bulk of the book about sin, temptation and obeying God. One can just imagine Satan taking great delight in all this. However, to recognize the *shut-halak* noise, if you will, is an essential step in setting things straight, and to do this means to engage in neither *shut* nor *halak* but simply to be aware of them with adding any public or private commentary. Now see how far you get by selling this nowadays.

What's key to learning from all this is that we don't arrive at a resolution by our own efforts but by having exhausted them. Such is the miraculous power of observation. At first glance it seems a waste of time but actually doing it plain and simple is another story. After having bottomed out we are primed for this watching. Basically we're left with nothing as described in Lamentations 3.28: "Let him sit alone in silence when he has laid it on him." The best part is we have nowhere to go but up. It's especially helpful when we try to articulate our situation within the context of some traditional teaching on spirituality, fine in itself. Refer once again to the Book of Job. There after getting word of his sufferings, his friends assemble and offer Job all sorts of advice which mirrors Satan's *shut* and *halak* as noted above. So when

you've been reduced to virtually nothing and worse, everyone around you knows about it, you're pretty much freed-up from input regardless of its source. Perhaps that's why Alcoholics Anonymous has maintained its efficacy over the years.

Earlier the fragility of staying awake as our contact point with the world was developed in terms of a distinction between the ocean's turbulent surface and the calm beneath which endures regardless of what's going on upon the surface. This image depicts where we're at most of the time as well as the burden of sustaining the contrast. Yet the turbulence and the ocean depths partake of the same water, realization of which is a major step in the right direction. Endless concerns and distractions on the surface put the turbulence in motion while the depths are free from this motion. One significant obstacle preventing us from grasping that the two are one is how we in the West have come to view life in general. Ingrained in our culture is the idea that we're progressing, moving forward to some unknown goal which presumably is an improvement on the earlier stages. Movement, not staying put, is everything. Some of this can be traced back to divine revelation concerning Israel in contrast to societies which took a cyclic view of reality. So somewhere along the line things go pretty messed up.

We've inherited the notion of advancement, of ever moving forward, and find it hard if not impossible to shake off, let alone consider an alternative. Perhaps this model which had served so well for centuries requires an upgrade or a shift to something else. Such questioning can rend our hearts deeply especially when it comes to long held values based in religion. This holds true even if people aren't religious. They too have been imbued in it which includes the way society has come to see itself such as through the notion of progress...and progress equals improvement.

For some time now the model in which we find ourselves has left behind the other dominant one which is cyclic. Remnants of it can be seen alive today such as primitive tribes or even better, advanced ones where Hinduism and Buddhism tend to dominate. You don't have to be an expert in Eastern religions to see the difference. Many Westerners are turned off as soon as they've come in contact with these two religions and barely can make a distinction between them. The initial impact is one of complete otherness, wholly alien in its manifestations. Then throw in their approach to things spiritual. It's couched in familiar yet barely understood terms as incarnation and Nirvana which tie in neatly with a cyclic world view. But the real bugaboo is lack of emphasis, even denigration, upon what the West values as tantamount, our personality. Actually the last is what most folks pick up even through their superficial contacts. What they perceive as alien fits in perfectly with this emphasis upon the impersonal. Then they'd point to societies as in India and Japan where the individual is swallowed up and lost not just in the crowd but in the cosmos itself.

Ironically modern science has done a whale-of-a-job at knocking humankind down from its centrality in the universe which bears a certain resemblance to the Eastern emphasis upon the impersonal. This reduction of human dignity is so well known that we take it as a fact of life and have adjusted to it. So when we confront, say Hinduism and Buddhism with it's so-called impersonal approach, we're pretty much caught in a bind. What we've imbued in the West turns out to be no different from the East. Yet this emphasis upon the impersonal has a liberating element if we can get past the noise we hear about it.

At the time of this writing the world is being afflicted with the Covid 19 virus plus the economic repercussions that surely will ensue, this being piled on top of increasing concerns about our environment's deterioration. Surely other concerns may be added, but these two suffice because currently they are in the forefront of everyone's attention. While people are turning to prayer and other spiritual practices, for some reason they of secondary concern despite the best intentions. What really challenges us is not so much our ideas about God and the virus itself but a genuine threat to the long-held almost sacrosanct belief in progress, of moving from a lesser to a better state. This would be okay if done in one shot or two, but we've come to expect it to go on indefinitely, That seems to be asking for too much, and we're questioning it right now without entertaining a suitable replacement model.

Directly inverse to this cherished belief is the much older cyclic model. It was set in motion eons ago by the gods as a kind of self-perpetuating machine that continues forever. This model bears a certain resemblance to the more modern one associated with Newton, that is, a clock that has been wound up, let go and allowed to unwind. However, the one at hand requires no rewinding. It just rolls along forever. I take it that various cultures with this model have worked out how long it takes to complete one revolution. At the end of a given turn, some cataclysmic event occurs which serves to bring on yet another cycle. The time span is long in most cases, hugely so, but each turn precisely mirrors the earlier one as well as the next one.

To us moderns this appears quite dreary, a cosmic imprisonment of sorts. Why bother trying to improve conditions within a given cycle when the next one will leave no trace of our efforts? If by chance our contribution happened to be a major one, a few cycles will flatten out its memory, and so back to business. Indeed, we have here a perfect environment making it easy to subscribe to fate as well as reincarnation. Fate offers a dreary outlook on life by encouraging resignation. Reincarnation offers some hope for improvement though that involves a number of steps, any one of which could backslide. The trouble with reincarnation is that these steps can take eons to complete, and who wants to wait that long?

However, there's a positive side to all this, spiritually speaking. There has to be despite objections, otherwise people wouldn't have found support in it for countless centuries.

Besides, look at the revered spiritual masters as from India. So if one cycle resembles all the others, that means they have one thing in common which has been fixed from all eternity. Putting this simply, it boils down to birth-to-life-to-death and back again *ad infinitum*. The pattern is laid out clearly and can open possibilities which balance the opposite one dominant in the West. Both the progressive and cyclic models have served well and are based on concrete experience. However, both could be petering out or are on the verge of having outgrown their usefulness. The obvious challenge is coming up with an alternative which may involve some cherry-picking from both.

Going about this cherry-picking requires considerable knowledge on many fronts, something that's clearly lacking here. Nevertheless it remain an issue of great personal interest, so any insights offered are done so with these limitations in mind. Besides, it's simply fun to explore various options even if what's presented is incomplete or lacking in many ways. As far as I can tell, the two models have been outlined sufficiently for purpose of making a specific point. Perhaps at some future time more can be said about the differences as in an ensuing article.

As for the linear model, it's so familiar that barely we are aware of it because we're born into a culture that values progress or advancing from a lesser to a more perfect state. To regress means something is wrong somewhere. It can even be taken as a sign of moral insufficiency. And so this model puts everyone in a perpetual tension or strain. Never can you relax. Even if unnecessarily overburdened, anyone subscribing to this model would look with horror at the cyclical one and exclaim at how frightful it is, chiefly because it lacks an open-ended future. As for those on the cyclic side, they'd observe how frantic people are, never at rest and at peace with themselves. They would pride themselves with knowing the future, not so much the details, but the overall plan which means anything that comes their way essentially will be the same as it had been eons before and eons into the future. Hence the renowned patience of the East which gnaws at any Westerner.

The simplest way to visualize both models is by actually drawing a line and a circle; no need to worry about one's artistic skills here. The former has a beginning and goes forward and slopes upward as on a chart which is indicative of growth and progress. The basic problem is this slope has to be maintained. If not, it falls to the earth not unlike a jet stalling shortly after take-off. We see this sometimes in dramatic form as in the Wall Street Journal with regard to the stock market. As for the latter, its beginning can't be traced. The idea of an origin simply doesn't come to mind, for such is the nature of a self-contained circle turning back upon itself. Although it's clear what both look like, still it's helpful to visualize both images side by side as on a piece of paper. Take a good look at them from time to time over an extended duration and allow them to sink into your memory. After all, you have drawn them. No other images

could be so easy to imagine. Also don't rush to come up with another image, for perhaps that's not within our reach at the moment.

I've tried this out using both methods, visualizing and drawing them, quite helpful. After all, we're dealing with the world's two major archetypes when it comes to making sense of our lives. The West subscribes to the dominant linear one and has not yet attained an optional one, that is, as far as I can tell. So if the cyclic and linear models have been around a long time, why bother looking for another¹? What are some of the signs that both have reached or are about to reach the end of their usefulness? First of all the cyclic model harps on the sameness of life regardless of its varied manifestations. If you've had such-and-such an experience (a basic one such as birth or death), you're bound to experience it all over again. As for the linear one, there's that danger of falling to the wayside as noted already. A projectile can't keep on going up and up without falling down. Even if the end is something divine and we're convinced this is true, our position on the trajectory can lead (and this is pushing it to the extreme) to despair, of having to wait an interminably long period of time before it arrives. That leaves us in a place where some of us are right now. The question then is what do we do in the meanwhile? Jesus Christ may not have had this exactly in mind but some of his parables deal with how people are to spend their time. Basically that boils down to watching: the wise and foolish virgins, the master entrusting his wealth to his servants while going away and so forth.

So whether we're within the cyclic or linear pattern we realize that both have their ground in a religious sensibility, the Latin root for the noun "religion" being defined as binding-back-to-the-source. As we know all too well, religion is being called into question while at the same time people hanker for it or something akin to it. So with all this in mind, if we take religion in the etymological sense, we discover that the cyclic and linear ways seek to bind themselves to the source from which they had come. By doing so, they end up with two basic patterns.

In light of this *re-ligo* enterprise, can we *ligo* ourselves differently? Does that mean we can choose a *re-* different from the two at hand? Here *re-* may be taken as two forms of memory, of *anamnesis*. For the cyclic one, that's easy. The pattern has been laid out from all eternity. No problem at recalling the last cycle because essentially it's the same as the one we're in right now. For the linear one, the future is wide open like a frontier. The second form is awareness of our mortality. All of us are moving away from any source we may have in mind, albeit dimly, on to death, the awareness of which no one can escape. As for what lays beyond death (if anything), it's not of concern in this article though may be addressed later.

1 From what I can tell, the linear one began with the ancient Hebrews and divine intervention which gave birth to a future which is better than the present situation. Prime examples of this are Abraham and the Israelites under Moses' leadership as they left Egypt and journeyed to the promised land.

Okay, so we project ourselves forward to death and stop there. Then we look back (i.e., *re-*) which is a kind of *ligo* as noted above.² Here our frame of reference is a horizontal one between two extremes. With this in mind, there's another basic pattern, one which is vertical or up-down. Here God is in heaven above while we're on earth below with a huge gap separating the two realms. We associate this with the linear model, not so much the cyclic one. The story of the tower of Babel is a classic example of those below attempting to reach the realm above, but as we know, this attempt resulted in disaster. From that point onward, humankind was kept firmly on the earth. It is at this point its helpful to keep in mind the image of that rainbow God has established after the flood and before Babel. Its arch-shape is grounded in two places upon the earth while the rainbow's height peaks into heaven above. As soon as it reaches heaven, it descends. You can't help but wonder how alive that image was to the architects of the tower, one they should have kept in mind.

As for the up-down model, there's nothing new. We find it throughout the Bible in both Testaments. However, it takes on a different dimension when we shift to thinking in terms of that which is normal and that which is natural. At first glance both seem pretty much the same but in reality they are quite distinct. Some of this mis-perception arises because superficially the two run parallel with each other. We may think they overlap but essentially do not. So some further consideration may lead to thinking outside the two current models, cyclic and linear.

As for what's natural in us, it's reflected in that same desire we have inherited from those who had constructed the tower of Babel in an attempt to reach on high from their position on earth. Their motive? "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" [Gn 11.4]. They see something missing on the plane where they had been living living and wish locate it elsewhere. For them this elsewhere cannot be upon the earth but in a different realm, so the only option they knew was above or where God dwells. It's not unlike the first woman reaching out to the tree to grab its fruit, only the reach at Babel was much higher. Still, no difference.. Note too that in addition to the tower, the people decide to build a city, this being clustered about the tower as compact as possible.

The natural impulse to erect a tower starts, as already noted, from below and strives upward. It's important to keep in mind that this movement goes against gravity, so to go in this direction means a constant strain and pressure is exerting itself from above. In other words, their effort isn't normal, isn't the norm. Part and parcel of this upward striving are desires, notably the one to escape an environment in which people feel rudderless, hence their wandering. This crowds out all other options. No one will listen to anyone offering another.

2 I take it those who initially subscribed to both the cyclic and linear models did the same. It seems only natural that they did.

This natural direction is largely ignorant of us being made in the divine image which has its source from above yet implanted in us below.

So already we have what's above planted in our environment below. While ignorance of this is pervasive, just about everyone retains a trace of this divine image within themselves. This realization is mostly vague but is persistent, something we can never shake off. For example, if miraculously all the builders of the tower could shake off their ignorance, they'd have no need to go ahead with their plans which goes against the pull of gravity. They would take the extraordinary step of acknowledging the tension and letting it go without attributing any form to it and work from there. No construction, if you will, would have been necessary.

As for the downward direction from above whose origin is conceived traditionally as coming from heaven, it simply goes in that direction or effortlessly toward earth. Once upon the earth, it takes human form which is what being made in the divine image and likeness seems to be about ¹. Because everyone has this...rather, *is* this...there's no need to take the natural approach as mentioned with regard to construction of the city and tower. They did this after having "migrated from the east" [Gn 11.2] which suggests a movement away from Eden. So in a sense the failed construction project is an inverted way of attempting to return to Eden, of going to where God dwells and to where they once had their home. Their failure simply put them on the path of their aimless migration further from Eden. After all, those who did—and this is the entire population of the world—"had one language and few words (*saphah* and *davar* or lips and word-as-expression)." This intimates there was no need to communicate very much with each other since they had enjoyed a certain immediate presence among each other by reason of being made in the divine image and likeness. In other words, memory of it was still fresh from Eden.

So this awareness of having one language and few words reflected the way the first man and first woman spoke with each other in the garden of Eden. However, something had changed with the first man's banishment from there. Right away we have the first murder (Cain and Abel) followed by the great flood. So it seems that normal relationship with God went downhill with amazing rapidity though some traces of it remained. The prime example of this consists of the long lives people had lived. Even that petered out relatively soon. So the increased distance from Eden or better, dimming of its memory plus shortening of the life span, had a lot to do with the people settling in the land of Shinar or Babylon.

Note that the migrants chose a plain in that vicinity, a large flat expanse of land so the tower would stand out all the more. Hopefully, they thought, they just might catch a glimpse of

1 As for actual biblical references to image and likeness, there are not many, just a handful. On this same website there's a short article about this. However, the concept caught on as anyone can tell who's familiar with Western spirituality.

Eden off toward the east. So in their discussion about constructing a city and tower was done with that “one *shaphar* and few *davar*.” That meant they could erect a complex involving considerable skill far easier than even us moderns. Actually, it went up almost overnight. Such was the staying power of the divine image and likeness, though soon that was to come tumbling down just like the tower. We can presume the city suffered a similar fate, for the Lord decided to scatter its inhabitants. Note, however, that he neither destroyed the tower nor the city. Actually the Lord wanted it to remain as a reminder.

As for bringing the first part of this somewhat disjointed article to a close, it began with a problem faced when we get older, staying awake. The more or less constant struggle to do so leads to an appreciation of awareness pure and simple as a contact point between ourselves, other people and the world at large. Without awareness we’d be, well, dead. Knowing that such awareness is going to pass away with our physical bodies or expand infinitely depends on a lot of what we’ve picked up through life. The culture in which we’ve been raised obviously plays a key role here. Because both the cyclic and linear models seem to be losing traction, it’s compels us to see what might come next. More concretely, how a new one would impinge upon our awareness. That’s where the second part of this article comes in.

The second part of this article follows as noted in at the beginning. Again, the text under consideration is Exodus 3.15: “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

Why is this verse singled out in the context at hand, that is, in conjunction with the two models of cyclic and linear movement? At first glance it seems proper to the first, rolling back upon itself. Yet the Exodus quote is part and parcel of divine revelation to Israel, largely responsible for insights into the second type of movement, of advancing to a divinely appointed goal even if it happens to be far off. So perhaps an examination of this verse might offer a better way of first viewing how God reveals himself to Moses and thus contribute to being a third option, if you will, to the cyclic and linear models. With this brief note out of the way, let’s take a look, keeping in mind that such observations are personal and not unsurprisingly, fraught with inconsistencies.

Let’s begin with the quote from Exodus which transliterates as ‘*ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*. These words are amazing at how open the Lord is, not at all afraid to reveal himself directly although chances are that Moses didn’t grasp them. At least he knew something real was going on, if we can put it that way. The first and second words mean “existed” or “was,” the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as “I will (shall) be.” While interpretation of this has been debated for centuries and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun ‘*asher* or “who” which bridges the gap

between the two “existings.” Attention to this pronoun is important to what the article at hand is attempting to present.

By its very nature, a relative pronoun connects two distinct elements. At the same time it represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. With this in mind, the quicker the relative pronoun gets the job done in making the transition, the better. However, the first half (in this case *'ehyeh*) could never make the switch to the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun *'asher*. Interestingly, the verbal root means to be straight, to prosper, be happy. Roots of it are found in the opening word of the Psalter: “Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked” where the adjective for “happy” is *'esher*. Then we have the relative pronoun as it is in the Exodus text, *'asher*. With this in mind, blessedness and the relative pronoun are tied in with each other. It may be pushing the issue a bit, but *'esher*-ness is something you can't quite get your hands upon because it's too slippery. It goes by you too quickly. The reason? Our attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point B which is our destination. Such is an essential characteristic of the linear model.

However, once you've put attention on the middle...the *'asher*...you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar YHWH, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself. As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. Already we noted that Moses was unable to comprehend this divine revelation although he would encounter the Lord later face to face on Mount Horeb. Still, that couldn't stop him from being overwhelmed. As for the Lord, he abbreviates *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words “Say to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” That is to say, “‘ehyeh has sent me’...‘ehyeh without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

So let's give some more attention to the relative pronoun *'asher* as contributing to a potential option to both the cyclic and linear models¹. First of all, the transition it signals from Point A to Point B is where our attention is turned most of the time. If we value highly the goal, we're less interested in the space in between which we wish to cross as quickly as possible. We could say that because *'asher* neither belongs to both models, it can represent something different, as an invitation to focus upon the transitional. Now the nature of something transitional is a hybrid of sorts. While comprising elements of Point A it has some of Point B

1 There's no room to insert “space” within a cyclic model since it's whole and complete. It seems to be more acceptable with a linear one, more natural to it.

but not completely. We could say that *'asher* is comprised of a kind of memory longing to be fulfilled. The more quickly it satisfies this desire the more quickly it completes its mission.

But what if we were to abide in this *'asher* space, for lack of a better phrase? Is it possible, and is there such a "place?" Harkening back to Ex 3.15, note that *'asher* goes from one *'ehyeh* to another *'ehyeh*. Cyclic? It might look that way on the surface, but the intermediary *'asher* prevents *'ehyeh* from being such. The same applies with regard to the linear model which can't run from one *'ehyeh* to another *'ehyeh* or from sameness to sameness. It begs to be incremental and doesn't see such a possibility here. So for all practical purposes *'asher* is in between which brings up an interesting point. Since it is in between two *'ehyeh*, we can say that by reason of its position *'asher* is gifted with a particular understanding. It so happens that the verb to understand as well as to perceive is *byn*. The preposition derived from it is *bayin*, between suggestive of an interval. So to have understanding...*byn*...implies having this ability to see in between or rather, invites us to take up a position there.

We could say that in the instance at hand having *byn* consists in perception of the first and second *'ehyeh*, of knowing that any relationship between them passes through the relative pronoun *'asher*. Actually *'asher* is notorious to pin down and should be so. You really can't grab on to it as action moves from one *'ehyeh* to the other. It's as though as soon as you reach out to grasp it, it's gone. Such is the role of a relative pronoun, not unlike a hinge essential to the context of a sentence or phrase yet always in transition. If you were to visualize yourself standing there, you'd see stuff moving from Point A to Point B, this stuff going right through you. Again, try grasping it and as soon as you do, it escapes your hands.

This elusiveness constitutes the very essence of what it means to be *'asher*, a relative pronoun. Without it the two sides, if you will, wouldn't be able to relate with each other. Such is what we could attribute to the verb *byn* as noted above which has attention on this between-ness. Obviously presenting it here as such may be stretching it a bit. Nevertheless, it contains some truth relative to between-ness. This "place" is valuable for teaching that if anyone has it, he has everything whole and entire with nothing lacking. To grasp this is so attractive, yet we shy away from it. Both the linear and cyclic models have some of this but seem not to grasp its fullness. The former goes round and round endlessly and hence has a certain static quality about it. On the other hand, the latter seems to have some room for *'asher* but is too focused on forward movement. It doesn't care for any transition from Point A to Point B, just with Point B squarely in its sights no matter how distant it happens to be.

So does all that has been said about *'asher* and *byn* have any practical value? After all, that's what we're after. Actually it's not a bad description of how we perceive the flow of things in our lives. Something comes on the scene and passes quickly through us with our barely grasping what it means. This applies to all things, good, bad and indifferent. Also we can

include all those times when we're forced to wait, are thrown off kilter and end up in a place or situation in which we'd rather not be. Perhaps this is why the Book of Proverbs puts a premium on *bynah* or understanding, the verbal root being *byn*.

While the various verses of Proverbs don't propagate *bynah* in the sense outlined here, let's sneak it in, regardless. That might be enable us to take one step beyond the cyclic and linear models. To *byn* something here-and-now means to realize that already we're whole and entire and don't need to add anything, let alone seek after it. This might have some echos from the cyclic side or from the East. It does have a Zen-like ring to it yet is present in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of being made in the image and likeness of God pointed out earlier. However, that teaching has been overlaid by layer upon layer of explanation instead of being presented as something to bring to realization. Thus a gap exists...always has existed...between the real stuff and endless teaching of it. That might be a chief drawback of a religion based upon the concept of word.

So if we're whole and entire here and now, chances are we don't feel it. Some of the obstacles have their root in that almost irresistible propensity to explain and to teach. Nothing wrong with that, but it harps endlessly upon essential points of revelation without pausing to rest and reflect. That signals a lack of appreciation of the contemplative side of life which favors quieting the mind and seeing it as a sense (like the five of them) which must be put to rest. If we can move in that direction and have even a tiny taste of what happens when we dispose ourselves accordingly, then some of that whole-and-entire thing presented here just might break through.

And so the contents of this article has come full circle from the title, **Staying Awake**. We began with a problem common to old age or approaching it and have moved to a fundamental appreciation of what it means to be aware, purely and simply. That deserved more fleshing-out which lead to the cyclic and linear models which most of the human race has adopted to make sense of the world. Whole cultures were formed around them. Then the article tried to posit an alternative...not one whole and complete like the two at hand but at least as working toward one. And that exists in the here and now...not the "I am" but in the "I am who am" or more precisely in that small but important relative pronoun noted for being in a continuous transitional state. Paradoxically this state turns out to be the one with the greatest stability by reason of it being transitional. Indeed, it may fit into our lives practically speaking. However, that depends on trying it out in the field.

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