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### **Beauty: Intersection between Science & Spirit**

The path between physical existence and spiritual eternity is connected by the relationship between the scientific phenomena proven to occur in the world and a greater being or meaning in the universe. Philosophers express the concept of seeing through three eyes: the strictly physical, mental imagination, and a spiritual or soulful vision. By approaching life through a lens compiled of all three eyes, a profound depth of understanding followed by even deeper confusion may arise. Annie Dillard is an insightful writer who communicates her experiences and perceptions of real scientific phenomena in relation to a higher divine power in her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

As an inspiring author, Annie expresses that whether people are religious or not and know the answers or not, life is precious and we all do die. Each person has the choice of how to experience their time of existence. The key is being aware on all levels of imagination, sensation, and intellect rather than letting life whoosh by. First, Dillard approaches this concept by exploring nature to identify biological truths through the physical and scientific lens. In contrast, her thoughts are intriguing to read when she removes the physical lens to contemplate reality from a divine spiritual outlook. Finally, Dillard reaches balance on the spectrum by inspiring the understanding that beauty is the intersection between science and spirit. An imagination and soulful eye take vision to depths of new meaning.

Annie Dillard connects scientific realities to a larger meaning. The way in which the universe came to exist may be unknown forever. Theories of science or creation are continually

contemplated and highly contradicted in extremes as binary oppositions. Referring to the three eyes again, the physical eye may see evolutionary and strictly scientific beginnings, while the spiritual eye sees a creation by a religious higher divine power. The relationship of the two viewpoints is where Dillard's quote comes to life: "After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down aeons of emptiness, heaping profusions on profligacies with ever-fresh vigor. The whole show has been on fire from the word go. I come down to the water to cool my eyes. But everywhere I look I see fire; that which isn't flint is tinder, and the whole world sparks and flames."

Dillard goes down to Tinker Creek to cool her eyes while observing the biological occurrences in nature. To explore the question as Dillard would, snow will be used as a medium. Strictly analyzing snow through the physical lens, many scientific phenomena can be discovered. Snow is a form of precipitation composed of small ice particles. The amount of snowfall is based on the liquid precipitation and temperature of the atmosphere. Snow crystals form when tiny cloud molecules freeze. Some snow crystals form stellar flakes with extended crystals; others are ice pellets due to melting and refreezing. Hoar frost forms on the surface of snowpack due to water moving up through the snow on cold clear nights freezing into an intricate crystal formation. Throughout the season, snowpack accumulates layers with each new snow or wind event. As Doug Fesler describes in the book *Snow Sense*, "The layers are then subject to changes in texture and strength throughout the winters. The changes help determine snow strength by influencing how well individual snow grains are bonded to each other both within a layer and between layers." There is an acoustic property to snow as well. On the ground, snow acts as a

sound absorbing material. The trapped air between crystal flakes actually trap sound waves and dampen vibrations. Snow encompasses multitudes of factual scientific phenomena to be explored.

Dillard also attunes to the third eye of spiritual vision. She confronts this concept by writing, “We have really only that one light, one source for all power, and yet we must turn away from it by universal decree. Nobody here on the planet seems aware of this strange, powerful taboo, that we all walk about carefully averting our faces, this way and that, lest our eyes be blasted forever.” This light she speaks of is interpreted as a greater being in the universe. Connecting to snow, a sense of inspiration is felt when a person walks into a snow covered forest with stellar flakes falling from the sky while the world is silent. All factual truths aside, what ignites this passionate yet peaceful resonant in the soul? There is a glisten of light through the clouds that shines upon the white blanketed ground. This light comes from above and surrounds the quieted world with a glow one cannot ignore as a spiritual and divine presence. As the world stands still, dancing crystals whisk through the brisk air and song birds sing a melody of heart and soul. God’s greatest cathedral is nature.

The balance between physical and soulful vision is the second eye. This eye is described to see through a lens of mental imagination. Referring to the snow concept, one consciously recognizes the realities of crystal formation, particle bonding, sublimation and all related scientific truths of snow’s existence. To balance the spiritual outlook, metaphorical concepts create deeper meaning. For example, imagine winter as a slow, quiet, colder period of a person’s life. Layers build on the heart and the combination of light fluffy versus hard ice experiences and

determine the fragileness or stability. There may be a breaking point for a person with hardship or an avalanche in nature where the built up layers slide off.

The snowpack actually protects the vegetation beneath from cold temperatures. Metaphorically, people put up barriers to protect their hearts. When the snow melts, it provides nutrients for new plant growth. Water helps plant growth which provides for the animal and insect life beneath the surface which in turn contributes to a continual life food chain. Dillard focuses on the insect existence along Tinker Creek. With spring come flowers, a new chance to bloom. For people, this new growth may be children, relationships, one's self-concept, faith, or simply colorful plants. The earth laughs in flowers. Clearly, biological truths allowed for this to happen, and a spiritual understanding gave meaning to the occurrences of life.

If spiritual meaning is felt so profoundly in the soul, and scientific phenomena are proven to exist as realities in the universe, what is the relationship between these binary oppositions? Annie Dillard wrote, "It is ironic that the one thing that all religions recognize as separating us from our creator—our very self-consciousness—is also the one thing that divides us from our fellow creatures. It was a bitter birthday present from evolution, cutting us off at both ends." Evolution or creation, science or spirit, beauty is found at the intersection of both. This world was created with such perfection that the physical, biological, chemical, and ecological phenomena would occur simultaneously intertwined to maintain existence. This intricate creation allows for a spiritual journey with beauty existing, souls blooming, and minds evolving. As humans, an awareness of intellect, sensation, and imagination allow for experiencing life through deeper vision and appreciation for both science and spirit.

