

# **What the Parable Means**

## **A Discussion Guide to The Story of Everything**

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The author would be pleased to discuss *The Story of Everything* with your reading group, book club, class, or seminar. To arrange a time and a method, email [jkotre@umich.edu](mailto:jkotre@umich.edu). Or go to the Story-of-Everything Place ([www.thestoryofeverything.com](http://www.thestoryofeverything.com)).

Here are some questions to aid any discussions you do have.

### Two Versions of the Story

1. When Adam's grandfather told the Story of Everything, how did he sequence Matter, Life, and Spirit? Which came at the beginning? Which came at the end?
2. When Adam told the Story, how did *he* sequence the three? What difference did Adam's order make?
3. Which of the two stories (Adam's or his grandfather's) was a "creation" story? Which, an "evolution" story? Was there "intelligent design" in either?
4. Which of the two was a "religious" story? Which, a "scientific" one?
5. Were the two stories incompatible? Why or why not?
6. In each, how do human beings fit in?
7. How do you suppose that Dawn will tell the Story of Everything?
8. How will you?

## You

1. Were you raised on a Story of Everything? What was it?
2. Who told you the Story? Where was it told? Was it told as a whole, or in bits and pieces?
3. Did the Story you were raised on have religious elements? Secular ones? Scientific ones?
4. Did Matter, Life, and Spirit come in any particular order?
5. Were you told that the Story was sacred? That it was eternal? How did that affect you?
6. Did you ever lose the Story you were raised on? Abandon it? Grow angry at it? How did that come about?
7. Did you ever discover that the Story had changed? "Evolved" even? How did that affect you?
8. Did you discover that the Story had a dark side? What was the nature of that dark side? What was your reaction to the discovery?
9. At this point in your life, is the Story "coming back?" In what way? Will it ever return?

## Want to Do Some Digging?

1. What exactly did Galileo have to say about the church?  
About the Bible?
2. What did Darwin have to say about creation?
3. How did Darwin's idea--evolution--spread beyond biology? How far did it get?
4. How did the two (Galileo and Darwin) differ in their attitudes toward religion?
5. How did the technology of writing affect religion? How did printing? How did computers and the internet? Did any of these technologies make religious ideas more authoritative? Less authoritative? Harder to change? Easier?
6. What were the effects of these technologies on scientific thinking and authority?
7. In a different vein, how have non-Western traditions put Matter, Life, and Spirit together? Is a sequence--first one, then another, then another--always involved?

## And Now . . . The Main Character

1. How would you describe Adam?
2. Whom or what did Adam love? Which of his loves lasted? Which came to an end?

3. How did Adam lose the Story of Everything?
4. Why did he grow angry at it?
5. What was Adam's work? How did it change over the course of his life?
6. What role did women--a teacher, Elise, Dawn--play in Adam's life?
7. Why was he always so alone?
8. "I am to speak a story," Adam says at age 60. What led him to this conclusion?
9. What prevented him from actually speaking the Story?
10. In the end, what enabled him to do so?
11. How, in a nutshell, would you describe Adam's journey? What was its critical moment?

### Adam's Counterpart

1. In the parable, the Story of Everything is personified. Is there any reason it's called a "he"? Why not a "she"? What if it were a "she"?
2. What did the Story want?
3. How would you describe the Story's journey? What was the starting point? What were the turning points?

4. What did the Story learn along the way?
5. What was the place of Silence in the Story's life? What did "she" represent?
6. On two occasions the Story travels through the cosmos. How were the two trips different? *Why* was the cosmos so different the second time around?
7. How did the Story reconnect with Adam? Was this an accident, or was it bound to happen? *Why*?
8. Did the Story want to be told Adam's way? *Why* did it finally go along with Adam?
9. *Why* did the Story die where it did?
10. Was death the end of the Story?

### Symbols

1. Certain symbols appear in the parable--a *tree*, for example. In the beginning, a tree has a hill to itself. In the end, it's replaced by many trees. What does the tree stand for?
2. What was the importance of the *hill*? How did it change from the beginning to the end of the parable? Will Dawn return to it?
3. The *moon*. What was its appeal to Adam? What meaning did its "other" side have for him?

4. *Breath*. What was its place in the Story that Adam's grandfather told? In the Story that Adam told? Where else does breath appear?

### And in Conclusion

1. What exactly *is* a Story of Everything?
2. Has there ever been one?
3. Was it told by men or women?
4. How can one find moral ground in a Story that changes all the time?
5. How can one unite a society if everyone's Story is different?
6. How, in a time of "exploding" information, can one still tell a Story of Everything?
7. How long would such a Story have to be?
8. Could such a Story be religious *and* scientific? To reconcile the two, how would religion have to change? How would science? How would those engaged in each?