

STILL SMALL VOICE

It is now two weeks since the eclipse, but even if we didn't see it, we are still talking about it. Did you know that we are living on the only planet which has a satellite which appears from the ground to be exactly the same size as the sun, which is 400 times as wide and 400 times as far away? This coincidence makes our eclipses (when they are not obscured by Devon clouds) so much more spectacular than they would appear from any other planet in the solar system. During 'totality' we may even see 'Bailey's Beads', the sun peeping between the lunar mountains, as well as the solar corona.

This is only one tiny example of the wonder of creation which, the more you study it, the more it shows a mixture of complexity and order that makes it almost incredible that it could be just a random happening. So - if it is not random, does it have a purpose? Just because we know humans like finding meaning and pattern in things does not mean that we are deluding ourselves in looking for a purpose, but where and how should we look?

Take a rainbow. Just beyond the red and the violet on each side of the bow you can almost see a colour. The feeling of knowing that there is something there, just beyond what we can see is tantalising. It is rather like not quite hearing bats squeak or not quite making sense of the voice you can just hear in the next room. Do you remember the story of Samuel, when in the silence of the night he heard a still small voice? If only I could stop deafening myself with the much louder voices of sloth, gluttony or lust (to name just my three favourites of the Seven Deadly Sins), perhaps I could also hear that voice, that inner voice that Quakers call the Inward Light. Because it asks questions that we find difficult to answer, we build up some very effective defences against it. Defences that are not by any means always based on the seven deadly sins. Busyness, wanting to get on with things or shyness about taking time to be quiet are all good ways of not listening, of not pausing for thought. I know, I try them regularly!

Richard Hilken

BBCRadioDevon Aug99