

WHY?

Stephen Hawking, Cambridge Professor of Cosmology, was diagnosed with motor neurone disease when he was 21. He relied almost totally on computer machines to communicate with his students. His book, 'A Brief History of Time', written to raise funds for equipment to help his work, is a testimony to both his brilliance and his sense of fun. His handicap conferred no immunity to the side effects of fame on his family. Stephen had no religious faith or conviction, though his first wife was a committed Christian and devoted her life to supporting him. When he died in 2028, his body was interred in Westminster Abbey next to the grave of Isaac Newton.

The following (very simplistic) poem was written during my ministry training, when we explored aspects of 'Wholeness' and 'Creation'. The vexed questions around disability and limitation were integral to the summer school experience. I was a scientist discovering theology. Science is the study of the world as we experience it. Theology is also a study - of living as we experience it, and the presence of God within that living. Do they ask the same questions? Are they mutually incompatible? Why does it matter? What do you think?

Anne E Marr (1992)

WHY? and what have you!

**If you want to stun a scientist,
A simple word will do –
Ask him WHY the 'big bang' happened
And he cannot answer you.**

**Why is not a question
The empiricist can face.
The evidence is hypothesis;
No test can prove the case.**

**In scientific circles
The whats, wheres, whens and hows
Are tangible and tactile:
Not so – elusive whys!**

**Wavelengths, quarks and gluons
Black-hole formulation
Lead Hawking to enquire
Whether why's a valid question.**

**So why ask why to start with?
Why did why arise?
Is it just for theologians
In their searching for the Wise?**

**Or is it for the Lawyer
To establish why the crime?
And so convict the criminal
And commit a man to time?**

**Or is why? a handy tactic
When we're searching to delay
An answer to a bidding
For commitment in some way?**

Science and theology both search for the truth but with different research 'tools'. The question 'why?' is more of a theological 'tool' of research than a scientific one.

A.E.M.

**(It all depends the tightrope
we mortals choose to walk
in our writings and our reasoning
and especially how we talk!)**

**Or could why? be for the children
Who use it everywhere
When they find it drives their parents
Absolutely spare!**

**Did the Wise give why to children
So that grown-ups then could see
The grace in being innocent
And the passport to be free?**

**For if why required an answer
To verify its stance
It would have reached extinction
Before it had a chance –**

**To challenge generations
And to fuel the belief
In all that is All-mighty
And all-giving to the death**

**So why in Stephen Hawking
Is such a brilliance trapped
In so malformed a body?
Is it purely chance?**

**Is there wholeness in the ‘holeness’
Of the universal world?
Is humanity a triumph
Or a tragedy unfurled?**

**Ecclesiastes had no answer;
Job came face to face;
Esther found her ‘Skallagrig’;*
Hawking challenged faith.**

**Why me? - we cry in anger.
Why me? - when things go wrong.
Why not? - the soft spoke answer
Why not? – Creation’s song.**

**Will we ever know the answer?
Does it matter very much?
Is not acceptance of our present
A divinely gracious touch?**

**Yet we never give up asking
When living goes awry,
why such difficulties happen.
Have you never wondered why?**

“Before the illness set in I was very bored with life. I think I am happier now. If you are disabled physically you cannot afford to be disabled psychologically.” (S. Hawking)

“One has to be grown-up enough to realise that life is not fair. You just have to do the best you can in the situation you are in.”
S. Hawking

“In the final analysis, the question of why bad things happen to good people translates itself into some very different questions, no longer asking why something happened, but asking how we will respond, what we intend to do now that it has happened.”

Rabbi Harold Kushner
‘When bad things happen to good people’ P154