

## **The Spirit, the Taste of Salt, and the Irreducibility of Qualitative Experience**

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**(1) Objective:** discuss how a particular philosophical insight and its implications (specifically, the irreducibility of qualitative experience) has helped me, and can help us, better understand the Spirit / revelation.

**(2) What is philosophy anyway?**

**(3) The Mind-Body Problem**

**(4) Physicalism & Response**

**(5) C.S. Lewis ("Meditation in a Toolshed"):**

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

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A physiologist, for example, can study pain and find out that it "is" (whatever *is* means) such and such neural events. But the word *pain* would have no meaning for him unless he had "been inside" [subjectively experienced it] by actually suffering. If he had never looked *along* pain [subjectively experienced it] he simply wouldn't know what he was looking *at*. The very subject for his inquiries from outside [objectively] exists for him only because he has, at least once, been inside [experienced it subjectively].

**(7) The "irreducibility of qualitative experience"**

**(8) The Spirit and the Taste of Salt:** Elder Packer, "The Candle of the Lord" (June 25, 1982; talk to new mission presidents. Reprinted in *Ensign*, January 1983, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1983/01/the-candle-of-the-lord?lang=eng>)

I sat on a plane next to a professed atheist who pressed his disbelief in God so urgently that I bore my testimony to him. "You are wrong," I said, "there is a God. I know He lives!"

He protested, "You don't know. Nobody knows that! You can't know it!" When I would not yield, the atheist, who was an attorney, asked perhaps the ultimate question on the subject of testimony. "All right," he said in a sneering, condescending way, "you say you know. Tell me how you know."

When I attempted to answer, even though I held advanced academic degrees, I was helpless to communicate. . . . When I used the words Spirit and witness, the atheist responded, "I don't know what you are talking about." The words prayer, discernment, and faith, were equally meaningless to him. "You see," he said, "you don't really know. If you did, you would be able to tell me how you know."

Then came the experience! Something came into my mind . . . and I said to the atheist, "Let me ask if you know what salt tastes like."

"Of course I do," was his reply.

“When did you taste salt last?”

“I just had dinner on the plane.”

“You just think you know what salt tastes like,” I said.

He insisted, “I know what salt tastes like as well as I know anything.”

“If I gave you a cup of salt and a cup of sugar and let you taste them both, could you tell the salt from the sugar?”

“Now you are getting juvenile,” was his reply. “Of course I could tell the difference. I know what salt tastes like. It is an everyday experience—I know it as well as I know anything.”

“Then,” I said, “assuming that I have never tasted salt, explain to me just what it tastes like.”

After some thought, he ventured, “Well-I-uh, it is not sweet and it is not sour.”

“You’ve told me what it isn’t, not what it is.”

After several attempts, of course, he could not do it. He could not convey, in words alone, so ordinary an experience as tasting salt. I bore testimony to him once again and said, “I know there is a God. You ridiculed that testimony and said that if I did know, I would be able to tell you exactly how I know. My friend, spiritually speaking, I have tasted salt.”

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We cannot express spiritual knowledge in words alone. We can, however, with words show another how to prepare for the reception of the Spirit. The Spirit itself will help. “For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.” (2 Ne. 33:1.)

Then when we have a spiritual communication, we can say within ourselves, this is it! This is what is meant by those words in the revelation. Thereafter, if they are carefully chosen, words are adequate for teaching about spiritual things.

We do not have the words (even the scriptures do not have words) which perfectly describe the Spirit. The scriptures generally use the word voice, which does not exactly fit. These delicate, refined spiritual communications are not seen with our eyes, nor heard with our ears. And even though it is described as a voice, it is a voice that one feels, more than one hears. . . .

The voice of the Spirit is described in the scripture as being neither “loud” nor “harsh.” It is “not a voice of thunder, neither ... voice of a great tumultuous noise.” But rather, “a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper,” and it can “pierce even to the very soul” and “cause [the heart] to burn.” (3 Ne. 11:3; Hel. 5:30; D&C 85:6–7.)

Remember, Elijah found the voice of the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but was a “still small voice.” (1 Kgs. 19:12.)

## **(9) The taste of cheese / chocolate**

Prophet Joseph Smith: “A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas . . . and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 151.)

President Julie B. Beck: “The ability to qualify for, receive, and act on personal revelation is the single most important skill that can be acquired in this life.” (April 2010, “And upon the Handmaids in Those Days Will I Pour Out My Spirit”)