

Star Struck

If you're like most people, you have probably wondered ever since you were a child... how many stars are visible in the night sky. And again, if you are like most people, you've probably given up any attempt to count them.

Turning to astronomers helps us guess at.. a meaningful number of stars. Some estimates (based on a guess that there are 10 trillion galaxies in the universe with an estimated 100 billion stars each): put the number at around 100 octillion stars -- that's 1 with 29 zeros.

Dr. David Kornreich, founder of "Ask an Astronomer" at Cornell University said, "*I don't* know [how many stars there are] because I don't know if the universe.. is infinitely large or not."

Those who watch the stars for a living *are staggered* by what they see.

So, when the psalmist says.... ~ God ... "*determines the number of stars; gives to all of them their names,*" ...*he* was in awe...of our Creator!

In Psalm 8, the Psalmist recognized God's immensity above us writing, "When I look at your heavens, the *work* of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; *what are human beings* that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for 'us'?" (8:3-4).

~ So, (*tilt head*) with all that in mind: Is it okay to pray to the God who determines the number of the stars, and ask that same God to help us....?? when we have a cold?

There's a good chance you had to think about that before answering. One woman told her pastor: She had misplaced her car keys. She ransacked her house trying to find them. Finally, she decided to pray for God's help, and within three minutes, found the keys.

But - she told her pastor, she felt as though she had disrespected God. She explained, "I felt like I was misusing God. God's got the whole world to care for. Surely the Lord can't be concerned about where I absentmindedly leave my keys, right?"

Well *does God care*...about every little thing in our life?

- And the larger question... the **nature** of God. How does God choose to be involved with us? That's a key question for religion. In fact, *no religion* can be **greater** than its concept of God!

Psalm 147 sees God as high and lofty. The One who created the universe... **and our magnificent world**. The One Who named an Octillion stars.

The Bible teaches that much of God's being is **cloaked in mystery**. **God is so far above us** ..that, this side of Heaven, the Divine will always be somewhat unfathomable.

Theologians think of God *this way*; they talk about God's **transcendence**. The Latin word meaning "to surpass". The "*otherness*" of God. God - above creation and outside human comprehension. God is wholly **other** than what we are.

We need a God whose ways, as Isaiah says, are *higher than our ways* ✨ (Isaiah 55:2). No wonder...at times we describe *God's light* as a shadow....hiding in the cleft of a Rock.

Yet, we **must not miss** that Psalm 147 also asserts -- that God ☺ "heals the brokenhearted, and **binds up their wounds**."

This... ..is the same God who named each star...but *is also concerned* about what goes on in our daily life. This is....God's **immanence**, Latin for "to remain or dwell in." *We abide*...in God. We lie and move and have our being...in God.

It's our way of saying God is near to *every one of us*, closer... than our own breath!

The Truth is we do not offend God's holiness by asking for divine help.... in the nitty-gritty of our lives. Or, as one elderly saint put it, ☺ "She who does not have God to thread her needle, does not have God to give salvation either."

Julia Ward Howe, the American poet.. and songwriter of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," knew this. She once asked Sen. Charles Sumner to come to the aid of a needy citizen.

Sumner turned her down, saying he had grown too busy to concern himself - with individuals. Howe replied, "Charles, that's remarkable. Even God hasn't reached that stage yet."

By the way, the Bible does not argue for transcendence *over* immanence, bigness...over smallness. Rather, it tells us God is both. God is God of *both*.. skies and earth. Huge. And intimate!

How we view God.. largely determines what help from God ...we are open to receive. Consider 1 Kings, where both Israel and Aram, learned God is Lord of : the hills and the plains. It's complicated but basically:

When King Ahab ruled Israel, the Aramean army marched against Israel and attacked. And although the Aramean army was stronger, King Ahab and Israel surprisingly routed the invaders.

That first skirmish left the Arameans licking their wounds, ...but not ready to give up. Some Arameans, knowing nothing about Israel's God, assumed the Israelites worshiped a host of gods, just as they did. They thought those gods were geographically defined as "gods of the hills."

So they concluded what Aram needed to do was fight Israel on the plains, where Israel's "gods" would have no effect. *"Their gods are gods of the hills", they said. "and so they were stronger; but let us fight against them again....in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they"* (1 Kings 20:23) So the Arameans invaded Israel on the plains.

But - - when the second battle took place, God's prophet told Ahab what was true....and Israel defeated Aram, putting an end to their troublemaking.

God is **not** just a god of the hills. Of the majesty of mountains, transcendent and above us. God is God of **both** hills *and* plains. Of *all* the earth....*and the heavens!* The cleft of rock (in the smallest of hiding places). And also...the whole universe!

God is both: high and mighty....and immediate and close. High above us ...*and* right beside us. God is both power ..*and love.*

This means God is not only **able** to help us....God wants....to help us. To be right here, intimately here...for us!

God lives not only in the hills of heaven... but also the plains of Earth.

We have God with us when we walk in the valley of dark shadows
....when we simply go about our day.

God holds the keys to heaven,

but God also cares about our distress when we can't find a parking space.

That...is what makes God ...**God.**

And it is sufficient reason for us to give God space in our heart.

Let God....Be **God!** Amen.