

THE WHOLE WORLD IS A SCHOOL ©Richard L. Smith PhD

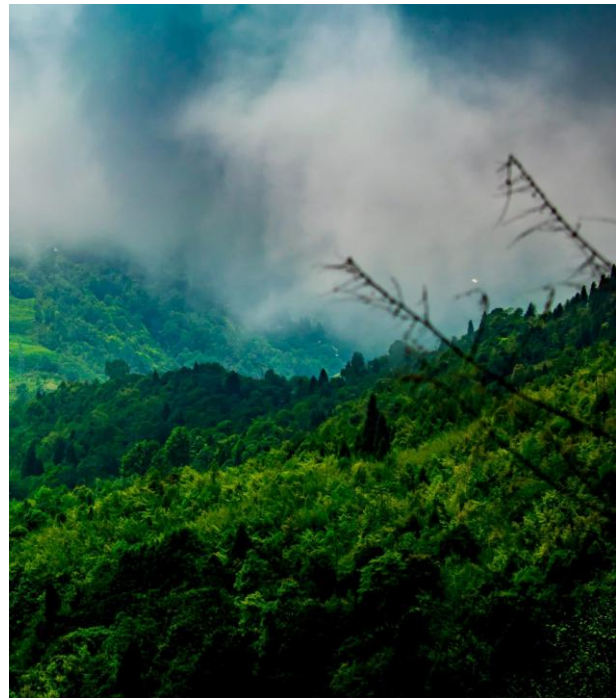
The first man Adam grew in knowledge by studying God's handiwork and following his instructions. In fact, Eden was a laboratory of sorts, a work-space where Adam could develop his intellectual abilities and get to know God better, even as he honed his skills as divine steward.

Most likely, however, Adam's journey to self-awareness, understanding of his environment, and knowledge of his Creator and commission required some time. It is doubtful that his mind functioned instantly at full capacity like that of Trinity in the film *The Matrix*. She simply popped into consciousness fully aware of herself and the setting, and then accessed complete knowledge of whatever kind downloaded directly to her brain. No, a scenario of immediate and comprehensive understanding is not likely in Adam's case. At least it is not obvious. Indeed, it is plausible that the learned much about himself and the world by means of observation and inference.

In fact, it seems Adam had to learn. He had to first develop his cognitive capacities. Most likely, after Adam took his first breath and opened his eyes, he did not jump to his feet (assuming he was lying down), and exclaim, "Where am I? What is happening? Who is in charge here?" Indeed, he might not have possessed the capacity to use language at all. He probably did not yet possess a developed sense of self or situational awareness.

How, then, did Adam learn about himself as a sentient being? What and how did he learn about his environment as creation? What did Adam surmise about God and how? How did Adam become God's apprentice king, architect, economist, and philosopher of the garden?

A partial answer to these questions relates to the kind of world that God created. He made a SMART world designed for thinking. It was measurable, manageable, and malleable. Further, Adam was situated within a web of meaning conditioned by Yahweh Elōhīm. Adam's calling and stewardship determined the content, method, and motive of Adam's thought. Everything about his environment was necessarily God-centered. Everything about the world pointed to the Creator, like a magnet points north.



With a little imagination and insight derived from the passage (Gen 1–3), as well as broader biblical assumptions, we can suggest what *might* have taken place as the *imago Dei* was first groomed for vice-regency—even before God addressed him directly. How did Adam reason from creation to the Creator *before* the influence of sin or the snake's twisted epistemology?

Let us engage in a thought experiment. Imagine Adam's intellectual progress following the pathway of sensory discovery, situational awareness, self-knowledge, and intuition of the transcendent. Such a process was necessarily inductive, based upon observation, experimentation, and reflection. The entire progression was guided *by* God leading *to* God. The following account is clearly speculative. *How* it happened, of course, is unknown; *that* it happened is entirely plausible.

When Adam woke up in creation, he felt no fear, but utter perplexity and stunned sensory stimulation. He was lying down, so the brightness of the sun assaulted his eyes. He closed them, though he felt its soothing warmth. After a little while, a cloud passed mercifully overhead and he looked up again. He perceived a palette of vibrant vegetative hues that captured his concentration. He then smelled for the first time, for there were flowers nearby. He heard for the first time, for there was birdsong and the wind rustled through the leaves above. He noticed movement. Just then, at the creator's urging a small, four-footed creature, an armadillo, approached the big toe of Adam's right foot and licked with all his might. Adam was startled but not annoyed, because the sensation was delightful. He was surprised, as well, to hear his own voice for the first time, for he laughed with pleasure.

Next, God sent his assistant to Adam's left ear. The stimulus produced the same result, except that this time Adam slowly turned his head, though he did not know that he had one yet. When he looked in that direction, he saw the agent of his joy munching on a plant, even though he did not yet know what eating was. Adam noticed that the animal was embodied and moved.

And he wondered: "Am I embodied? Can I move as well?"

At this point the teacher utilized a second teaching assistant, a hefty pig. The animal did not know the difference between himself and the man, but it was in a mood for play. He snuggled against Adam's head, snorted, and pushed against his shoulder. The noise, smell, and contact roused Adam to a sitting position.

And there, he thought with amazement, "What a different view from here!"

The pig shuffled around to the human's feet and nudged there as well. This caused Adam to draw his legs up and throw his arms back for support. Then, he looked at the pig and saw that it had four moving parts, just like the smaller creature. He looked about his body and saw that it, too, had four appendages.

And he inquired of himself once more: "Can I also move? And how?"

So he tried to imitate the pig, executing a clumsy crab walk, for he had been lying on his back. But he did not get very far and the movement was quite awkward.

Next, God sent teaching aid number three, a large black gorilla. The animal appeared in front of Adam, standing on two strong legs. The great ape and the man studied one another intently for some time. Then, it abruptly seized Adam and lifted him to an upright position.

Adam was astonished. He thought, "What a view!" And he heard a second noise emerge from his body, an expression of wonder and amazement.

From this vantage point he cast his gaze at a distance. He saw many more animals and now birds. He heard many more sounds and noticed other smells as well. He felt the breeze more distinctly. He witnessed subtle changes of light and temperature as clouds passed overhead. He also noticed, curiously, that some animals moved as pairs. In fact, the gorilla's companion appeared to carry a much smaller creature of the same kind.

After a while, he watched many animals gather beside a large smooth surface with the color of the sky. He decided to use his two lower appendages and approach the strange sight. Slowly and with great caution he walked to the shore nearby. He observed that the animals lowered their heads very close to the surface and made a lot of noise. He did not understand what they were doing.

As he endeavored to do the same, he froze in shock for he observed his own image. He recognized quickly that he was very different. The creatures all had eyes, ears, noses, and mouths, but his were quite distinct. They all had heads, but his was different. He was also taller than most. His feet and hands were different. He was not as hairy as most of the creatures. Again, many of them were accompanied with another of their kind, but he was alone.

He wondered, "Why was that?"

These kinds of discoveries continued for some time, as Adam gained more and more knowledge. He loved to investigate and was insatiably curious. He discovered many of nature's rhythms, such as day and night and spring and fall. He discerned the signs of a coming storm. He observed how the animals sought shade from the heat and retired to their nests at night or sought shelter during violent weather.

He realized, also, that he could make simple things, whereas the animals generally could not. He noticed that his tastes varied and that his diet was often different from some of the animals. He learned that he could utter many kinds of sounds, whereas the animals generally could not.

He realized, though, that there were many capacities that he did not possess. He could not fly as the birds or swim like the fish. He could not run fast or jump high. He could not climb trees efficiently. He was not nearly as strong as some of the larger animals. He recognized, though, that creatures gathered around him when they were afraid, for instance, when they heard thunder and saw lightning. Often, they even deferred to him, since they moved aside so that he could pass and allowed him to select his food.

He liked to apply what he learned. He enjoyed building shelters and experimenting with alternative designs. He began to develop simple tools. He delighted to make beautiful sounds with objects he discovered or even with his own mouth. He paid attention to colors and textures. In addition, he was awed by the wonder, bounty, and order in which he was immersed. He was enthralled at nature's complexity and its inherent potential.

And because he was the only one of his kind, he became an avid student of himself. Gradually, he discovered and enjoyed exercising and more of his cognitive powers. He

took pleasure in counting and measuring. He studied causes and effects. He catalogued the many utterances he could make.

Eventually, he became aware of still another world, a subjective realm, within his own mind. He experienced emotions. He sometimes cried with joy. He laughed. He preferred some animals more than others and felt affection for them. He also observed desires that he could regulate, for objective things, like food or drink, but also subjective longings such as for beauty and satisfaction.

He asked questions, also. "How did this place come into existence? What am I? What is all this for?"

He continued to ponder his solitude and yearned for company like himself.

But more and more he wondered if he were somehow analogous to something greater, similar but also different. Earnestly, he ached for something beyond himself, higher and beyond what he could see.

Then, one day soon thereafter God spoke to Adam (Gen 2:16–17).

Now, think about *your* life. How have you experienced God as your divine teacher? Can you see that the entire lesson was guided *by* God leading *to* God?