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HERE IS THE DIALOGUE TAKEN FROM A VIDEO BY JONATHAN SACKS, THE CHIEF RABBI OF BRITAIN, AND A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

LORD SACKS BEGINS:

What do I say to the atheist? Very simple. Human beings are meaning-seeking animals.

LORD SACKS, IT IS REFRESHING TO HEAR A RELIGIOUS BELIEVER ADMIT THAT HUMANS ARE ANIMALS. SO MANY OF YOUR "BROTHERS OF THE BOOK" REFUSE TO ACCEPT THAT REALITY. YOU'RE OFF TO A GOOD START MY LORD.

That is definitive of who we are.

LORD SACKS, MAYBE YOU CAN DEFINE YOURSELF THAT NARROWLY, BUT MOST OF US ARE FAR TOO COMPLEX TO BE DEFINED AS NOTHING MORE THAN MEANING-SEEKING ANIMALS.

Take away meaning, you take away humanity.

LORD SACKS, LET'S SAY YOU TAKE AWAY MEANING. NOW WHAT? ACCORDING TO YOUR STATEMENT, WE ARE NO LONGER HUMAN. THEN WHAT HAVE WE BECOME? ANIMALS? WELL AS YOU STATED ABOVE, WE ALREADY ARE ANIMALS. SO THEN WHAT? EXACTLY WHAT IS IT THAT YOU ARE CLAIMING WE BECOME IF MEANING IS TAKEN AWAY?

Almost every great achievement in the arts, in politics, in ethics, any great thing human beings have done, has always been in response to a sense of meaning.

OKAY LORD SACKS, LET'S START WITH THE ARTS. WHAT WOULD BE AN EXAMPLE OF A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT IN ART? THE MONA LISA? SO WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU OFFER TO SUPPORT YOUR HYPOTHESIS THAT DA VINCI'S PAINTING WAS PRODUCED IN RESPONSE TO A SENSE OF MEANING? FOR ALL YOU KNOW, THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN NOTHING MORE THAN HIS WAY OF GETTING IN HER PANTS. MAYBE THAT'S WHY IT TOOK HIM SO MANY YEARS TO PAINT IT. THEY MUST HAVE BEEN DOING *SOMETHING* BETWEEN ALL THOSE TIMES SHE SPENT SITTING IN THAT CHAIR. WE KNOW THEY WEREN'T PLAYING VIDEO GAMES. I WONDER WHAT SHE TOLD MR. LISA?

WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT IN POLITICS? PASSING LAWS TO PREVENT GOVERNMENTS FROM COLLECTING TAXES FROM THE CHURCHES? OKAY, I'LL BUY THAT ONE. THAT'S A PRETTY SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT. BUT WHY WOULD THAT NECESSARILY HAVE BEEN IN RESPONSE TO A SENSE OF MEANING? IT SOUNDS MORE LIKE THE CHURCHES DID IT IN RESPONSE TO A DESIRE TO ENRICH THEMSELVES.

A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT IN ETHICS WAS THE ELIMINATION OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA. HOWEVER, THAT ONLY APPLIES TO ONE SIDE - THE NORTH. THE SOUTH FOUGHT FOR 4 YEARS TO KEEP HUMANS ENSLAVED. SO REGARDING SLAVERY, WHAT "RESPONSE TO A SENSE OF MEANING" WOULD YOU ATTRIBUTE TO SOUTHERN SOLDIERS?

We now have to think about the meaning of any system; and I propose the following axiom.

LORD SACKS, FROM DICTIONARY.COM, DEFINITION #1, AXIOM:

A SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH THAT REQUIRES NO PROOF.

WELL MY LORD, IT'S OBVIOUS WHY YOU CHOSE TO PROPOSE AN "AXIOM." YOU PEOPLE HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PRODUCE EVEN A THIMBLEFUL OF EVIDENCE FOR ANY OF YOUR SUPERNATURAL CLAIMS, SO YOUR ONLY OPTION IS TO RELY ON AXIOMS. THE ONLY PROBLEM WITH AXIOMS IS, WHAT MAY BE A SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH TO ONE, MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE A SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH TO ANOTHER. IN FACT, I BELIEVE THAT THE SUN CIRCLING THE EARTH WAS CONSIDERED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS BY 99.9% OF ALL HUMANS TO BE A SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH REQUIRING NO PROOF ... AND WE ALL KNOW HOW THAT ONE TURNED OUT, DON'T WE?

AND HERE IS LORD SACKS' AXIOM:

The meaning of the system always lies outside the system.

LORD SACKS. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT YOU CONSIDER THAT SELF-EVIDENTLY TRUE SINCE YOU ARE ASSERTING IT. OTHER MEN, AS LEARNED AS YOU PERCEIVE YOURSELF TO BE, COULD PROPOSE AN AXIOM THAT THE MEANING OF THE SYSTEM ALWAYS LIES *WITHIN* THE SYSTEM. THAT WOULD DIRECTLY CONTRADICT YOUR AXIOM. WITHOUT EVIDENCE, HOW COULD ONE DETERMINE WHICH SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH IS THE TRUE ONE?

EVEN IF YOU HAD THE COURAGE TO TRY TO DEFEND YOUR ASSERTION WITH EVIDENCE RATHER THAN CALLING IT AN AXIOM SO THAT YOU CAN SIMPLY ASSERT IT, YOU WOULD FIRST HAVE TO DEFINE, SPECIFICALLY, THE WORDS "MEANING" AND "SYSTEM." BUT BY CALLING IT AN AXIOM, YOU ESCAPE THE NEED FOR

COURAGE.

So for instance, supposing our E.T., our Martian, arrives here on Earth and sees you going into a shop and using a credit card. He says, "Hey that's very interesting. Let me examine it." He looks very carefully at the plastic and says, "but you lend them that for a minute and you get all that stuff from the shop? This is very magical stuff. Now tell me what property of the plastic is it that magics that stuff into your possession?"

LORD SACKS, LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. THESE ALIENS ARRIVE ON EARTH IN SPACECRAFT FAR IN ADVANCE OF ANYTHING WE HAVE, AND YOU THINK THEY WILL BE AMAZED ... BY CREDIT CARDS?

IT'LL TAKE ME A WEEK TO MOP UP ALL THE BRAIN MATTER THAT OOZED OUT OF MY EARS AFTER THAT ONE.

AND YOU NEED TO DO SOME SERIOUS CATCHING UP ON CURRENT EVENTS. WHILE YOU'VE BEEN BUSY IN PARLIAMENT, HUMANS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TO MARS; AND UNLESS THOSE LITTLE GREEN GUYS ARE THE BEST HIDE-AND-SEEK PLAYERS IN THE GALAXY, IT ISN'T TOO LIKELY WE'LL BE SEEING MARTIAN SPACECRAFT ANY TIME SOON.

Well you could not explain to anyone the meaning of the credit card in terms of the properties of the credit card. You would have to teach them a little bit about barter, exchange, money, and then the abstract forms of money in which it is not the object of value, but the object that symbolizes value. In other words, you would have to teach them a great deal about human history, cooperation, economics, and the rest. The meaning of the system lies outside the system.

LORD SACKS, I NOTICED THAT YOU REPEATED YOUR *AXIOM* AGAIN. IF THERE IS ONE THING THAT DOES NOT GROW WITH REPETITION ... IT IS AN ASSERTION.

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS USE CREDIT CARDS QUITE REGULARLY WITH LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN HISTORY OR ECONOMICS. MOST CAN'T EVEN BALANCE THEIR OWN CHECKBOOKS, BUT THEY HAVE NO DIFFICULTY FIGURING OUT HOW TO USE CREDIT CARDS. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT A MAN AS WELL-EDUCATED AS YOU, COULD BE SO ASTOUNDED BY SOMETHING AS COMMON AND AS SIMPLE AS A CREDIT CARD.

Or you see some people playing chess. Well, you can see the pieces made out of wood; the board is there in that checkerboard way and the pieces are moving in certain ways. And a stranger might understand all those things. Might even be able to play chess quite well. Afterall, computers can beat chess masters.

LORD SACKS, I'M CURIOUS ABOUT THAT LAST LITTLE NUGGET OF LOGIC(?). HOW DID YOU GO FROM A STRANGER WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO PLAY CHESS QUITE WELL, TO COMPUTERS CAN BEAT CHESS MASTERS? IF THERE IS A LOGICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THOSE TWO THOUGHTS, THEN I NEED TO ENROLL IN A REFRESHER COURSE IN LOGIC.

IF THERE ISN'T ... THEN YOU DO.

But do they really understand the meaning of chess?

LORD SACKS, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THERE IS ANY? WHY CAN'T PLAYERS SIMPLY BE PASSING TIME BY HAVING FUN WITH FRIENDS? AGAIN I REQUEST THAT YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHAT YOU MEAN WHEN YOU USE THE WORD "MEANING."

AND HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN CASES WHERE TWO PLAYERS ATTRIBUTE DIFFERENT MEANINGS TO THE GAME. A VERY COMPETITIVE PLAYER MIGHT FIND MEANING ONLY IN VICTORY, WHILE THE OTHER MAY FIND MEANING IN SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS, AND COULD CARE LESS WHO WINS THE GAME. DOESN'T THIS INDICATE THAT THERE ISN'T NECESSARILY ONLY ONE MEANING TO PLAYING CHESS?

In order to do that you have to understand the long history of human conflict.

LORD SACKS, SO IF ONE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE LONG HISTORY OF HUMAN CONFLICT THEN ONE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF CHESS? THAT ASSUMES THAT THE MEANING OF CHESS IS THE ONE YOU HAVE ATTRIBUTED TO IT. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHESS IS THE CORRECT ONE? OH YEAH, I ALMOST FORGOT ... IT'S AN AXIOM.

SINCE YOU LIKE AXIOMS SO MUCH, HERE IS ONE FOR YOU:

UNDERSTANDING THE LONG HISTORY OF HUMAN CONFLICT IS MORE CLOSELY RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE ... THAN IT IS TO UNDERSTANDING CHESS.

And how people try and avoid or prepare for conflict by turning it into symbolic forms that we call games.

LORD SACKS, NOW THAT I KNOW THE MOTIVE BEHIND WHY YOU PLAY GAMES, PLEASE DON'T EVER INVITE ME OVER FOR A GAME. I PLAY FOR ENJOYMENT AND MENTAL STIMULATION. PREPARING FOR CONFLICT IS THE LAST THING ON MY MIND WHEN A FRIEND AND I ENGAGE IN A GAME OF CHESS.

BUT YOUR THINKING DOESN'T SURPRISE ME. IF THERE IS ONE UNDERLYING SIMILARITY AMONG ALL FUNDAMENTALIST BELIEVERS, IT IS CONFLICT; AND AS YOU HAVE JUST SHOWN US, THAT EVEN APPLIES WHEN YOU PLAY SIMPLE GAMES.

And why those games have a particular appeal to those who want to learn strategically. So there's no way you can look at the board of chess and understand the meaning of chess.

LORD SACKS. IF THE MEANING OF CHESS IS THE ONE YOU JUST ASSERTED, THEN I AGREE. BUT WHEN I LOOK AT A CHESSBOARD, THE LAST THING ON MY MIND IS PREPARING FOR CONFLICT. IN FACT, MANY TIMES IN THE PAST I HAVE PURPOSELY MADE MOVES WHICH ALLOWED MY OPPONENT TO WIN. I DERIVED FAR MORE SATISFACTION FROM THAT THAN I DID FROM WINNING; ESPECIALLY WHEN I SAW HOW HAPPY IT MADE THEM. I IMAGINE THAT IS A FEELING YOU WILL NEVER KNOW ... OR UNDERSTAND.

The meaning of the system lies outside the system.

LORD SACKS, ALL YOU NEED IS A WATCH ON A CHAIN TO SWING BACK AND FORTH. I'VE NOTICED THAT THIS TECHNIQUE IS VERY POPULAR AMONG THE RELIGIOUS. JUST KEEP REPEATING AN ASSERTION OVER AND OVER, AND SOON ENOUGH IT WILL BE ACCEPTED AS FACT.

Therefore the meaning of the universe lies outside the universe.

LORD SACKS, HUGE MISTAKE ON THAT ONE BIG GUY. YOU JUST MADE A GIANT LEAP FROM AN UNPROVEN PREMISE TO YOUR CONCLUSION. YOU COMMITTED THE LOGICAL FALLACY OF ASSUMING THE ANSWER IN YOUR PREMISE. A GIGANTIC BLUNDER FOR WHICH YOUR GOD SHOULD SEVERELY PUNISH YOU, LATER TONIGHT. IF I WERE YOU I WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER SACRIFICING A LAMB OR SOMETHING. JUST OUT OF CURIOSITY, DO YOU OWN ANY PETS?

ALSO, YOU ASSUMED THAT THE UNIVERSE HAS MEANING. YOU CANNOT ASSUME YOUR CONCLUSION, YOU MUST PROVE IT. OH THAT'S RIGHT, THAT WAS ANOTHER AXIOM WASN'T IT?

IF YOU COULD PROVE THE UNIVERSE HAD MEANING, THEN YOU COULD WORK ON PROVING THAT IT LIES OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSE. AND BY WORK, I DON'T MEAN ANOTHER AXIOM. AND YOU WOULD HAVE TO DEFINE "UNIVERSE." WHICH COULD BE A PROBLEM AS I'VE NOTICED YOU'RE NOT VERY GOOD AT DEFINING THINGS.

And either you believe there is something outside the universe or you believe in a meaningless universe.

LORD SACKS, FROM WIKIPEDIA:

A FALSE DICHOTOMY IS A TYPE OF LOGICAL FALLACY THAT INVOLVES A SITUATION IN WHICH ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES ARE CONSIDERED, WHEN IN FACT THERE ARE ADDITIONAL OPTIONS.

YOU OMITTED THE OPTION WHERE SOMEONE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN ANYTHING OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSE YET STILL FINDS MEANING WITHIN IT. IN FACT THERE ARE MILLIONS OF THOSE PEOPLE. THEY ARE KNOWN AS AGNOSTICS, ATHEISTS, DEISTS, HINDUS, AND OTHER RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS.

That is why atheism can never answer the question of the meaning of the universe.

LORD SACKS, ATHEISM DOESN'T ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION. WE ARE STILL WAITING FOR YOU TO PROVE YOUR CLAIM THAT YOU CAN ANSWER THAT QUESTION.

AND WHILE WE HAVE THE DICTIONARY OUT, YOU SHOULD LOOK UP THE DEFINITION OF ATHEISM. IT MIGHT SAVE YOU LOTS OF EMBARRASSMENT NEXT TIME, IF YOU AT LEAST UNDERSTAND WHO YOUR OPPONENTS ARE, WHAT THEY BELIEVE, AND WHAT THEY DON'T.

And without meaning we are less than human.

LORD SACKS, YOU ARE A COWARD.

IF YOU HAD SAID "ATHEISTS ARE LESS THAN HUMAN," I WOULD HAVE DISAGREED, BUT I WOULD HAVE DEFENDED YOUR RIGHT TO EXPRESS THAT BELIEF. BUT YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE GUTS TO SAY IT.

YOU SAID, "*WE* ARE LESS THAN HUMAN." WHO IS WE? YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY BE REFERRING TO BELIEVERS BECAUSE YOU CLAIM THEY DO HAVE MEANING. THEY GET THAT MEANING THROUGH THEIR GOD.

THEREFORE, YOU CAN ONLY BE REFERRING TO ATHEISTS. IT IS THEY, WHOM YOU CLAIM ARE WITHOUT MEANING, AND THEREFORE LESS THAN HUMAN. THAT WAS AN EXTREMELY DEVIOUS WAY TO WORD YOUR INSULT.

I HAVE A FINAL QUESTION FOR YOU, LORD SACKS: AS BRITAIN'S CHIEF RABBI, WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU REPLACED THE WORD *ATHEIST* WITH THE WORD *BLACK* ? "BLACKS ARE LESS THAN HUMAN." THAT'S RIGHT. YOU WOULD NO LONGER BE A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS. YOU WOULD HAVE TO GO BACK TO PERFORMING CIRCUMCISIONS OUT OF YOUR GARAGE.

MY SUMMARY

IN OUR "POLITICALLY CORRECT" WORLD ATHEISTS DO NOT ENJOY THE SAME RIGHTS TO DIGNITY THAT OTHER MINORITIES ENJOY. DON'T WORRY, THAT'S NOT A COMPLAINT. I DON'T NEED THIS LAXATIVE'S RESPECT. AS THE WORLD BECOMES EVER MORE EDUCATED AND THE MASSES SLOWLY FIND THE COURAGE TO CHALLENGE THEIR FEAR OF INVISIBLE GHOSTS, VIDEOS OF LORD SACKS AND OTHER GHOST WORSHIPPERS WILL PROVIDE COUNTLESS HOURS OF HILARITY FOR FUTURE HUMANS. EITHER THAT, OR THEY WILL JUST SHAKE THEIR HEADS IN PITY - NOT FOR HIM - BUT FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAD TO LIVE THROUGH THIS ANCIENT, SUPERSTITIOUS PERIOD FILLED WITH FOOLS WHO ENFORCED THEIR SILLY BELIEFS WITH THREATS AND VIOLENCE.

THERE. I FEEL BETTER NOW.

THE LINK TO LORD SACKS' VIDEO:

HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=HGKI87RX7O8

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

VOYAGER PROBES SET TO ENTER INTERSTELLAR SPACE

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AFTER THEY LEFT EARTH, NASA'S TWIN VOYAGER PROBES ARE NOW AT THE EDGE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM. NOT ONLY THAT, THEY'RE STILL WORKING. AND WITH EACH PASSING DAY THEY ARE BEAMING BACK A MESSAGE THAT, TO SCIENTISTS, IS BOTH UNSETTLING AND THRILLING. THE MESSAGE IS, "EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED."

VOYAGER 1 AND 2 HAVE A KNACK FOR MAKING DISCOVERIES. ON APRIL 28, 2011, NASA HELD A LIVE BRIEFING TO REFLECT ON WHAT THE VOYAGER MISSION HAS ACCOMPLISHED--AND TO PREVIEW WHAT LIES AHEAD AS THE PROBES PREPARE TO ENTER THE REALM OF INTERSTELLAR SPACE IN OUR MILKY WAY GALAXY.

THE ADVENTURE BEGAN IN THE LATE 1970S WHEN THE PROBES TOOK ADVANTAGE OF A RARE ALIGNMENT OF OUTER PLANETS FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED GRAND TOUR. VOYAGER 1 VISITED JUPITER AND SATURN, WHILE VOYAGER 2 FLEW PAST JUPITER, SATURN, URANUS AND NEPTUNE. (VOYAGER 2 IS STILL THE ONLY PROBE TO VISIT URANUS AND NEPTUNE.)

THE TOP DISCOVERIES FROM THOSE ENCOUNTERS INCLUDES THE DISCOVERY OF VOLCANOES ON JUPITER'S MOON IO; EVIDENCE FOR AN OCEAN BENEATH THE ICY SURFACE OF EUROPA; HINTS OF METHANE RAIN ON SATURN'S MOON TITAN; THE CRAZILY-TIPPED MAGNETIC POLES OF URANUS AND NEPTUNE; ICY GEYSERS ON NEPTUNE'S MOON TRITON; PLANETARY WINDS THAT BLOW FASTER AND FASTER WITH INCREASING DISTANCE FROM THE SUN.

IN 1980, VOYAGER 1 USED THE GRAVITY OF SATURN TO FLING ITSELF SLINGSHOT-STYLE OUT OF THE PLANE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM. IN 1989, VOYAGER 2 GOT A SIMILAR ASSIST FROM NEPTUNE. BOTH PROBES SET SAIL INTO THE VOID. SAILING INTO THE VOID SOUNDS LIKE A QUIET TIME, BUT THE DISCOVERIES HAVE CONTINUED.

IF YOU TURN ON A FAUCET, WHERE THE WATER HITS THE SINK, THAT'S THE SUN, AND THE THIN SHEET OF WATER FLOWING RADIALLY AWAY FROM THAT POINT IS THE SOLAR WIND. NOTE HOW THE SUN 'BLOWS A BUBBLE' AROUND ITSELF. THERE REALLY IS SUCH A BUBBLE, RESEARCHERS CALL IT THE "HELIOSPHERE," AND IT IS GARGANTUAN. MADE OF SOLAR PLASMA AND MAGNETIC FIELDS, THE HELIOSPHERE IS ABOUT THREE TIMES WIDER THAN THE ORBIT OF PLUTO. EVERY PLANET, ASTEROID, SPACECRAFT, AND LIFE FORM BELONGING TO OUR SOLAR SYSTEM LIES INSIDE.

THE VOYAGERS ARE TRYING TO GET OUT, BUT THEY'RE NOT THERE YET. TO LOCATE THEM, RETURN TO THE SINK: AS THE WATER [OR SOLAR WIND] EXPANDS, IT GETS THINNER AND THINNER, AND IT CAN'T PUSH AS HARD. ABRUPTLY, A SLUGGISH, TURBULENT RING FORMS. THAT OUTER RING IS THE HELIOSHEATH--AND THAT IS WHERE THE VOYAGERS ARE NOW.

THE HELIOSHEATH IS A VERY STRANGE PLACE, FILLED WITH A MAGNETIC FROTH NO SPACECRAFT HAS EVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE, ECHOING WITH LOW-FREQUENCY RADIO BURSTS HEARD ONLY IN THE OUTER REACHES OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM, SO FAR FROM HOME THAT THE SUN IS A MERE PINPRICK OF LIGHT.

IN JUNE 2010, VOYAGER 1 BEAMED BACK A STARTLING NUMBER: ZERO. THAT'S THE OUTWARD VELOCITY OF THE SOLAR WIND WHERE THE PROBE IS NOW. NO ONE THINKS THE SOLAR WIND HAS COMPLETELY STOPPED; IT MAY HAVE JUST TURNED A CORNER. BUT WHICH WAY? VOYAGER 1 IS TRYING TO FIGURE THAT OUT THROUGH A SERIES OF "WEATHER VANE" MANEUVERS, IN WHICH THE SPACECRAFT TURNS ITSELF IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION TO TRACK THE LOCAL BREEZE. THE OLD SPACECRAFT STILL HAS SOME MOVES LEFT, IT SEEMS.

NO ONE KNOWS EXACTLY HOW MANY MORE MILES THE VOYAGERS MUST TRAVEL BEFORE THEY "POP FREE" INTO INTERSTELLAR SPACE. MOST RESEARCHERS BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE END IS NEAR. THE HELIOSHEATH IS 3 TO 4 BILLION MILES IN THICKNESS. THAT MEANS WE'LL BE OUT WITHIN FIVE YEARS OR SO.

THERE IS PLENTY OF POWER FOR THE REST OF THE JOURNEY. BOTH VOYAGERS ARE ENERGIZED BY THE RADIOACTIVE DECAY OF A PLUTONIUM 238 HEAT SOURCE. THIS SHOULD KEEP CRITICAL SUBSYSTEMS RUNNING THROUGH AT LEAST 2020. AFTER THAT, VOYAGER WILL BECOME OUR SILENT AMBASSADOR TO THE STARS.

EACH PROBE IS FAMOUSLY EQUIPPED WITH A GOLDEN RECORD, LITERALLY, A GOLD-COATED COPPER PHONOGRAPH RECORD. IT CONTAINS 118 PHOTOGRAPHS OF EARTH; 90 MINUTES OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST MUSIC; AN AUDIO ESSAY ENTITLED SOUNDS OF EARTH (FEATURING EVERYTHING FROM BURBLING MUD POTS TO BARKING DOGS TO A ROARING SATURN 5 LIFTOFF); GREETINGS IN 55 HUMAN LANGUAGES AND ONE WHALE LANGUAGE; THE BRAIN WAVES OF A YOUNG WOMAN IN LOVE; AND SALUTATIONS FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS. A TEAM LED BY CARL SAGAN ASSEMBLED THE RECORD AS A MESSAGE TO POSSIBLE EXTRATERRESTRIAL CIVILIZATIONS THAT MIGHT ENCOUNTER THE SPACECRAFT.

A BILLION YEARS FROM NOW, WHEN EVERYTHING ON EARTH WE'VE EVER MADE HAS CRUMBLED INTO DUST, WHEN THE CONTINENTS HAVE CHANGED BEYOND RECOGNITION AND OUR SPECIES IS UNIMAGINABLY ALTERED OR EXTINCT, THE VOYAGER RECORD WILL SPEAK FOR US.

SOME PEOPLE NOTE THAT THE CHANCE OF ALIENS FINDING THE GOLDEN RECORD IS FANTASTICALLY REMOTE. THE VOYAGER PROBES WON'T COME WITHIN A FEW LIGHT YEARS OF ANOTHER STAR FOR SOME 40,000 YEARS. WHAT ARE THE ODDS OF MAKING CONTACT UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES?

ON THE OTHER HAND, WHAT ARE THE ODDS OF A RACE OF PRIMATES EVOLVING TO SENTIENCE, DEVELOPING SPACEFLIGHT, AND SENDING THE SOUND OF BARKING DOGS INTO THE COSMOS? EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED, INDEED.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

DROMEDARY HUMP (BORN 1949) 62 YEARS OLD.

HUMP IS THE PSEUDONYM OF THE AUTHOR OF THE ATHEIST CAMEL CHRONICLES. HE SERVED IN VIETNAM IN THE SIXTIES, THEN RETURNED TO COMPLETE HIS B.A. IN PSYCHOLOGY, AND ALSO STUDIED RELIGION. HE RETIRED FROM A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN RETAIL AND BEGAN A NEW CAREER BATTLING AGAINST THE LIES BEING SPREAD BY EVANGELICAL CREATIONISTS. HIS WEB SITE CAN BE FOUND AT:

HTTP://ATHEISTCAMEL.BLOGSPOT.COM/

"IF YOU’RE FACE TO FACE WITH ME AND HAVE THE URGE TO SUGGEST

THAT MY LOVE OF REASON, AND REJECTION OF RELIGIOUS DELUSION

DIMINISHES MY LOVE OF COUNTRY, BE SURE TO TAKE YOUR GLASSES OFF FIRST.

YOU WON’T HAVE TIME AFTERWARD."