

Different Kinds of Mushrooms

By Katie Skurja

“Is there any way for me to be confident that what I experienced was from God?”



If, by being confident one means 100% certainty, the answer is no.

The question was asked by a student in my class on inner healing. In a discussion about understanding God’s heart for us, I invited the students to put themselves into the story of the Prodigal Son as the son walking timidly up the road to ask the father if he could return as a servant. Upon reflection, the student wrote:

During the Prodigal Son exercise this week I saw myself walking back to the father carrying my sin neatly packed in a compact suitcase. As the father came running, I felt like I was supposed to leave my sin-case on the ground behind me, but I just could not let it go. As the father embraced me, I wrapped my arms around him still holding my suitcase of sin. He whispered in my ear, "It is alright, you can set down the case when you are ready." The effect of that message was powerful but as the imagery ended. I still had a tight hold on my sin-case. Was this actually communion with the divine?

The question behind the question is this: *Can God really be that good?*

Sadly, it is all-too-common for believers to not trust the goodness of God: *How do I know if I am being deceived by darkness disguised as an angel of light?*



The process of discerning whether something is of God or not is much the same as how a wildlife biologist would discern between edible mushrooms and poisonous ones.

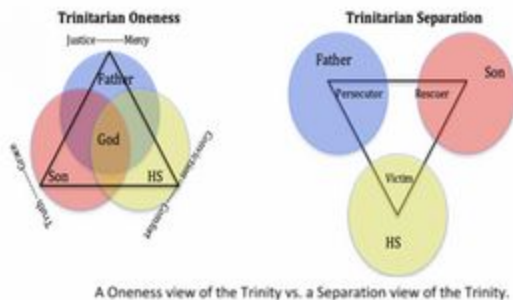
If you want to have a safe and enlightening experience about mushrooms, you might want to have someone like Paul Stamets with you. His specialty is in mycology and he is passionate about mushrooms. He has discovered many different ways mushrooms can help heal not only people, but also the planet. For example, he discovered ways mushrooms can be used to clean up toxic waste areas and how they can be enlisted in the eradication of carpenter ants without the use of pesticides.[1]

Most people would not trust an “expert” who has read a lot about mushrooms, but never tasted and seen that mushrooms are good. Nor would one trust an expert who had repeatedly gotten sick from eating bad mushrooms or led others to their peril by faulty discernment. Some mushrooms are so poisonous they can cause serious illness and even death.

If a person had a lot of knowledge about mushrooms, but considers all mushrooms to be disgusting or worthless, you might not feel comfortable trusting the expertise or guidance of such an “expert.” Not all experts are created equal. The Pharisees knew a great deal about the scriptures, the law, and the moral codes of the day, but didn’t recognize the Messiah in front of them.[2]

A theology that starts in Genesis 3, claiming “sinner” as the primary identity of humanity, is going to be toxic to the soul. It leaves us believing we are nothing more than a pile of dung at the core of our being, unworthy of God’s presence. It leads to a low view of humanity, denying the proclamation by God in Genesis 1 about the ones created in the image and likeness of the Creator: *Very good*.

A theology that divides the union of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into some form of good cop/bad cop schtick will also be toxic to the soul. In some versions of this view of God, the Father purportedly loves you, but can’t stand to look at you. In his wrath, he wants to kill you for your imperfection. Like a mother standing in between an angry, abusive father and the cowering children, the Son takes a beating for us. It makes for a perfect unholy union of the Drama Triangle with the Father as the Persecutor, Son as the Rescuer, and we mere mortals are the Victims.[3] There is usually no room for the Holy Spirit in such versions, so it relegated to living in the historical accounts of the days of Pentecost.



The moral of the story: Don't eat toxic mushrooms.

But just because some mushrooms are toxic, it doesn't mean all mushrooms are bad. Some are not only very tasty, but they can heal you.

This leads us back to the question at the outset: How do I discern if what I experienced was from God or not? Is it really ok to trust my experience when I sensed an invitation from the

Father to lay my carefully guarded satchel of sin down, freeing up my arms to fully experience the loving embrace?

Though there is no certainty in the process of discernment, we are not left to play a game of Russian roulette, blindly choosing between what may be delicious and what may be deadly. In the person of Jesus Christ, the Living Word, we have an expert guide to help us along the way. The written word, the lives and writings of the saints, and the faithful companions in the journey can all assist in the discernment process. What evidence do we find in scripture and what has stood the test of time to help us discern the delicious mushrooms from the toxic ones?

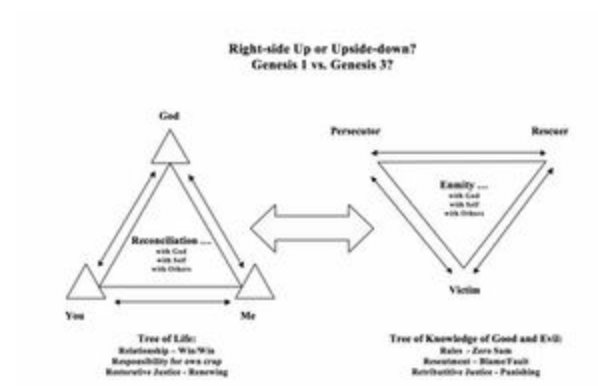
Some questions we can ask to help us discern:

- Does the experience cause your heart to open (river of living water)? Or does it cause you to shut down (parched and barren)?
- Is it an experience of consolation (movement of God)?^[4] Or desolation (movement away from God)?
- Is the experience life-giving? Or is it life-sucking?
- Does the experience make you fall more in love with God, humanity, and creation? Or does it embitter you towards God, humanity, and creation?
- Does the experience cause you to have more compassion for yourself and others? Or less?
- Does the experience line up with the person of Jesus as we see in the gospels? Or does the experience contradict the person and teachings of Jesus?
- Does what I hear sound like the Father as taught to us by Jesus through the parables, his life, and other teachings? Or does it sound like the voice of an accuser?
- Does the experience open you up to the fruit of the Spirit (peace, joy, love, patience, etc.)?^[5] Or does it provoke works of the flesh: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, etc.?^[6]
- Does the experience move you toward forgiveness? Or does it reinforce bitterness?
- Does it lead me towards reconciliation, renewing, and restoration? Or does it bring an experience of enmity as evidenced by a sense of shame, resentment, and strife?

If the answer to the first part of each question above is *yes*, chances are pretty good you are encountering the living God. If the answer is *no* to the first

part, but affirmative to the second, don't eat the mushrooms. They are poisonous.[7]

In all things related to God, we can use the lens of the Two Trees to help us discern what is life-giving and what is life-sucking.



Notes:

1 See TED Talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/paul_stamets_6_ways_mushrooms_can_save_the_world?language=en or *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Save the World*

2 John 5:39-40; Matthew 15:8; Isaiah 29:13

3 For more understanding on the Drama Triangle see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v61wINGhPo8>

4 Not all consolation feels good. For example, becoming aware of the ways one's actions have caused another suffering is a type of painful consolation. By contrast, there is also a form of false consolation that is really desolation when darkness is presented as light. For example, the intoxication of an affair can feel like consolation, enticing the person to believe it must be of God.

5 Galatians 5:22-23

6 Galatians 5:19-21

7 Brad Jersak pointed out the following: Note that the most poisonous mushrooms in my area are actually called "the Destroying Angel" (some translations of the Bible use this term, though it's literally just Destroyer, to describe the 10th plague. ...maybe that's what killed the firstborn). The destroying angel (*Amanita bisporigera*) and the death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) account for the overwhelming majority of deaths due to mushroom poisoning. The toxin responsible for this is amatoxin, which inhibits RNA polymerase II and III.