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The Spiritual and the Scientific

The aliens have tasked both Roy and the scientists a challenge to prove that they are worthy of meeting the aliens. Roy’s challenge is whether he can give up his life, family, and worldly belongings in order to dedicate himself and join the aliens. The spiritual is not linked with any particular religion in the film but the analog is clear. While the scientist challenge is to prove to the aliens that the human race is scientifically advanced enough to join the aliens in the cosmos. The scientists travel all across the globe hunting for clues or hints that they think will help them in their search. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* shows when people dedicate themselves to either science or the spiritual, they can achieve the same goals. The film does this by following Roy’s spiritual journey to find the aliens being portrayed as omniscient, able to defy gravity, and always associated with blinding light while also following the scientists journey where they must hunt for clues, decipher codes, and navigate a new language through music.

Throughout the film Roy has multiple moments where his faith is tested and he must decide what is really important to him. Roy’s first encounter with the aliens is after he becomes lost trying to navigate the town in his truck. This is where Roy first learns of the higher power that is the aliens. Roy yells out “Help, I’m lost!” in to the night and a short couple of minutes later an alien ship appears above Roy’s truck shining a beam of light down on him. Roy called for help and the aliens responded. This shows that the aliens are either always listening or aware of everything that goes on. The alien ship quickly fly’s away and Roy chases after, allowing the ship to guide him through the night. Roy abandons the job he was supposed to be doing in order to follow the aliens because he finds them much more important and interesting. Afterwards, Roy has no problem finding his way home to his family because the aliens have guided him back to civilization. Later in the film, Roy is seen multiple times sculpting a mountain like figure out of anything he can get his hands on, clay, shaving cream, mashed potatoes, uprooted flowers from the garden, in an attempt to recreate the image that he sees in his head but can’t identify. Roy continues to do this despite making his family progressively angrier with him, so much so that his wife decides to take the kids to her sisters. While his family is gone, Roy sees Devil’s Tower on the tv and realizes that is the place he is being summoned to and decides to leave his family behind in search for the alien ship that he saw earlier. Roy making the decision to leave his family behind is another test of his faith to see if he is willing to completely dedicate himself to reaching the aliens. When Roy is in the helicopter about to be taken out of the quarantine zone, Roy rips off his gas mask despite being told the air is unbreathable. Roy does this because he has put his full faith in to the fact that the aliens are real and that this is where they want him to be. Despite the many challenges Roy faced on his journey he managed to stay focused and followed what he believed to be true.

Just like Roy, the scientists in the film go on an adventure searching for the aliens but their journey leads them across the globe searching for scientific clues. The scientist journey begins by first discovering the missing planes in Mexico, then finding the Cotopaxi in Mongolia, and finally hearing the monks singing in India. After hearing the pattern of notes from the monks in India, the scientists begin broadcasting the musical combination. What they receive is a set of six numbers that they eventually decipher to be a set of coordinates that point to Devil’s Tower, Wyoming. Unlike Roy who had an irresistible urge to travel to Devil’s Tower, the scientists are required to solve a puzzle created by the aliens in order to prove they are worthy of meeting the aliens. In this case the scientists want to prove that humans are smart enough to be able to understand and communicate with the aliens. When the scientists arrive at Devil’s Tower they set up a small research facility that allows them to observe and try to communicate with the aliens using the musical pattern. The scientist begin by playing the musical pattern to communicate with the alien ship but it responds with an increasingly more complex rhythm and notes. The scientist used a computer to interface with the aliens. By doing this they again prove that they are worthy because they have created a computer to interface with a more advanced race. Because the scientist represent the human race, they send some of their own with the aliens to live in the cosmos. Engel says, “the film is about breaking down barriers – national, linguistic, physical, and bureaucratic – in pursuit of knowledge” (Engel) and you can see that in the way the scientist are made up of people from multiple nationalities, speak multiple languages, and travel to many countries. The scientist are able to complete the challenges put on them by the aliens and have such proven themselves worthy.

The film follows Roy and the scientist journeys and struggles as they travel and make their way to the final encounter. Even though both Roy and the scientists followed different paths to get to the final encounter with the aliens, they both were able to complete their goals of meeting the aliens. Because both Roy and the scientists were able to fully dedicate themselves to the aliens, they both were greatly rewarded at the final encounter.

Works Cited

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