

1997 07 22 Tuesday Leonard Nimoy Star Trek

LN: "The center of the Earth. Science calls it the core. Legend calls it hell. Somewhere between the two lies man's imagination. It is man's blessing to explore his world, and his curse that he is never satisfied with what he finds. Astonishingly, even as we probe the edge of our solar system, we have only penetrated our own planet's crust a handful of miles.

The Earth itself poses a formidable obstacle. What scientists call the Earth's core begins approximately eighteen hundred (1800) miles straight down and reaches a temperature of nine thousand (9000) degrees Fahrenheit and its molten, nickelized center, a scalding link to our cosmic creation.

The center of the earth is one of mankind's greatest untapped mysteries – hypnotically enticing and truly elusive. One hundred thirty (130) years ago Jules Verne fantasized that the center of the Earth was not an inferno, but rather a habitable place – a place that could be explored, and explore it he did. In 1864 – with words – and now we will explore it as well – with words and sounds – as we embark on a *Journey to the Center of the Earth*."

AB: "In a moment, Leonard Nimoy. Hello everybody, I'm Art Bell. This is Coast to Coast AM, and what you just heard came from Leonard Nimoy's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* [a new CD/audio now available]. He also has available *The Time Machine* ... In a moment, Leonard Nimoy – here for only a very short time, unfortunately – so we will pummel him with questions."

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"And now – I shouldn't have to introduce him – this is Leonard Nimoy. Leonard, welcome to the program!"

LN: "Thank you. Hi!"

AB: "Hi. We have such a short time that I feel obligated to literally – to pummel you with questions. Hah, hah, hah!"

LN: "Okay, go!"

AB: "The character Mr. Spock came along at a time in our country of peace, love, Woodstock, sex, drugs, rock and roll, let it all hang out ... and yet Spock was the picture of the very essence of self-control, self-denial, self-governance ... How could that character become such a hero in such an uncontrolled atmosphere?"

LN: “Well, that’s a great question! I think for one thing the time was one where so many people were becoming cynical about government, authority figures ... It was clear that bureaucracy was not responding to the individual, and the war in Vietnam was ongoing in spite of the fact that more and more and more people every day believed it was wrong – we all believed in supporting our country, but we believed we shouldn’t be in that war. And here came a character, who had dignity and integrity and intelligence. I think the sense was that this was a period that you could believe and count on, that wouldn’t be involved with hypocrisy, duplicity ...”

AB: “There was a hunger then?”

LN: “Yeah, oh yeah ... I think so – he served a great hunger ... yeah, absolutely. I think too, we were ready for the idea of a friendly alien.”

AB: “Well, that’s right. How do you feel by the way about the role itself? You’ll be Mr. Spock of course, forever. Do you ever get resentful of that?”

LN: “No. I’m very comfortable with it. That’s why the last book that I wrote *I Am Spock* is titled the way that it is. I’ve really come full circle with it, I’m totally comfortable.”

AB: “Do you think that Gene Roddenberry would approve of the repeat direction usage of original characters ... that have been now exhaustively repeated [and] so many other knock-offs?”

LN: “Well, I don’t think Gene had any problem with perpetuating *Star Trek*. I think he would always enjoy the idea of the success of the franchise. But I do think that he would be at least interested in seeing the thematic ideas were strong.”

“That’s what *Star Trek* really is about when it’s at its best – is the thematic idea. It should be great entertainment, great adventure, but it should be about something.”

AB: “Yes, and *Star Trek* always was. Is it moving away from that slowly with the knock-offs?”

LN: “Well, I gotta be honest with ya. I don’t watch enough of it to pass judgment. I feel very good about what we did. I feel very good about the TV shows and the movies that I was involved with. I’ve seen *Generations* and I’ve seen *Contact* – I’m not really sure that they are stories that I would have set out to do as major motion pictures.”

AB: “So your reaction to *Contact* was not ...”

LN: "I think it was very well done. Very well executed. I'm just not ..."

AB: "Where was the story?"

LN: "I wasn't blown away with the story." ...

AB: "With respect to other television programs, movies, and so forth, has anything really come close to the genre of *Star Trek*?"

LN: "What an interesting question! I saw a few episodes of *Outer Limits* that I thought were very interesting. I think *The X-Files* has a kind of internal light going on, it has a certain kind of style, it has an attitude – it has an attitude – and I think that's very important. I think *Babylon 5* has an attitude that works at times. That's pretty much it as far as I'm concerned ... in my range of experience."

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AB: "A very trivial question, but important to me nevertheless: In the early episodes, years actually, the women – the Ensigns – all had these wonderful uniforms that in later years changed to *pants!*"

LN: (laughs).

AB: "Who did that?"

LN: "I don't know, but you're touching on a very interesting point. ... Science fiction for a long time was a sub-sub-genre. It was considered a distant cousin of important work. In fact, when I started acting in science fiction – forty-five (45) years ago, I believe – in a Saturday afternoon serial called *Zombies of the Stratosphere*, science fiction was a genre in which you saw monsters, you saw people in strange outfits who came from other worlds, and you saw ladies who were scantily dressed. And there was always some sexy aspect to it. And that was what you saw in the early days of *Star Trek* ...

And then later on I guess, political correctness and feminism came along on the scene, and there was a question whether or not these women shouldn't be wearing more clothes in the professional situations. And that's what happened."

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AB: "Where did the idea of the all-famous Vulcan mind control, mind-meld come from?"

- LN: Gene Roddenberry came up with the idea to use a mind-meld to replace a tedious investigation scene. It was “a very useful tool for the Spock character.”
- AB: “What was it like to [have Spock] be killed off?”
- LN: “I had a tough time with it ... I really thought this might be the last [*Star Trek*] film, so why not go out in a blaze of glory saving the *Enterprise* and dying in the process ... ? But by the time we were shooting the final scene, I had the sense that the movie was gonna work, and I thought if this movie is as good as I think it is, there are going to be more – and I began to have second thoughts about what I had done.” But the producer asked me to give them a thread to pick up, in case there was another movie, and I came up with the ‘Remember’ mind-meld with De [sic] Kelly ... ‘If there’s another movie, don’t forget me!’”
- AB: A lot of people have written me to ask you about *In Search Of* ... Any chance of bringing that back?
- LN: “*In Search Of* was a pleasant surprise to me. Again, I thought that maybe two (2) or three (3) seasons would be the stretch for the show” We did seven (7) years – one hundred forty-four (144) episodes, and it became the model or basis for such shows as followed.
- AB: Presidential candidate “Alan Keyes ... said ‘*Star Trek* in many ways personifies the spirit of what NASA used to be than does the current NASA.’ Would you agree with that?”
- LN: “Interesting. I wasn’t aware of that. I think it’s true ... I think just this last week that we’re seeing a revival of interest in NASA. I think they’ve had an enormous success with the rover on Mars, and I think that they have gotten out of a kind of bureaucratic bind and gotten into an adventurous spirit that’s captured the imagination again. And it that’s true, and if they can keep that kind of sense of adventure going, I think that they might build on it successfully. There’s still a tremendous interest in what’s out there, and I think NASA is the organization that is best set up to do the exploring.”
- AB: “Building greater interest than ever in what’s out there ... How much chance do you think there really is that we will be contacted? There’s so much media attention – it’s almost as if we are being prepared!”
- LN: “Yeah, you know, when we were making the *Star Trek* series – in the middle of the first season, some people came to me and they said: ‘You may not know it, but you have been chosen as a kind of vessel to carry

information to this civilization to help prepare this society for the coming of another civilization – for alien arrival. And your character is a character designed to educate this public that there's nothing to fear. That it's possible to interact with other species. I said, 'Okay ... it's okay with me if that's the case.'" ...

AB: "Right."

LN: "The Carl Sagan movie that just opened – the movie based on Carl Sagan's book *Contact* just opened ... It's a flawed movie – but I think one of the most important moments in the movie is when Jodie Foster tells us the numbers:

There are something like four billion (4,000,000,000) stars in our galaxy alone – *in our galaxy alone* – and there are billions of other galaxies. Each of those stars are potential suns just like ours. And that means that if one out of every million of those stars has planets around it and if one out of every million of those has some kind of life on it, then the numbers tell us that the chances are very, very great that there is life out there someplace."

AB: "But the distances are immense and the technology involved to get here would dictate that they would be far, far ahead of us."

LN: "Well, not necessarily. They might be far ahead of us, they might be parallel to us – we don't know that for sure. But you're right, the chances are they're far ahead of us ... yeah."

AB: "So the question is: Whether you think that beings – not just humans – evolved toward or away from violence ... an important question if we're going to meet up with somebody?"

LN: "Well, that's always a question ... You know, the first thing that we would like to know is how did you get through the technological phase of your civilization and survive? How did you survive all the discoveries of atomic weaponry and atomic power, and that kind of thing without killing each other?"

AB: "Yes, yes ..."

LN: "The assumption is that we'll be able to ask these questions and they'll educate us and help us get through it. It won't necessarily work that way. ... It may take an enormous amount of time just for us to learn how to communicate with them, let alone to get information from them. The assumption always is that they have traveled the same path that we are traveling and that they may be a hundred or a thousand years ahead of

us, but that they have gone through the same experience, and chances are that is not necessarily true.”

AB: “Well, recalling the prime directive – if you look at what we have done here on Earth, you know, reality of when we have met people who have been isolated from the world until one sudden day when they’re found in the middle of a jungle somewhere – we destroy them.”

LN: “Yeah, right.”

AB: “On a lighter note ... not too many people know that you dabbled with music, do they?”

LN: “Well, music has always been a love of mine. ... I must have done about six (6) albums.” ... I’ve toured the country doing musical theatre: ‘*Fiddler on the Roof, My Fair Lady, The King and I, Camelot ...*’ I had a great time! I loved doing it!”

AB: “And then the question ... is: How do you ‘get a life’? You are so busy – so many demands on your time ... How do you make time for life?”

LN: “Well, let me say this: When I came to California, I was eighteen (18) years old. I left Boston [and] came to California to be an actor. For the first fifteen (15) years that I spent working at building a career, I was always wanting more opportunity – I was always struggling to get more work. When it all came together for me and *Star Trek* started, and I haven’t been out of work since – and particularly when I had a couple of hits directing movies – and all of that came together, suddenly ... there’s a tremendous amount of pressure that builds up to do this, to do that, and people would be happy to keep you busy twenty-four (24) hours a day ...”

AB: “That’s right.”

LN: “I don’t resent it, because of the time spent wanting more and needing more, and knowing what it’s like being out of work.”

AB: “So you just make rules?”

LN: “Yeah, exactly. I try to keep a level head about it and I try to help people to understand that a man does not live by work alone!” (laughs).

AB: “That’s it ... Leonard, that’s it – in more ways than one! That’s a half hour ...”

LN: “Oh really?”

AB: "Yeah, that's half an hour."

LN: "Ohh, too fast."

AB: "Too fast is right. So can we do this again some time?"

LN: "Yeah, I'd love to." [JS note: Sadly, they never did another interview].

AB: "All right. Leonard Nimoy, thanks a million! I wish I had hours ... Take care!"

LN: "Thank you."

AB: "That's Leonard Nimoy."

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