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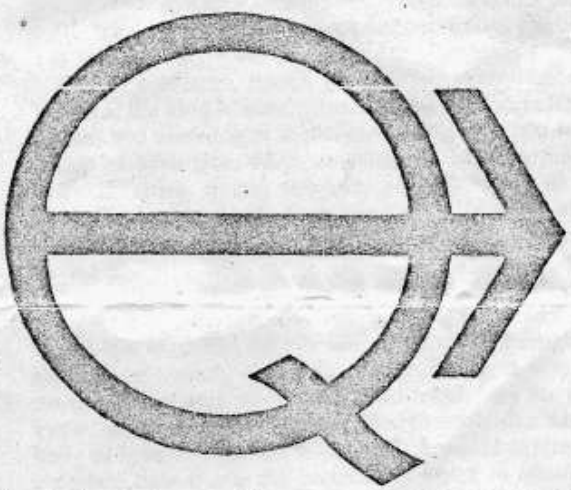

by Theodore Sturgeon

I give you this symbol. I want you to wear it between your eyeball and your eyelid and look at the world through it. I want to do this, and I want you to do what I say, because you are not the crawling blob in that big bucket of ooze which, down deep, you think you are: you are Mankind. That isn't the best thing in the Universe to be, but it can be. It can be. It will be, if you do what I tell you. All I ask of you is that you hear me out.

Here is the symbol: Q

What it means is: *Ask the next question.*

Every advance this species has ever made is the result of someone, somewhere, looking at his world, his neighborhood, his neighbor, his cave, or himself, and asking that next question. Every deadly error this species has committed, every sin against itself and its high destiny, is the result of not asking the next question, or of not listening to those who do ask it.

That next question — Q — is nothing more than a signboard which points toward the truth; the absolute, furthermost irreducible truth. There are not many absolutes, but we know one thing about them all: they are not complicated. More on that later.

First, an example of Q in action. Let's take something that has filled countless thousands of newspaper inches, incomputable hours of argument and temper, a rich crop of injustice and stupidity, and has wasted a great deal more time than it is worth — the pornography question. We'll start with the wrong "We've got to get that filth off the newsstands!"

This is quite enough, in many communities, to gain a majority support right now. "Right-thinking people" gather up their axe-handles and burning torches and rally round what looks to them like ultimate and self-defining truth. Now we ask that next question:

Q: Why?

A.: Because it can get into the hands of young people.

At this point, for many people, doors close, shutters bang, and all the lights go out inside. But that answer isn't an answer, as you can discover by asking the next question:

Q: What happens if it gets into the hands of young people?

A.: It might arouse them.

Slam. Bang. Click . . . but wait. Isn't there another question? Sure!

Q: What happens if they get aroused?

This will probably get you a variety of answers, and you'll forgive me if I don't pursue them in this question-and-answer format, because I haven't much space and I mean to pack it as full as I can. But you get the pattern: Every time anyone answers that next question, that Q to see if there isn't another one which can be asked. In this instance you can run the thing down until you find out on the highest scientific (and moral-ethical) authority that it doesn't harm anyone to get sexually stimulated with no outlet; that it happens all the time to virtually everyone; that the list of things which stimulate one person or another at various times are by no means limited to what one finds in the girlie books, but include such things as pieces of string, wash on the line, sunsets, music, dogs howling, and a thousand other things, and if you got rid of all that filth you'd find yourself on a desert or in a cell — where, probably, your imagination would do a whole heap worse than any professional pornographer; further, that if the young person is stimulated to find an outlet it is, in a vast majority of cases, masturbation, which does *not* make green hairs grow in the palms of your hands, which does *not* cause pimples, and in the case of hyperactive individuals leaves them *less* likely to commit rape than more — especially if they are free of guilt about it. How do I know all this? By getting my questions answered, and by unfailingly asking that one more. If you do the same, you'll find the references, the carefully performed and documented experiments, the careful analyses and cross-checked conclusions. Let me here caution you never to abandon the Q technique when it leads you to a conclusion you like. Ask that one more question again, and ask it again . . . really, the only time you won't be able to ask it will be when you're up against a truth so basic and so simple that the question can't be asked.

And I've never had an answer that was that close to the truth — not ever. But in looking for it I've gotten rid of an awful lot of well-known facts that just ain't so. It makes you very light-hearted, very sure, and rather hard to hurt.

Now about basics and simplicity: complicated and subtle things can be fascinating and overwhelming and they can change your whole life and the face of the world, but if they are complicated they are not (in the most important sense) important. Now here's a simple basic: living things change. Growth is only one of the many kinds of change; what you can be sure of is that anything