

**THE MYSTIC'S VISION:
ESSENTIAL ARTICLES
OF SWAMI ABHAYANANDA**

Volume Three

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INTRODUCTION

The essays, poems, and other writings that make up this little book were not originally composed as parts of a larger work, but were independent pieces written on the spur of the moment according to unique moments of inspiration occurring over the course of several decades. Each short piece first appeared independently on my website, “The Mystic’s Vision” (www.themysticsvision.com). But I saw that these various brief writings centered around only a few mystical or metaphysical topics, and that these short pieces could easily be consolidated, combined to form a broader informative treatment of each of those few important metaphysical topics. And so, each of these metaphysical topics then became the chapters of this little book, each chapter containing an expanded treatment of that specific topic. And now, rather than search through all my writings for those that speak to a specific mystical or metaphysical topic, you can now easily find those writings that reflect my best thoughts about a particular topic simply by searching the chapter headings of this collection.

It is my sincere wish that this collection of my combined reflections will prove to be a beneficial contribution to your own spiritual understanding. Blessings on you all.

—Swami Abhayananda, February 18, 2019

25. IS THE WORLD AN OBJECTIVE PHENOMENON?

**A Collection of Articles from The Mystic's Vision
by Swami Abhayananda**

**Composed and dedicated to the Public Domain 5-2-19
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In the 1960's, when I was first learning about Nondual Vedanta, much of the material that I encountered came from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, and specifically from the Vedanta Society which represented that tradition. Swami Prabhavananda of the Hollywood Vedanta Society wrote a number of influential books, as did Swami Nikhilananda of the New York Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center; and both of them propounded the Advaita Vedanta of the 9th century acharya, Shankara, whose philosophy Swami Vivekananda had espoused and which interpretation of Nondual Vedanta was inherited by his Vedanta Society followers. As an informal student of Swamis Prabhavananda and Nikhilananda, I too was heavily influenced by this interpretation of Shankara's. Unfortunately, that philosophy was heavily tinged with what I later realized was a major fallacy.

This Article, which addresses that fallacy, originated in 1991, was revised in 2014, and today incorporates some excerpts from several different essays written at different times in the past few years; I have pulled these excerpts together in an effort to construct a coherent statement of my position regarding the question of whether the world that we experience actually exists 'out there' or simply resides only in our minds.

Part One

Elsewhere, I have described what I believe to be the method by which God created the universe as an emanation of high-frequency Light, which subsequently converted into material wave-particles that formed the atoms and molecules that constitute the many forms of the universe. It must be recognized, however, that not everyone believes that the universe was 'created', either by a divine Light or any other means. There are some

thinkers like Shankaracharya, the 9th century Indian philosopher, and his late neo-Advaita counterparts, such as Sri Nisargadatta and Ramesh Balsekar, who deny that an objective universe exists, i.e., they deny that there is really a universe that is created by God and perceived by everyone. They believe, rather, that the one divine Consciousness-Bliss produces in each and every mind the power to create an illusion of a universe that does not actually exist anywhere but in the mind. An excellent summary of this philosophy may be found in an online book by one of the advocates of this philosophy, Stanley Sobottka, the late university physicist. Professor Sobottka was highly enamored of this philosophy as it was espoused by Shankara and more recently by Sri Nisargadatta and his disciple, Ramesh Balsekar, and he embodied that philosophy in his online book, called *A Course In Consciousness* (www.courseinconsciousness.org).

Does The World Exist Only In Our Minds?

The philosophical position that the world exists only in our minds has a long and storied history, and it has considerable appeal to even the wisest of men. The Irishman, George (Bishop) Berkeley (1675-1753), made a brilliant case for that philosophy in the eighteenth century and aroused great interest in what came to be called “subjective idealism.” Some interpretations of Buddhism also adopt that position, and there is, of course, the philosophy of Shankara, the great Vedantic acharya, whose system is referred to in India as *vivartavada*, or “the philosophy of superimposition.” Shankara holds that we perceive in ourselves only the pure Consciousness known as Brahman, but by God’s power of illusion (*maya*) placed within our individual minds, we project or superimpose upon that perception an image of the phenomenal universe.

This idea that the world exists only in our minds is a legitimate idea, deserving of consideration, and it's based on many prudent and scientific observations, but there are, as I've pointed out, some major objections to it. We need to approach this cosmological hypothesis as we would approach any other universal genesis theory: we must ask, “If the world exists only in our minds, where did this mind come from? Did I create this mind? Did I create myself.” If by “I,” I mean this individualized human entity, then, of course, I must answer, “No. I did not create my mind. I did not create myself.” However, if by “I,” I mean the one eternal Consciousness, the Divine Mind, then “Yes. I, the Eternal, the Uncreated, created this mind.” When we speak of “the mind,” we are ordinarily referring to our own

individual mind, which is exclusive to the unique bodily entity that we regard as our distinctly personal self. Sometimes, we refer to the individual mind as the *soul* or *jiva*.

Shankara asserts that it is the individual jivas who superimpose the world upon Brahman, but isn't Brahman the ultimate power and underlying reality of every jiva? And isn't He therefore, in fact, doing the superimposing? And isn't it He who is doing everything within that superimposed world as well?

I and others, including most of the traditional Upanishadic rishis, as well as the author of *The Bhagavad Gita*, hold to the opinion that it is the one eternal Consciousness (God) who has created an apparently objective universe through His Power of Creation (variously called Shakti, Maya, Ishvara). It is a theory based on the mystic's experience of an eternal and universally pervasive Mind or Consciousness that "creates" or projects an entire universe within Itself. According to this theory, that one Consciousness produces within Itself by Its Creative Power, a very powerful eruption of high-frequency electromagnetic energy, which transforms into material wave-particles, which wave-particles then aggregate into the various 'material' forms that constitute the phenomenal universe.

The resulting universe of forms is enlivened and made sentient by virtue of its existence within the one living and all-pervading Consciousness that is God. The Spirit of God exists therefore within each living sentient creature as its eternal soul. Each manifested soul is associated with a physical body and lives and moves and has its being in that one Spirit. Though every soul knows that the all-pervading Spirit is its own being, its own reality, it sometimes refers to that Spirit as 'God' or 'our Father.'

And so, the metaphysical question debated is: 'Does God create in our minds a faculty of imagination that creates an illusory universe of objects in our perception that does not really exist, OR has God, the one divine Consciousness, created, by His power of Maya, the universal illusion of an objective universe which is made of His Light-energy, and which merely appears to our senses to be substantial and tangible?' It should be noted that both of these theories lead ultimately to the same overall metaphysical conclusion: They both assert that the appearance of a phenomenal universe is produced by the power of the one Consciousness-Bliss; and that, *whether* we live in an objective universe or a subjective one, that universe is essentially illusory and that the one and only permanent reality is the

nondual Consciousness-Bliss (referred to as ‘God’), which is our own eternal Identity.

And similarly, there is a question of whether or not individual souls exist. There are some who believe in the temporal existence and evolution of individual souls; and there are those who believe that there are no such individual souls but that it is always only the undivided nondual Consciousness-Bliss alone that we are and which we misinterpret as a soul. And here again, whether or not individual souls actually exist in the temporal universe is ultimately irrelevant; for in both theories, our only permanent and everlasting reality and Identity is the one Divine Consciousness-Bliss, and the existence and evolution of transient individual souls or the non-existence of such individual souls does not alter that ultimate fact.

Perhaps that is as close as we humans can come to resolution of this controversy, but let us investigate further with some relevant background information:

The Mystical Tradition of Vedanta

The people of India call their indigenous religion, the *sanatana dharma* or ‘the eternal religion.’ It existed even before the Aryan incursion, before the Vedas. From the Vedas came the philosophy of *Vedanta*, which means ‘the end of the Vedas’, a philosophy embodied in the writings of some ancient sages, which writings are referred to as the *Upanishads*. The philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, or Nondual Vedanta, was beautifully expressed in the Upanishads, written by some nameless sages perhaps a thousand years before the Current Era. The *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of God) was written ca. 500 B.C.E., as part of a larger epic tale, the *Mahabharata*, (reputedly by the legendary sage, Vyasa), as a dialogue between Krishna (represented as an incarnation of God) and Arjuna, a warrior on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. And it is Krishna who, speaking as the Divinity itself, teaches to Arjuna the perennial philosophy, explaining that in His Divine unmanifest state He brings forth the entire universe, which he describes as his ‘lower’ nature; and He manifests this ‘lower nature’, the material universe, in a cyclic fashion, periodically creating, then dissolving it:

"At the end of a cycle, all beings, O son of Kunti, enter into My *Prakriti* [His creative Power], and at the beginning of a cycle, I generate them all again. Controlling My own *Prakriti*, I send

forth, again and again, all this multitude of beings, helpless under the sway of Maya." ¹

But, as He tells Arjuna, He contains a 'higher nature' [*Purusha*] that is not subject to this cyclic manifestation:

"But different from it, know, O mighty Arjuna, My higher nature—the indwelling Spirit by which the universe is sustained.² ...By Me, in my unmanifest form, are all things in this universe pervaded." ³

Pervading the material universe, He (*Brahman*) is the invisible Spirit, or soul, in all:

"The Lord (Krishna) said, Brahman is the Imperishable, the Supreme. Dwelling in each body, Brahman is called the individual soul." ⁴

This soul, says Krishna, "is indivisible, and yet It is, as it were divided among beings."⁵

"It is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain. Only the bodies, of which this eternal, imperishable, incomprehensible Self is the indweller, are said to have an end. That by which all this is pervaded know to be imperishable. None can cause the destruction of That which is immutable."⁶

He goes on to explain to Arjuna that this indestructible soul or Self is not limited to one embodiment only:

"Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, so does it pass into another body. Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new."⁷

Much later, the illustrious teacher (*acharya*), Shankara, who flourished sometime between the seventh and ninth century C.E., attempted a reformulation of *Advaita* (Nondual) Vedanta, and in the process, introduced some ideas which are controversial to this day. Appearing to follow in the

Upanishadic tradition, Shankara also spoke of the ultimate reality as *Brahman*. In the Advaita Vedanta of the Upanishads as well as in the philosophy of Shankara, Brahman is regarded as the unmanifest Absolute who is the ground of all existence, but who is inactive. His active creative aspect is known as *Ishvara*, who is regarded as the Lord and ruler of Maya and its manifest world-appearance, including all living souls. Brahman is the conscious Ground and Source, while *Ishvara* serves an executive and creative function. *Ishvara* can be prayed to, worshipped, envisualized, and realized; Brahman, however, is formless and absolute, far beyond human conception or relationship. Since It cannot be described in speech, Brahman is sometimes simply referred to as *Satchidananda*, “Existence, Consciousness, Bliss”.

In his writings, Shankara asserted that the phenomenal world produced by *Ishvara*'s *maya* was *mithya*, “illusory” or “unreal”. The phenomenal universe, said Shankaracharya, is an *adhyasa*, a “superimposition”, upon Brahman. This statement is not extraordinary in itself, but what is extraordinary is his statement that the superimposition of the world upon Brahman was an act of *Ishvara*'s *Maya* produced through the individual minds of those perceiving the world. According to Shankara,

“Brahman remains eternally infinite and unchanged. It is not transformed into this universe. It simply *appears* as this universe to us, in our ignorance. We superimpose the apparent world upon Brahman, just as we sometimes superimpose a snake upon a coil of rope.”⁸

According to Shankara,

“There is no reality independent of our [individual] knowing minds.” “The apparent world is caused by our imagination, our ignorance. It is not real. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. It is like a passing dream.”⁹

In other words, according to Shankara, there is no objective world; there is only the world that exists in our minds and that we individually invent.¹⁰

Following in the tradition of his *paramguru* (his guru's guru), Gaudapada, Shankara taught that only Brahman exists, and that the universally perceived phenomena of ‘the world’ appear, not because they are ‘created’ by God, but

rather because we humans, while actually perceiving only *Brahman*, project, or “superimpose” names and forms upon that invisible substratum by the power of *maya*. He interpreted God’s power of *Maya* (illusion) to be, not God’s power to ‘create’ an illusory objective universe, but a power placed by God within the human soul to project, or imagine, a phenomenal world where there is truly only Brahman, much as one might imagine a snake where there is actually a rope, or a body of water where there is only a dry desert. But since Brahman is not an object of our perception upon which an illusory object might be superimposed, we must wonder how such analogies could apply.

Thus, while in the traditional philosophy of Vedanta—supported by the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*—the world is represented as an illusory, but objective, phenomenon produced by God through His Creative Power (*Shakti, Maya, Brahma, Ishvara*). Shankara’s ‘doctrine of superimposition’ asserts that the perceived universe is merely an imaginary projection by the individual mind or soul of a world superimposed upon the substrate of *Brahman*—in other words, that it is a subjective illusion that takes place solely in the human mind, or individual *jiva*.

[Let me remind the reader, however, that “the individual *jiva*” is, in reality, the *Atman*, the divine Self, Brahman, or the one Consciousness-Bliss.]

In the West, Plato and Plotinus postulated an all-pervading radiation of the Divine Consciousness throughout the material universe, which they called “Soul”. It is by means of this pervading Divine Consciousness, says Plotinus, that God is present as the Self of everyone. Shankaracharya offers no such explanation, however; in fact, for him, there is no universe to be pervaded. There is only *Brahman/Atman*; and the perceived universe is merely a projected illusion existing only in the consciousness of the *jiva* (which is really the *Atman*).

Nevertheless, Shankaracharya concedes that, from a relative point of view, *Brahman/Atman* is omnipresent as the absolute Consciousness that is the substratum of the universe and the inner Self of man, falsely appearing to us as an *ego*, soul, or *jiva*. He explains that it is due to *Ishvara*’s power of *Maya* that one *appears* to be an individualized soul; but this soul is actually *Atman*, the Divine Self, and can be realized as such. Here, Shankara explains the identical nature of the individual soul and the Divine Self (*Atman/Brahman*):

"The transmigrating soul is not different from the Lord. ...Just as the light of the Sun and the Sun itself are not absolutely different, so also the soul and the supreme Self are not different.

"...Because all souls are essentially non-different, and their apparent difference is due to ignorance (*avidya*) only, the individual soul, after having dispelled ignorance by true knowledge, passes into Unity with the supreme Self."¹¹

"The Self...can be directly realized as pure Consciousness and infinite Bliss. Its appearance as an individual soul is caused by the delusion of our understanding and has no reality. By its very nature, this appearance is unreal. When our delusion has been removed, it [the individualized soul] ceases to exist."¹²

So far, Shankara's philosophy is in accord with the mystical philosophy of all true seers; however, it is in Shankara's explanation of the jiva's mental superimposition of the universe that the difficulties arise. The *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* hold that Brahman possesses a creative Power, called *Maya*, by which He creates or projects an objective universe of visible objects. Passages from certain of the works attributed to Shankara, such as the following from his *Atma Bodha*, would lead one to believe that he held a similar position:

"Visible objects, like the body, mind, etc., are born of the primal Energy (*Shakti*) and the ignorance (*avidya*) attending it and are evanescent like bubbles. One should realize the pure, eternal Self, which is other than these, and know, "I am Brahman (*aham brahmasmi*)."¹³

But Shankara clearly believed that the world was never actually created, that it is merely a "projection" (*adhyasa*) upon Brahman produced by the individual soul or mind, due to an ignorance (*avidya*) divinely inherent in it. From his considerable body of works, it is apparent that Shankara believed that we "project" or "superimpose" an imagined world upon Brahman, as one "projects" a mirage upon the desert, or an imaginary snake upon a rope. This is known as 'the doctrine of superimposition' (*vivartavada*). Here is Shankara's explanation of this idea:

"The universe does not exist apart from the Self (*Atman*). Our perception of it as having an independent existence is false, like our perception of blueness in the sky. How can a superimposed attribute have any existence, apart from its substratum? It is only our delusion which causes this misconception of the underlying reality. ¹⁴ ...The apparent world is caused by our imagination, in its ignorance. It is not real. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. It is like a passing dream" ¹⁵

Shankara's theory of 'superimposition' asserts that the subjective human ego, or *jiva*, endowed with a Mayic power, projects the entire universe of objects upon Brahman. That means that, since the universe has clearly been around for a while, the universe was initially projected by early man. But we must remember that in Shankara's time no one even imagined that man had *evolved* over time from more primitive species. Shankara could not have anticipated the eventual development of evolutionary theory, which, if it is correct, puts a serious crimp in the theory of superimposition. Insofar as Shankara knew, man had existed forever, and had always been around to imagine a world. He was ignorant of the fact that prior to around two million years ago there were no humans. And if the world existed only by virtue of the human power of superimposition which could only be imagined or projected by a human being, then the world did not exist prior to the evolution from the lower animal species to the human species since there was no one to project it. If this were true, the present evidence for the evolutionary history of the universe, from its beginning to the development of *homo sapiens*, including astronomical observations, geological strata, fossils, etc., tells of a world that never existed or even appeared to exist, since there was no one around at that time to imagine it.

If Shankara's theory were correct, it would mean that the first humans, as well as all subsequent humans, imagined (or projected) the geological strata that falsely told of a more ancient past, and we imagined a universe where the light from galaxies distant in time told, not of an objective reality, but of a merely imagined past. The history of our universe, according to Shankara, never occurred—except in the minds of the first humans, i.e., all the empirical evidence for the antiquity of the world was simply deceptive and illusory.

The obvious question that arises is: ‘If the world, the universe, is much older than man, as it appears to be, how could the world possibly be the product of man’s mind?’ *Can an effect precede its Cause?*

Had Shankara known of the relatively recent origin of man, it would have been necessary to suggest that perhaps the animal and even bacterial life-forms, who seem also to perceive a world of objects, project the world by means of the same Mayic power of imagination, this same mental projection! But what of the compelling astronomical and geographical evidence for the existence of the universe during preceding billions of years prior to the appearance of even the simplest forms of life? How could we possibly justify the belief that the universe only came into existence when there was a conscious living being to imagine or superimpose it upon Brahman?

In recent years, a similar misconception arose when a group of Jews and Christians banding together under the label “Young Earth Creationism”, professed to believe in a literal interpretation of the Biblical book of *Genesis*, asserting that the universe, earth, and all life was actually created by God between 5700 and 10,000 years ago in six 24-hour days, despite the empirically based evidence that the universe began some 13.7 billion years ago, the earth about 4.5 billion years ago, and intelligent life on earth around 2.5 million years ago. They interpreted the account given in the Bible as literal, believing that it was infallibly and necessarily true. In fact, prior to around 1800 A.D., when the empirical method of science first began to be regarded respectfully, nearly everyone interpreted the Bible literally, like these “Young Earth Creationists”. And a 2011 Gallup survey reports that 30% of U.S. adults still do.

When these ‘Young Earth Creationists’ were confronted with the cosmological and geological evidence for a much more ancient past, they countered that the universe and the earth were created around 6000 years ago with all the false indications of an older cosmological and geological past built into it, even though that past had never actually occurred! In other words, the evidence for a more ancient universe and planet earth was divinely fabricated. However, this explanation implied a devious and deceitful Creator God, which ultimately could not be considered as acceptable.

And so, as it turns out, it is not so easy to explain away empirical evidence. We are forced to choose between a speculative metaphysical theory and the evidence of our reason and senses. Is there really a world out there or does it exist only in our consciousness of it? Another way of thinking about this question is to ask: ‘Did the one Divine Mind create this illusory universe around 14 billion years ago, or is it created independently by each of us daily in our own conscious minds?’ This is a question which each of us must answer for ourselves. What do *you* think?

Our current understanding of the nature of the material world leads us to conclude that the forms we perceive through our senses are in fact mere agglomerations of the electromagnetic charges and emergent forces that constitute the fermions and bosons produced from the original electromagnetic radiation (the ‘Great Radiance’), and that the perceivable forms produced by the congregation of these insubstantial wave-particles are indeed “illusory”. But we must remember, however, that Shankaracharya could not possibly have understood in his own time that the appearance of physical matter arises from the organization of intangible submicroscopic wave-particles in such a way that they present the appearance of substance and extension.

Neither Shankara, nor anyone else at the time, knew anything of such wave-particles. Though he had not imagined them, we have every reason to believe that they nonetheless existed, even then. He *did* know, from his unitive visionary experience, that the Soul (*Atman*) is identical with Brahman and that, in relation to eternal Being, the phenomenal world is illusory; but, without a knowledge of the true nature of matter, and perhaps influenced somewhat by the Buddhist metaphysics popular at the time, he was able to account for the unreality of the world only by assuming that it was an illusion (*maya*) produced by an ignorance (*avidya*) within the human mind by which the mind *imagined* a world exterior to it.

Science And Gnosis

Science and philosophy deal with theories, and we attempt to prove them by logic and experiment; but the mystic is gifted with a visionary (mystical) experience that comes to him without his knowing how, and it shows to him the true nature of reality. His consciousness is elevated during a rare moment of contemplation whereby his awareness reaches to a noumenal level beyond his normal experience, and at once he is privy to an egoless

state in which the transcendent reality becomes evident. In this state, the universe does not cease to exist; the universe continues as before, but he experiences it from a perspective that is free of the duality produced by a limited individual perspective. He becomes aware that his sense of an individual identity is gone, and that his body is not the possession of any individual persona but belongs to the one independent current of existence which is universal, an ocean of conscious energy in which all things and beings exist. He sees his body as a wave on that ocean, as a configuration of energy within a sea of energy, related to the universe as a pebble is to stone, as the mountains and valleys are related to the earth.

He feels that, in being divested of an ego— that is, of an individual identity, he is now seeing himself and the world correctly; the veil of an illusory ego had been lifted, and now he is seeing truly and without the obfuscation of an erroneous orientation. He experiences himself as a wave on an infinite ocean, or like a golden trinket melted in a vat of gold. For a wave, the subsuming reality is the ocean; for a golden trinket, the subsuming reality is gold; for the individual consciousness, the subsuming reality is the one all-pervasive Consciousness-Bliss. No longer separate, his identity is merged into the larger substratum. If he entered this state from a state of prayer, there is no longer a deity, for there is no longer an “I” to relate to that deity; and, without the duality of “I” and “Thou”, neither exists. He realizes that his former dualistic relationship with God was a product of the ego-mind’s duality-producing habit. But now, all dualities are vanished. Not only is there no “I” or “Thou”, there is neither now nor then, for time is also transcended in this eternal state.

Dualities, or opposites, are judgments from a distinct individual reference point, and without that egocentric reference point, dualities do not exist. Without the ego, there is only the timeless universal sea of existence, a vast ocean of Consciousness and Energy. Without the ego, where is love and hate? Where are peace and unrest, the heights and the depths of emotion, weeping and laughing? Without an ego, there is no life and death, no night or day, no music or silence, no motion or stillness. These all require a point of identity, and without that illusory perspective, there is only the one universal existence. When what *is* is the one Divine Energy doing everything, where is pride or regret? Furthermore, where is the distinction between body and soul? There is no such division in this one conscious energy; it is homogeneous. There is only one. And this one all-pervasive existence is conscious, autonomous, and integrally coordinated.

The idea that we, as individual egos, experience our world subjectively does not exclude the possibility of an objective world; in fact, it seems to me that the world that we experience is most certainly *both* subjective and objective. It is true, as is claimed by the subjectivists, that everything we experience is experienced within our minds, subjectively. But consider: the world that we experience is one that has evolved objectively in time from its primitive beginnings to its present state. In other words, if there hadn't been a real evolution, from high-frequency light to quanta, to atoms and molecules, to objects and living creatures, and their development through time, then how would the world that we perceive today have otherwise attained to its present form? Is it possible that the relics of the past, such as skeletal remains, etc. have resulted from an historical evolution that takes place entirely in our subjective minds? It seems to me that we have to conclude that the world, the broad universe, though illusory, is an objective universe that is really out there, and that it is experienced subjectively, in here.

So, to answer the question that is posed in the title, is the world an objective phenomenon? Objective for whom? For the One or for each individual soul? For all of us soul/egos in the world of duality, the world certainly appears as an objective phenomenon, but to the One who alone exists, to the eternal Consciousness-Bliss, the appearance of the universe is experienced as a subjective illusion. So, no, the world is not an objective phenomenon!¹⁶

We have to distinguish between the false ego, that doesn't really exist, and the real Identity, which is the one Consciousness-Bliss that is revealed as everyone's ultimate Self. Many confusions arise when we speak of the false (ego) as the doer or experiencer. That individual being [yourself] whom you refer to as "me" is but a transitory imagination. The consciousness within you is the Divine Consciousness and is eternal; but the imaginary self you falsely identify with never really existed. That ego (or 'I') is just a false idea that has no factual agency. While it lasts, it is merely an illusion. The ultimate 'I', the undefinable Self that mystical experience shows to be the eternal Reality, is who we really are; and everything in the entire universe undeniably exists within that Self. That being so, the world is experienced—*from the vantage point of the One*— as a subjective illusion; it is a projection within Itself. I/He/It is the one and only doer, the only reality. The world-appearance is *within* I/Him/It, and, for I/Him/It, that world-appearance is His own *subjective* illusion.

Because the one Consciousness-Bliss has produced along with the world-appearance the illusion of separate individual beings (egos), there is an appearance of multiple experiences occurring to these individual beings both within and without, both subjectively and objectively, but that is in the world of duality, in the projected world of illusion. The one Consciousness-Bliss is beyond the illusion of duality. That world of duality is nothing more than a dream—a subjective dream occurring within the one eternal Consciousness-Bliss, the only true ‘I’. That Mind-constructed world comes and goes. It is a transient illusion. The one and only lasting Reality is the eternal Consciousness-Bliss. He alone *is*. That eternal YOU alone exists. Rejoice!

When this truth was revealed in me, the very first words from my mouth were “O my God, even this body is Thine own!” And then, suddenly, my consciousness was the Consciousness of God, and ‘I’ was seen to be in the clouds and in the earth; ‘I’ was realized to be the life-pulse of all creatures, the resounding bells of inner joy and the fiery intensity of song that bursts from the human heart. Everything—even this being I call ‘I’—is made of God. All was seen to be an endless continuum of divine Being; and I experienced that infinite Consciousness as my own. The universe is arguably an illusion, a sequence of appearances, formed at the subatomic level by electromagnetic impulses and experienced in the subjective mind; but the underlying cause and substance is the divine Consciousness that is God. And That, it is realized, is one’s eternal Identity.

I saw, in my spiritual vision, that it is the restrictive egoic sense, the personal ‘I’, that creates the interior illusion of duality, that invents the mental opposites of love and hatred, peace and unrest, happiness and sorrow, while in truth there is only the one undivided blissful reality. I saw that the Creator breathes forth the vast universe and then withdraws it again in a repetitive cycle of becoming and dissolving, and that all things move together of one will in an intricately coordinated universe.

And once the larger, subtler, eternal reality is known, the soul, returned to awareness of this world, can scarcely see the phenomenal reality in the same way as before. During the visionary experience of the Eternal, that soul is identical with the Eternal, and blissfully content to remain in that state. However, that state wanes and gives way to the return in consciousness to this temporal and phenomenal reality. And this departure from the unitive

experience is truly an unwelcome eviction. Having known the bliss of her eternal Self, she is at first greatly shocked and dismayed at finding herself back in this little world of separable images in time and space. But after her initial dismay, she reflects on her current state, and quickly realizes that she is still the eternal Self, and that the world to which she has returned consists solely of the bright Energy breathed forth from her own divinely transcendent Self. She recognizes that now she is in a dream-movie, but it is the dream-movie of God, who is indeed her very Self; and even this body in which she moves about is woven of that Divine fabric.

She realizes that, even in this projected image which God puts forth, she remains enveloped in His blissful Being, and realizes that she could never be anything but safe at home in Him. That is the great gift of Spiritual vision: that now she sees this transient world of images as suffused with ethereal light and splayed with dazzling beauty. Joyful contentment fills the air she breathes, and adoration fills her heart. This is the translation of divine vision into the world of phenomenal awareness. This is the carryover from the transcendent vision to the sensory vision here on earth.

This revelatory unitive experience, sometimes referred to as “mystical experience”, that reveals the Divine nature of the universe, is the same for all who have known it, and yet it is interpreted variously. The unitive experience has the quality of being ultimately real, unmediated, indubitable. And the experience of returning from that unitive vision to the world of duality, to the phenomenal world of space and time, *does* seem like re-entering a mind-projection, a hologram, or a dream scene. In fact, it *is* a mind-based projection. But it is not the projection of one’s *own* mind; it is a projection of the one Divine Mind, who has formed this universe of His own Light.

For everyone who has experienced this revelation, the Divine Self is realized to be the source and essence of the universe; but in the one interpretation, the Self projects an Energy from Itself that forms the perceived universe; and in the other interpretation, the Self projects (or imagines) a non-existent universe within the mind of the perceiver. The one interpretation states that the universe exists in the Mind of God, even when there is no one else to be consciously aware of it; and the other interpretation holds that the universe exists in the mind of the individual soul, and that without a soul to be conscious of it, the universe does not exist. Which view do *you* regard as “true”?

Whether you think that the phenomenal universe is an illusory reality produced by the Divine Mind, or that it is an illusion produced by a Divine power (Maya) within the human mind, the resolution of this dispute is not, and probably never will be, amenable to conclusive and demonstrable proof. However, it *is* amenable to a happy resolution, since the final conclusion remains *the same in either case*; It is this, as expressed by Shankara in the following premise:

*Brahma satyam
Jagat mithya
Jivo brahmaiva naparah*

("Brahman (the one eternal Consciousness-Bliss) is the Reality. The phenomenal universe is merely an appearance, an illusion. The soul is truly Brahman, without a doubt.")

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX.7, 8; *Ibid.*, p.103.
2. *Bhagavad Gita*, VII.5; *Ibid.*, p. 83.
3. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX. 4; *Ibid.*, p. 102.
4. *Bhagavad Gita*, VIII.3; *Ibid.*, p. 92.
5. *Bhagavad Gita*, XIII. 16; *Ibid.*, p.151.
6. *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 20, 17; *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.
7. *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 13, 22; *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 20.
8. from the Introduction to Shankara's *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda & Christopher Isherwood, Hollywood, Calif., Vedanta Press, 1947, 1975; p. 12.
9. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:16; Swami Prabhavananda and C. Isherwood, *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; pp. 70-71.
10. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood; Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; p. 73. In order to illustrate the process of 'superimposition', Shankara utilizes several examples:

A person might see a piece of rope lying on the ground and think that it is a snake. In such a case, that person is said to 'superimpose' a snake on the rope. Or one might be walking by a field at night, and imagine that a

wooden post is a man standing in the field; in such a case, one is said to have ‘superimposed’ a man on the post. Another example Shankara offers is that of a person seeing a piece of an oyster shell—what is known as ‘mother of pearl’; but he imagines that it is a piece of silver. He is said to have ‘superimposed’ the silver on the mother of pearl. All of these examples are intended to be analogous to the superimposition by the *jiva* of a world of objects upon what is really Brahman. And, while it’s easy to see how one could mistake one form for another, such as mistaking a post for a man, or a rope for a snake, or a piece of shell for silver; Brahman is formless. How, then, could one mistake Brahman for a universe of forms? The analogies do not stand up to scrutiny. Shankara *does* distinguish between a personal illusion (*pratibhasika*) and a universal, or collective, illusion (*vyavaharika*); but, according to Shankara, in both cases, it is the individual *jiva* who is responsible for the creation and maintenance of his own illusory perceptions.

11. Shankaracharya, *Commentaries on The Vedanta Sutras*; Thibaut, G. (trans.), *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana*, N.Y., Dover Publications, 1962; Vol. I, p. 51; Vol. II, pp.173-74.

12. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood; Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; p. 64.

13. Shankara, *Atma Bodha*, 31.

14. *Vivekachudamani*, op. cit., p. 71.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

16. In the One, the duality of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ does not exist. The One contains everything, and yet It transcends everything. It is only the human ego that sees a division in the world such as ‘subject’ and ‘object’. In the world of duality, perceived by the false ego-identity, subjective and objective may be a useful distinction, but in the One, there is no such distinction. There is only the One. He is the perceiver, the perceiving, and what is perceived as well. He alone is.

Part Two

It is generally understood today that the community of scientists—in particular, quantum physicists—regard the existence of the quantum world as entirely dependent upon its observation by a human observer. It is this understanding and the belief among the populace that this principle can be applied to the non-quantum world as well, that is investigated here:

Everyone knows the old conundrum: “If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound if there is no one to hear it?” The question is really about whether or not there is an objective reality that exists independent and regardless of our sense experience of it. This is precisely what Einstein and Neils Bohr argued about: Einstein asserting that there *is* an existent reality independent of its knowability, and Bohr arguing that the only reality is what we are able to know (i.e., observe), and that reality exists only in the consciousness of the knower. And while that argument is far from settled, the consensus of contemporary quantum physicists currently falls solidly on the side of Bohr.

To physicists studying the submicroscopic quantum reality in the early part of the twentieth century, it became apparent that one cannot separate existence (ontology) from knowledge (epistemology), for the only means by which to agree among ourselves as to what exists is our sense experience of it. So, for physicists, existence is integrally tied up with knowing—i.e., observing. Likewise, there is no criterion by which to say: ‘the tree fell’, without someone having experienced it through their senses. From the scientific point of view, sensory knowledge, i.e., the confirmation of sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc., is regarded as the only acceptable criterion of “knowledge”. Knowledge obtained in this way is accepted as *empirical* knowledge. “Empiricism” is defined by Webster’s New World Dictionary as “(1) relying or based solely on experiment and observation [the empirical method] rather than theory; (2) relying or based on practical experience without reference to scientific principles.” In these sentences the sensory nature of “experiment,” “observation”, and “practical experience” is implied and understood.

However, scientists were unable to *see* subatomic particles such as the electron—even with a microscope. They could not calculate *where* it is because, according to Heisenberg’s Principle of Indeterminacy, it is impossible to determine with accuracy both the position and momentum of an electron, as our means of observation inevitably alters either one or the other. And if it is impossible to know accurately where it is, where it’s heading, and at what speed, then that’s the end of science—or so it seemed in the early part of the twentieth century. This barrier to the determination of the exact whereabouts and activity of subatomic particles seemed to toll the death knoll for scientific investigation into the nature of matter and causality. It appeared to be the end of the story!

But some scientists were not satisfied to let that be the end. Using a mathematical formula devised by Erwin Schroedinger, scientists were able to calculate the *probable* location of an electron, using an algorithm called a ‘wave-function’. With this calculation tool, the location of the electron could be generalized, and eventually accurately determined, but only by assuming, in the process, that the electron, prior to the determination of its actual location, is in a ‘superposed’ state in which it both exists and does not exist at any given point. This is simply the result of the probabilistic formula as it approaches the determination of the one actual location of the electron, or the so-called ‘collapse of the wave-function’. Prior to the collapse of the wave-function, the wave-particle under consideration does not technically *exist*, except as a *possible* (or superposed) state. Only when it is observed by a conscious observer may that wave-particle be said to actually exist.¹

We must understand that the ‘superposed’ state is only a procedural necessity of the calculation formula and does not represent an actual (real) condition. We can either accept that we *cannot* know with certainty the location and momentum of an electron, and give up the search, *or* we can go through Schroedinger’s actuarial formula to determine its *probable* location—which turns out to be amazingly accurate in the end. The formula’s procedure does not actually place the electron in many places at once but places it *everywhere* only theoretically as a formulaic requirement. Also, we do not, by observing the actual location of the electron *cause* it to be at that location, though the procedure makes it appear that our conscious observation is a causal factor. It is only as a process of eliminating its being everywhere at once that we ‘collapse’ the wave-function and thus ‘*cause*’ a wave-particle to be where it really is. And since we cannot know what is actually going on with the particle, but only what we predict and observe, what we observe is therefore our only ‘reality’.

It is in this sense that Quantum Physics has effectively replaced our notion of *being* or *existing* with the act of *knowing*. We can no longer discuss what *is*; we can only speak of what we are able to *know*. Now, the first thing we must know about waves and particles and the wave-particle duality is that waves and particles are not complementary realities; they are merely complementary *perspectives*—human *perspectives*—on the one indivisible and immutable Reality. Each is a valid perspective from one or another

vantage point. It is only in that sense that they are complements, both perspectives contributing to the total information about—not Reality, but what is *knowable*.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the shift to a probabilistic quantum mechanics was wholly acceptable to physicists like Bohr and Heisenberg; others, like Einstein and Schrödinger, who despite having been so instrumental in the birth of quantum mechanics, were of the old school, and wanted to find another way—one that implied a reality that existed regardless of what was observed or not observed. Nonetheless, in the area of science, a blurring of the line between *being* and *knowing* imperceptibly crept into the thinking of quantum physicists, and subsequently into ours. Because of that blurring, Heisenberg's 'principle of uncertainty', having to do with what we could *know*; in other words, epistemology, is nowadays taken to refer to what *is*, i.e., an ontological condition. The same is true of Schroedinger's 'wave-function': what had been intended as a tool for *knowing*, became a criterion for *being*. So that, instead of saying that a wave-particle's condition could not be *known* until it is measured, physicists today commonly declare that a wave-particle does not *exist* until it is measured (observed), since observation is the only recognized criterion for being.

For quite a long time now, the question of whether or not there is a universal reality independent of conscious observation has been seriously asked, not only by physicists, but by philosophers and metaphysicians as well. Is there really a world out there or does it exist only in our consciousness of it? Empirical science admits only the evidence of the senses, and so we must, if we side with the scientists, grant reality only to what is observable by the senses, or, like the theologians, we must put our faith in the existence of an absolute metaphysical reality that is intangible and undemonstrable.

This begs the question of whether the 'spiritual' reality that has been experienced extrasensually by so many mystics and sages is therefore unreal simply because it does not meet the empirical criteria of science. And the answer is 'No, it is not unreal; it is simply undemonstrable.' Science operates on the principle that empirical knowledge is the *only* criterion for existence—not because it is necessarily so, but only because scientists have as yet discovered no other criteria for *determining* existence, or the *real*. But you may be sure that existence, or reality, is not limited by our ability to

perceive it; it is, in fact, only our *knowledge* that is limited! It is merely our ability to perceive, to *know*, other dimensions of reality, other dimensions of existence, that is limited.

Happily, however, God has made Himself known to a few of us as the formless Reality within us that is eternal and all-pervasive. That Reality is the one conscious Source and substance of everything and lives as the divine Self of everyone. It is not experienced by the senses and is therefore unknowable by *science*; but it is knowable through an interior revelation in consciousness, or *gnosis*, revealed by divine Grace. God grants that revelation, that knowledge, that Grace, to those whom He finds worthy of it. May He grant it to you!

Consciousness And Matter

Humans meet reality on two fronts: the mental front and the physical front—what the ancient Greeks referred to as *Psyche* and *Cosmos*—or what we today might call the subjective and the objective realities. Another way of referring to these two fronts is as the realm of *Consciousness (Mind)*, and the realm of *Matter (Body)*. And so, if we are to give a full picture of our experience of reality, we must give an account of both its mental and its physical aspects. The mental aspect of our reality, or consciousness, is experienced as wavular; the physical, or material aspect of reality is experienced primarily as particulate. But, since Consciousness is the source and creator of Matter, every distinct particle of Matter also contains Consciousness; and so, Matter is both wavular and particulate, as is the Light from which Matter is made. There is one all-pervasive Consciousness, and the consciousness of every distinct individual is included in and partakes of it.

Consciousness is like an ocean in that it is a continuum that is wavular; in other words, it is capable of producing waves of consciousness in the form of thoughts. We are all familiar with the waves we produce in our consciousness, and we are familiar with the fact that waves, in whatever continuum, are formed of two opposing movements: a crest and a trough—each movement necessitating the other. This became clear to me during a ‘mystical’ experience that occurred when I was in my twenties:

That (mystical) experience had been initiated by an intense prayer, and initially, while I was still identified with my separate self, I was addressing God as “Thou”; but when God’s grace revealed to me that I was merely a wave on the one ocean of Consciousness, and that He alone was the sole reality, I realized that now, to speak the word, ‘Thou’, would be to re-establish duality. For I saw that, with the thought of ‘Thou’, I bring into existence at the same time, an ‘I’. ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ are interdependent; there is no ‘Thou’ without an ‘I’, no ‘I’ without a ‘Thou’. The crest and trough of a single wave are opposing twins, two sides of one coin. It is the same with all such pairs of contraries: “I love and (thereby) create (its opposite) hatred; I am in peace, and am fashioning chaos; standing on the peak, I necessitate the depths.” All opposites occur as the crest and trough of a single wave. It is only in a continuum capable of producing waves that opposites necessitate one another in this manner. Thoughts, created in and of consciousness, are therefore undeniably wavular.

These waves of thought on the ocean of Consciousness produce duality, but Consciousness Itself, like an ocean, has no contrary to Itself, no opposite; It is the one substratum, the boundless and undivided ocean of Consciousness, and has no duality in It. Divine Grace having revealed that ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ are merely the crest and trough of a wave of thought, both were resolved in the one ocean of Consciousness who alone exists absolutely. Then, the false ego-identification simply vanished, leaving only the one all-pervasive Consciousness aware of Itself; and in that expanded awareness, all became clear:

“But now, weeping and laughing are gone.
 Night is become day.
 Music and silence are heard as one.
 My ears are all the universe.”

In that moment beyond time,

“All motion has ceased; everything continues.
 Life and death no longer stand apart (because that One contains everything—living or otherwise).
 No I, no Thou; no now, or then.
 Unless I move, there is no stillness (for stillness cannot be without movement).”

This is the realization of the one eternal ocean of Consciousness; It is *That* which has been called ‘God’, ‘the Absolute’, ‘the Unchanging Ground’, ‘the divine Self’. When it is known, It is known to be the ultimate Reality, the final irrefutable answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’ Anyone who has experienced the divine Self in this way will tell you that the experience at its peak does not last forever; but it is certainly transformative and lasting in its joyous certainty.

What, then, of the material universe that surrounds us and constitutes our bodily form? Theoretically, the universe of Matter is the result of a Divinely initiated eruption of high-frequency electromagnetic radiation, or Light, from the eternal Consciousness, that occurred around fourteen billion years ago. That Light transformed into wave-particles, collected into atoms, molecules, gases, stars, and entire galaxies that are now spread throughout this vast universe. The one eternal Consciousness, being the absolute all-pervasive substratum, manifested in this way as Light, and subsequently as multiple forms *within Itself*. And because the universe of forms exists within that one Consciousness, those forms are naturally permeated with Conscious awareness, which is naturally imparted to all the animate forms as Life, and those Life-forms thereafter evolved and multiplied, eventually becoming the species known as humanity.

Presumably, after the passing of a lengthy stretch of time, the expansion of the universe will cease and then reverse like the alteration of a breath, becoming a universal contraction; and all Matter will implode back to its energy state in the eternal Consciousness from which it originated, and the universal cycle will be repeated once again. That high-frequency Light which transforms into the fabric that we call *Matter* is woven of God’s Intelligence and Light. Scientists prefer to say that Matter is made of *wave-particles*; but, of course, no one has ever seen a wave-particle. In fact, no such thing actually exists; ‘wave-particle’ is merely a statement of alternate possibilities of experience.

Since the first half of the twentieth century, physicists have regarded both Light and Matter as possessing the contradictory but complementary properties of both waves and of particles. This has become well known as the Wave-Particle Duality (WPD), observable in physics experiments at the Quantum level. Equally well known is Werner Heisenberg’s Principle of Uncertainty (or Indeterminacy), which states the impossibility of

simultaneously measuring both the position and momentum of a wave-particle. It now turns out that these two limitations on our ability to know and understand Matter are really one and the same! This astonishing discovery appears in detail in the December 19, 2014 edition of *Nature Communications*. International researchers Patrick Coles, Jędrzej Kaniewski, and Stephanie Wehner made the breakthrough while at the Centre for Quantum Technologies at the National University of Singapore. They found that ‘Wave-Particle Duality’ is simply the quantum ‘Uncertainty Principle’ in disguise. An article describing this new understanding appears also in the PhysOrg Newsletter for December 19, 2014. It is entitled “Quantum Physics Just Got Less Complicated,” and it states:

The quantum uncertainty principle is the idea that it’s impossible to know two certain sets of information about a quantum particle at once. For example, the more precisely you know the position of an atom, the less precisely you can know its momentum, i.e., the speed with which it’s moving. It’s a limit on the fundamental knowability of nature, not a statement on measurement skill. The new work shows that how much you can learn about the wave versus the particle behavior of a system is constrained in exactly the same way.

What’s really surprising about this discovery is that, for three quarters of a century, the entire scientific community has been widely discussing and utilizing in their experimental research these two limitations on our ability to know, and yet no one before now even suspected that these two limitations were related, let alone that the Wave-Particle Duality was simply another manifestation of the same principle of Indeterminacy. In fact, there was a great deal of speculation over the years by well-respected physicists that the Wave-Particle Duality referred, not to a merely *apparent* duality, but to an *actual* duality in the objective nature of light and material substance.

In the case of the experimental determination of whether an elemental constituent of matter behaves as a particle or a wave, as well as in the case of determining its position or its momentum, the very act of observing that constituent of Matter has the power to alter the experimental result. Whether the outcome of an experiment results in a wave or a particle, and/or whether its position or its momentum is measured, each outcome is wholly dependent

upon the experimenter's intent, since in both cases, one kind of experiment will give one result, another kind of experiment will give another result.

In other words: If we perform an experiment that allows us to know the *position* of a wave-particle with some certainty, that experiment precludes the accurate knowledge of its *momentum* (velocity times mass); and if we perform an experiment that allows us to have accurate knowledge of the *momentum* of a wave-particle, that experiment precludes the accurate knowledge of its *position*. Similarly, if we perform an experiment that allows us to know the *particulate* nature of a wave-particle, that experiment precludes our knowing (observing) its *wavular* nature; and conversely, if we perform an experiment that allows us to know the wavular nature of a wave-particle, that experiment precludes our knowing (observing) its particulate nature.

All of these limitations on our ability to know are described by Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy, or Uncertainty. The question is 'what, if anything, does the unification of these two phenomena, previously thought to be separate and uniquely distinct, say about the nature of Matter that was not previously known?' To physicists, this new understanding places both of these limiting phenomena under the common umbrella of one mathematical formula; but that hardly tells us anything *new* about the nature of material reality. Despite all the words and the mathematical formulas, we remain as ignorant concerning the mysterious nature of Matter as we were before this mathematical unification.

All that we really know is that Matter, in its very tiniest forms, appears to us as either waves or particles. If we ask the question, 'Waves or particles of what?', we are back to the original electromagnetic impulses—elusively invisible forces created, governed, and coordinated by a transcendent Intelligence. That Intelligence that projects the Energy by which the material universe is formed is the same Intelligence, the one divine Consciousness, in which our individual consciousness exists. That one conscious Self, that Lord of the universe, is the ultimate Source of the progression of all causes—both mental and physical. He is the uncaused Cause, existing in Himself alone, remaining unaffected by all this busy world and all our mind-born creativity. And so, all enquiry comes to an end: we, with our material form and our conscious awareness, are projections of the one divine Mind.

We consist of Him and live in Him; He is the one reality. He is in fact our own eternal Self.

The only question remaining for us is: ‘Can we give up our long-accumulated addiction to dualistic conflict, our addiction to worry and doubt, our addiction to fear and fault-finding, and rest simply in the peace of God, our eternal Self? Can we accept our inability to know all the mysterious details of this material universe, and put all our trust and faith securely in God, knowing that we are upheld in His mercy, guided by His wisdom, enlivened by His breath, and made happy in His joy?’ Is it possible that such knowledge could be enough for us simple mortals? Can we learn to turn our gaze within, to quiet our own minds, purify our hearts, and know God as our own eternal Self? Yes, with His Grace, we can. Praise God.

NOTE:

1. (“Only when it is observed by a conscious observer may that wave-particle be said to actually exist.”) The paradoxical nature of this quantum circumstance is illustrated in the story in which quantum principles are erroneously attributed to the non-quantum circumstance of ‘Schroedinger’s Cat’, in which a cat is encased in a closed box with a bit of radioactive matter that *may* decay and poison the cat in the next few minutes. The paradox is that, after that time has passed, prior to the opening of the box, (if we apply quantum principles) the cat is in a superposed state, neither alive nor dead, until the box is opened, and the cat’s state is witnessed by a conscious observer. But how can a cat be neither alive nor dead? Well, it can’t, of course. But, in a word-game, in which *being observed* means *being*, it can. For, *if we falsely apply quantum principles to this non-quantum circumstance*, then we may say that, unless the cat is observed by a human observer, *it does not exist*. In other words, *if we apply quantum logic to this non-quantum circumstance*, then the cat is neither alive nor dead.

* * *

26. REVELATIONS

The Progressive Development Of My Mystical Theology

**An Ebook by Swami Abhayananda
From The Mystic's Vision**

**Dedicated to the Public Domain, 11-15-18
(last revised 5-4-22)**

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Introduction

This book is a history of the progress of my own spiritual journey as it is reflected in the sequence of my book publications. I feel that, since I have now reached the age of eighty-three, I can confidently look back in an overview of my written works with some sense of finality, and so this is a retrospective look at the metaphysics that has developed over the years from both my mystical experience and my philosophical and scientific enquiry.

I will begin by saying that my early life in Indiana was ordinary and unspectacular, but comfortable and happy. I grew up in a family that, I believe, was typical of the period. My father was a simple uneducated man, and my mother was also a good, kind person, neither of whom possessed a strong urge to obtain learning. I don't think either of them ever read a book. They took pleasure in their children and in gathering with their friends for a few drinks and a game of cards. They also took pleasure in hosting outdoor barbecues in their spacious backyard for friends and family. I was the oddball of the family. I was the reader. I read everything from an early age—Poetry, philosophy, classic novels, popular science—whatever was available. My family was not religious, and I was repelled by the popular religious thinking of the time during my youth, though I was strongly attracted to the famous rebel philosophers—Plato, Voltaire, etc.

This attraction I attribute to my grandfather on my mother's side. He was the grand patriarch of the family. Having immigrated to this country from Copenhagen, Walter Jensen started a business in Indianapolis called "The Indiana Hog and Cattle Powder Company." He was in possession of a formula for a product—mostly sulfur—that effectively got rid of intestinal worms in hogs and cattle. He became quite successful, traveling about the Indiana countryside, convincing farmers to try his product. But he was also a man of some learning, and had a handsome collection of books, mainly concerned with history and philosophy. But regrettably, I didn't get to know him very well. He died of a heart attack when I was twelve. My grandmother, knowing of my propensity for reading, gave some of my grandfather's books to me. Among them, was a book, popular in its time, called *The Story of Philosophy*, by Will Durant, which became a catalyst for me.

As a teen, I was interested in girls, but I was also interested in history, poetry, literature, and philosophy. I was disdainful of schools, however, and preferred to follow my own uncharted path of learning. After leaving High School prior to graduating, I joined the Navy Reserves, and served two years as a Seaman aboard a Destroyer Escort based in Pearl Harbor, making periodic cruises to various ports in Japan, Hong Kong, Manila, etc. After being discharged, I worked for a time as a Collector for a small loans company, and also as an ADT inspector. Soon thereafter, I joined a couple of friends in Southern California, where I worked as an electronics inspector in a small firm, later migrating to San Francisco where I worked as a Director's Assistant at KRON-TV and gave much of my free time to reading and frequenting the San Francisco bookshops.

It was not until I reached my twenties that I began reading more widely among the mystics, such as the Zen Buddhists, but I was still immature, and didn't understand much of what I read. For as long as I can remember, I knew that I would become a writer, though I had no idea *what* I would write. By the time I was in my twenties, I had passed through an infatuation with the writings of Jack Kerouac, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and the absurdist playwrights, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. But there came a drastic change in the focus of my attention as I approached maturity in my late twenties. It was only when I discovered the nondual philosophy of Vedanta and the writings of some of the modern Indian yogis, such as Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda and Swami Prabhavananda, that I had a real spiritual breakthrough and entered onto the path of Self-realization. Here is how I described that change of focus in my autobiographical book, *The Supreme Self*:

“Everyone has a spiritual awakening somewhere along the way. For me, it was sudden and unexpected. It was 1966; I was approaching twenty-eight, and it was a very special time in my world. Laura and I had moved from San Francisco to Los Gatos, California, in the mountains south of San Jose. We had rented a beautiful house with a knotty-pine interior and a huge porch overlooking a bubbling brook. I worked at the Santa Clara hospital as an Orderly, and later I worked nearby at the Los Gatos Post Office on a split-shift that gave me time in the afternoons to sit on my beautiful private porch and drink coffee and read or work on the great American novel I was writing.

“In June of 1966, I was fascinated with the symbology of myths, and was reading Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, both of whom were speaking repeatedly about “Vedanta,” the mysterious philosophy of India. And so, when I saw in a local bookstore a copy of a book called *Vedanta For The Western World*, I bought a copy. This book, edited by Christopher Isherwood, consisted of a series of articles by such figures as Swami Prabhavananda and Aldous Huxley, and spelled out in very easy-to-understand terms the philosophy of Vedanta.

“Vedanta, I soon learned, refers to the philosophy expressed in the *Upanishads*, considered to be the final appendages to the Vedas. It is a nondualist philosophy; that is to say, a monistic one. It admits to an *apparent* duality between God and the world, between Consciousness and matter, but this duality, says Vedanta, is apparent only. In the “mystical vision” they are experienced as one.

“According to Vedanta, when a person becomes enlightened—in other words, when he realizes the ultimate Truth, or God, in mystical vision—he experiences an absolute Unity, wherein everything is seen to be a manifestation of one universal Self. He knows for certain: “I and the Father are one.” This is not a mere aberration of consciousness, nor an illusory “union” of the soul and God; it is a glimpse into the nature of the underlying Reality of one’s existence. It is the revelation of one’s true and eternal Self. This, says Vedanta, is the perennial teaching of all the sages and saints of all times. For the experience of Unity, whether called *samadhi*, *satori*, or “union with God,” is the same for all, and is the basis for all the various religions.

“Reading of this, I suddenly understood what the religious mystics had been talking about. The teachings of Jesus, the Buddha, and all the saints of all religions were seen to be based upon this same experiential knowledge. Everything I had ever puzzled over became clear; everything fell into place. I had scarcely finished with the Introduction to this book, and I knew that I had acquired a new and profound vision, which brought everything together for me and answered all my questions forever. I knew my life would never be the

same. I knew I had found the key to an extraordinary wealth of understanding about myself and the nature of reality.

“It was as though a veil that I had previously been unaware of had suddenly been drawn away, revealing a world I had heretofore been looking at as through a hazy fog. It was not so much an intellectual revelation as a spiritual one, for suddenly I saw everything bathed in light, and from deep within me there welled up a happiness, a clear, bright joyfulness, that testified to its truth, its rightness, more convincingly than any reason or merely intellectual conviction could do.

“As I continued reading this amazing book, I was introduced to the 19th century mystic, Sri Ramakrishna, who was mad with fervor for “the vision of God” from an early age, and who became so one-pointed in mind through devotional love that he became entirely lost to the world of forms, aware only of the all-pervasive Reality. Reading of the life of Sri Ramakrishna and other such saints, I felt I had entered into an elite society of delirious madmen, madmen who called themselves, “the lovers Of God,” who, turning away from the normal transitory pursuits of man, sought to become intimate with the very fountainhead of the universe. Somehow, I had never understood before that such a thing was really possible.

“Reading the inspiring words of Sri Ramakrishna, who had clearly known the unitive Reality, I experienced a wave of such happiness that I could scarcely bear it. Sitting on my porch, becoming aware of these things for the first time, I experienced a shower of golden light pouring down upon me, as though raining on the back of my neck, and awaking a deep and delicious chill in my body that ran up my spine and caused my scalp to tingle.

“For the first time, I understood what drew men to religion. I had previously attributed it to weakness of mind. How much grander was the heritage of man than I had supposed. I had viewed all this talk of “God” through the ages as the superstitious babbling of fools. But I had been the fool. There *was* a God—but it was not what I had supposed men meant by the term. “God” meant not some ethereal

being with a white beard, etc.; God was Being itself—the eternal substratum of Existence. And the proof of it was that God could be experienced, actually realized, seen with the inner eye of unleashed awareness. For the first time, I could fathom it; I understood the method in the madness of the saints. My mind was dazzled, ecstatic.

I was really extraordinarily happy. Of course, all my friends thought I had suddenly gone mad. Their faces betrayed their uneasiness when I began talking about God and the mystics who had known Him. I began to realize that I had touched on something that not everyone could, or was willing to, understand. I read about “Grace,” the amazing descent of Grace; and it seemed to me that just such a thing was happening to me. By some process of awakening, to which I was an unwitting spectator, I was seeing with an entirely new and different pair of eyes. My old friends were unable to understand or to share in any way the intensity of my fervor, my excitement; and I realized that I would have to go on this journey alone.”

NOTE:

The above passages are excerpted from my book, *The Supreme Self* (with a few later comments added).

* * *



This is the only extant photo of me at that time. It was taken as I was sitting at my kitchen table in my Los Gatos, California cabin in late 1965.

I. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

(The Supreme Self)

The details regarding the content of one's mystical experience usually become lost or obscured during the passage of time before the attempt to recount the experience; but now, perhaps for the first time in history, an account of a mystical experience was written down during and as it was occurring, lending a unique clarity and authenticity to what is more often merely a vague and uncertain recollection. Here is a continuation of the previous narrative from *The Supreme Self*, which takes us up to the account, written as it occurred, of my mystical experience and Self-realization:

“I had read, in one of the chapters of *Vedanta For the Western World*, a story of a man whose wife told him that their neighbor had decided to renounce the world of petty distractions to focus on the realization of God. When the man asked his wife how the neighbor was going about this renunciation, she said, “Well, he's renouncing a few things today, and then tomorrow he'll renounce a few more things, and so on, until he's entirely free to meditate solely on God.” The man said, “That's not the way to renounce the world!” And the wife retorted, “Well, how then would you do it?” And the man, by way of answering her, tore the shirt from his body, turned around and walked out the door of his home, never to return.

“Impressed with the stark simplicity and decisiveness of this approach to the renunciation of all restricting conditions, I decided to follow the example of the man in the story. Within only a few days, my life took a startling and unalterable turn. I sent a note to my employer stating that I would not be in on Monday “...for reasons beyond my control”; I then gave what I owned to Laura, and went off into the mountains of Santa Cruz, into solitude, to give my life to the quest for knowledge of God.

“Walking along a tree-shrouded mountain road, I came across an empty cabin nestled down in the woods a little off the road, and, exploring it, I discovered that it had been long uninhabited, except for the mice who had left abundant evidence of their assumed occupancy. I decided to take shelter there until I could talk to the owners, and so I cleaned the place up, and then went into Santa Cruz to look up the owner at the County Records office. I

wrote to the two men who were the present owners and awaited their contact while I made myself at home in the rustic cabin.

“The building had been left unfinished and was really just a shell with a concrete floor and a kitchen sink that drained directly out onto the ground outside. There was no running water, but a beautiful pure stream of water flowed just a few feet from the back door of the cabin in the form of a babbling spring-fed brook. There was a large picnic-type table in the main room and a mattressless cot in one of the two adjoining bedrooms. In the kitchen was a cast-iron cooking stove, and next to it a canvas director’s chair, a fold-up card table, and an old refrigerator that served as a mouse-proof food cabinet. That was the extent of the furniture.

“There was no electricity, but just out back, a previous tenant had stacked a good cord of seasoned oak to warm me through the winter and provide me with cooking heat as well. Candles did the job of providing me with light. Out front, just beyond the dilapidated garage, was a wooden outhouse, and so, although I lacked what some might consider the necessities of modern life, I truly lacked for nothing, and I came to love the simple life my situation required.

“The two men who owned the property showed up one day, and after I explained my intentions and my willingness to safeguard their property against hunters and trespassers, they readily agreed to let me stay in the unused cabin. In fact, we became good friends, and they frequently came to the woods on weekends with their chainsaws to cut some live oak trees for their own firewood and for me as well. They owned about 300 acres of beautiful redwood groves, green meadows, rocky cliffs and scenic plateaus; this was surrounded by another 1000 acres of similar woodland owned and preserved as wilderness by the University of California. And, for the next nearly five years, all this magnificent country was my own private garden of meditation.

“How romantic it was! I felt that I was a Francis of Assisi. I was Rumi, the Sufi poet. I was Basho, the Zen hermit. Walking on the country roads in the early morning with my freshly baked honey-bread in my brown canvas bag on my shoulder, I’d walk the long winding mountain road to town to sell my loaves to the owner of a coffee shop. And on the way, I’d sit myself down

in the grass by the roadside and write Zen poems to the poppies in the fields, or to the cottontails that went suddenly hopping through the dewy morning grass. Walking along, I would see the curving road suddenly turn and open wide a breathtaking expanse of sky and green slopes and blue ocean rising up to meet the sky—and a tearful joy would well up in me and drown me in a rapturous sweetness I'd never before known.

“There were places where the dense pine and redwood forests formed a canopy over the narrow twisting mountain roads, and the light would stream in green sprays and twinkling raindrops of beauty through the trees; and I'd stoop by the bubbling stream to sink my cupped palm into the pebbly cold water and drink. And again, that sensation of chill that caused the hairs of my neck to rise, and the sweet delirious bliss of dissolving into an all-pervading light!

“I was just a poor hermit of the woods, singing the name of God. I had learned that, in the Indian tradition, one of the names for God was “Hari,” meaning ‘the stealer of hearts.’ It was that name I called: “Hari! Hari! Hari!” as I walked along in my clumsy rags. I was a sweet, bearded monk of the forest and the world was in my eyes the beautifully glorious form of the Divine; all about me the playful sport of God.

“2. THE COMMON VISION

“I had come into the mountains to realize God, to know Him as Sri Ramakrishna and others had done. But I also had an insatiable hunger to know about those saints of the past who had succeeded in their attempt to know Him, and to know how they had lived and how they had spoken.

“The University of California was only a few miles away, and the University library was very complete. So, nearly every morning, I'd pack some bread in my sack and set out for the University, where I'd read for the whole day, or bring home some books to study. Though I was already familiar with many philosophers, both ancient and modern, I voraciously read or reread every major philosopher and every saint in the Religion & Philosophy section of the University library, from the Greeks and early Christian Fathers to the Hindu, Sikh, Moslem, Taoist and Buddhist saints and sages. I read of

Catholic monastic disciplines and Christian Science; I poured over the classics of medieval Indian and Sufi literature; I burrowed into the remote past through the long-lost writings of the Dead Sea scrolls and the Gnostic apocryphal books; I re-examined Heraclitus, Epictetus, Philo and Plotinus; and discovered the writings of Swami Vivekananda, al-Ghazali, Vidyananda, Rumi and Shankara. It was a glorious time of wild excitement and uncontrollable exhilaration.

“The *Upanishads* were a revelation to me. These scriptures of the ancient Hindus were as old as the Jewish scriptures, but their conception of God was quite different from the jealous tyrant the Jews had invented. He was knowable as the one all-inclusive Reality, the one Self of the universe. I could not help feeling that there had been a tacit conspiracy in the Western world by the church, the state, and academia to conceal from me the fact that God could be “seen” and known. But, of course, the truth of the matter is that the knowledge was always there; only I was simply not ready to grasp these ideas until this moment, and it was only now that I was able to comprehend what the *Upanishads* had to tell:

“He is beyond time and space, and yet He is the God of infinite forms who dwells in our inmost thoughts, and who is seen by those who love Him.¹

“He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be reached by the senses, or by austerity or sacred actions. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen indivisible in the silence of contemplation.²

“He is the Eternal among things that pass away, pure Consciousness of conscious beings, the One who fulfills the prayers of many. Only the wise who see Him in their souls attain the peace eternal.³

“Reading through the collection of writings known as the *Upanishads*, I had a sense of recognition, a recollection of truths I had known before. “Of course, of course,” I kept repeating as I devoured the words of the sages. Nothing in the Western cultural tradition came close to the penetrating

subtlety and clarity of the writings of these ancient Indian seers who had penned these immortal scriptures.

“But the West *did* have its seers—though they do not appear as early or as abundantly as their Eastern counterparts. In the West, the experience of Unity, “the vision of God,” is only vaguely implied by the early Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Socrates (by way of Plato). The later Stoics and Philo of Alexandria in the 1st century C.E. also refer only vaguely to such an experience, without any real attempt to offer a convincing account. In fact, it is not until Plotinus (204-270 C.E.) that an explicit and unequivocal account of “the vision of God” is offered in the West. Here is Plotinus’ description of his own experience in an extensive passage from his *Enneads*:

“The soul naturally loves God and yearns to be one with Him, just as a noble daughter naturally loves her noble father... And suddenly, [she] is uplifted and sees, without ever knowing how; ... the Supreme has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence. She has turned away from everything around her and has readied herself, having made herself as beautiful as possible and fashioned herself in likeness with the Divine by those preparations and adornments which come unsought to those who grow ready for the vision. And she has seen that Divine presence suddenly manifesting within herself, for now there is nothing between herself and the Divine. There is now no longer a duality, but a two-in-one, for, so long as that presence continues, all distinction between them is dissolved. The longing of a lover to unite with his [human] beloved is a longing for a mere imitation of that Divine and perfect union.

“...In this state of absorbed contemplation, there is no longer a relationship between a subject and an object; the vision itself is the one continuous Being, so that seeing and seen are one thing; the object and the act of vision have become identical.

“...It is a knowing of the Self restored to its original purity. No doubt we should not speak of *seeing*; but we cannot help speaking in terms of duality, such as “the seer” and “the seen,”

instead of asserting boldly that it is the attainment of absolute Unity. In this *seeing*, we neither regard an object nor perceive distinctions; for there are not two. The man is altered, no longer himself nor belonging to himself; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It. ...Duality exists only in separation; by our holding ourselves apart from It, the Supreme is set outside of us. This is why the vision cannot be described; we cannot separate the Supreme from ourselves to speak of It, for if we have seen something separate and distinct, we have fallen short of the Supreme, which can be known only as one with oneself.

“... [In this vision] there are not two; beholder is one with the beheld ... The man who has experienced this mingling with the Supreme must—if he but recalls It —carry the memory of Divinity impressed upon his soul. He is become the Unity, and nothing within him or without can create any diversity. Nor is there any movement now, or passion, or outreaching desire, once this ascent is attained. Reasoning is suspended and all intellection as well, and even—to dare the word—the very *self* is gone. Filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation, aloneness.

“... This is the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, ...the passing of the alone to the Alone.⁴

“After Plotinus, perhaps the most lucid and explicit description of the experience of Unity comes from the 13th century German mystic, the Dominican Prior of Erfurt, Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). Eckhart’s Sermons and other writings were “condemned” by the Catholic Church in 1329; nonetheless, his writings have carried the torch of mystical experience over the centuries by which the way of many later mystics has been lighted. Speaking of his own experience of Unity, Meister Eckhart declares:

“In this breaking through [of consciousness], I find that God and I are both the same. Then I am what I [always] was; I

neither wax nor wane, for I am the motionless Cause that is moving all things. ⁵

“I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one being with Himself—not a *similar* being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction. ⁶

“The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving. ⁷

“Here, one cannot speak of the soul anymore, for she has lost her nature yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There, she is no longer called soul, but is called *immeasurable Being*. ⁸

“I found in me all things forgotten, my own self forgotten and awareness of Thee, alone, O God. ... I found myself with Thee, being Thy being and speaking the Word and breathing the spirit.⁹

“Here and there, I found other seers scattered along the shores of time, from legendary eras to the present: early Greek philosophers, sages from the Vedic period of India, Moslem Sufis, Christians, Chinese Taoists and Buddhists; each telling the experience of Unity in terms that reflect the time and tradition in which he or she wrote. The women, in most cases, tended to color their accounts with emotion and allegory, but it was clear that the experience had occurred in them, and obviously showed no sexual bias. In fact, it appeared that all sorts of people had experienced the vision of Unity; not only those who could express it in philosophical or poetical terms, but also simple good-hearted people who have left us no record of their experience.

“Of those who wrote, who recorded for posterity some of the insights gained in that vision of truth, were many who said little or nothing of the experience itself but confined themselves to presenting a systematic philosophy based on that experience; others, like the prophets of early Judaism, wrote or spoke as “holy” men, feeling that they were chosen to be spokesmen for God. And some, like the Buddha and the yogis, in an effort to stem a tide of futile

intellectual speculation, declined to speak at all of the traditional notions of God, soul, and the nature of reality, but stressed instead the need to practice those disciplines which would lead to the direct experience of Truth, wherein all doubts and speculations would be resolved.

“Naturally, each of these great beings spoke in his own language, his own restricted terminology, and the consequence is that today we regard each of these efforts to reveal the nature of reality as disparate and unrelated “philosophies” or “religions.” But the experience of Reality is the same for all, of course; and in all the declarations of the many prophets and Messiahs one can hear the attempt to convey a common knowledge based on that common vision.

“It was thus I passed my days in the forest, devouring the writings of the sages and saints of the world in whose company I found great comfort and happiness. During the day I read, and in the evenings, I sat quietly, happily, in the presence of God. The growing clarity of my understanding seemed to open my heart to His ever-present reality, and little by little, I grew more aware of and filled by His Love. My intellectual curiosity had been satisfied; and now there remained only the simple directing of all my attention, all my thought, to the God whom I desired with all my heart.

(The above passage was excerpted from *The Supreme Self*.)



My cabin in the woods

NOTE:

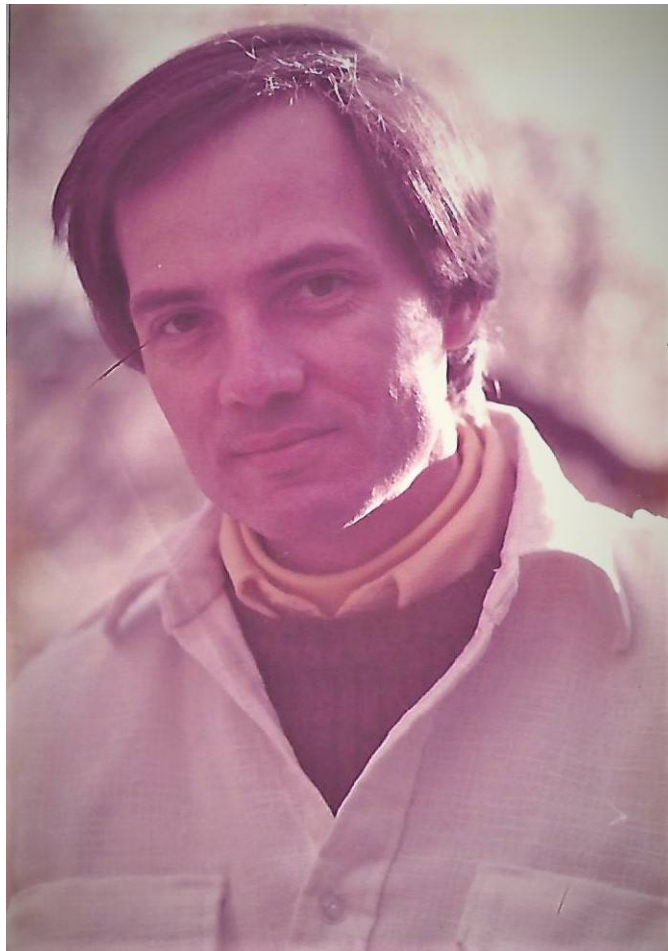
(The reader wishing to read the account of my mystical experience which follows the above quotation, may find the account of my experience in *The Supreme Self*. That book is available as a free downloadable PDF at my website.)

II. THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

(History of Mysticism)

After my mystical experience in 1966, I continued to live happily in my little cabin in the woods, until I met Swami Muktananda, an Indian Guru, who, while on an American tour, gave a lecture at the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1970 which I attended. I was very impressed by him and the spiritual energy surrounding him. I read his book, *The Play of Consciousness*, and then wrote to him. He invited me to join him, and I subsequently traveled to Ganeshpuri, India to live at his ashram and learn from him. I spent almost ten years in his service and was initiated by him into the ancient order of *sannyasa* in 1978, thereby becoming Swami Abhayananda.

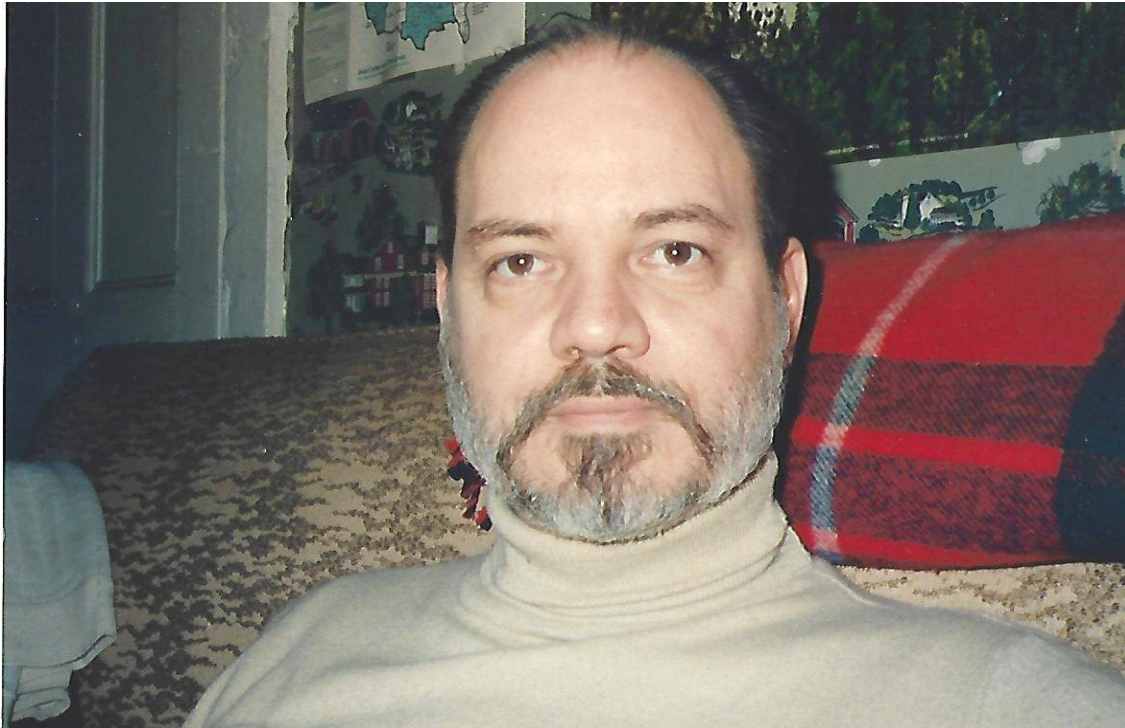
Here is a photo of me taken in Oakland, California, where I was working in Muktananda's ashram in 1977, the year prior to my becoming a Swami.



As a Swami in his service, I taught at the Siddha Yoga New York City ashram for a period of time, and then, in 1979, I was sent to run the ashram in Philadelphia. A year later, I was ordered to be the Director and Lecturer at the Chicago ashram, where I served for another year. After that, I was sent to run a fledgling ashram in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It was there that I discovered that Muktananda was using some of his young female disciples for his own sexual pleasure. I immediately left my post and flew to California where I joined a few of my former Muktananda devotees to confirm the rumors that had reached me in Oklahoma City. I then wrote an open letter to my former colleagues still involved in Siddha Yoga, telling them what I had learned.

It was only after I had left Muktananda and his organization of Siddha Yoga in 1981, that I settled in Fallsburg, New York at the vacation home of an acquaintance from Siddha Yoga that was only a few blocks from the South Fallsburg Siddha Yoga ashram where Swami Muktananda was still living. By growing a beard and remaining out of sight of the nearby ashramites, I managed to live on this property incognito allowing me the privacy and freedom required to fulfill my earlier prayerful promise to God to “speak out in Thy praise and to Thy glory for the benefit of all Thy children.” It was there that I began writing the book that would be titled, *The Supreme Self*, which I published in 1984 under my own publishing imprint of “Atma Books.” By this time, I was in my mid-forties. In that book, I had publicly revealed my mystical experience and the understanding that accompanied it, and, only a few years later, I recounted the story of the perennial recurrence of that experience in the many others who had known it throughout history in a comprehensive book, which I titled, *History of Mysticism*.

Here is a selfie photo taken in 1986, while living in that South Fallsburg hideout during the time I was writing *History of Mysticism*. That book was published in 1987.



There were many other significant findings that surfaced as I undertook the research for *History of Mysticism*. I was re-introduced to the Western mystical tradition, including the writings of Heraclitus, which I recovered and compiled from the extant ancient fragments of manuscripts that remained, and I became acquainted as well with the writings of Plotinus, the father of Western Mysticism, from whom the Neoplatonist tradition arose. One of the best results of the publication of my *History* was the awakening of the wide-spread public recognition of the depth and endurance of the mystical tradition as it existed through all the religions and over all the ages. Here is a small sampling from that book:

“Preface To *History of Mysticism*”

“I am one of those who have been privileged, by the grace of God, to experience the ultimate Truth of existence. This “mystical experience” occurred, for me, on the night of November 18, 1966. Since that time, I have easily recognized, by their various descriptions of it, those who have also directly experienced that absolute Truth. And it has become abundantly clear to me that, over the course of man’s long history, many individuals of differing cultures, languages, and religious traditions have known that same unitive experience. Contained in this book are the accounts of the lives and teachings of some of the best known of those individuals, for whom I feel great empathy and comradeship, as my own experience coincides with and confirms their own. In fact, their experience is my experience; for all who have realized the Truth have known that same eternal Self.

“The material contained herein presents no speculative philosophy; it offers no metaphysical hypothesis. Rather, it is the collected legacy of those who have experienced, first-hand, the unitive Truth underlying all existence. It is a record of the voices of the illumined souls of the past, all of whom gave their hearts, their very lives, to sharing their transcendent knowledge with unborn humanity. And so, to the prospective reader, I say: mark well what you read here. This is no ordinary history of people, places and events; it is the secret history of man’s perennial journey on the ultimate Quest, where all the travelers, arriving from widely diverse paths, arrive at the self-same unitive Truth. It is really the greatest, the most thrillingly wonderful, story ever told. May it awaken you and inspire you to join the great Quest.

Swami Abhayananda”

“Introduction To *History of Mysticism*”

“Mysticism is that point of view which claims as its basis an intimate knowledge of the one source and substratum of all existence, a knowledge, which is obtained through a revelatory experience during a rare moment of clarity in contemplation. Those who claim to have actually experienced this direct revelation constitute an elite tradition, which transcends the boundary lines of individual religions, cultures and languages, and which has existed, uninterrupted, since the beginning of time. It is, as Aldous Huxley points out, the “perennial philosophy” that resurfaces again and again throughout history in the teachings of the great prophets and founders of all religions.

“When we study the many speculative philosophies and religious creeds which men have espoused, we must wonder at the amazing diversity of opinions expressed regarding the nature of reality; but when we examine the testimonies of the mystics of past and present, we are struck by the unanimity of agreement between them all. Their methods may vary, but their ultimate realizations are identical in content. They tell us of a supramental experience, obtained through contemplation, which directly reveals the Truth, the ultimate, the final, Truth of all existence. It is this experience, which is the hallmark of the mystic; it goes by different names, but the experience is the same for all.

“By many of the Christian tradition, this experience is referred to as “the vision of God”; yet it must be stated that such a vision is not really a “vision” at all in the sense in which we use the word to mean the perception of some ‘thing’ extraneous to ourselves. Nothing at all is perceived in “the vision of God”; rather, it is a sudden expansion, or delimitation, of one’s own awareness which experiences itself as the ultimate Ground, the primal Source and Godhead of all being. In that “vision,” all existence is experienced as Identity.

“We first hear of this extraordinary revelation from the authors of the Upanishads, who lived over three thousand years ago: “I have known that spirit,” said Svetasvatara, “who is infinite and in all, who is ever- one, beyond time.”¹ “He can be seen indivisible in the silence of

contemplation,” said the author of the Mundaka Upanishad.² “There man possesses everything; for he is one with the ONE.”³

“About five hundred years later, another, a young prince named Siddhartha, who was to become known as the Buddha, the enlightened one, sat communing inwardly in the forest, when suddenly, as though a veil had been lifted, his mind became infinite and all-encompassing: “I have seen the Truth!” he exclaimed; “I am the Father of the world, sprung from myself!”⁴ And again, after the passage of another five hundred years, another young man, a Jew, named Jesus, of Nazareth, sat in a solitary place among the desert cliffs of Galilee, communing inwardly, when suddenly he realized that the Father in heaven to whom he had been praying was his very own Self; that he was, himself, the sole Spirit pervading the universe; “I and the Father are one!” he declared.⁵

“Throughout history, this extraordinary experience of unity has repeatedly occurred; in India, in Rome, in Persia, in Amsterdam, in China, devout young men and women, reflecting on the truth of their own existence, experienced this amazing transcendence of the mind, and announced to everyone who would listen that they had realized the truth of man and the universe, that they had known their own Self, and known it to be the All, the Eternal. And throughout succeeding ages, these announcements were echoed by others who had experienced the same realization: “I am the Truth!” exclaimed the Muslim, al-Hallaj; “My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself,” said the Christian saint, Catherine of Genoa. And Rumi, Jnaneshvar, Milarepa, Kabir and Basho from the East, and Eckhart, Boehme and Emerson from the West, said the same.

“These assertions by the great mystics of the world were not made as mere philosophical speculations; they were based on experience—an experience so convincing, so real, that all those to whom it has occurred testify unanimously that it is the unmistakable realization of the ultimate Truth of existence. In this experience, called *samadhi* by the Hindus, *nirvana* by the Buddhists, *fana* by the Muslims, and “the mystic union” by Christians, the consciousness of the individual suddenly becomes the consciousness of the entire vast universe. All previous sense of duality is swallowed up in an awareness of indivisible unity. The man who previously

regarded himself as an individualized soul, encumbered with sins and inhabiting a body, now realizes that he is, truly, the one Consciousness; that it is he, himself, who is manifesting as all souls and all bodies, while yet remaining completely unaffected by the unfolding drama of the multiform universe.

“Even if, before, as a soul, he sought union with his God, now, there is no longer a soul/God relationship. He, himself, he now realizes, is the one Existence in whom there is neither a soul nor a God, but only the one Self, within whom this “imaginary” relationship of soul and God manifested. For him, there is no more relationship, but only the eternal and all-inclusive I AM. Not surprisingly, this illuminating knowledge of an underlying ‘I’ that is the Soul of the entire universe has a profoundly transformative effect upon the mind of those who have experienced it. The sense of being bound and limited to an individual body and mind, set in time and rimmed by birth and death, is entirely displaced by the keenly experienced awareness of unlimited Being; of an infinitely larger, unqualified Self beyond birth and death. It is an experience, which uniquely and utterly transforms one’s sense of identity, and initiates a permanently acquired freedom from all doubt, from all fear, from all insecurity forevermore. Little wonder that all who experience such liberating knowledge wish to share it, to announce in exuberant song to everyone who will hear that, through the inner revelation of wisdom, “You shall know the truth, and the Truth will make you free!”

“If we can believe these men, it is this experience of unity, which is the ultimate goal of all knowledge, of all worldly endeavor; the summit of human attainment, which all men, knowingly or unknowingly, pursue. It would seem, then, a valuable task to study and review the lives and teachings of those who have acquired this knowledge. In this book, I have sought to present just such a study and anthology; it is presented in an historical perspective in order to better view the long-enduring tradition of mystical thought, and to reveal more clearly the unity underlying the diversity of its manifold expressions. Naturally, it has not been possible to include every single instance of mystical experience, or to touch upon all the myriad extensions of mystical knowledge, but I have attempted to tell the story of the lives and teachings of those who most intelligibly represent the mystical tradition as it has manifested throughout the ages. It is a story

that begins long, long ago, in a past so remote that it is but vague and faint, beyond the reach of our straining vision, obscure in the hazy mists of time.”

NOTES:

1. Svetasvatara *Upanishad*, 3
2. Mundaka *Upanishad*, 3:1
3. Svetasvatara *Upanishad*, 1
4. *Saddharma bundarika*, 15:21; Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. I), London, Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1962, p. 600.
5. New Testament, Book of *John*:10:30

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III. THE NONDUAL PERSPECTIVE (*The Wisdom of Vedanta*)

After writing *History of Mysticism*, I concentrated on finishing my Jnaneshvar book. Jnaneshvar, a thirteenth century mystic-poet, was an important figure in Swami Muktananda's world. Muktananda often referred to his earlier life as Raja Ramadev Rao, who had been a king during the life of Jnaneshvar, and he had even been mentioned in one of Jnaneshvar's books. During the time that I was still a part of Swami Muktananda's organization, I had translated some of Jnaneshvar's works with the help of a native Marathi speaker. Now, in order to complete my book about him, I needed to research and write the biographical portion. It was during this research that I was to learn much more, not only about Jnaneshvar, but about the previous life and times of my guru as well.

I was still living in Fallsburg, New York, not far from Muktananda's ashram, and had frequently driven the thirty miles to New Paltz, New York in order to research *History of Mysticism* at the State University of New York (SUNY) library. Now, I continued my trips to the university library to research the historical milieu of the thirteenth century Indian saint, Jnaneshvar. The completed book, *Jnaneshvar: The Life And Works Of The Celebrated Thirteenth Century Indian Mystic-Poet*, was not published, however, until 1989, after I had moved to Lacey, Washington, near to Olympia.

It was during this time in Washington state that my interest focused on the writings of the pioneer mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, and I wrote a book, describing his immense contribution to mystical philosophy in the Western world and containing some significant excerpts from his third-century book, *Enneads*, and I called it *Plotinus: The Origin of Western Mysticism*. I published this book in 2000.

Another book published during my Washington state residence was *The Wisdom of Vedanta*. The content of that book was derived primarily from lecture notes that went back to my teaching days with Siddha Yoga, and many of the ideas which formed the basis of my developing philosophy are

contained therein. *The Wisdom of Vedanta* was published in Olympia, Washington in 1991. Here are a few excerpts from that book:

“Introduction To Vedanta

“All people of intelligence eventually awaken to some degree to the presence of God in their lives, and, depending on what religious or philosophical environment they happen to be in at the time of that awakening, they tend to interpret their spiritual experience in that context. The person living in a Moslem intellectual environment interprets his experience through the Koran, and worships Allah; the Hindu gives his heart to Krishna or Shiva; the person inundated with Buddhist ideas sees his awakening in Buddhist terms; the Jew relates strongly to the religious history of his forefathers and looks to Yahweh; the Christian describes his path in Christian terms, and the Platonist in Platonist terms. But, of course, they are all turning in the same direction. If they reach the object of their yearning, they transcend sectarian interpretations and come to know directly the Source of their attraction, and realize that It is beyond all religious tradition, containing all traditions and yet transcending them all.

“We may picture the many spiritual seekers of various traditions as a group of men widely scattered around the base of a peaked mountain; each starts up the mountain from his own place and wends his way along his own mountain path. From their individual perspectives, each appears to be far apart from the other, with different destinations. But each, as he nears the top, draws nearer the others, and eventually all reach the very same mountaintop. It is then they realize that the destination each sought, though each along his own unique pathway, was ultimately the same for all. And once they have reached the pinnacle of their quest, they come to know directly the One they sought, and realize It as the eternal and universal Self of all. As the 16th century mystic, Dadu, said so well: “Ask of those who have attained God; all speak the same word. ... All the enlightened have left one message; ... it is only those in the midst of their journey who hold diverse opinions.”

“This book is intended to reveal the perspective of the enlightened, those who have reached the pinnacle at the end of their journey, all sharing a common vista. We find today many who have attained that summit of

knowledge and who espouse a common perspective based on that universal knowledge; they are to be found in every religious tradition that exists. However, it only rarely that we find an acknowledgement that this unitary knowledge was originally expressed in its fullness and perfection in the written scriptures of that most ancient of lands, India, in a tradition known as *Vedanta*, the purest and most concisely expressed understanding of Non-Duality. Vedanta is not Hinduism; Hinduism is a religious tradition, with its own rites and customs; but Vedanta is an expression of the direct knowledge of Unity. Vedanta may be expressed in the tradition of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism; but it is none of them. It is the essence and guiding principle of them all. It is the heart of each of them, the string on which the pearls of all religious traditions are strung. Vedanta is a perspective based, not on the teachings of any one particular person, but on the common experience of countless souls since the beginning of time.

“*Vedanta* means “the end of the Veda,” and was originally intended to signify the collection of writings called the *Upanishads*, which were written nearly three thousand years ago by some anonymous Indian sages and appended to the earlier *Vedas* as their final portion. But the word, *Veda*, simply means “knowledge,” or “wisdom”; and so, the real meaning of *Vedanta* is “the end of knowledge,” “the ultimate wisdom.” In this broader interpretation, Vedanta refers, not only to the Upanishads, but covers the whole body of literature which explains, elaborates and comments on the Upanishadic teachings from their conception to the present day. It is synonymous with “the perennial philosophy,” that universal knowledge of Unity possessed by all the mystics and sages of past and present. In this sense, Vedanta is the culmination of all knowledge seeking. It is the final philosophy, recurrently discovered by seekers of Truth in every age.

“Because it is the highest knowledge possible to the man, the philosophy of Vedanta does not appeal to those without the courage and desire to ferret out the Truth for themselves. But those minds long accustomed to enquiry and Truth-seeking will experience a thrilling surge of joy upon discovering the philosophy of Vedanta. For it provides all the missing pieces to the puzzle of life and makes the total picture puzzle at last intelligible and perfectly clear. What a moment it is for the long-searching intellect when it finally comes across the truths expressed in Vedanta! What excitement it feels on having all its doubts dispelled, like cobwebs swept from the newly lighted

corner of a room. How happy it feels on looking out upon a world perceived as for the first time bathed in clarity and light!

“What is it then, about Vedanta that infuses the mind with such delight and happiness? Reduced to its elements, the philosophy of Vedanta consists of three propositions: First, that man’s real nature is Divine. Second, that the aim of human life is to realize this Divine nature. Third, that those first two propositions constitute what we know as “religion,” and that, therefore, all genuine religious traditions are essentially in agreement. It is the teaching of all genuine religion that our separative ego, our vaunted individuality, is but a flimsy charade; and that who we really are beneath the ever-changing tide of thoughts and impressions which flood our minds, is that one, bright, undivided Consciousness whom men call *God*. He is the one Self of all selves, “the One who has become many”; and the realization of our eternal and ever-joyful Self is the realization of the Truth that shall make us free.

“It is the aim of Vedanta to show men the way to realize and become established in the awareness of their true, Divine, Self. A thousand years before Jesus asserted, “I and the Father are one,” the Upanishads declared: *aham brahmasmi*, “I am Brahman”; and *tat twam asi*, “That thou art.” These assertions are not merely high-flown theories or mere suggestions to bolster the ego, but are the confident declarations of those who, in a moment of rare quietude and clarity, have seen through the veil of appearance and come face to face with their eternal Identity.

“It is of utmost importance to understand that Vedanta is not a mere speculative *theory* about the nature of Reality; it is the account of Reality by those who have “seen” It and known It—much more clearly than you see these words before you. It must be approached therefore as the sacred knowledge that it is. We must open ourselves to be taught, with an eagerness to look beyond the limitations of language and of our own conceptual framework, in order to understand what the seers of Truth have to say. If their words are true, they will not contradict our own rational judgment. If they are true, they will stir us to new heights of mental clarity and intellectual delight; and they will have the power to inspire us toward the realization of our own Divine Self.

“Historical Origins of Vedanta

“The *Vedas* may be thought of as the “Old Testament” of Indian religion, insofar as they represent, for the most part, the views of an archaic Indian priesthood who had not the benefit of mystical vision, but who taught men rather to accept a conciliatory relationship to a pantheon of warring, jealous gods. The *Vedas*, which comprised the oral religious tradition imported into India at the time of the Aryan invasion (ca. 2000 B.C.E.), tended to hypostasize various natural elements and forces, attributing to them lurid personalities and histories, much as did the mythologies of ancient Greece. The *Upanishads*, on the other hand, were the esoteric writings of the *rishis*, the seers, the rare sages of ancient times, who had actually realized the unitive Reality through their own contemplative experience.

“The *Upanishads*, as well as the *Bhagavad Gita*, may be thought of, therefore, as comprising the “New Testament” of the Indian religious tradition, which, while expanding upon the old Vedic writings, also supplants them by transcending the polytheism and anthropomorphism of the more elementary *Vedas*. However, neither the *Upanishads* nor the *Bhagavad Gita* should be thought of as the “authority” of Vedanta in the same sense as some take the Bible to be the authority of Judaism and Christianity. The authority of Vedanta is one’s own personal experience of enlightenment. But the *Upanishads* are the earliest and clearest expression of the mystical, or unitive, experience and of the knowledge resulting from such an experience; and for that reason, hold an honored place in the world of religious literature. They stand as testimony and proof of the common perennial knowledge available throughout the history of the world to all who earnestly seek to know their origin and their destination in this life; and all who have come to attain that knowledge have acknowledged the authenticity and purity of these ancient testaments.

“Of the many recognized *Upanishads*, twelve are regarded as of primary importance and merit. In philosophical clarity and persuasiveness, these few represent what, for most of us, are to be considered “The Upanishads.” Their names are: *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Chandogya*, *Brihad-aranyaka*, *Aitareya*, *Taitiriya*, *Svetasvatara*, and *Maitri* Upanishads. The authors and exact date of authorship of these individual spiritual treatises are unknown; we know only that they were written, by

various anonymous sages who had realized that Truth of which they speak, sometime between 1200 B.C.E. and the first few centuries of the Current Era. While they vary in length and in style, their one common theme is the inner realization of the identity of the Self (*Atman*) and God (*Brahman*). We may seek to know God, or we may strive to know our Self; but, say the *Upanishads*, when you find the one, you will find the other as well—for they are one. It is this inner discovery, which constitutes enlightenment.

“In its long history, Vedanta has had many enlightened sages, many holy saints, to serve as its glorious representatives. Indeed, it may be said that even those enlightened souls of other lands and other religious traditions—such as the 3rd century Roman, Plotinus, or the 13th century Christian, Meister Eckhart, or the Sufi, Ibn Arabi—may be regarded as representatives of Vedanta, insofar as their experiences and their teachings are wholly consistent with the philosophy of Vedanta. But there is one historical figure who played a most prominent role in revitalizing Vedanta by his writings, his teachings and his very life: that man is the medieval Indian *acharya*, or teacher, known as Shankara.

“Shankaracharya lived sometime between the 7th and 9th centuries, during a time when Vedanta had become almost forgotten and nearly supplanted throughout the Indian landscape by Buddhism. And even those who clung to the ancient ways tended, for the most part, to make of Vedanta nothing more than a priestly Brahmanism based primarily on the adherence to conventional Vedic ritual and the laws of behavior governing the various castes. It was Shankara who brought, through his single-handed efforts, a return to the unitive philosophy of the *Upanishads* and a reawakening of the Indian spirit to its long-established heritage of spiritual wisdom.

“Before his death in the Himalayas at the age of thirty-two, Shankara authored many independent treatises as well as commentaries on ancient Vedantic texts; he re-established the monastic tradition on a firm footing; and he traveled the length and breadth of India on foot, teaching the truth which he had realized in himself, and which corroborated the teachings of the ancient *rishis*. He taught also the means whereby one could realize, as he had done, that eternal Lord of the universe. Here are his own words:

“Gain experience directly. Realize God for yourself! Know the

Self as the one indivisible Being and become perfect. Free your mind from all unnecessary distractions and dwell in the consciousness of the Self.

“This is the final declaration of Vedanta: Brahman is everything; it is this universe and every creature. To be liberated [from ignorance] is to live in the continual awareness of Brahman, the undivided Reality. ¹

“Shankara’s philosophy, the philosophy of Non-Dual Vedanta, may be characterized by a simple formula taken from his writings; it is this:

brahma satyam
jagan mithya
jivo brahmaiva napara

(God is the Reality.
 The world is illusory.
 The soul [or Self] is, indeed, nothing else but God.)

NOTES:

1. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, Vedanta Press, 1978, pp. 112-113.

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IV. THE BLENDING OF MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE (*The Divine Universe*)

In 1992, still living in Washington state, I published two books simultaneously as a statement of the co-equal importance of devotion and Self-knowledge; those books were *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God* and *Dattatreya: Song of The Avadhut*. Both of these books had been written long previous to their publication—*Thomas á Kempis* back in the sixties when I was still in my Santa Cruz cabin, and *Dattatreya* in 1977, while I was living in the Oakland, California ashram of Swami Muktananda.

Returning to Florida, I took up residence on the Treasure Coast in October of 2002. I continued to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant through various Healthcare Agencies, taking various assignments in institutions as well as private homes. And in my spare time, I pursued my interest in writing about mystical experience. I had long had an interest in reconciling my mystical vision with the perspective of contemporary science, which I attempted to do in my next book, *Mysticism And Science: A Call For Reconciliation*. This book was published by O Books in London in 2007.

This was followed quickly by another book focused on the disparity between Gnosis and Science, the Mystical worldview and the Scientific perspective. This book was called *The Divine Universe: An Alternative To The Scientific Worldview*. I published it myself with the help of the iuniverse organization in 2008, and I feel that it is an important book, containing much that is still significant and highly relevant today. Here are some excerpts from *The Divine Universe*:

“Introduction

“For many, contemporary materialistic science offers a sufficiently convincing worldview; but I wish in this book to offer an equally convincing alternative to that established worldview. I offer not a refutation, but rather a reformulation of the scientific perspective into which the worldview of spirituality is neatly integrated. Upon examination, this worldview

integrating science and spirituality will be recognized to be an ancient and perennial one, and yet it is a vision that wonderfully satisfies the requirements and sensibilities of the modern intellect as well. However, it is a vision that can only be approximated, and never *fully* told. For, to be truly known, its truth must be revealed to the inner eye, and thus “seen” by each single soul who seeks to know it. It is a vision that does not lend itself well to language but shines forth and communicates itself clearly through a higher and subtler means of expression that is at once intuitive and revelatory. And so, these words I offer in the service of Spirit are only suggestive, like the finger pointing at the moon. Only the reader can make them productive of understanding by tracing their meaning to the living Reality within to which they point.

“In our contemporary world, the spiritual worldview is very much under attack. Many books have appeared on the market today touting scientism and decrying the spiritual worldview, and just the other day, I heard a segment on the radio highlighting a group of atheists. How smug they seemed with their scientific perspective on things, and how condescending they were toward those they referred to as “believers”, we poor ignorant masses of superstitious humanity. I could only laugh. Years ago, as a young man, I sympathized with their position. I saw no evidence for belief in God; in fact, those who embraced religion seemed to me to be merely passive followers of the naïve beliefs blindly accepted by the culture as a whole. When I was twenty-eight, however, my mind became opened to the possibility of the direct experience of God, and I went into solitary retreat in a mountain cabin to prepare myself for a direct meeting with God. By the grace of God, that meeting came on the night of November 18, 1966.

“At that time, drawn deeply into contemplative prayer, I experienced from the vantage of eternity the outflow of the universal manifestation and its subsequent return in a never-ending cycle of manifestation and dissolution. Much later, I read of the theory of ‘the Big Bang’ put forward by the theoretical physicists. It was not long before I realized that the initial expansion of the newborn universe, said by the physicists to have occurred around 15 billion years ago from an ‘infinitely dense point’, was the same origin that I had witnessed in meditation years earlier. With this understanding, I set out to reconcile these two visions—one from the viewpoint of the Eternal, and one from the viewpoint of contemporary

theoretical physics—in the hope of bringing about a synthesis of the spiritual and the scientific visions regarding the origin of our Cosmos.

“Here, then, is a collection of independent Essays on various aspects of this integrated worldview, written spontaneously over the past year or so, with an intent to offer a clear and reasoned alternative to the worldview promulgated by the many advocates for the popular ‘scientism’ of our age. There are four distinct ‘groups’ of Essays included here: there are those that deal with correcting some of the myths of popular science; there are some that are expressive of the ‘perennial philosophy’; there are some that deal with that much maligned subject: astrology; and there are those which attempt to give some idea of what it is like to “see God” (See Chapter 11, “My Own Experience”).

“One of the reasons for the difficulty in describing such an experience is the fact that God is not experienced as someone or something that can be spoken of in the third person as “He” or “Him”, or even spoken of in the second person as “Thou” or “Thee”. God is experienced as one’s eternal Self, and therefore can only be spoken of as “I”. In the religious traditions of India, this understanding is commonplace; God is spoken of as *Paramatman*, “the Supreme Self”, or simply as the congregation of the subjective qualities *sat*, “Being or Existence”; *chit*, “Consciousness”; and *ananda*, “Bliss”. Yet in our Western culture and language, this entanglement of the individual’s “I” (or *ego*) and the Divine “I” still makes for confusing and problematic communication regarding the subject of God, the Divine Self.

“Perhaps the most persistent and perplexing question about God is “How is the experience of God to be attained? Is there a reliable scientific answer to the question of how this can be done?” And the answer is “No”. To be sure, the focused directing of the soul’s attention to the eternal Reality through meditation or prayerful contemplation is paramount; but why do so few obtain the desired results where so many make the effort? There are clearly no clear-cut guidelines that can promise success in this endeavor. And so, it has always been regarded as a matter of God’s grace or favor. This declaration of partiality on the part of God is regarded by many as unsatisfactory, though individual merit does not seem to be a determining factor either. Yet, how else may we regard it? It is possible that the karmic evolution of the soul is a factor. Having discovered some unusual planetary

phenomena occurring at the time of my “mystical” experience, I have suggested the possibility of a connection between the two occurrences; but the establishment of a tangible correlation between them awaits the collection of data concerning many more such experiences. The fact is that we do not know for sure why God reveals Himself in some and not in others.

“The question of how a God, who is Eternal Consciousness, is able to “create” this immense and multi-faceted universe is also one which presents a stumbling block for many. From my own experience, the universe is projected and withdrawn in a recurring cycle, in the manner of a breath that is exhaled and inhaled. Each cycle of that ‘breath’ lasts, from our temporal perspective, for billions of years; yet from the perspective of eternity, beyond time and space, each endures for merely the space of a breath. God is not confined to human possibilities; He is at once eternally transcendent Consciousness, and active Energy operating in the spatio-temporal field. He is both unmoved and mover. He projects or emanates our universe in a manner similar to the way we project a thought-form or dream upon our own consciousness while remaining the witness to our creations.

“Underlying a dream phantasm is the active mind of the dreamer. That dreamer’s mind is the material cause, the formal cause, the effective cause and the final cause of the dream. Using that analogy, God, the Divine Mind whose projected “dream” this universe is, is the material, formal, effective and final cause of this phenomenal world. Once this is grasped, what further purpose does the investigative analysis of this world serve? It brings to mind the thought of a scientist-character in a dream tearing up the dream-pavement in the dream-landscape in order to analyze it, then placing the pieces under a dream-microscope. We might further imagine such a dream-scientist coming up with pronouncements about what this dream-terrain is made of, such as: “It seems to be made of waves!” “No, it is made of particles, but the particles themselves seem to be nothing more than a kind of energy!” “I’ll be damned! It’s both waves and particles! What *is* this stuff?” Truly, it is clear that such efforts would be utterly futile, and that, in order to really know the truth about himself and the reality in which he lived, our dream-scientist would simply need to wake up. Our dreams thus show a close parallel to the nature of our ‘real’ universe. While I do not wish to denigrate the efforts of scientists, I have seen that the true nature of ‘reality’ can only be realized by those who ‘wake up’ to the eternal Self.

“While that eternal Self is forever unaffected by the evolution of our cosmos, He is intimately involved in it. Just as our own consciousness is involved in the play of dreams, so is the one Divine Consciousness playing in this universal drama. He is the Self of our self, the Joy of our joy; and as we evolve toward full awareness of His truth, our understanding will eventually become clearer and expand to encompass both the heavens and the earth. I sincerely hope that the following collection of Essays will stimulate you to look deeply into the nature of your own self and the universe around you, and truly come to see yourself as the one Divine Consciousness playing in your own Divine Universe.

“Mysticism Versus Scientism

“Let me say at the onset that I have no scientific training. My interest in cosmogony derives primarily from my own direct “mystical” experience. I certainly would not pretend to know anything about this universal ‘Creation’ if I had not seen it with my own eyes in the light of an inner revelation, while drawn into a deep contemplative union with the Father. And I am now attempting to bring together this vision of gnosis with the vision of science in the hope of shedding some small amount of light on both.

“The theology of the illumined mystics is the same the world over. Only the names for God and His Power are different owing to the differing languages. All hold that the Supreme Being is absolute and unchanging. And all hold that He possesses a creative Power by which He manifests this spatio-temporal universe. In His eternally absolute and unchanging aspect, He has been called by one name, and in His aspect of universe Creator, He is called by another name. In the West, these two aspects of God have been called Theos and Logos, Jahveh and Chokmah, The One and Nous, Godhead and God, Father and Mother, and so on. In the East, they have been called Prajapati and Prthivi, Purusha and Prakrti, Shiva and Shakti, Brahman and Maya, Tao and Teh, Haqq and Khalq, and many other names. In our modern era, the names most commonly used to denote these two aspects of God are the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Energy.

“Undoubtedly, some confusion arises due to the fact that these terms, consciousness and energy, are also used by contemporary scientists in their

own more limited contexts to denote quite different realities. For example, science does not recognize Consciousness as the universal Source of all, but rather sees it as a mysterious byproduct of the biological activity of the human brain. Likewise, the term, Energy, which I regard in its theological sense as the Divine Power, has an historically traditional use in the scientific lexicon as an ambiguously defined term attached to various qualifiers—chemical, nuclear, thermal, potential, electrical, etc.—to represent the dynamic activities of these differing material frameworks.

And so, there is a paradigmatic disconnect between the conceptions and terminology of theology and science, as they are quite different both in content and meaning. And so, here, in this First Section, I present what I hope are some unusual and thought-provoking Essays regarding the contemporary scientific perspective, and some innovative ideas on how this perspective might be enhanced by the perspective of gnosis.

“Mysticism, Science, And The Heirs of Democritus

Part One

“Mysticism and science represent two opposing worldviews which may be reduced to the two diametrically opposed philosophical positions known as *idealism* and *materialism*. These two starkly differing views of the nature of the reality underlying the appearance of the world have been at odds with each other for twenty-five centuries beginning with Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Anaxagoras and Socrates on the idealist side, and Thales, Leucippus, and Democritus on the materialist side. Idealists hold that Mind is the primary reality of which matter is an evolute; materialists hold that matter is the primary reality of which mind is an evolute. Mystics, those who claim to have actually experienced or “seen” the ultimate reality directly in a moment of contemplative revelation, fall squarely on the side of idealism. Every mystic who ever lived has declared the idealistic viewpoint, stating that the ultimate reality underlying all phenomena is unquestionably noumenal. i.e., a transcendent Mind. There are no materialists among mystics.

“Mysticism, therefore, is an idealist point of view which asserts the possibility of the *direct* apperception of the ultimate reality in a rare,

profound, and purely introspective experience, wherein an extraordinarily intimate knowledge of the noumenal Source and the nature of the universe and human existence is acquired. This “mystical experience”, say those who have known it, reveals the formless, transcendent Noumenon, the “groundless Ground” of all physical and mental phenomena, which is seen to constitute everyone’s original and eternal identity. Such an experience seems to have been first spoken of in ancient Greece among the populace taking part in the “mystery religions” such as the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries (whence mysticism gets its name); and later formed the basis of the philosophical position of such seers as Socrates (by way of Plato), Philo Judaeus, and Plotinus. In the East, mysticism made its appearance in the writings of Lao Tze, the Upanishads, and the early Buddhist texts, and later in the Middle East with the teachings of Hermeticism, and the rise of Christianity and Gnosticism, all of whose central figures claimed an intimate, mystical knowledge of the noumenal Source.

“Science, in its present state, represents the position of materialism; though, it should be noted, science is not *necessarily* materialistic; that is, materialism is not an *essential* feature of science, shown by the fact that many of the greatest scientists who ever lived held religious views which demanded a noumenal source for the phenomenal world. But there is an established trend among modern scientists toward an exclusively materialistic view, no doubt as a result of the emphasis in science on conclusions which are empirically demonstrable. Science deals in tangibly objective sense-data and does not comfortably extend to less tangible subjective mental states. The very definition of science limits its focus to only that which may be empirically verified. And that requirement assures that science will probably always tend to have a materialistic bias and will grant little credence to noumena experienced in a subjective and unverifiable state of awareness.

“While science, and its attendant materialism, may be said to have originated with the early Greek philosophers cited above, it had to struggle in the West for many centuries against the strictures of religious doctrine, and only began its cultural ascendancy from the seventeenth century onward, influenced by such philosophers as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, and the works and accomplishments of scientists such as Galileo, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton. By

the twentieth century, materialism was firmly embedded in the scientific (empirical) method and implicitly formulated in the widely held philosophy of logical positivism. This view, that only knowledge obtained by the scientific method and capable of being demonstrated experimentally was worthy of the label 'knowledge', became the widespread faith of our Western culture, a faith referred to by its critics as 'scientism'. And, while there are still a few maverick idealists among the ranks of scientists today, the vocal majority utterly reject the slightest hint of mysticism or idealism and hold as firm doctrine that the universe came into being and is sustained through "natural," that is to say, purely material, processes. Nevermind that "matter", upon close examination, dissolves into "thought".

"These two, empirical knowledge, or *science*, and mystical knowledge, or *gnosis*, represent knowledge obtained through two radically different methodologies: empirical knowledge represents the ordering and analysis of *outward* observations of phenomena perceived by the senses in the normal waking state; mystical knowledge represents the *inward* observation of noumena intuitively perceived by the mind in a highly extraordinary, but well documented, contemplative state. They are really two different *kinds* of knowledge, referred to as *science* and *gnosis*. *Science* is from the Latin *scientia*, derived from *scire*, to know, and usually denotes the organization of objectively verifiable sense experience; *gnosis* is a Greek word, also meaning knowledge, but denoting an inwardly "revealed" knowledge unavailable to science.

"The difficulty presently apparent is that advocates of materialistic science refuse to acknowledge not only the validity and relevance of *gnosis*, but even the very possibility of its existence. Today, science is so steeped in the materialistic perspective that scientists and, through their influence, "educated" members of the public, routinely regard all those who hold to idealistic views as unfortunate members of the ignorant and uneducated masses, misguided by superstition. Those with a mystic bent are held in especial disdain and are the subjects of frequent ridicule in our materialist-oriented culture. Colleges and universities around the nation instill this arrogant prejudice in the youth who flock to them for their one-sided educations. One has to wonder if we are not due at this time in our history for a return of the cultural pendulum to a fresh idealism, one that is informed by both science *and* *gnosis*.

“Part Two

“Let’s go back once again and look a little closer at the initial split between these two ways of knowing: It probably began with the earliest hominids; but the best records of this division that we possess from Western civilization only go back around twenty-five hundred years to ancient Greece. Democritus (ca. 460-390 B.C.E.), student of Leucippus, contemporary of Socrates, was the Greek philosopher who surmised that the world we live in is made up of very small, indivisible, entities which he called atoms. These atoms, he guessed, were the elementary particles and building blocks of the cosmos, and were, therefore, the ultimate and final answer to the question ‘what is everything made of?’ Democritus was a firm materialist. He was, in fact, the foremost in a long line of materialistic scientists. He saw no need to look any further than these ‘elemental’ particles for the material foundation of existence. Other materialists of the time were Thales (ca. 625-545 B.C.E.), who thought that water was the ‘material principle’ of the world; and Anaxamenes (fl. 548 B.C.E.), who believed that the element, air, was the fundamental constituent of everything. But there were some other philosophers of the period who were a bit more intuitional, and certainly more contemplative, in their approach to the knowledge of ultimate reality. These philosophers had “seen” into the depths of their own conscious minds and discovered through that vision that the source of the material universe is not itself material, but is rather an eternal Mind, a Noumenon beyond all phenomena, who is the source of the phenomenal, projecting the cosmos as a human mind projects thoughts and ideas upon itself. This view, known as idealism, was held by Xenophanes (ca. 580-480 B.C.E.), Pythagoras (b. 570 B.C.E.), Parmenides (b. ca. 540 B.C.E.), Anaximander (fl. 547 B.C.E.), Heraclitus (fl. ca. 500 B.C.E.), and of course Socrates (469- 399 B.C.E.) and Plato (427-347 B.C.E.).

“Both the materialistic scientist, Democritus, and the idealists such as Socrates and Plato, have their present-day descendants. It seems, after 2500 years, that the controversy is unresolvable. Some consider the reason for this division in human perspectives to lie in the differences in the educations and life-experiences—in other words, the nurture—of those individuals making up these two philosophical worldviews. Others feel that it may be because of certain basic differences in the cerebral makeup—in other words, the nature—of idealists and materialists. Perhaps there are subtle differences

related to the evolutionary stage at which each individual soul finds itself; perhaps these differences are reflected in right-brain/left-brain patterns of dominance. Who can say? But what is certain is that this duality of philosophical perspectives greatly affects our current society and colors nearly every aspect of the conduct of life on earth.

“In our contemporary American culture, these opposing views may exist unnoticed side by side, often within the same individual. Many find that their favorite religious faith provides their subconscious idealistic perspective, while their worldly preoccupations bespeak their conscious materialistic bias. But these two co-existing, though opposing, ideologies are rarely ever analyzed, defined or even mentioned in our society. Religious faith and materialistic science co-exist comfortably within the minds of the vast majority of the indiscriminate masses. In fact, materialistic science, and its corollary, ‘scientism’, has for several centuries been sanctified as the ideology of choice within the American culture. And though we, as a culture, currently seem to be slowly emerging from that lengthy period of blind materialism, the materialistic perspective continues to flourish, and no doubt shall continue until the last man and child on earth becomes enlightened by the merciful grace of God.

“Today, there are many heirs to Democritus’ materialistic science who are vociferous in extolling their ideology. I would like to mention two of them, without mentioning their names: One is a Theoretical Physicist, physics professor, and best-selling author. In his latest book he attempts to enthrall his reading audience for the expected coming validation of ‘Superstring Theory’, which, he expects, will prove that the ultimate reality is actually very tiny material ‘strings’ of which all matter and forces are made. It seems that someone has calculated mathematically that the present menagerie of particles and forces so far discovered may be reduced to a common unifying ‘element’ if all those particles and forces were themselves constituted of a yet tinier material entity in the form of vibrating strings, which would then, according to theorists, produce by their vibrations and varying configurations the appearance of every particle and force thus far known. The only problem is that these ‘strings’ would have to be so tiny that, if a hydrogen atom were blown up to the proportions of the Milky Way galaxy, strings within it would only be the size of dust mites. It would take more than a billion, billion quadrillion of these strings to make up an inch. Also,

they would have to exist in a universe consisting of 10 to 24 curled-up dimensions.

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if you really could infer the ultimate reality by taking things apart and finding that one common element in everything! However, it’s a very multi-faceted and insubstantial ocean of constantly transforming (Thought) energy that we find instead. The cosmos in which we live almost seems to be designed in such a way as to confound any and all efforts to comprehend the manner of its existence. Fortunately, the One who is the ultimate Source of this energetic ocean of appearance has periodically revealed Himself to certain individuals and made known the manner of His projection of this universal array. But, unfortunately, that vision and that certainty is not available to all. There’s the rub. So, the unilluminated go on refusing to acknowledge a Mind greater than their own; and they go on inventing myriads of incredibly bizarre scenarios for the origin and constituency of the universe. They go on enquiring, delving, analyzing, and presupposing, wending their way more and more deeply and inextricably into labyrinthine mazes of imagination – all to no avail. Isn’t it amazing what an ingeniously designed comedic drama the Author of this universal production has fostered! ¹

“Another materialistic scientist, a Cosmologist, also a professor and author, is anxiously awaiting the empirical verification of the ‘quantum fluctuations in the vacuum of space’ as the ultimate cause and origin of the ‘Big Bang’. He suggests that the universe began from nothing as a “quantum fluctuation in the vacuum”; but it seems to me that one would then be required to explain what caused the quantum vacuum. Is the “quantum fluctuation” the prime mover, the ultimate reality? I’m being facetious, of course; I know it’s not the ultimate reality. I’ve seen the ultimate Source. He lives in/as eternity, and this universe is the projection of His will, an indescribable breathing forth of the whole Mind-born shebang and a subsequent withdrawing of it all once again, a cycle endlessly repeated. Why? No one knows. And I don’t think there is a why. But the important point is that, while the manifested universe is our temporal reality, that one Mind is our eternal reality. And He can be known within as the consciousness of “I” through His gracious revelation.

“In a recent book, our Cosmologist offers ten questions which comprise his ten Chapter titles: *1. How do we know the things we think we know? 2. Is there a theory of everything? 3. How did the universe begin? 4. How did the early universe develop? 5. Why is the universe the way it is? 6. What is it that holds the universe together? 7. Where did the chemical elements come from? 8. Where did the solar system come from? 9. Where did life originate? 10. How will it all end?* While our Cosmologist explains the answers to each of these questions as ‘natural’ processes, I couldn’t help laughing when I realized that, for me, in my simplistic view of things, the answer to each of these questions is perfectly obvious. The answer to each is “God”. Needless to say, that answer would fall short of satisfying any of our materialistic scientists. But it clearly points out the immense difference between our perspectives on reality.

“For me, the richness of the multitude of universal phenomena is understood to be projected by and contained within the One. The One, and not the perplexing multitude of phenomena, is the unvarying focus of my attention. Having seen the splaying out of the universe from the vantage of eternity, curiosity for just *how* each particular phenomenon is produced is utterly lacking in me. What a simple bumkin I must seem! Yet I truly believe that, once the scientists follow all their theoretical extrapolations to their ultimate resolution, they will come at last to the same simple unity in which I am comfortably settled. They may call it by another name, but they must in the end come to the one eternal Mind that has breathed forth this immensely complex universe of seething motion. That is the ultimate Theory of Everything. The universe began from (in) Him. The universe is the way it is because He thought (willed) it so. It is His Thought that produced it and holds it together. The chemical elements, the solar system, and life all come from Him. It will end also by His will when He withdraws it all back into Himself.² This is the theory backed up by the visionary experience of countless mystics, seers, sages, and prophets from time immemorial.

“In the conceptualization of a materialistic universe, there are clearly no limits to the possibilities of one’s imagination. These clever materialistic scientists hope one day to announce to the world: ‘We’ve finally discovered what the universe is made of; it’s made of a whole lot of strings!’ ‘And it all began with a random fluctuation!’ But sorry boys; you’re on the wrong track. We (mystical idealists) have seen the ultimate source, and turns out

He's an eternal Mind, who, though completely beyond our time and space universe, also intimately pervades and constitutes this universe as divine Thought. That's why you keep coming up with little particles that turn out to be waves of pure (Thought) energy. That's why all those little particles seem to be interconnected, though there is nothing apparently connecting them. That's why you can't get a handle on what's making the whole thing hold together and behave as an intelligently guided and integral whole. That's why you're never going to discover the ultimate reality by means of a microscope or telescope or supercollider. Give it up, boys. The ultimate reality is an open secret already; and you guys have been sadly and terribly misled by your unilluminated mentors. It's okay if you're just clowning around, trying to see what amazing fantasies you can come up with; go ahead, knock yourselves out. But please give some due acknowledgment and respect to the truth as it has already been revealed countless times to countless individuals.

“The Ultimate Theory of Everything

“When physicists and cosmologists talk about a ‘Theory of Everything’ they are referring to the potential for a theory that would provide a single unifying mathematical law governing the properties of all elementary phenomena: the various wave/particles categorized as quarks or leptons and the four known basic interactions. Such a law, if it exists, would enable these scientists to feel that they understood the means by which all the matter in the universe operates. Such a law, once formulated and proven by evidence, would be greatly celebrated among the scientific community, and would fulfill the long-sought desire on the part of physicists for a consistent theoretical framework—at least for a brief moment. For it would very quickly become apparent that there is much more to this universe than merely matter and material interactions, and that mathematical laws concerning the material universe do not answer the important questions, nor are they able to offer any lasting satisfaction in the quest for true knowledge. Such a law, if it did not take into account the Conscious eternal Source and Ruler of the universe, who constitutes the very identity of those physicists and cosmologists, would be ultimately futile and meaningless.

“There can only be one ultimate theory of everything; it must be the theory that *accurately* describes the origin, evolution, sustenance, and purpose of

the universe and all that's in it. And such a theory does indeed exist; it is a theory that has been both implicitly and explicitly expressed throughout the span of human history, sometimes referred to as "the perennial philosophy", but often regarded as mere myth. This ultimate theory is based entirely on direct experience and is therefore an experientially confirmed philosophy or theory. It begins and ends with the One, known as "the Lord of the universe", "the Divine Source", "the Eternal". 'In the beginning,' this ultimate theory starts out, 'there was no universe, nor any creatures to perceive its absence; there was only the One, the "I am", who has always been. Within that One, a breath-impulse welled up, and He expelled it, projecting His own life force into the simultaneously newborn spaces. And, while there were not yet any eyes to see it, it was as though a great explosion had appeared out of nowhere, from which the entire universe evolved. From Him, the universe is breathed forth; in Him it lives and evolves, and to Him it ultimately returns, in the same manner as a person's outgoing breath is indrawn once again. This world is constituted of His life's breath and contains His life within it. From the beginning, it is alive with Consciousness and Energy, manifesting as quanta of light and matter, and evolving into manifold forms; and this Consciousness and Energy, inherent in all matter, evolves eventually into the various sentient life-forms that populate the Earth.

"All this variegated universe of form appears to exist independently as a thing in itself, with its own internal laws; but it is entirely contained in the One, consisting of His Power, and governed by His inherent and unfolding Thought. Just as men create imaginative worlds within themselves, He creates this world in time, supplying it with Consciousness and Energy out of Himself. But, just as a man dreaming is not affected by the events in his dream-world, neither is the One affected by His Mind-born creation. He remains an immaterial Presence beyond this imagined world, an eternal Consciousness in omniscient and eternal bliss. For Him, the expansion and withdrawal of this universe is but a momentary breath, though to His creatures encased in time's illusion, billions of Earth-years pass both in its expansion and in its contraction. He is beyond time and space, beyond beginnings and endings, and though He contains all things, He is uncontained, as He is the only One, besides whom there is no other.

“The evolution of His cosmos brings into being sentient creatures, the most intricately evolved of these creatures being human beings. These beings inherit the eternal Consciousness of their Creator; but they also possess a false sense of individuality (called the ego), which constitutes a subtle, ideational identity (called the soul). This ego-soul comprises an ideational identity within the eternal Consciousness—which is the real underlying Identity of all human beings; and this ego-soul, in correlation with the evolving planetary patterns of this solar system, continues to evolve in intelligence and awareness through numerous lifetimes, until at last it is awakened to its true Identity. When such an ego-soul is awakened to its true Identity, it knows the true, everlasting Self as the one eternal Consciousness; and the ego-soul vanishes, as an imaginary snake disappears when it is realized to be in actuality a rope. Until such an awakening, souls continue to pass from life to life pursuing illusory selfish goals. But once having evolved, and having awakened to their true Self, such individualized souls are released from the need for further human birth and live in the freedom and bliss of the one eternal Consciousness, serving as manifest instruments of the Divine. This is the ultimate Theory of Everything. It is discovered by each soul in its allotted time.

“The empirical sciences developed by human beings serve a valuable function in that they seek to discover consistent laws governing physical phenomena, without dependence upon theoretical considerations. They seek, through pragmatic experiment and empirical sensory evidence, to derive a satisfactory understanding of universal phenomena, from the microscopic to the macroscopic, in the endeavor to formulate a consistent and accurate spectrum of human knowledge. This endeavor is both exemplary and praiseworthy; it has led to many outstanding clarifications of our understanding of the world and has brought many improvements in the lives and circumstances of much of humanity. However, the representatives of science, by their materialistic framework and self-imposed limitation of the acceptance of empirical (physical) evidence only, have rendered science impotent to see and consider the entirety of reality, which consists of spiritual and psychological elements as well. It is as though the representatives of science have declared that *‘We only deal with that part of reality that is perceivable by the senses because that is the limit of human certainty, and therefore the limit of our epistemological province; and if evidence from other experience outside that province contradicts our theories of the nature of the universe, we must simply ignore them, since*

such experience is not our concern'. Thus, in their attempt to limit reality to the physical only, they have bound themselves to partial and mistaken judgments of the nature of reality. It is the task of this and future generations to correct this illogical and harmful limitation on the exploration of knowledge in all its forms, and to bring about an integral perspective that takes into account not only the physical evidence, but the psychological and spiritual evidence as well. It is only then that we will possess the capability of providing an ultimate Theory of Everything that is comprehensive, accurate, and irrefutable. Only then will the human thirst for a complete knowledge of the reality in which we live be truly satisfied."

NOTES:

1. Regarding the Big Bang and some of the modern cosmological theories, renowned mathematician and physicist, Roger Penrose, has said: "We really don't know what happened there—the big bang was a totally amazing occurrence. I don't believe any of these theories about fields we haven't found or baby universes we have no evidence for, or a larger universe in which ours is embedded. There is no objective reason to believe in any of these hypotheses. ... I don't know about the cosmological constant—I don't believe in it. As for the inflationary universe theory—I am a skeptic. What these people do is come up with a theory, and when the evidence doesn't support it, they change their theory, then change it again and again." (This quote is by Amir Aczel from a personal conversation with Penrose, in *God's Equation*, N.Y., Dell Publishing, 1999; pp.217-218).

2. The cyclic arising and disappearance of the universe is famously described by the mystic-author of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapters VIII., verses 17-20; and IX, verses 7-10. For other similar historical descriptions, see Swami Abhayananda, *Mysticism And Science*, Winchester, U.K., O Books, 2007; Chapter 8, "The Eternal Return", pp. 75-83.

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V. THE GREAT RADIANCE (*Reflections On The Soul*)

Back in 2007, when I wrote *The Divine Universe*, I was bursting with the notion of the world having been exploded into existence by the Creative Power of God, His Divine Energy. I had not addressed, however, the nature of that Creative Energy. It hadn't yet dawned on me that the original "Energy" of which the universe is manifested had to have been in the form of Light—i.e., high-frequency electromagnetic radiation. It was only *after* the publication of *The Divine Universe* that this overwhelming likelihood clearly dawned on me. The theory that the Energy that created the universe was Light-Energy was clearly formulated and elucidated in my book, *Reflections On The Soul* which was published in 2010. The concept of "Divine Energy" as the origin and substance of the universe, which I had written of in *The Divine Universe*, was correct; it just didn't go far enough: it didn't explain *what kind* of energy!

So, there had been a radical enlargement of my perspective from the one expressed in *The Divine Universe* to the revised one expressed in *Reflections On The Soul*. In addition to coming up with the theory that the Big Bang was a Divine emanation of Light-Energy, I also reconsidered the concept that the Creative Light-Energy of God, which constituted our universe, innately contained the organizing Consciousness of God within it, and I came to the new conclusion that, while they were both Divine, the Light-Energy was distinct from the Spirit, or Soul, and of a different nature, though their Divine origin was the same. The conventional wisdom since Biblical times had held that the life-giving Spirit was breathed or "infused" into matter by God; but it became clear to me that the very manifestation of the 'material' universe had taken place *within* the Consciousness of God, since only God existed, and therefore an 'infusion' of Consciousness to guide the organization of matter was never required. The material universe, created and existing *within* God, *within* the eternal Consciousness, was thereby already imbued with Consciousness. This, it should be recognized, was an important distinction that would (or should) negate the old Judaic concept of God's breathing His Spirit into man, and forever revolutionize modern theology.

Here are a few excerpts from *Reflections On The Soul*:

“The Mind-Body Problem

“For much of human history, nearly everyone concluded, as Descartes did, that God manifests as two complementary ‘substances’: a subtle one of Spirit, or soul, that manifests as a subjective conscious awareness (mind); and a phenomenal substance consisting of matter, or body. And that, at human conception or birth, the two are joined, and then, at the cessation of life in the body, they separate. At death, the body returns to its elements, eventually decaying back into its original Energy state, while the soul continues to live in its subtle Spirit realm, until such time as, according to some, it is re-embodied in a newly born creature; or, according to others, it is relegated eternally to a place of punishment or reward, depending on the deserts accumulated in its earthly sojourn. This dualistic scheme is all very reasonable, and very neat: there is the material world, and the spiritual world, both made of God-stuff, but of different kinds. They combine and interpenetrate during the lifetime of the body, and then separate when the body is no longer an apt host.

“How, then, are we to explain this intermingling of Soul and Matter in a manner consistent with our current understanding of the nature of Matter? We can’t, of course. For Soul is not a substance; it cannot be described in a way similar to material particles or to photons or wave frequencies. It leaves no physical imprint; it requires no medium; I suspect it has no spatial or temporal signature at all. It is utterly undemonstrable to the senses. It is a Divine and eternal Consciousness which, despite its non-material nature, permeates and interacts with the world of phenomenal material; and which, though undetectable by the senses, is clearly perceived subjectively as human awareness.

“Plotinus, utilizing his flawed third-century knowledge of natural science, attempts to draw an apt analogy:

“May we think that the mode of the soul’s presence to body is that of the presence of light to the air? This certainly is presence with distinction: the light penetrates through and

through, but nowhere coalesces; the light is the stable thing, the air flows in and out; when the air passes beyond the lit area it is dark; under the light it is lit: we have a true parallel to what we have been saying of body and soul, for the air is in the light quite as much as the light [is] in the air.”⁶

“But, of course, the permeation of Matter by Soul cannot truly be compared to the permeation of air by light: both of these latter are of a physical, or phenomenal, nature; whereas Soul, we may rightly say, is of another ‘dimension’. It is not phenomenal, but noumenal.

“Plotinus formulated a linear progression of generation: from the One to the Divine Mind, to Soul, to the material universe. For, since the Divine Mind was engendered by the One, and Soul was engendered by the Divine Mind, the material universe, thought Plotinus, must have been engendered by Soul. It appeared to him that it had to have been Soul that imaged forth a material universe of forms in which to reside. Here are his words:

“In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body also exists.

“When the Soul...comes at last to the extreme extent of its light and dwindles to darkness, this darkness, now lying there beneath, the soul sees and by seeing brings [it] to shape...”⁷

“But such a causal scheme is logically untenable. For one thing, it would contradict Plotinus’ condition that Soul could not have gone forth without the pre-existence of body, or Matter. Also, his suggestion that Soul is analogous to light, that it dwindles as it recedes, and has the power to create a universe out of darkness, is an incorrect and fanciful one. We now know the origin and constituency of Matter to a degree unknown in Plotinus’ time. And so, we must “revise” the vision of Plotinus somewhat: asserting that it is not Soul, but the Divine Mind that projects a universe of substance: a periodically appearing world of ‘matter’, in which Soul is disposed to operate.

“In order to visualize this process of universal generation, we must suppose that the Divine Mind sends forth a sudden great burst of Energy with the capability of transforming into an expanding world of time, space, and material substance—a substantial world which Soul inhabits, and which it is able to set in order according to its own designs. Soul, the amorphous realm of multiple ideas, now has a playground where it may temporarily inhabit substantial forms and act out its many fantasies to its heart’s content. We will explain this ‘creation’ of the material universe in more detail when we get to the section on “The Phenomenon of Light”; but for now, we will continue to discuss the nature of the Soul.

“Plotinus regards Soul as the intelligent organizing principle that impresses its order upon matter. In the language of contemporary knowledge, we would say that Soul is the all-pervading Intelligence that coalesces matter wave-particles into structures such as atoms, molecules, cells; and organizes them into microbiological structures such as amoeba and bacteria, into photosynthetic vegetation and aquatic creatures, becoming the very life-pulse of all that lives and moves. Matter alone has no abilities such as these; it is Soul that permeates the expanding heavens and earth, bringing living organization into matter and enabling replication and evolutionary change. Soul is the guiding intelligence, the evolutionary force, and the breath of Life permeating all the universe.

“Soul, as an organizing influence in the structuring of the material universe, on either the microcosmic or macrocosmic level, is not empirically evident; but cumulatively, the various “fine-tuned” developments in the ordering of the simplest atoms to the grandest galaxies leads us to discern a purposeful intelligence at work that has been recognized even by hardened empiricists, who have dubbed it “the anthropic principle”. This principle derives from the increasing recognition on the part of scientific observers that nature appears from the beginning, at every step, and in countless ways, to be teleologically structured with an innate intention toward the emergence of human life-forms. May we not accept this principle as evidence of the presence of an invisible guiding intelligence such as that Plotinus labeled “Soul”?

“Soul, the all-pervading Intelligence of God, may be said to be the “unified force” that manifests as the weak, strong, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces, binding the elements of this universe together. We may also account for the phenomenon of quantum interconnectedness known as ‘quantum entanglement’, which requires a medium of transmission allowing for the instantaneous relaying of information, if we assume the existence of an all-pervading consciousness extending throughout the universe—something akin to what Plotinus refers to as ‘Soul’. Further, Soul is the life-force that transforms inert matter into living, breathing entities. And it is the conscious intelligence that operates as the minds of men, acting as an evolutionary force to lead them to the knowledge of their true source and being, the one Spirit, their own Divine Self.

“Throughout most of our history, every major theology has agreed with this conception of a dual-faceted Divine Reality, consisting of a transcendent-immanent Mind, or Consciousness, and an active Energy emanating from that absolute Consciousness, by which the universe of forms is made manifest. These two aspects of Reality were given innumerable names throughout the course of history, such as *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, *Jahveh* and *Chokmah*, *Theos* and *Logos*, *Tao* and *Teh*, *Dharmakaya* and *Samsara*, *Haqq* and *Khalq*, and on and on.

“This classic Spirit-Matter dualism has not only been the conventional Eastern metaphysical view; it has been the conventional Western metaphysical view as well, from the time of Pythagorus and Plato, on through the Neoplatonists, Hermetics, and Jews, carried forward by Christianity and Islam, and reaffirmed analytically in the seventeenth century by René Descartes. Its rationality and broad acceptance firmly established this Spirit-Matter dualism in the depths of our collective psyche. But by many today, this dualistic worldview is considered archaic and moribund. Today, we base our knowledge, our convictions, on what is revealed solely by our sense-experience; that is to say, by what is revealed to us through empirical evidence; and Spirit or Consciousness, which is only experienced subjectively, remains, from the standpoint of the empiricist, an inexplicable mystery, as does the origin of Life and Consciousness itself.

“Life and Consciousness

“From the perspective of materialistic science or scientific materialism, the question of how life arose on earth appears to be one of the greatest mysteries. And, clearly, if we attempt to explain the arising of the phenomena of life on earth, relying solely on the physical sciences and our rational faculties, we run into many difficult-to-answer questions.

“We may assume that the original creative act by the transcendent Spirit was the instigation of a great burst of Energy, the particles of which transformed into “matter” through the ‘spontaneous’ process of energy-matter transformation, thus forming the universe of time and space. But in order to account for the development from inorganic matter (minerals, gases, and liquids) to micro-organisms that resulted in bacterial and vegetative life arising on earth, we need to assume some rather remarkable additional transformations. However, no one can account for how the mere handful of ingredients existing on earth prior to the existence of life might have spontaneously produced living organisms.

“Our present evolutionary theory, including our understanding of natural selection and the spontaneous mutation of genes, begins with the transformations that occurred from simple microbiological forms to more complex animal forms, and subsequently to humans. But the prior elementary transformations, from mineral to vegetable and microbial life forms, are wholly unexplained. The causal progression of those ‘elementary transformations’ represents a gap or ‘missing link’ in the evolutionary story (beginning with matter-bearing Energy and culminating in man) that materialistic science is currently unable to bridge. Despite a couple of centuries of active scientific research, the transformation from inorganic to organic matter has not been observed to occur, and no scientist has been able to account for its having occurred.

“However, the knowledge acquired in the past fifty years concerning the biological mechanism of heredity, and its working, is nothing short of awe-inspiring. We have learned how the cells of living tissue encode instructions, store information, and manufacture the necessary nutrients to form the new cells that maintain all bodily functions. The complexity and productivity of the manufacturing process going on every second within each of the

seventy-five trillion cells of our bodies, producing four to five million new cells every second, as other cells die and are replaced, dwarfs any concepts of complexity and productivity that we may have previously had. Truly, what a marvel of God's Energy, Consciousness and Joy we are! If only we had eyes to see!

“Biological scientists celebrate having found “the secret of life” in the information storage and processing factories discovered to reside in the nucleus of every living cell: the tiny strand of genetic material called *deoxyribonucleic acid*—DNA for short. For they have discovered that the information that instructs every one of the amazingly complex processes of life is encoded in the DNA molecules located in the nuclei of the cells that make up our bodies. It is the encoded information in this double-helix strand of nucleic material that directs, empowers, and produces the dazzling complexity that is our living body. But the *Source* of that intracellular information, the *Designer*, the *Organizer*, the *Programmer*, of that information, is hidden from them, and from us. Clearly, there is some intelligent force bringing about so marvelous a machine as the human body. No one could conceivably imagine that the encoded information in a strand of DNA just randomly arranges itself in such a way without an indwelling intelligence. And if it is conceded that there is some manner of intelligence at work here, what is its source? Science has no answer to this question. But mustn't it be an invisible yet pervasive Intelligence similar to what Plotinus has described as “Soul”?

“I think it is entirely possible that we may never fully understand the details of the transformations which gave rise to life on earth, but of this much we may be certain: The one eternal Consciousness, He whom we call God, breathes His own Life as Soul into all that is created. That God-essence, that Soul, is the Life in all life-forms. He is the substratum of all that lives and breathes, of all that is sentient and aware, and of all that appears in our world. He is the only Awareness, filling the entire universe, enlivening, animating, and constituting the consciousness of all beings. Life—in fact, all existence, including the material entropy we call death—is contained in and supported by His Being.

“The essence of life cannot, therefore, be reduced simply to the complexity of any material structure but is attributable only to the one transcendent and

eternal Source of all. Life arose on earth by His power, enlivening matter through His extension as Soul in order to manifest His own Life in among the stars. Soul pours itself into individual forms, enlivening them and becoming thereby individualized conscious souls.⁸

“But today, the overwhelming trend is toward a nondual materialistic worldview in which Spirit (including soul) is rejected, and Matter (including body) is all that is said to exist. This, in fact, is the nearly unanimously avowed position of the contemporary scientific community, which has, in effect, drawn the entire civilized world toward a purely materialistic worldview; and handily solved ‘the mind-body problem’ by declaring that there is no problem, because there is no soul or mind, but only material bodies and their effects.

“*Materialists* are spoken of in some types of literature as ‘physicalists,’ *physicalism* being the preferred scientific term for the position that everything is in fact physical, that *consciousness*, for example, is simply an attribute of a particular physical state of the animal or human brain, and not the attribute of an indwelling *Soul*. One representative of this group of skeptics, a professor of philosophy at UC Berkeley, here epitomizes the doubt of the scientific community regarding the existence of such a thing as “soul”:

“It is a logical possibility, though I think it extremely unlikely, that when our bodies are destroyed, our souls will go marching on. I have not tried to show that this is an impossibility (indeed, I wish it were true), but rather that it is inconsistent with just about everything else we know about how the universe works and therefore it is irrational to believe in it.⁹

“But perhaps what we *know* about how the universe works is not correct. For our distinguished professor, as for so many others, consciousness does not require the necessity of a soul: “Consciousness”, he says, “is just a brain process. It is a qualitative, subjective, first-person process going on in the nervous system.”¹⁰ And he takes the somewhat unusual position that Descartes was wrong to define *mind* (soul) and *body*, or *consciousness* and *matter*, as two separate experiential realms; that in fact the phenomenon of *consciousness*, along with its subjective nature, is just one of the ways

matter—biological matter—appears and behaves, and therefore, despite its unique attributes, consciousness falls under the heading of *matter*—a biologically enhanced aspect of matter, but matter nonetheless. “At the most fundamental level,” he says:

“Points of mass/energy are constituted by the forces that are described by the laws of nature. From those laws the existence of consciousness follows as a logical consequence, just as does the existence of any other biological phenomena, such as growth, digestion, or reproduction.¹¹

“From the viewpoint of our representative materialist/physicalist philosophy professor, life (biology) is inherent in matter, and “consciousness is *caused* by microlevel processes in the brain,”¹² though all that has ever been actually shown by neurological evidence is that consciousness *corresponds to*, or is *accompanied by*, microlevel processes in the brain. Here is one neurobiologist addressing this issue:

“Consciousness indubitably exists, and it is connected to the brain in some intelligible way, but the nature of this connection necessarily eludes us.¹³

“Another says:

“I doubt we will ever be able to show that consciousness is a logically necessary accompaniment to any material process, however complex. The most that we can ever hope to show is that, empirically, processes of a certain kind and complexity appear to have it.¹⁴

“Over the years leading up to the present (2009 C.E.), little progress has been made in the attempt to formulate a satisfactory theory of the material origin of consciousness. In the beginning of a recent book of memoirs (2006) by Nobel prize-winning Neurobiologist, Erich Kandel, a hopeful and promising picture of future progress is offered:

“The new biology of mind ...posits that consciousness is a biological process that will eventually be explained in terms of molecular signaling pathways used by interacting populations of nerve cells.... The new science of mind attempts to penetrate the mystery of consciousness, including the ultimate mystery: how each person’s brain creates the consciousness of a unique self and the sense of free will.¹⁵

“Understanding Consciousness is by far the most challenging task confronting science. ...Some scientists and philosophers of mind continue to find consciousness so inscrutable that they fear it can never be explained in physical terms.¹⁶

“What we do not understand is the *hard problem* of consciousness—the mystery of how neural activity gives rise to subjective experience.¹⁷ ...Biological science can readily explain how the properties of a particular type of matter arise from the objective properties of the molecules of which it is made. What science lacks are rules for explaining how *subjective* properties (consciousness) arise from the properties of objects (interconnected nerve cells).¹⁸

“It is clear to me that the disappointed expectations of materialistic science in solving the mystery of consciousness have their roots in the basic assumptions of materialists regarding the origin of the universe and the origin of life on earth. Their position on consciousness is logically dependent upon the theory that life (biological phenomena) occurs spontaneously and is intrinsic to matter, without the necessity of any extraneous operative; and that theory is in turn dependent upon the assumption that the universe itself originated from a material source without the involvement of any supernatural cause. The materialist-physicalist theory of consciousness is founded on those precedent assumptions, and without those assumptions, the physicalist theory of consciousness crumbles. It is a theory based on a theory based on a theory, each one dependent, not upon the accumulation of evidence, but upon the *lack* of empirical evidence to the contrary.

“The ‘archaic’ theory of the *Soul* also has no evidentiary foundation. It has been suggested by some of its advocates that the individual human brain is

constructed, through the process of evolution, to act as a receiver and processor of Soul-consciousness in a manner similar to a radio that receives and processes radio signals. The radio receiver is not the source of the broadcast signal, but its range and quality determine the range and quality of the signal produced. Is it not possible that our brains act in a similar manner in relation to Soul-consciousness? One might also compare the human brain to the power and hardware drive of a computer, and the Soul to the software used to program that computer. But, despite such analogies, we clearly do not yet have a precise comprehension of how the consciousness of Soul and individual brains might interact.

“No; the only hard evidence for the Soul is the subjective personal experience known to thousands, perhaps millions, who have been referred to as “mystics” or “yogis,” but whom materialists refer to as deluded and “irrational” individuals, whose “mystical” experiences they regard as aberrational hallucinations caused by some neuronal malfunction in the brain. In the interest of transparency, I must admit that I am one of those “mystics” who has been fortunate enough to experience the Divine reality; and so, I think it is both appropriate and beneficial to interject here an account of my own experience of the Divine reality in order to provide a first-hand account of just what such an experience reveals:

“At the age of twenty-seven, I began experiencing the presence of interior sensations and spiritual understandings which led me to actively seek the knowledge of the existence or non-existence of God. At the time of the occurrence of my contemplative ‘vision’, I had retired to a small cabin in a secluded forest environment and was giving all of my attention to the pursuit of that goal: the revelation of God. One evening, I was having my usual nocturnal conversation with my divine Father; and after a while, I found myself in an elevated and finely focused state, experiencing an intense longing for God in the very deepest part of my own soul. I felt then that my sole purpose in life was to ascend to union with the Divine, in order to be able to knowledgeably praise and glorify God for the benefit of all His children. And I was willing to die in the process, if necessary.¹⁹

“As I prayed for that union, my consciousness was suddenly expanded so that I became aware of myself as all-pervasive, beyond time, and indivisible. In my newly altered awareness, ‘I’ had become aware of my identity with

the one cosmic energy and consciousness that constituted this entire universe and all beings in it. There was no duality of Spirit and Matter, of soul and body, however. It was clear that ‘I’ was one undivided Essence that was *both* consciousness *and* the energy comprising form. My ‘I’ was seen to be the ‘I’ of every conscious being as well as of every inanimate object within this universe. It is an ‘I’ beyond time and place that fills all spatio-temporal beings with life and awareness, even though I might mistakenly attribute that ‘I’ exclusively to this individual body-brain complex.

“More than that, as the focus of my concentration continued, I could see at a more elevated, subtler level, the unmanifest source, the transcendent Absolute, as the very font of all origination. I say that I *saw*, but it was not the seeing by a subject of an object, a second; rather, it was a recognition, from that eternal vantage point, of my own transcendent nature, my own true Self. What I saw, I saw through identity with it rather than as a seer separate from the seen.

“In this visionary experience I saw no separate soul—neither my own nor any other; but experienced my identity as the universal and all-inclusive Consciousness-Energy that manifests all this universe of forms, including the form I am accustomed to calling “my own”. Clearly, there was nothing else but the one all-pervading Divinity, with no sense of a separate personal soul-identity. I had not become immobile during this experience but was allowed to write by candlelight my impressions as they occurred. But in reflecting on this experience in the ensuing years, many questions remained. My reason and learning told me that multiple souls exist; yet my visionary (spiritual) experience told me otherwise. For, in that unitive mystical experience, I had not ‘seen’ a soul, or even the suggestion of a soul. I had known only the indivisible spiritual unity of all existence.

“Now, at last, thanks in part to the reflections of Plotinus, the truth has dawned on me: The soul is not experienced in the unitive vision because the soul is the *experiencer*! It is seeing that which is above it, namely its prior: the creative aspect of God, the Divine Mind, which is its unqualified source, its own true Self, at a higher level of consciousness. It glimpses also That which is prior to the Divine Mind, namely, the Absolute, the One, *through* the Divine Mind. The individualized soul is that in us which is conscious of limited selfhood; and it is that which is silenced and made transparent,

enabling it to experience its identity as the transcendent source, the Divine Mind.

“Individualized Souls

“We are all cognizant that each of us is an individual soul that is distinct and unique in its development and experience, and, in the manifest world, has an apparent “identity” of its own, regardless of its unitive identity with other souls in the one Oversoul. This simultaneous unity and multiplicity is readily acknowledged by Plotinus; but neither he nor any other has been able to satisfactorily explain the manner in which the one Soul becomes a multitude of individualized souls; how Soul, though one and indivisible, is also, at the same time, divisible and manifold, becoming separate, individually responsible, souls. Nevertheless, he does offer an explanation:

“There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete.²⁰ The differentiated souls ...issue from the unity while still constituting, within certain limits, an association. ...They strike out here and there but are held together at the source much as light is a divided thing upon earth, shining in this house and that, while yet remaining uninterruptedly one identical substance.²¹

“The entity described as “both the undivided Soul and the soul divided among bodies,” is a Soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius from a center. Thus, it is that, entering this [earthly] realm, it possesses still the vision inherent in that superior [indivisible] phase by virtue of which it maintains its integral nature unchanged. Even here [on earth] it is not exclusively the partible soul: it is still the impartible as well...²²

“The nature, at once divisible and indivisible, which we affirm to be soul has not the unity of an extended thing. It does not consist of separate sections; its divisibility lies in its being present at every point of the recipient, but it is indivisible as dwelling entire in the total, and entire in any part. To have

penetrated this idea is to know the greatness of the soul and its power, the divinity and wonder of its being, as a nature transcending the realm of "things."

“Itself devoid of mass, it is present to all mass. It exists here and yet is [still] there, and this not in distinct phases but with unsundered identity. Thus, it is "parted and not parted," or, better, it has never known partition, never become a parted thing, but remains a self-gathered integral, and is "parted among bodies" merely in the sense that bodies, in virtue of their own sundered existence, cannot receive it unless in some partitive mode. The partition, in other words, is an occurrence in body and not in soul.²³

“That such individualized souls exist is clearly evident to us who know ourselves as separate, individualized, self-governing, units of self-awareness. We may understand that Soul is nothing less than an emanate of the Divine consciousness; and yet, we must also acknowledge that each soul’s perspective is unique. Differences in perspective seem to arise and persist through the accumulation of individual experience, inference, and willful intent. And so, there appears a multitude of souls, united in the Divine Consciousness, but separate in manifestation. Later, we will examine the alternative theory of the Buddha, which suggests that there are no individual souls, but only aggregates of tendencies.

“In Plotinus’ scheme, however, because body-bound souls are uniquely distinct, they are able to formulate desires and set out to fulfill them in the (lower) material world, thereby losing sight of their Divinity. And so, in place of the one Soul, which is truly their common Source and Reality, a multitude of separate selves comes into existence, each driven by its own independent desires and circumstances, as well as by its false identification with the material body.

“These individualized souls, we must not forget, are manifestations of the Divine. Nonetheless, while inhabiting or being associated with bodies, they pass through various experiences which may serve to forge a strong bond with the material world. However, over time, the indwelling Divinity instructs those ‘individualized souls’ by those very experiences in the errors

of their ways and returns them by various and sundry ways to the awareness of their true integral nature as the one Soul, guiding them by the most blessed path to the reformation of their awareness of all-inclusiveness and the restoration of their natural bliss. This is known as ‘the evolution of the soul’.

“According to Plotinus, the Divine Mind, in its infinite wisdom, allows more than one ‘incarnation’ for the soul to traverse this evolutionary path. The soul’s excursion into the material realm is fraught with difficulties and dangers and may bring with it many painful and binding impressions. These must be resolved and released in order for the soul to regain its blissful freedom. And so, the process of soul-evolution may be prolonged and stretched over a number of soul-incarnations. Whatever necessity requires will inevitably find a means for its accomplishment in the evolutionary journey toward truth and freedom.

“Jesus put it well when he said, “You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.” According to this understanding, a man is free insofar as he is cognizant of his essential identity with the Highest and bound when he departs from the knowledge and awareness of his Divinity, identifying with the body/brain complex. He then succumbs to the rule of earthly necessity and is moved willy-nilly by the causative forces inherent in Nature. He has the power, as the Divine Self, to will freely, unencumbered, uncompelled by circumstance; and, for that reason is responsible for his individual actions. All souls are linked by inclusion to the one Soul, and by extension to the Divine Mind; but only he who is cognizant, aware, of his Divine Identity, is truly free.

“Meanwhile, along the way, in the soul’s evolutionary journey, an inescapable justice continually operates. As Saint Paul warned, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”²⁴ Plotinus, acknowledging this same universal law of justice, then known as *adrasiteia*, and today known as “the law of actions, or *karma*”, says:

“No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done. The divine law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer,

all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last, wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by self-chosen movement, is brought to the lot he never chose. And the law decrees, also, the intensity and the duration of the suffering while it carries with it, too, the lifting of chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places of pain—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme²⁵

“Thus, a man, once a ruler, will be made a slave because he abused his power and because the fall is to his future good. Those who have misused money will be made poor—and to the good poverty is no hindrance. Those who have unjustly killed, are killed in turn, unjustly as regards the murderer but justly as regards the victim, and those who are to suffer are thrown into the path of those who administer the merited treatment.

“It is not an accident that makes a man a slave; no one is prisoner by chance. Every bodily outrage has its due cause. The man once did what he now suffers. A man who murders his mother will become a woman and be murdered by a son. A man who wrongs a woman will become a woman, to be wronged.²⁶

“We humans are, undoubtedly, of a two-fold nature: We are, in essence, identical with the Divine Consciousness, our Divine Self, which assures us of immortality and a free will; we are only secondarily individualized souls, with their accompanying karmic tendencies. We are a combination, a duality, of identities existing together in the one spectrum of Consciousness: we are the Divine Self, and we are also the divinely limited individual soul. Our essence, the one Divine Consciousness, is the only true ‘I’ in all the universe and beyond; It is everyone’s eternal Identity. But, by God’s mysterious Power of illusion, everyone born into this world takes on a limited set of characteristics as well, constituting the limited temporal identity of each, what we refer to as the individualized soul. According to that soul’s previous history and its corresponding mental tendencies, the characteristics of each soul are made manifest.

“The ‘soul’ is in essence the Divine, but as it appears within the material universe, it manifests both the Divine and the illusory—just as in a dream, we partake of both our true conscious selves and an illusory self. The analogy is exceedingly apt, as in both instances, we retain our fundamental reality, while operating in an illusory, ‘imaged’, reality. The individual soul is, to a great degree, who we experience ourselves to be in this world; and we operate in this life from the past karmic tendencies we embody. However, at a more fundamental level, we are identical with the Divine Self, which comprises, not only our freedom to will and act from a level of consciousness beyond the properties and characteristics of our individualized soul, but comprises the very consciousness by which we, as souls, exist. The past karmic tendencies are very powerful in their influence; and they can lead us where we don’t necessarily want to go, unless we are able to identify with our true nature as the Divine Self and turn those inherent tendencies to Divine purposes.

“Here is Plotinus again, with some pertinent comments on this subject:

“If man were... nothing more than a made thing [whose behavior is determined], acting and acted upon according to a fixed Nature, he could be no more subject to reproach and punishment than the mere animals. But as the scheme holds, man is singled out for condemnation when he does evil; and this with justice. For he is no mere thing made to rigid plan; his nature contains a [Divine] Principle apart and free.²⁷ ...This, no mean Principle, is... a first-hand Cause, bodiless and therefore supreme over itself, free, beyond the reach of Cosmic Cause.²⁸

“We may indeed identify solely with our limited self as an individualized soul, says Plotinus:

“...[But] there is another [higher] life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm, towards the Good and Divine, towards that Principle which no one possesses except by deliberate usage. One may appropriate [this Higher Principle], becoming, each personally, the higher, the beautiful, the Godlike; ...For every human Being is of a twofold character: there is that compromise-total [consisting of

soul conjoined to body], and there is the authentic Man [the divine Self].²⁹

“The great Vedantic sage, Shankaracharya, taught, “the soul is in reality none other than Brahman” (*jivo brahmaiva naparah*). And this is true; for, in essence, the soul is identical with the transcendent Source of all, and is supremely, absolutely, free. In its transcendent aspect, it is always free, immutable and unaffected by the bodily conditions or worldly circumstances of individuals. However, when the soul identifies with the conditional, it is bound; it is subject to being carried along in the floodwaters of the archetypal forces of Nature. Only when it knows and identifies with the One, the Divine Self, does it realize and manifest its true freedom. This is the view of Vedanta, and the basis for its concept of “liberation”; and this is the view of Plotinus as well.

“Soul is the essential radiance of the Divine Mind, and individualized souls partake of that same reality, though by their connection to body, they are confined to time and space. These souls, enamored of the material world, become disoriented, bound by their own attachment to matter; but by a deliberate reversal of its intention, an individualized soul is able to look within, examine itself, and ‘see’ its Origin, its higher Self, thereby regaining awareness of its true, eternal identity. Since both Soul and Matter are the emanated products of the Divine Mind, and both consist of the Divine essence, an individual soul inhabiting a body may look within and come to realize that both its conscious self and its material casing consist of the one Divine Mind; that truly he is nothing else but that one eternal Reality.

“Plotinus describes, from his own experience, the vision of a soul turned inward to its own Source:

“Once pure in the Spirit realm, [gazing intently inward toward the Divine Mind] the soul too possesses that same unchangeableness: for it possesses identity of essence. When it is in that region it must of necessity enter into oneness with the Divine Mind by the sheer fact of its self-orientation, for by that intention all interval disappears; the soul advances and is taken into unison, and in that association becomes one with the Divine Mind—but not to its own destruction: the two are one,

and [yet] two. In such a state there is no question of stage and change. The soul, motionless, would be intent upon its intellectual act, and in possession, simultaneously, of its self-awareness; for it has become one simultaneous existence with the Supreme.³⁰

“Here is no longer a duality but a two-in-one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades. It is as lover and beloved here [on earth], in a copy of that union, long to blend. The soul has now no further awareness of being in body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being, not Being, not All. Any observation of such things falls away; the soul has neither time nor taste for them. This she sought and This she has found and on This she looks and not upon herself; and who she is that looks she has not leisure to know.

“Once There she will barter for This nothing the universe holds; not though one would make over the heavens entire to her. There is nothing higher than this, nothing of more good. Above This there is no passing; all the rest, however lofty, lies on the downward path. She is of perfect judgment and knows that This was her quest, that nothing is higher.³¹

“The soul wishes to remain forever in that unitive vision,

“But it leaves that conjunction; it cannot suffer that unity; it falls in love with its own powers and possessions, and desires to stand apart; it leans outward, so to speak: then, it appears to acquire a memory of itself [as an individualized soul once again].³²

“My own experience of this unitary vision was identical in all respects with that of Plotinus, and I shared his conclusions; but I had been puzzled regarding *souls*. There was no *soul* in my (mystical) vision! There was no soul in that vision because the “soul”, in its vision of its prior, is “taken into unison” with its prior, the Divine Mind, and is made transparent and unaware of itself as something apart. It is the soul that is *seeing*,

experiencing its identity with its source, its subtler Self, as a wave's sense of individuality might disappear as it becomes aware it is the ocean. Likewise, the soul merged in the Divine Mind doesn't see any *other* souls, because in the Divine Mind all Soul is one; it is only when it becomes embodied that Soul becomes individualized.

“So long as the soul is *not* caught up in union with the Divine Mind, the soul is inspired from within by an attracting love for God; but when the soul is merged in God, there is no longer the duality of lover and Beloved, but only one blissful Self-awareness. When the soul is ‘merged’ in the Divine Mind, it sees from the vantage point of the Eternal, and no longer sees from the spatio-temporal vantage point. In that sense, the world disappears. But, in fact, the ‘world’ continues to exist; it is just that the soul is seeing it from the inside, as the one Consciousness-Energy. Without the perspective of the ego-self, all duality is annihilated, dissolved in the unitive Identity of the Divine Mind.

“Duality—all duality—comes into existence with the descent of Consciousness from the Divine Mind-identity to the individualized soul-identity, in other words, the inexplicable leap downward in consciousness from the Eternal to the temporal. Then, instead of the one all-inclusive Identity, there are two identities: an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’. From this initial duality, all other dualities are born: the dualities associated with time and space—such as “now” and “then”, or “here” and “there” or “near” and “far”, “night” and “day”; the dualities associated with personal identity—such as “life” and “death”, “pleasure” and “pain”, “joy” and “sorrow”, “sound” and “silence”, “moving” and “still”; and the dualities associated with possessiveness—such as “mine” and “yours”, “love” and “hate”. All these are born from the establishment of a soul-identity, an ‘I’, separate from and other than the one all-inclusive Mind.³³ From that perspective, the soul recognizes that it alone constructs duality:

“Even now, I speak the word, “Thou”, and create duality;
I love and create hatred;
I am in peace, and am fashioning chaos;
Standing on the peak, I necessitate the depths.³⁴

“But when the separate soul-identity is once again merged in the one Divine Mind, even if only temporarily, all these dualities disappear. Time and space also disappear, and all is Eternity once again:

“But now, weeping and laughing are gone;
Night is become day;
Music and silence are heard as one;
My ears are all the universe.

“All motion has ceased; everything continues.
Life and death no longer stand apart.
No I, no Thou; no now, or then.
Unless I move, there is no stillness.³⁵

“In its vision of the Divine Mind, the soul, now transparent, now ascended in consciousness, experiences its own eternal Self. The soul ‘sees’ now that: ‘I’ am all-pervading, ‘I’ am the one Consciousness-Energy constituting all minds and bodies and all this universe, wherein all things move together of one accord and by a universal assent; and it exclaims:

“I am the pulse of the turtle;
I am the clanging bells of joy.
I bring the dust of blindness;
I am the fire of song.
I am in the clouds and in the gritty soil;
In pools of clear water my image is found.³⁶

“And this liberating knowledge, upon which is based the soul’s conviction of its eternal and indivisible identity, remains with it always.

(From this point, the book goes on to describe the means by which God produced the material universe, which may be discovered in the pages of *Reflections On The Soul*. This book is available as a downloadable PDF from my website, The Mystic’s Vision [www.themysticsvision.com].)

NOTES:

6. *Ibid.*, 6:23-27.
7. Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.*, XI.9-1
8. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 38:6:22-23; MacKenna, Stephen (trans.), *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London, Faber & Faber, 1956; p. 199.
9. *Ibid.*, 30:3:8; pp. 113-114.
10. *Ibid.*, 38:6:35; p. 204.
11. *Ibid.*, 9:6:10; p. 221.
12. Meister Eckhart, Treatise A.2, Colledge E. & McGinn, B. (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 222.
12. *Ibid.*, Sermon 6; p. 188.
14. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 18, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; p. 181.
15. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, *Ibid.*, p. 206.
16. *Rig Veda*, x.129.1
17. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 25.
18. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 44:5:15-16; MacKenna, Stephen (trans.), *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London, Faber & Faber, 1956; pp. 162-163.
19. *Ibid.*, 49:5:13; p. 162
20. *Ibid.*, 26:3:4; p. 101
21. *Ibid.*, 47:1; p. 76
22. *Ibid.*, 30:3:10; p. 116
23. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 27, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; pp. 225-226.
24. *Rig Veda*, x.129.2-5
25. *Enneads*, V.1.4-8: *The Three Initial Hypostases*
26. Taittiriya Upanishad, II.6.1, Swami Nikhilananda, *The Principal Upanishads*, N.Y., Dover Publications, 1963, 2003; p. 269.
27. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Heresium* VI.29.5ff. Roberts, Rev. A. & Donaldson, J. (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; Vol. VI.
28. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 1
29. *Ibid.*, 1
30. *Ibid.*, 4
31. *Ibid.*, 52
32. *Ibid.*, 6
33. *Ibid.*, 16

- 34. *Ibid.*, 21
- 35. *Ibid.*, 21
- 36. *Ibid.*, 37

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VI. THE DUAL ASPECTS OF GOD *(Body And Soul)*

Body And Soul was published in 2011 and was, in many ways, merely a reformulation or rearrangement of the ideas presented in my previous book, *Reflections On The Soul*. It was written to reiterate and accentuate the information that appeared in *Reflections On The Soul*, without the focus of attention being so much on the works of Plotinus. Here are a few relevant excerpts from *Body And Soul*:

“Conclusions

“Any conclusions that we may draw regarding the Divine reality must necessarily be nothing more than mere theories made of word-symbols, bearing only a vague resemblance to the reality Itself. With that in mind, let me share with you my conclusions, my theories. Having looked at the question of the Body-Soul duality from the perspective of several religious and philosophical traditions going back millennia, now, let’s attempt to look at this question from another, entirely new, perspective:

“The Universe

“We have seen that the Judaic tradition, and by extension the Christian tradition, asserts that the Spirit, or Soul, was infused in man by the enlivening breath of God. Early philosophers, including Plato and Plotinus, held that the One “emanated” or “radiated” the Divine Mind, which in turn “emanated” an all-pervading Soul. They described the Divine Soul as permeating the material universe as light permeates the atmosphere. To this day, these age-old concepts constitute the framework of our theology and the imagery of our religious imagination. Our minds continue even now to operate in these established patterns, utilizing these ancient conceptualizations, to which we have become habituated for so long.

“But I would submit, there is another, perhaps more accurate, way of viewing the permeation of matter by God’s Spirit, not as an “infusion” of Spirit, but rather as a ‘containment’ by Spirit: Consider how our own

individual consciousness permeates our thoughts and dream-images. Our thoughts and mental images are permeated by our consciousness because these thoughts and dreams are contained *within* our minds. May we not conclude that, likewise, God, the Divine Mind, permeates the universe because the universe is contained *within* God? After all, where else would a Divine Mind's creations exist but *within* Himself? ¹

“Every mystical theology holds that the individual self is in fact identical to the universal Self; that the Spirit within is synonymous with the transcendent Spirit and can be realized as such. We must ask ourselves how that is possible unless we—and in fact, the whole universe—is within God. But habit inclines us rather to think that ‘God is within us’, as though He were a trillion separate homunculi hiding in each individual heart. No, He pervades all because all is *within* Him. This universe, and all within it, is a figment of *His* imagination. He is the only one who is. All these forms and all these ‘I’s’ exist within that one infinite Mind.

“If the Divine Spirit, or Soul, was *infused* into the material universe as Plotinus asserts, permeating, pervading, and guiding every wave-particle, what kind of entity would that be? We cannot even conceive of anything—other than consciousness—that might have the properties that would allow it to enter into, permeate, vivify and awaken to consciousness a material body. But, if the entire universe consisted of the Thought-images of a Divine Mind, then that universe must exist only within that Divine Mind and be intrinsically permeated by that conscious Divine Mind—just as our own thought-forms are permeated by our own conscious minds in which those thought-forms are created and exist.

“‘But how,’ we might wonder, ‘could so substantial and physical a universe be a mere imagination, a Mind-born projection of Thought?’ An answer might be found in the recent results of science’s investigation into the nature of matter. The science of physics, for all its denial of the supernatural reality, has done more in the last one hundred years to dispel the notion of the substantiality of the material world than all the theologians throughout history. During that time, the discoveries of physicists have reminded us of the declarations of the Upanishads that the appearance of matter, i.e., the phenomenal universe, is an illusion, a product of Maya, the Creative Power of the One (*Brahman*).

“Contemporary science has shown that the universe does indeed consist of an Energy that has transformed into material wave-particles; but these material particles are really nothing more than submicroscopic electromagnetic impulses, mere ‘points of Energy’, interacting in such a way that the appearance of substance is produced—forming, in other words, an illusory world.

“How do these “points” of Energy, these so-called ‘wave-particles’ that began as “photons” of light, manage to produce the illusion of form and substance? They spontaneously transform into particles such as electrons, and quarks—which combine to form protons and neutrons—which combine to form atoms; and the atoms combine to form molecules, which combine in vast numbers to form perceptible gases, liquids, and solids in a variety of sizes and configurations. The elementary ‘particles’ themselves are unimaginably tiny: according to the physicists of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, “protons are 100,000 times smaller than the simplest atom, hydrogen; and quarks are 10,000 times smaller than protons. For comparison, if a hydrogen atom were six miles across, a quark would still measure less than four-thousandths of an inch.”²

“Clearly, the atoms of which these perceivable solids consist are mostly empty space in their interior. In fact, physicists tell us that all of what we call *Matter* is 99.999999999999 percent empty space; the other infinitesimal part seems to be nothing more than energy wavelets and intangible forces. Subatomic wave-particles consist of intangible electro-magnetically charged impulses held in proximate “orbits” about one another by invisible forces, so as to form the appearance of much grander substantial entities. And these appearances are multiplied in infinite profusion and variety as if by some magician’s hand, to appear before our eyes as a multitudinous world of objects. And so, this material world, this phenomenal reality of ours, is a marvelous magic show of truly immense proportions!

“This Light, these particles and forces—what an amazing universe they make! How real it all seems! A burst of Light, and all congeals into a universe of form and color, intelligence and emotion, *sturm und drang*. Time drags the whole process out, making it all seem quite natural, making it seem, from the perspectives of our individual lives, a long and gradual

evolution. But, if we were to see each of the fourteen billion years of evolutionary history reduced to a mere second each, it would become clear that it is a Mind-born creation, an instantaneous imagination from beginning to end. From God's eternal perspective, all is accomplished in an instant.

“The Light-energy by which God forms the universe is simply the substance of His Thought—or what is analogous to Thought in a Divine Mind. Simply because we have identified a whole array of different ‘wave-particles’ that make up the material world does not mean that these constituent entities are really separate substantial ‘things’ in themselves. We have simply given names to the impulses and forces inherent in God’s Light-illusion, as one might examine and give names to the cohesive thought-constituents within a dream. This world-appearance does indeed seem substantial; but it is God’s illusion—as the circle produced by a whirling flame is an illusion. And in the aggregate of trillions of these illusory wave-particles, a larger, more complex, visual illusion is produced—which, by reflecting millions of photons onto our retinas, produces an electrical impulse in our brains, which in turn produces an image to our conscious minds; while the gentle forces produced by the motion of electrons presents a tactile sensation in another section of our brains, and is interpreted in our minds as the sensation of touch, confirming our impression of substantial form. But it is only a marvelous masquerade of light—God’s light; and it is all His grand illusion.

“There is one Consciousness. It is the Consciousness of the One Being. And all the manifested universe exists within that one Consciousness. The various objects of this manifested universe move and operate, not by individual forces or laws of physics, but in and by that One. Immersed in that one Consciousness, united with it, one sees that: “all things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Who, then, is doing what? In Him we live and move. In Him one Will operates throughout. And we, mere dust motes dancing in His sunbeam, are swallowed and encompassed in His light. Look within and see the Truth.

“The One

“We may conceive of the Divine Mind, producer of the universe of light; but we cannot imagine It without stipulating that it draws Its own conscious power from the One, the unlimited Consciousness in which It exists. For the Divine Mind is not an entity separate from the One; it is the functioning power of the One, operating within the One, and lending being, consciousness and bliss to all that arises from it. However, of the One—also designated as the Void, Brahman, the Tao, the Godhead—we cannot speak. It is beyond even our ability to imagine.

“We certainly may not ascribe to the One any descriptive characteristics, since the One transcends whatever characteristics we may attribute to It; and yet the Vedantic characterization of the One (*Brahman*) as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or “Existence-Consciousness-Bliss”, seems unavoidable and undeniable. That infinite sky must certainly be regarded as the ultimate Source of all existence, all consciousness, and all bliss. Those who have seen It speak of It as ‘the Father’.

“That source of consciousness is, in fact, beyond time and space, and all manifestation; It is the eternal Identity of all that exists. It transcends the universe, while constituting its essence—as a dreaming mind transcends its dream-images, while constituting their essence. Consciousness is not the property of matter, or of any individual being. It is not produced by any material process; but rather is a Divine stream of Intelligence filling the entire universe. It is the fundamental nature of Being, the foundation of the phenomenal universe, and the light of awareness filling it.

“We are able to know it by following our own individual consciousness back to its Source, where we are able to discover our original Self. That Self is God. He is the one Source of the material universe and He is the life and awareness pervading it. But, of course, we must see Him for ourselves. Our soul/mind must be illumined by the eternal Light itself and drawn into Its hidden depths. To obtain that grace, all men focus their minds on Him through prayer and contemplative longing, and He shines His Light on whom He will.

“The Soul

“What we regard as our “soul” derives its existence, its consciousness, and its inherent bliss from the Divine Mind in whom it exists. When the soul comes to realize its Divine identity, it knows with absolute certainty that its existence is rooted in the creative Power of the One; it knows that its consciousness is grounded in the Consciousness of the One; it experiences bliss only insofar as it is drawn into likeness with the One, and it is imbued with bliss as a result of that proximity of consciousness.

“Each individual soul is confined to a body that defines the extent of its individual being in the spatio-temporal universe. We regard what is not within that limitation as “outside” of us. But God has no body or any limit to His extent. There is no “outside” of Him; even if He were to create an outside, it would be within Him. God is an infinite, eternal Mind. He transcends space and time. Space and time are His creations, and they exist within Him. *Whatever* He creates is within Him. We, and the entire universe, exist within Him. Our own minds are limited; each one has its own perspective and considers itself to be the “subject”; and what is external to it is regarded as the “object”. But in God, subject and object are one. He is unlimited and undivided. His Consciousness pervades everything and everyone.

“We must understand that the separation of body and soul, of Matter and Spirit, exists only in the temporal world of appearance. In the Eternal (the Divine Mind), this duality, this separation, does not exist. In the Divine Mind, they are indistinguishable. Like water and ice in a glass, they are separable in appearance though they are one in essence.

“Those who have ‘seen’ into their own eternal reality have realized that both the subtle Soul, containing life and consciousness, and the Energy constituting gross Matter, are together contained within the Divine Mind. This is why the mystic, experiencing his identification with the Divine Mind, experiences himself, not simply as Soul, but as an illimitable awareness that is *both* universal Soul *and* universal Matter. Matter and Soul are both contained within the Divine Mind. The unmanifest Light and the manifested Light together form all that is. Ultimately, they are one, as they both derive from the same One.

“We are made of the Consciousness and Energy of God. His Consciousness manifests as Soul, and His Energy is sent forth to establish the material universe at the ‘Big Bang’, ‘Big Burst’, ‘Great Radiance’, or whatever you wish to call it. And the ultimately true Origin, Source, and *initiator* of that field of Consciousness and Energy, is the One. All that exists is His. It is His projection, His exuberant radiance. Nothing else exists but that One. Our sense of ‘I’ too is Him. ‘I’ am the one and only ‘I’ that is. My consciousness is His Consciousness. My body, as well as the whole universe, is His manifest form. I and the Father are one.

“A personage in a dream is not only permeated with the consciousness of the dreamer, he is *made of* the consciousness of the dreamer. He is essentially *identical* with the consciousness of the dreamer. In just the same way, we are not only permeated by God’s Consciousness, we are *made of* His essence; we are projections of His light. And our consciousness is essentially identical with the Consciousness of God.

“Our bodies are His light-forms, and we are animated and made conscious by the all-pervading presence of His living Consciousness. When we look within ourselves, we discover that we are Him. For, just as a dream-person looking within to enquire who he is would discover that he is in fact the dreamer, so do we, enquiring within, discover that we are the limitless Mind in whom all things and all beings exist.

“If you ask a beam of sunlight, “Who are you?” it will answer, “I am the Sun.” If you ask a wave on the sea, “Who are you?” it will answer, “I am the ocean.” If you ask a soul, “Who are you?” it must answer, “I am the One in all. I am He who alone exists now and forever. I am the light of the one Sun; I am a wave on the one Sea; I am a living breath of the one Life. I am in all that is seen or unseen. I am the One in all.”

“Jesus said, “I am the Light that is over all things. I am all: From me all has come forth, and to me all returns. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”³

“Unfortunately, many believe that this is a truth that applies only to one unique historical figure; but it is a *universal truth*, a truth for all, and a truth to be realized: *I* am not merely this body, not just this spark of consciousness, nor merely the entire manifested universe; I am the Source of the universe, and the universe itself. I am both the subject and the object. There is nothing else here but I AM. Listen to what the great Shankaracharya said:

“The fool thinks, ‘I am the body’. The intelligent man thinks, ‘I am an individual soul united with the body’. But the wise man, in the greatness of his knowledge and spiritual discrimination, sees the Self as [the only] reality, and thinks, ‘I am Brahman’.⁴

“I am that Brahman, one without a second, the ground of all existences. I make all things manifest. I give form to all things. I am within all things, yet nothing can taint me. I am eternal, pure, unchangeable, absolute.

“I am that Brahman, one without a second. Maya, the many-seeming, is merged in me. I am beyond the grasp of thought, the essence of all things. I am the truth. I am knowledge. I am infinite. I am absolute bliss.

“I am beyond action; [I am] the reality which cannot change. I have neither part nor form. I am absolute. I am eternal. Nothing sustains me, I stand alone. I am one without a second.

“I am the soul of the universe. I am all things, and above all things. I am one without a second. I am pure consciousness, single and universal. I am joy. I am life everlasting.⁵

“You and I—we are alive in God. Become awake and sense Him—within you, around you, constituting your body and your awareness, the earth, the heavens. This ocean of existence is His. Nothing exists outside of God. To know God is to know one’s Self. It is to know the originating Mind of the Father, the One. It is to know the Source of all existence, the Source of all consciousness, and the Source of all bliss. What will you do with this knowledge? Praise Him in your thoughts, and in your words and in your actions. Find your delight in Him—seeing only Him, loving only Him, praising only Him. But we cannot even use the word “Him”. We cannot

Speak of God in the third person, for who would be the third? Even the two, “I” and “Thou”, is an illusion, a false duality that will be dissolved when the one indivisible Identity is revealed.

“God, being so close, is easily accessible to us;
He is always within the reach of our call,
Always ready to provide succor in our need,
“And the light of wisdom in our times of darkness.
Our own soul is the conduit of this accessibility,
This communication, this succor and this wisdom.

“In our own soul, when the chattering of the mind
is silenced,
And all our attention is focused on His presence,
There He is found in the very qualities of the soul;
For we are rays from His brilliance,
Diminished only by our unwillingness
To manifest His light.

“He is the air in our nostrils and the earth under our feet.
He is the light of our eyes and the music in our breast.
He is the bright awareness that lives as you,
And He is the storied tale your living tells.
You dance in His firelight; you float on His sea.
You breathe by His breathing; you move by His joy.

“No matter how far you may gaze into the rolling
Galaxies cascading above;
No matter what dark or clownish scenes you dream,
Or terrestrial landscapes you cross;
In the depths of the ocean, or on the chilly
Snow-peaked mountains;
And even in the abyss of death and darkness,
You are ever within His close embrace.

“You cannot leave Him, nor scamper from His sight.
For you are in Him as a fish is in the ocean
Or a bird is in the sky.
His love surrounds and holds you,

And He sees all through your eyes.

“These are my conclusions, based on my own experience; but you must come to your own conclusions, from your own experience. The truth is confirmable only by direct experience—not by a majority consensus, not by rational deliberation, not by reliance on scriptures, not by scientific proofs. The truth of your eternal Source and Identity is known for certain only when His grace reveals it to you. Therefore, gather all the strength of your mind and heart and focus it on Him without interruption for as long and as often as possible. Others have succeeded in this endeavor; and so, can you.

“Postscript

“On the evening of November 18, 1966, I prayed to God: “Let me be one with Thee; not that I might glory in Thy love, but that I might speak out in Thy praise and to Thy glory for the benefit of all Thy children.”
Immediately, this soul became irradiated with His Light, making it one with Him; and these words came forth from that unutterable Height as a gracious gift that, I believe, was meant to be shared with everyone:

“O my God, even this body is Thine own!
Though I call to Thee and seek Thee amidst chaos,
Even I who seemed an unclean pitcher amidst Thy waters —
Even I am Thine own.

“Does a wave cease to be of the ocean?
Do the mountains and the gulfs cease to be of the earth?
Or does a pebble cease to be stone?
How can I escape Thee?
Thou art even That which thinks of escape!

“Even now, I speak the word, “Thou”, and create duality;
I love, and create hatred;
I am in peace, and am fashioning chaos;
Standing on the peak, I necessitate the depths.

“But now, weeping and laughing are gone;
Night is become day;

Music and silence are heard as one;
 My ears are all the universe.
 All motion has ceased; everything continues.
 Life and death no longer stand apart.
 No I, no Thou; no now, or then.
 Unless I move, there is no stillness.

“Nothing to lament, nothing to vanquish,
 Nothing to pride oneself on;
 All is accomplished in an instant.
 All may now be told without effort.
 Where is there a question?
 Where is the temple?
 Which the Imperishable, which the abode?”

“I am the pulse of the turtle;
 I am the clanging bells of joy.
 I bring the dust of blindness;
 I am the fire of song.
 I am in the clouds and in the gritty soil;
 In pools of clear water my image is found.

“I am the dust on the feet of the wretched,
 The toothless beggars of every land.
 I have given sweets that decay to those that crave them;
 I have given my wealth unto the poor and lonely.
 My hands are open; nothing is concealed.
 All things move together of one accord;
 Assent is given throughout the universe to every
 falling grain.

“The Sun stirs the waters of my heart,
 And the vapor of my love flies to the four corners
 of the world;
 The moon stills me, and the cold darkness is my bed.

“I have but breathed, and everything is rearranged and set in order once
 again.
 A million worlds begin and end in every breath,

And in this breathing, all things are sustained.”

“These words were written during the time I was drawn into union with the Mind of the Creator and reflect the transformation from a dualistic perspective to an utterly unitive one. These words of mine are, therefore, His words. For these many years afterward, I have enjoyed an enhanced sense of the Divinity within me and surrounding me; but I have not ascended to that unitive state again since that time.

“Often, I have attempted to express the knowledge I had received, and found, as many others have found, that to describe the knowledge acquired is not so easy as it might at first appear. It seems that, no matter what approach one takes, the experience not only refuses to fit into words, but refuses even to be accurately formulated in the mind. What was clear in that rare awareness is less clear in retrospect.

“Nevertheless, over these many years, I have undertaken to share the certain knowledge given to me since the day I made that bargain with God. He fulfilled His part of the bargain, and I have endeavored since that time to carry out my promise. I have written many books telling of His presence as the eternal Self of all, and of His greatness and goodness, in the hopes that others might be benefited thereby. Whether or not I have succeeded, I leave to His judgment.”

NOTES:

1. This is asserted by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita: 9:4*: “By Me, in my unmanifested form, are all things in this universe pervaded. All beings exist in Me; I do not exist in them.”
2. “Large Hadron Collider could reveal our origins”, April 19, 2010 by Roger S. Boyd, copyright 2010 McClatchy-Tribune Information Services; appeared April 19, 2010 in PhysOrg Newsletter, www.physorg.com/news190869267.html.
3. Saying of Jesus, in *The Gospel of Thomas*, 77.
4. Shankaracharya, *The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda & Christopher Isherwood, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; p. 58.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

VII. IN HIM WE LIVE (*Mystical Theology*)

The book, *Mystical Theology*, was written in an effort to summarize my metaphysical perspective, and to offer a unified statement of my most mature conclusions. Therefore, this book contains a good deal about my perspective on astrology. Those chapters on astrology later made up the better part of my later Article: “The Astrologer’s Vision.” It was never produced in print; rather, it was published as an ebook in 2012. Here are a few excerpts from that little book:

“Recent Developments

“Over the centuries since the time of Plotinus, many others have also experienced the unitive vision of God, but our metaphysical understanding has changed very little. What *has* changed is our understanding of the origin and nature of the material world.¹ Ancient Greek thinkers found the subject too daunting, and simply accounted for the existence of the material world by positing an unoriginated sea of Chaotic matter, which the divine Thought (*Logos, Sophia, Psyche*) then permeated, bringing organization and life into it by Its power. But the last few centuries of our current era have seen a worldwide focus on the discovery of the secrets of nature, most especially through the study of *physics* and *astronomy*.

“In the twentieth century, Hubble’s discovery that the universe is expanding led to the formulation of the concept of a definite *beginning* to our universe approximately fourteen billion years ago, and Einstein’s realization that energy and matter (mass) are interconvertible gave a solid explanation for the manner in which the universe of matter came into being, and impelled science into the forefront of a rare advancement in our philosophical understanding.

“Most of us, when asked, “What is matter made of?” would answer, “It is made of elementary wave-particles, such as quarks, which constitute all hadrons (such as protons and neutrons); and all leptons (such as electrons and neutrinos). But if we were asked, “What are these various particles made of?”, we might answer, “No one knows.” However, that would be

incorrect. Physicists know very well that all these wave-particles are made of energy—electromagnetic energy—or more succinctly, light-energy. *All matter*, and therefore the entire universe, came from the initial burst of *Light* that we refer to as “the Big Bang”.² The question of where that universe-originating light-energy came from, however, is still a controversial matter of opinion.

“Clearly, there was a sudden immense burst of electromagnetic energy where prior to it there had been nothing; and that energy coalesced into the wave-particles that make up our material world. Philosophers can no longer hold to the notion of an eternal *universe*; there *was* a creation moment, and the ultimate ‘stuff’ of the universe is now revealed: it was light—an inconceivably large burst of high-frequency light (which we refer to as ‘electromagnetic energy’)—that almost immediately converted to material wave-particles.³ Up to the point of that empirical discovery, philosophers speculating on the origin of matter were free to imagine many possible scenarios; but now speculation is dead. Matter is converted light; that is a proven fact. And material particles, when collided at high velocity, convert back into light (photons). What previously had seemed two different things—energy and matter—were now seen to be one.

“Though so much of what passes as 'science' today is merely the passing fashion of the moment or a speculative theory that can never be substantiated, the current understanding among scientists that all matter is the evolute of an original light is one which seems to allow of no possible future refutation. That energy and matter are interconvertible, and that the light-energy of the so-called 'Big Bang' of fourteen billion years ago transformed into the quarks and leptons that make up the entire world of matter is a discovery that is so incontrovertible, so uncontestable, as to effectively put an end to all future speculation as to what our world is made of.

“And so, for the first time in history, after centuries of philosophical inquiry and intense scientific exploration, we now know with certainty exactly what the material world is made of. Physicists have announced it, astronomers have proclaimed it, and technicians have proven it without a doubt in their laboratories; and yet hardly anyone in the world seems to be aware of the fact that *everything is made of light*. Even those physicists who describe how

the primordial photons of light transformed themselves into material particles do not seem to fully grasp the significance of the fact that *everything in the universe is made of light*.⁴

“And, despite the fact that scientific thinkers believe that that pristine burst of light was a 'natural' phenomenon (whatever that means), and spiritually oriented people are certain that the light came directly from God, the fact remains that an unimaginably immense blast of high-energy light flashed at the dawn of time in a nascent universe, and each photon of that light became a matter-antimatter pair that contributed to make the phenomenal universe of form and substance that we live in today, where *everything is made of that light*.⁵

“Everyone has heard of the 'Big Bang', and of how all forms of energy and all material particles were produced from that initial 'fireball' of high-energy photons; and yet, in the minds of many, there is still the burning question: ‘Where did that abundance of light come from?’ Scientists have concluded that the light from which the world of matter is made had to have come from the explosion of an unstable super-dense chunk of matter which they call a "singularity", while people of religious or spiritual beliefs have understood since the most ancient of times that that light was caused by an act of God.

“That the matter constituting this physical universe was produced by an initial high-energy burst of Light around fourteen billion years ago is accepted by the entire scientific community; the empirical evidence for this conclusion is formidable and incontestable. And physicists and cosmologists of integrity have declared that this is as far as science can reach, that to extrapolate farther back than that would be nothing more than conjecture and supposition—certainly not science. Nonetheless, some scientists have reached beyond the empirical evidence into the realm of unfounded speculative theory and have declared that the *cause* of that burst of Light was the explosion of a submicroscopic speck of matter that existed prior to the manifestation of the universe, a speck that contained all the mass of the universe within it. And often this is declared with a straight face.

“On the other hand, those who have experience of God’s presence, regard science’s discovery that an ancient originating Light was the source of the entire material universe to be a delightful confirmation of the Divine

Creation that has been famously heralded by the wise of long ages past. It is clear, however, that neither the speculation of the theoretical scientists nor the tradition of the religions is subject to incontrovertible proof; we can only weigh the two positions and see which seems to us the more credible.

“Can we really accept that a tiny rock is the ultimate creative Force from which sprang the entire vast living universe? Or perhaps the tiny rock is not the Creator, but rather the Creator, having decided to make a universe, first put the whole thing into a tiny speck, and then had it all burst forth somehow. Did life exist in the rock prior to its existence in the universe, or did life spontaneously arise once the rock exploded? Well, you see how difficult it would be to defend such an originating principle. But such difficulties do not arise if we assume that the God whom we know in our hearts was the originator of the universe and all its living variety.

“If we accept that God breathed forth or otherwise manifested an immense burst of light-energy that contains in it the capacity and propensity to ‘evolve’ into wave-particles in time and space, constituting the elements of our universe, then why couldn’t He have similarly predisposed the resulting matter to produce living bodies by a further evolutionary development? And why couldn’t those first primeval living bodies, such as bacteria and eukaryotes, be predisposed to evolve further into larger creatures, such as fish and fowl, mammals, primates, and eventually humans? Somewhere along that chain of evolution, why couldn’t consciousness and self-awareness emerge as well from the initial predisposition programmed into that divine light from the very beginning?

“Such a scenario lends credence, not only to a theistic interpretation of evolutionary history, but justifies a naturalistic interpretation as well. For, from the theistic perspective, the divine Creator’s initial act brings about each emergent quality of that evolution from light to life and intelligence; and from the ‘naturalist’ perspective, every step of universal evolution occurs in a natural causal sequence, seemingly without any extraneous input. It has to be said, however, that a light such as that, with so many inherently emergent long-term evolutionary developments, would have to have come from a divinely omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent source; of that we must be certain.

“How could we possibly doubt that that *Light* is a miraculous energy that proceeds from the power of God? At its highest frequencies—such as that produced in its original appearance that we call ‘the Big Bang’—it has the ability to convert to electrically charged wave-particles that make up the atoms of every known or unknown substance that has existed through time, and provides the energy of every known or unknown invisible force or field of force appearing in the universe at both the microscopic and the macroscopic level. That is to say that, not only did that Light produce all the matter in the universe, but it produced the force of gravity, the so-called weak and strong forces that bind matter into cohesive entities, and all the electric and magnetic forces that exist in every wave-particle and produce so many effects on earth and beyond.

“These electric charges are not only produced in every particle of matter, constituting its properties, but also constitute every chemical reaction governing your digestion and metabolism, and every electrical impulse such as the firing of axons in your system of nerves, the firing of neurons in your brain, the beating of your heart, and the blinking of your eye. Everything—every visible or invisible thing and every perceivable or imperceptible variety of energy owes its existence to that initial Light. How can we believe, as some scientists profess to believe, that the Light, containing in its potentiality an entire universe such as this one, is the result of a random accident?

“And yet, in the view of some materialistic scientists, this efficient mechanism of matter-energy interactions provides evidence that every bit of the functioning of man and the universe can be accounted for without the need to postulate a supernatural origin or underlying spiritual support. By some process of selective reasoning, they are able to ignore the question of where that light came from, and how it happened to distribute itself as discreet particles and electrical charges in just the proper “fine-tuned” relationships to form so inconceivably complex a cosmos of form and awareness.

“Be that as it may, it is certain that any physical or metaphysical theory framed in the twenty-first century must begin with the certain premise that the origin of all matter is light—regardless of whatever one might speculate was the cause of that burst of light. And, even if it had not been revealed to

every enlightened soul that the material world is a manifestation of Divine energy, if we were to apply the rule of Ockham's razor, which suggests that we shave away unnecessary assumptions, the simplest and most obvious attributable cause of that burst of light is the Divine Creator. The assumption that the explosion of an unstable and super-dense chunk of matter (a singularity) was the cause is simply an unwarranted, irrational, and unjustified supposition.

“But those of a materialist bent could scarcely be expected to concede that that Light came from a supernatural Source; they could be expected rather to fight against this notion with all the powers of their imagination. “The light resulted from the explosion of a single densely compacted speck of matter,” they said; “a ‘singularity’”. Nevermind that it was now necessary to explain where *that* came from. For these people, that was the end of the line. Their position is reminiscent of the dismissive attitude of those people who held that the world was supported by a giant turtle, and who, when asked ‘What supports the turtle?’ answered, “It’s turtles all the way down.”

“Today, it is common knowledge that all wave-particles of matter were born from the high-frequency (EM) energy released in the ‘Big Bang’ event of fourteen billion years ago; and that it was those wave-particles that evolved into the stars, our world, and all that we know as matter and energy. However, an important question arises: ‘Did the qualities of life and consciousness exist intrinsically in the light-energy and in the wave-particles that arose from it [as many scientists believe], or was there an *infusion* or *suffusion* of a divine consciousness into that primordial matter that served to purposely organize and arrange those wave-particles toward the presently evolved state of life and consciousness that we know and experience today?’ And what should we call such a principle? Anaxagorus called it “Thought”; Heraclitus, and later Philo, called it “Logos”; the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* called it “Sophia”, or “Wisdom”; Plotinus called it “Psyche”, or “Soul”.

“No matter what word we use to denote this principle, it is necessarily a divine, consciously governing and organizing Spirit akin to the “Thought” or “Will” of God, acting in and through all the sensible universe. There are no other alternatives: either that initial Light itself was and is purposeful, living and conscious, or that purposeful living consciousness acts within and

through that light but is distinct from it. And since light-energy and matter in its pre-organic state seem to be inert and not alive, we must assume that they are also not conscious, nor do they intrinsically contain the seed of consciousness. It would seem, therefore, that we are forced by the evidence to conclude that an invisible living consciousness operates *within* and throughout the material universe, guiding its operations, advancing its evolution, and bringing Its own life and consciousness to light in the living creatures appearing on at least one planetary body orbiting the star we call the Sun.

“Philosophers and sages from the beginning of time have declared that, in addition to the light from which all 'things' are made, there must be a conscious deliberate force at work in the world that functions as the organizing principle of design, and as the source of life and awareness—a conscious force which has been referred to as "spirit" or "soul". Materialists deny that such a universal principle exists—even though by doing so, they tend to deny the existence of their own intelligence; while the mystics, seers, and all the worshippers of a transcendent/immanent God affirm the principle of a divine "soul", and stake their lives and actions upon it, living so as to give expression to the Divine source within them.

“It is commonplace knowledge—and among those who have experienced the Divine Mind it is *certain* knowledge—that the Creator God is the active emanate of a yet higher, inactive Source known as the “Godhead”. But of that higher Source we cannot speak; It is beyond linguistic description, and even beyond rational conception. The Upanishads call It *Brahman*; Buddhists call that ultimate Source the “Void”; the third century Roman mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, simply referred to It as “the One”; and Lao Tze called It “the Tao”:

“Before heaven and earth existed, there was something unformed, silent, alone, unchanging, constant and eternal. It could be called ‘the Source of the universe’. I do not know its name and simply call it ‘Tao’⁶

“And Chuang Tze, commenting on the words of Lao Tze, said:

“If you want to know the Tao, said Lao, give a bath to your mind; wash your mind clean. Throw out all your sage wisdom! Tao is invisible, hard to hold, and difficult to describe. However, I will outline It for you: The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Energy [Teh] is born from Tao, and all life forms are born of this creative Energy; thus, all creation evolves into various forms.

“...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen.

“It is fathomless, like the Sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The Tao sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ...That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon—that is the Tao.⁷

“It is *that*—the One, the Tao, Brahman, the Void, from which the active Creator-God—called *Brahma* by the Upanishads, *Teh* by Lao Tze, *Nous* (the Divine Mind) by Plotinus—was born. How do we know this? Because those whose minds have ascended to that transcendent Self have seen It, have experienced It, and have spoken of It. Without a creative Power, that One would simply remain in Its own blissful eternity without the means to create. But It produced from Itself an entity to serve as Its executive Power of Creation, so It could create, even while remaining in Its blissful eternity, Its eternal blissfulness.

“Though we cannot speak of the Godhead, except to say that It is the Source of the active Divine Power that we refer to as ‘God’, or ‘the Creator’, we *are* able to speak of this active Creator-God, who is the producer of the phenomenal universe. When the soul of the mystic is uplifted to union, it is to the Creator-God that she is united. And yet, in that union with the Creator-God, she “sees” God’s Source as well. And though she is not *united with* the Source, she perceives that Source, that ‘Godhead’, as the ultimate Ground of existence, her ultimate origination, her ultimate Self.

“God, the Creator, derives His own eternal Being from the One, His source. It is He who has created this universe. He transcends the material universe and yet is present as an immanent conscious force within it. As Spirit, He is above and beyond our world; and yet He produces this spatio-temporal world from Himself and acts as a conscious force within the temporal universe. We are reminded by this knowledge that He is unlike any other thing that we are aware of—but one. The only other instance of such a bifunctional entity is the human mind (or soul), which both transcends its thought productions and dream productions, and yet acts as a conscious (or subconscious) force within those thought and dream productions. In this, it would seem, the human mind is patterned after the eternal Mind. And because, The Divine Mind is the source and essence of the human mind (or soul), the two are linked in such a way that the human mind is capable of ascending to the Divine Mind and recognizing its own identity with It.

“Let me illustrate this with a recounting of my own experience: I experienced the revelation of God when I was twenty-eight, living in an abandoned cabin in the mountains of Santa Cruz, California. I had gone there, inspired by the prompting Spirit of God within me, in the hope of meeting with Him in the solitude of the forest. On one November night, I sat in that darkened cabin by the woodstove, gazing into the burning embers through the stove’s grating, and longing for God’s visitation. As my mind became solely fixed, and my breath subsided, I entered into the eternal Consciousness, and knew for the first time the secret of my own being.

“I will not tell all the details of this revelation, for I have done so elsewhere on numerous occasions; I wish only to tell of one element of my vision which is pertinent to what follows: It was toward the end of that ‘vision’ that I viewed the breathing out of the universe, and, being at that moment identical with the Divine Mind, I wrote:

“I have but breathed, and everything is rearranged and set in order once again. A million worlds begin and end in every breath, and in this breathing, all things are sustained.

“The only visual impression I currently retain is of a vast amount of indescribable ‘stuff’ flying outward, expanding into the surrounding void. Shortly thereafter, my mind returned to my place in time, and I collapsed, exhausted, on my bed.

“That was in 1966, and I’ve had many years to contemplate the meaning of my experience and the words written by the light of a candle during its occurrence. Since that time, I have written extensively about that revelation and its meaning; for it has been, over these years, my deep desire to reconcile that vision with the picture of reality portrayed by the empirically based sciences, and to come to some fully satisfying conclusions about the origin and nature of this universe in which we live.

“I confess that I did not see in my vision an originating flash of light resembling what is described as “the Big Bang”. I was only conscious of the “breathing out” of the expanding matter that constitutes the universe. It is only by inference that I conclude that that original light, which scientists say transformed itself into the material particles forming the expanding universe, is synonymous with what I experienced as the Creator’s outgoing breath. What I saw was seen from an eternal vantagepoint; and what to timebound eyes would require billions of earth-years to capture in its entirety, was reduced to a mere exhalation and inhalation of a moment’s passing.

“I cannot doubt the authenticity of this vision in eternity, though it was a compressed, or encapsulated vision. It was the Divine Mind, or Brahma, or God, from whom that breath arose, and this breathing of the universe was shown to me as it occurred and recurs. It is to that unerring vision that I must reconcile any account that scientific theorists may give of that universal beginning. The assumption by theorists that the original state of the universe was squashed into a single point of super-dense material is an unwarranted assumption; rather, I believe that assumption is the product of the attempt to mentally reverse the present expansion of the universe to its ultimate logical extreme: a single compressed point of origin. But that single point of ultimate compression calculated by mathematicians, is merely an erroneous projection of the imagination.

“That the universe began in a sudden burst of light is unquestioned; but that light did not burst forth from a “singularity” into which all the matter of the

universe had been compressed. Rather, that initial abundance of light burst forth from another kind of ‘singularity’: the energy potential of the eternal Mind, who is both the universe’s Creator and the universal Soul pervading it. Who else could produce an Energy that transforms itself into substantial forms as material particles along with the purposeful forces required to establish such a universe? Who else could pervade that universe as Mind, and animate each fully evolved form with a living consciousness? Who else could fill the universe with His own Consciousness, imbuing living beings with distinct identities and an individualized self-awareness?

“Clearly, that eternal Mind that we call ‘God’ is the source and power of all that is. He has produced all these bodies and their evolutionary developments from His all-powerful light; and He is the inner Soul permeating all matter which we identify within ourselves as ‘I’. Indeed, all is He, and all glory is His. What else might we imagine exists? Who else might we imagine ourselves to be?

“All the material universe and all the forces operating within it are evolved from His outspreading light, breathed forth nearly fifteen billion years ago. Yet this immense burst of light-energy would have remained but a teeming chaotic mass, random and lifeless, without His conscious direction, without His in-dwelling Spirit. His manifestation of a material universe is plainly evident to us; but His guiding Spirit is subtle and hidden from our view. We may infer the existence of that subtle Spirit by observing Its effects in the universe and in ourselves; but It is known directly and with certainty only when He reveals Himself as our inner Self.

“So, as I hope I have made evident, there are *two* different ways in which the one Creator-God manifests: (1) As the Mind, Spirit, or Soul that permeates all matter as Consciousness, and which constitutes the limited mind, or soul, of each individual sentient being; and (2) as the Creative Power that produces the light-energy that transforms into the material wave-particles that make up the physical universe.

“With these two aspects of Himself, He constitutes both matter and Spirit, both body and soul; thus, He constitutes all that exists. Though some might object philosophically to what appears to be a dualistic perspective, I would point out to those objectors that, since both the substance of the material

universe and the indwelling Mind, or Spirit, both derive from one and the same supreme Being, there is, in fact, no duality, but rather an undeniable Nonduality—or, if you prefer, a Unity. That the one God manifests in these two different ways does nothing to detract from His integrated singularity.

“There is one other issue I wish to resolve: and that is whether the light-energy that the Creator produces to form the material universe is His own substance or a second substance other than Himself. I maintain that the great burst of light-energy which formed the vast universe is a projection of His own power and is therefore identical with His own essential Being. He did not borrow some other substance to make the physical cosmos; from where would He borrow it? No; He breathed forth that active light-energy from Himself. Though the universe is not *synonymous with* the supreme Consciousness, it is a projection of His inherent power and does not belong to any other category than Himself. It emanates from Him and is therefore of His Being.

“Both the light-energy that transforms into the material universe and the indwelling Spirit, or Soul, derive from the same Divinity; and yet they are not the same. They are different in quality and characteristics and are distinct and obviously separable from one another. The forms that evolve from His light-energy are subject to entropy and dissolution. They appear for a brief time; and when those material forms cease to function as viable entities, the indwelling Spirit departs. The forms of His light-energy are therefore transient and subject to decay and dissolution; while the Spirit, or Soul, continues to exist eternally. It is immortal.

“Now, to the question of *how* the Spirit, the Soul, or Divine Consciousness “permeates” the material world: Some ancient philosophers posited a *pneuma* that the Creator breathed into man exclusively, constituting the human soul; others suggested that the Divine Consciousness fills the entire universe as a numinous and all-pervading intelligence. Accumulated evidence—both from empirical and mystical sources—supports the latter premise. An all-pervasive Consciousness may be inferred from the “fine-tuning” effects evident throughout the cosmos, though such an all-pervading Intelligence remains undetected by our technological instruments. It is witnessed directly, however, by the human mind, or soul, during what we call “mystical” experience.

“During the so-called “mystical” experience, the individual mind (or soul) is drawn into union with God, the Divine Consciousness, and perceives through and as that Divine Consciousness, seeing from the perspective of that Divine Consciousness. While seeing from God’s perspective, the all-pervasiveness of the Divine Mind is experienced and known. In such awareness, that Divine Consciousness is revealed to the soul as both the initiator of the Creative Act of universal manifestation *as well as* the living Spirit pervading that universal manifestation. Though this knowledge (*gnosis*) is not what we consider to be ‘empirical’ knowledge, it *is* experiential knowledge. It is knowledge obtained from a transcendent perspective and carries a certainty for the experiencer far above any mere temporal knowledge.

“‘Very well,’ you may say; ‘but just *how* does the Divine Consciousness pervade the material universe? How can I picture it or form a conception of it?’

“I don’t believe it can be pictured, since that Divine Consciousness is an invisible and noumenal reality. But we can conceive of it by way of analogy: He is present within this world as our individual consciousness is present within our thoughts and dreams. Our thoughts and dreams are within our minds; and because of that, they are permeated by our own consciousness. In this same way, God is present within us, and within this world, because this world exists within Him.

“This universe, fostered by His light, exists *within* Him. He is all-encompassing. When the “Great Radiance” of God’s light burst forth as an expanding universe of time and space, of substance and form, where must that ‘Radiance’ have occurred? It had to have occurred in the Mind of God! Where else could you put a universe when there is nothing outside of that Divine Mind, when nothing exists or *can* exist but that all-encompassing Mind?

“And so, without the need for an “infusion” of the spark of life and consciousness, this world, by virtue of its presence in the Mind of God, is naturally and effortlessly suffused with His living presence. And what we

speak of as the 'soul' of individuals is simply the embodied expression of His all-encompassing conscious presence. The inclusion of the universe within the Divine Mind obviates the need for an *infusion* of God's presence as 'soul', since His Life and Consciousness are inherently the very Ground, substance, and support of the world, and constitute its very being. It is this realization that prompted St. Paul to declare, "In Him we live and move and have our being."

"Some people speak of "intelligent design" in the universe, as though God were similar to a human craftsman or architect who had thought out and prepared a blueprint prior to building the universe. But a little reflection on the nature of God reveals that He is neither a maker of blueprints nor a builder. What He *is* is an unfathomable Intelligence, the all-pervading Mind in which the universe exists, and by whose power it operates. God does not stand apart from the universe, like a builder fashioning a building; He does not "fine-tune" the universe as an object separate from Himself; rather, the universe exists within the Mind of God, and every single speck of it is controlled and coordinated by His will.

"Though we have given names to all the various forces comprising our universe, such as 'electromagnetic fields', the 'force of gravity', the 'strong' force, and the 'weak' force; all these are simply manifestations of the cohesion inherent in His Mind-born creation. We have also named the material particles mysteriously formed from His light, such as 'quarks', 'protons', and 'electrons'; but these also are but the evidence of the scintillating effusion of His imagination. Only in these last centuries have scientific investigators come to understand just how inconceivably evanescent and indescribable these sub-microscopic particles really are.

"As the stuff of our dreams responds to our human will, the stuff of this universe, produced from Himself, within Himself, responds to His will. And, since He transcends the confines of space and time, those evolutionary changes that, from our human perspective, require eons for their accomplishment, He accomplishes in an instant. Because His Consciousness is all-pervading, all things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain. What appears to our eyes to be random and uncaused is, in fact, the unfoldment of His will.

“Consider: If an invisible and omnipotent Mind caused the decay of one particle of uranium and left a second particle intact, would it not appear to those witnessing it that what had occurred was the random spontaneous decay of a particle? And if that same invisible and omnipotent Mind caused a gene in a strand of DNA to mutate, would it not appear to those examining that DNA that what had occurred was the random mutation of a gene? How would one be able to distinguish such a Divinely caused event from a random one? All is occurring within that one Consciousness. He has only to breathe, and a million worlds begin and end; and in this breathing, all that is contained within this universe is nourished and sustained.

“This body that you regard as your own is actually His—as pebbles are the earth’s, as waves are the ocean’s. In accord with His purpose, the sun daily stirs the waters of your heart, and the vapor of your love flies to the four corners of the world; while at night the moon stills you, and the cold darkness is your bed. All is in accordance with His design. He is the life-pulse of every creature; and when the clanging bells of joy exult within you, it is His joy; the fire of song that inspires you is also His. Even the obscuring dust of unknowing that blinds us to His presence is brought by Him. He is in the clouds and in the gritty soil; and if you bend over a pool of clear water, you may see on the water’s surface the reflection of His face.

“*How* does He pervade every particle of this universe? He is the Mind from which the universe took birth, and the universe exists within Him. All is contained in Him. In Him, there is no I or Thou, no now or then. In Him, life and death are undifferentiated. And that transcendent deathless Self is our eternal identity. So, you see, there is truly nothing to vanquish, nothing to lament, and nothing on which to pride oneself. In Him, and by Him, all is accomplished in an instant.”

NOTES:

1. Of course, not everyone agrees with the notion of a material universe. Some believe it was never created. Since there is no way to prove the existence of the universe outside of our mental perceptions of it, every few centuries someone frames the theory that the entire physical universe has no actual being outside that interior perception, that it exists solely in the human mind. It is a theory that has been postulated by the eighth century Indian mystic-philosopher, Shankara; by certain Buddhist philosophers; by the eighteenth-century English philosopher, George Berkeley; and by certain popular modern thinkers. But it is a theory that is at once contradicted by the fact that man (*homo sapiens*) did not exist prior to two million years ago—modern humans (*homo sapiens sapiens*) did not exist until around 200,000 years ago; and life, even in its most rudimentary stage, did not exist on this planet prior to around four billion years ago. However, the universe itself is around fourteen billion years old—clearly older than man—and therefore could not have been *originated* in the mind of man, or in the consciousness of any living creature, since the nature of time does not allow an effect to precede its cause. The only continuous consciousness capable of producing the appearance of the universe is that of the eternal Mind of God. Therefore, the theory of a humanly subjective production of the phenomenal universe will not be considered here.

2. According to the current scientific evidence, around fourteen billion years ago the universe was created by a great burst of light that some call “the Big Bang” and others prefer to call “the Great Radiance”. In order to produce an entire universe as vast as this one, that light had to have been at the highest end of the energy spectrum. The most energetic light in the electromagnetic spectrum is that with the highest frequency, and shortest wavelength; that radiation is referred to as “gamma-rays”, a term coined by Ernest Rutherford in 1903.

3. Gamma-rays, or gamma radiation, is radiation that reaches a frequency of 10 exahertz, or 10^{19} Hz, with a wavelength less than 10 picometers, and energies from 400 GeV (billion electron volts) to 10 TeV (trillion electron Volts). Since energy and mass are interconvertible ($E=mc^2$), energy converts to mass, and mass converts to energy. In that immense “fireball” at the beginning of time, trillions upon trillions of

photons of gamma radiation collided, and each of these photons converted to a particle-antiparticle pair. So long as the energy of the photon is equal to or exceeds the mass of the particles produced, this conversion occurs. The reverse process also occurred: for example, the mass of an electron-positron pair equals 1.02 MeV (million electron volts); when such a pair collides, it is annihilated, and, in its place, are two photons of at least 0.51 MeV each. In “the Great Radiance”, particle-antiparticle creation and annihilation were occurring at once on a grand scale. A full explanation of this process in the creation of the material universe may be found in my earlier book, *Body And Soul*.

4. The medieval English philosopher, Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) theorized that primeval matter was expanded to form the universe by the impetus of light. But he had not the benefit of the knowledge introduced much later by Einstein that light and matter are alternate forms of the same thing. Regarding light and matter as two distinct categories, he understood that light, since it “diffuses itself in every direction,” provides a likely medium for the extension of matter in all dimensions:

Thus light, which is the first form created in first matter, multiplied itself by its very nature an infinite number of times on all sides and spread itself out uniformly in every direction. In this way it proceeded in the beginning of time to extend matter which it could not leave behind, by drawing it out along with itself into a mass the size of the material universe. (Robert Grosseteste, *On Light*, trans. from the Latin by Clare C. Riedl, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Marquette University Press, 1942, 2000; p. 11.)

From our vantage point today, it seems quite amazing how close Grosseteste came to an anticipation of the cosmological theory that only emerged seven hundred years after him. His theory influenced his Oxford student, Roger Bacon (1214-1292) as well, though both still held to an Aristotelian cosmology consisting of spheres within spheres. Neither could guess that it was the light from the Divine that actually transformed or converted into the material particles that constitute the universe of form, and which, through its expansion, gave birth to space and time.

5. When gamma radiation photons collide, they convert to matter, becoming a particle-antiparticle pair, such as a proton and an antiproton, or an electron and a positron. These two members of a symmetrical pair possess opposite electric charges, and annihilate upon contact, turning back once again to light (photons). One would expect that, this being the case, every matter-antimatter pair would have annihilated over the course of time, and that consequently there would be no material universe. However, there *is* a material universe. And so, we must assume there was an asymmetry that found its way into this process, sparing approximately one matter particle in every 10 billion produced, which matter particles now constitute what is our material universe. Why and how this asymmetry should exist, however, has not yet been explained.

6. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 1

7. *Chuang Tze*, 22

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VIII. REWRITING HISTORY

(Enlightened Christianity: *The Story of Jesus, The Mystic*)

In 2012, at the age of seventy-four, I retired from my work as a Certified Nursing Aide and Home Health Care employee. It was then that I was able to give my time to the creation of a website called “The Mystic’s Vision” (www.themysticsvision.com), where I began posting my books online for free downloading. (Here is a studio photo of me in 2012)



Additionally, at that time, I dedicated all of my writings, past and current, to the Public Domain, renouncing all benefits of copyright. I had not intended to produce any more books, but in 2016 I offered to my online readers a two-volume collection of the brief excerpts from my writings that had accumulated on my website, which I titled, “The Mystic’s Vision, Volume One and Two”. Then, in January of 2019, I gathered some of these writings together under twenty-six separate topics and published them online as “*The Essential Articles of Swami Abhayananda, Volumes One and Two.*” It is these “*Essential Articles*” that I regard as containing the complete and comprehensive expression of my Mystical Theology. In September of that same year, I offered a collection, containing a briefer version of my ideas, which I entitled “Thoughts of A Mystic.” Later, in March of 2020, I added a third volume of “*Essential Articles of Swami Abhayananda.*” And in July, of 2020, I added a fourth volume, entitled “*Supplemental Articles of Swami Abhayananda.*”

One of the major ideas put forward during the period of 2018-2020 is the recognition of the primary significance of mystical experience in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and the derailing of the significance of that mystical experience by the founders of the Christian church. Though I had explained that notion in the Chapter on Jesus in *History of Mysticism*, published in 1987, I later amplified on it in the Article entitled “Enlightened Christianity: The Story of Jesus, The Mystic” that appears in *The Essential Articles of Swami Abhayananda, Vol. One.*

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27. THE CONSPIRACY OF IGNORANCE

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

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Some I Met Along The Way

As I was walking toward my home, I came upon three men. The first man I saw was lying helpless on the ground and weighted down with a large tangle of chains. “Throw off your chains,” I said to him; “stand, and be free, as your immortal soul intends you to be.”

“I can't stand,” he said; “perhaps you can help me.” And, attempting to aid in his release, I took hold of one of the chains and lifted it. “Hold on,” cried the man; “would you take from me the knowledge of my sinfulness, and leave me unremorseful? I would rather bear the weight of this chain,” he said. And so, letting go of that chain, I grasped another chain and began to lift it from him.

“O please,” cried the man, “would you take from me the faith in my savior, who was not made, but begotten of God, as Light from uncreated Light, Himself become man so that man might become ‘God—would you take away from me the Way, the Truth, and the Life?’” I loosened my hold on that particularly heavy chain and began to tug on another.

But, as I attempted to lift the chain, it was as though I was causing the man injury and pain, for he cried out, “O sir, that is the holy religious tradition to which I have vowed allegiance, and to which my soul is bound. I would as soon die as remove that chain! I gently placed the chain back in its place on his chest and stood upright.

“No one has wrapped you in these chains but yourself,” I told him; “and you alone can remove them. I’m sorry that I cannot rid you of them, but I will leave you with these words that may give you some guidance: Like the one you call your savior, you are God’s own Life in human form. God is your true savior, and He lives within you *as you*. Therefore, rise up, and throw off your chains.” And then, after so addressing him, I saluted him and continued on my way.

The second man I encountered was armed to the teeth with rifles and handguns, bullets and knives. “Why are you so heavily armed?” I asked him; “and who are you fighting?”

“I am a warrior of Allah,” said the man, “and I am the slayer of the godless infidels!”

“What godless infidels?” I asked.

“Those who do not worship Allah,” he said.

“But do not all men have the right to choose the path that they will take?” I asked, in an attempt to reason with him.

“I am simply following the mandate of the prophet,” said the man. “He has written, ‘Kill those who join other deities to Allah, wherever you shall find them. But if they shall convert, ... then let them go their way.’¹ And again: ‘Say to the infidel, if they desist from their unbelief, what is past is forgiven them. But if they return to it, ... fight then against them to the end, until the only religion left is Allah’s.’²”

“All religions already belong to Allah,” I said to him, “whether He is called Allah, Hari, Yahveh, God, or Shiva; for all these names refer to the same Creator and Lord recognized as the universal Spirit dwelling within everyone.”

“You are mistaken,” the man insisted. “The God they worship is not the same as the God we worship.”

“But how,” I asked him, “is it even possible for there to be more than one Creator, more than one all-pervasive Spirit?” But I could see that this line of reasoning was having no effect, and so I took another tack: “The spiritual quest is *not* the pursuit of a worldly victory for a particular sectarian ideology,” I said; “it is not a pursuit that is advanced by physical conquest at all. The spiritual quest is an *interior* pursuit of the direct inner revelation of God as one’s own divine Self.³ And when we do come to know Him, we realize that He can never be limited to any single name, concept, or form.”

“Are you not aware that there are many different religions?” he asked me.

And I replied, “Yes, of course, there are many superficial differences among religious traditions: the various items of faith, the various rules and rituals, are distinctly different in each religious tradition, but so what? They arose in different times and places, in different cultures with different customs, and were written in different languages; so, it is only natural that they would be different. Let them be! If your faith and your rituals help you to become aware of the Divine within you, adhere to them, and let others adhere to their own. God has made us innately free: we are free to choose our own scriptures, our own ideas, and our own ways of worshiping, so long as by doing so no one is harmed. It is incumbent upon us to leave others to choose their own ways as well. God has given each man and woman the ability to see things from their own individual perspective and by the light of their own intellect.”

For a moment, the man had nothing to say, and so I continued, “Each of us is given a mind capable of thought and judgment and self-rule; each of us is a manifestation of the Divine, possessing the God-given freedom of independent choice. Honor that gift—and give voice to it. In this current period of time, it is crucial to establish this truth on earth for all to share, along with the mandate of ‘Do no harm’. May Allah bless everyone with the possession of this wisdom.”

But the warrior of God was having none of it, and he pushed me away threateningly, and so I continued on my way.

The third man I met was in a mechanized wheelchair; he was noticeably crippled in body, and his face was drawn by his disease into a frightening grimace. He had witnessed my encounter with the other two men, and he came right up to me and said, “Do you not see that those men are deluded who place their faith in a God who doesn’t exist?”

“Oh, but He *does* exist!” I replied, “He is existence itself.” But this only brought forth a tortured laugh from the man in the chair.

“Well, my friend,” he said; “you may believe what you like, but science makes God unnecessary. This world is but a speck of dust in a random array of similar specks of dust in an endless extension of space. I have investigated and found only emptiness. There is no God, no invisible ruling hand, no bearded archetype upholding this cosmic accident, but only the inexorable play of the laws of physics in a dazzling yet meaningless universal display.”

“You are mistaken,” I told him; “I don’t know why God has chosen to keep your mind in darkness and has not illumined your mind with His gracious presence. I only know that He has revealed Himself in me and has left no doubt that all this universe is His manifestation. I have seen the glory and grandeur of God, and how everything in His universe works in unison with everything else in the great unity of His mind. And I have known beyond the slightest doubt, that I am nothing else but God’s manifest appearance in this world. He is the entire ocean of existence of which I am but a single wavelet. Contrary to your opinion that God doesn’t exist, the truth is that nothing else exists but God. It is He who has inspired me with His own thought to sing His praise with His own voice so that all His children might know Him and know His infinite joy.”

“You cannot prove to me that God exists,” he said; “and I cannot prove to you that He does not exist. But know this: the origin of this universe can be convincingly explained by the laws of science, without recourse to the theory of divine intervention.”

“No, there is no proof of God,” I said, “—except for the sublime proof that is His revelation within the soul, which you seem not to have experienced.

You have my condolences. But be aware that it is never too late: He is ever capable of illuminating your mind with the revelation of His presence. But you must be receptive to the possibility. You must open your mind and your heart to God if you wish to know Him.”

“My dear sir,” he sternly addressed me, “I am a man of science and I rely on science and the powers of my intellect to investigate the nature of the cosmos; I do not rely on fairytales.”

“Very well,” I said; “I wish you well.” And I bade him “Good day,” as we parted company.

Such were the three men I met on my way, each of whom was deluded in his own way and suffering terribly from his mistaken views. But what could be done? There’s an old saying that ‘you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.’ These days it seems that hardly anyone is willing to drink of the ‘water’ I’m offering. So, while I’ve been privileged to praise God for so long, it’s probably time for me to reduce my activities, leaving the lifting of chains and reasoning with the unreasonable to those who are younger and more capable. Besides, I have faith that God, who is ever in charge of the unfolding of His creation, will bring all good souls home to His infinite Bliss in His own time and in His own way. May His Name be praised!

NOTES:

1. Quran, IX:5, 6.
2. Quran, VIII:39, 40. Also II:191-193. This scriptural doctrine of ‘conversion or death’ was no doubt a highly expedient factor in the rapid expansion of Islam throughout the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent from the 7th to 13th centuries. But today it is only the relatively few radical Islamic fundamentalists who regard this doctrine as still valid. They have adopted this policy as the foundation of their current universal *jihad* aligned against the entire rest of the world. But, I have it on good authority that for the great majority of all Muslims, this doctrine is considered to be a remnant of an antiquated past and no longer a valid or relevant portion of Islamic scripture.

3. “The spiritual quest is an *inner* pursuit of the direct inner revelation of God as one’s own divine Self.” Some of the greatest mystics of the Islamic tradition (known as ‘Sufis’) were followers of this spiritual quest—mystics such as Hasan al-Basri, Rabi’a Adawiyya, Dhu’n-Nun, Beyizid Bistami, Abu’l-Husayn an-Nuri, Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, Muhammed ali Ibn Arabi, Fakhruddin Iraqui, and Jalaluddin Rumi, the account of whose lives and teachings may be found in Abhayananda, *History of Mysticism*, Atma Books, 1987 (freely downloadable at the download page of my website: www.themysticsvision.com.)

The Great Split

I am daily reminded of the great split that exists in this world as soon as I am connected in the morning to those ignorant people on the radio or TV who represent the popular perspective on the daily news of the world. No, I am not talking about the racial split between the blacks and the whites, the political split between the democrats and republicans or the societal split between the liberals and the conservatives. These splits occur at the grossest, worldly level. No, I’m talking about the huge underlying split between the spiritually ignorant and the spiritually informed. If you are one of the spiritually ignorant, you don’t even know that this dichotomy exists. But if you are one of the spiritually informed, the wall of separation between the few and the many is blatantly apparent, permeating every word of discourse uttered in every segment of the populace and our society.

For the spiritually ignorant, the only social or intellectual framework for spirituality is Abrahamic religion: in other words, the three interconnected Biblically sourced religions, Judaism, Christianity or Islam. The great *mystical* traditions of Vedanta in the East, Sufism in the Middle East, or Neoplatonism in the West are totally beyond the intellectual scope of the spiritually ignorant. If the subject of spirituality comes up in our society, which it rarely does, it is invariably the mythical, and not the mystical variety that is intended. By mythical, I mean the legendary, doctrinal, popular secular, ‘organized religion’ variety of spirituality, and not the experientially informed, mystical variety.

We are an ignorant society. We idolize and celebrate our sports heroes, and love to hear gossip about our notorious film actors, but our knowledge of the

spiritual reality in which we live is almost nonexistent. This ignorance extends from the lowliest laborer to the famed representatives of society and government to the degreed professors in the hallowed halls of academia. It is the most distasteful, egregious and harmful dichotomy that could possibly exist, and yet it constitutes the impenetrable bedrock of our very society. For thousands of years, the various religious organizations have successfully peddled their fairytale religions and their fairytale heroes and phony descendants of God, relying on the stupidity and ignorance of the overwhelming populace to reinforce the centuries-old customs and traditions passed down to them, and that populace continues to blithely ignore the perennial message of the mystic seers that soars beyond their meager understanding. Today, these bastions of religious ignorance are as strong and as prevalent as ever, and the vast majority of the populace continues to be as blindly oblivious to the truth as ever. What can be done? Can such an overarching edifice of resistant ignorance ever be overthrown? I don't know. Though I am doing my part to shed some light and to reduce this ubiquitous spiritual ignorance, the task seems insurmountable.

Can You Not See?

Is there anyone who cannot see that the popular religious organizations are simply instruments for separating people into enclaves of partisans, instead of bringing diverse partisans together in the love of God? We have separated ourselves into what are in fact political camps, each with its own limited perspective on life's meaning and history; and we call that 'religion'. Do we really think this mockery is 'religion'?

It appears that we want everyone to know that we are totally committed to the ideals and tenets of your own club, and that those tenets expounded by other clubs are simply wrong, perhaps criminal, and definitely despicable. And the members of each of the different clubs holds the exact same opinion regarding the other clubs. Has it ever occurred to you that you are *all* wrong? Religion, by its very definition, is all-inclusive, recognizing that *all* beings are included in God's all-enfolding creation, governance, and providence. It's not about that historical person who is your favorite religious representative and who you are convinced is Divinity incarnate; it's about the all-inclusive Divinity of each of us; it's about bridging the

separation between yourself and God, and eventually coming to know the two as one.

Are we all insane? Are we unable to broaden our parameters? Can't we learn to see from the all-encompassing perspective of God, the one all-pervasive Spirit? Our opinion regarding the divine status of this or that historical personage is not important. It is the direct knowledge of God that is important! So, what if Jesus attained that knowledge? How has that changed what *you* have attained? At a sports event, all the partisans of the home team stand up and give each other high-fives whenever their team scores. But I've always wondered, what did the people in the stands have to do with it? Why are they so proud of themselves? And likewise, why are those who regard themselves as followers of Jesus, or Muhammed, or Krishna, or Buddha so proud of themselves?

So, you are a Christian! So, you are a Muslim! Have you known that one Spirit who contains, includes, and watches over all of you—Christian, Jew, and Muslim alike? Grow up! As a society, you are currently in a shameful state! You profess to love the fellow club-members who are on your team, and you congratulate yourselves that you are members of so prestigious a club, but you hate the members of the other club, the other party—even though you know next to nothing about them. What a lovely religion! You seem to have no clue whatsoever!

My dear brothers and sisters, I have encouraged you and attempted to inspire you for lo, these many years. And all the while I have grown older, until I am scarcely able to urge you on. I so want you to know God, to receive His bountiful Grace, but, as you must know, I can only lead you to the water; whether or not you drink of it is entirely in your hands.

But please know that I have nothing to apologize for. I have told you nothing but the truth, I have shown you the path. I have rooted for you all the way. If you have not yet been the beneficiary of His Grace, I regret it, but I have not led you astray. The prize is there within your reach. It is eternally there within you. I can only pray along with you that the Lord will reveal it to your soul!

A Pertinent Question

In the first century, a young Jewish man named Jesus declared to his companions that he had experienced a divine revelation. Today, nearly everyone has heard the story of Jesus' revelation; but here's a question you've probably never considered: 'If you had been a neighbor of Jesus in those days in which he lived way back in the first century, do you think you would have believed his story?' You can't really know for sure, of course, but do you think that, having known him as a sensible young man, his story would have seemed credible to you? Imagine yourself sitting with him and listening as he told of the remarkable experience he had while attending a baptism ceremony at the river Jordan with John the Baptist. Would you have believed him? Would you have believed that he had experienced the divine revelation that he was 'in God and God in him, and that all this world was the kingdom of God'? Would you believe that this young man had truly experienced that he and God, the Father, were one?

Would you have said, "Well, I have heard of people having such a personal experience of God; and what you describe seems to be a true experience. You are certainly very fortunate"? Or would you have said, "Jesus, my boy, you've experienced a hallucination. But nothing to worry about; it was probably just something you ate."

What if, instead of Jesus, it was someone you know today who experienced such a revelation, would you believe them? What if it was your brother? And what if you had never before heard of anyone having such an experience? It is almost certain that Jesus' brothers and sisters had never heard of such experiences either and were incredulous at hearing of Jesus' revelation. No doubt, they, as well as his parents, regarded him sadly as deluded. But today there is no excuse for such ignorance! It is high time that you and all religious people became educated regarding such spiritual experiences. Learn what you need to know: You can start by reading my two books, *The Supreme Self*, which tells the story of my own spiritual experience, and *History of Mysticism*, which is a documented and reliable history of some of the people throughout the ages who have also known such a spiritual experience, many of whom, like Jesus in the first century, suffered

greatly due to the widespread ignorance and narrow-mindedness of the people at the time.

The Culture of Secrecy

There is so much to be learned about our human nature from the famous mystic-teachers of the past, and yet, over the years, the subject of the human experience of the Divine has always been shrouded in secrecy. In ancient Greek and Roman societies, those rare and subtle 'mystical experiences' were regarded as belonging exclusively to members of the secret 'mystery' schools. Teachings about mysticism or mystical experience could be found only among the Adepts and initiates of those secret schools.

Even as late as the 3rd century of the Current Era, the mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, repeated the ancient warning that matters relating to mystical experience were "Not to be told, not to be written." The obvious reason for this is that, in the hands of the unlearned, the uninitiated, mystical knowledge is very likely to be misinterpreted and misrepresented, and those who spoke of it ran the risk of being persecuted by the ignorant. In those times, as well as today, one would certainly be ill-advised to bandy such mystical knowledge about in the public marketplace, as a certain young Palestinian mystic of the first century learned, much to his great chagrin.

Though the interior experience of Plotinus (third century) was identical to that of Jesus, Plotinus was acutely aware that he could not openly announce his mystical experience to the commoners of Rome; rather, he spoke of his own mystical experience with only a few close students of philosophy, and his circle was very exclusive and very secret. Even to this day, only the few, the advanced elite among spiritual seekers, are able to access, appreciate, and find joy in the great spiritual wisdom of Plotinus. And yet, it seems to me, that there is so much benefit to be had by the entire society through an open sharing of spiritual knowledge by those to whom it is revealed, and so much loss accrued to the whole society without it, that I believe the benefit of sharing this knowledge by those who have experienced it greatly outweighs the risk of its corruption by the foolish or its danger to the one who shares it.

Great, liberating knowledge is not to be hidden and relegated to whispers behind doors because of the fear of recriminations from religious fanatics. The more it is shared, the more accepted it will become, and understanding will increase in even greater circles, expanding to benefit more of those who would, otherwise, suffer in the dark and lonely blindness of ignorance. Hasn't the world done that for long enough?

The Conspiracy of Ignorance

Mysticism is a revolutionary ideology. It was revolutionary in the times prior to Jesus, and it is still revolutionary. It goes against the complacency of the followers of traditional religious orthodoxy and is therefore always regarded as 'the enemy' by the ignorant majority. For this reason, every influential mystic, from Heraclitus onward, has been persecuted and denounced by the representatives of the established religious tradition.

Today, as ever in the past, that ignorant majority is predominant. As always, they are content to remain oblivious to the past and to the great and lasting legacy of both the ancient and recent mystics and their revelations; and they blindly strike out against any effort to educate them. Such entrenched ignorance can only be vanquished one person at a time, and too often any real progress in understanding comes only after an entire generation dies off and is replaced. It is true that ignorance is an affliction affecting individuals, but when that ignorance becomes the acceptable norm, it must be regarded as a conspiracy, a universal conspiracy of ignorance.

In fact, this conspiracy of ignorance has existed as part of the human legacy for thousands of years, and has always had the support of the "respectable" institutions and persons who rule this world from the centers of government power, from the pulpits of churches, mosques and temples, from the universities and all of the schools, from the newsrooms throughout the world, and from all of the purveyors of public information, permeating all society and influencing all the ordinary people on the street; in short, this conspiracy is made up of and includes *all of you*.

A conspiracy of ignorance requires complicity from everyone and can only be countered by the willingness to honestly consider extraordinary new information, and to accept that information where it is universally and unassailably valid. I only ask that you investigate with an open mind the many declarations by countless honorable people regarding the ‘mystical experience’ that occurred in them, weigh their testaments, and draw your own conclusions. The evidence is staggeringly immense; people from all over the globe, from every historical period, have given testimony of a common interior experience of eternal Being that is transpersonal and all-inclusive.¹ Such a revelatory vision may go by the name of “mystical experience”, “spiritual experience”, or any number of other labels, but it is undeniably a God-given revelation of the underlying spiritual nature of this universe and everything and everyone in it.

Once realized and understood, the knowledge conveyed by the mystics will transform your world and refashion your life and the lives of all of us. Once the unanimous declarations of the mystics, who are the seers of our spiritual reality, are accepted as real and true, the truths revealed may be assimilated into our daily lives and given a central place in our thoughts and in our intellectual communications. The great mystical truths must become acknowledged and announced from the centers of power, from the pulpits, from the newsrooms, from the classrooms, and from all of us, if the world is to be truly revolutionized by the truth of our spiritual reality. Stand with me, brothers and sisters; boldly take your stand against the universal conspiracy of ignorance! Do whatever you can to let people know the liberating message of the mystics. Spread the word!

NOTE:

1. If you wish to learn more about the great mystics of times past and their unwavering message, read my *History of Mysticism*. It is available in PDF format for free download at: www.themysticsvision.com.

A Greater Truth

Divine revelation is real. God-realization is real. Please understand that Jesus was not the only one who was visited by Grace, not the only one to know his own divinity and announce it to the world. The revelation of truth that dawned in Jesus has dawned in others and has dawned in me. The same truth that Jesus announced I have announced. It is a truth that *must* be heard—if not today, then tomorrow. It is the greatest of truths, and it *will* be heard. So, open up your minds, my friends and countrymen: A greater truth than you have ever known or imagined is dawning—once again!

I may appear a solitary figure paddling against the tide, but I am not alone. I am one among many thousand souls who have known the Father of all souls. Our combined voices will one day overtake the current and turn the creeping tide, for we have His truth behind us and within us, and we have His uplifting hands to carry us forward. We cannot be stopped. And one day you must join us. We are truth and we are legion, and our voices are His own.

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28. MAYA

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

Maya: The Power of God

(Excerpted from *The Wisdom of Vedanta*, 1991; last revised: 5-25-21)

In the final chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna: “O Arjuna, the Lord dwells in the heart of all beings, while revolving them all on the wheel (of transmigration) by His mysterious power of *Maya*.”¹ This word, “Maya,” is one, which we hear quite often in discussions of Vedanta, and, because it is a word that is so often misinterpreted, I’d like to see if I can clear up any misunderstanding about it.

We may well understand that ‘Brahman’ is a name for the Godhead, the absolute Consciousness, the eternal Mind, which mystics throughout history have experienced as the transcendent Source of all creation. It is said by those who have known It to be pure Consciousness, Bliss, unmoving, unchanging, unqualified, beyond all form and beyond all activity. How then, the rational intellect questions, can such a quiescent Emptiness create a universe of myriad forms? The difficulty of explaining this satisfactorily is readily acknowledged even by those who have experienced It directly. The truth of the one Reality is “seen” clearly in the mystical “vision,” and yet to describe It is nearly impossible, because Its mode of existence is unique, and without parallel in the phenomenal world, and for that reason, there is nothing else with which It may be truly compared.

Those seers who do speak of It say that the one Reality has two distinct aspects: It is the absolutely pure Consciousness, which remains as the eternal Ground, the immoveable Witness; and yet, at the same time, It possesses the power of projecting a manifold universe upon Its own Self. Frequently, the analogy is made of the human mind and its power of projecting thoughts or images upon itself. These two aspects of our own

immediate experience help us to grasp a little of what these two cosmic principles: *Brahman* and *Maya*, are like.

“Maya” is just another name for God’s power of manifestation, His power of form-projection. However, the word, “Maya,” is also used to signify the form-projection itself. It is God’s Power of manifestation, which remains eternally with Him, whether there is a manifestation or not; and it is also the actual world of forms which results from that power. Maya, in other words, is both the cause and the effect, both the Creator (or Creatrix) and the creation.

This word, “Maya,” is synonymous with all the other words used to represent the manifestory Power of God, such as “*Shakti*,” “*Prakrti*,” “*Logos*,” etc. So many different words exist because every seer of every time and place has found it necessary to give a name to the Creative Power of God in order to distinguish the temporal from the eternal, the phenomenal appearance from the constant and unchanging Ground. “Maya,” like so many of the other names for this “Power,” is a noun of the feminine gender. Just as the absolute Godhead is referred to as the figurative “Father,” His Power of manifestation is commonly referred to as “Mother,” as in “Mother Nature.” Maya is the Creatrix, the divine Womb from which everything is born, sometimes called the Will, or the effulgent Glory, of God.

Understand that God’s Power is not something *other* than God—just as our own power of thought-production is not distinct from our minds to which that power belongs. However, we must bear in mind also that, just as the thoughts and images which are produced in our minds are mere ephemera which come and go, and once gone, have no claim to existence, so, likewise, the various forms in the universe, however alluring and seductive, or however frightening and dreadful, are mere ephemera which come and go, and are, by that standard, illusory, or unreal. The Power, Maya, exists eternally, being inherent in God; but the world-illusion, Maya, is transient, having a beginning and an end.

Those who have experienced God, through contemplation, have “seen” the creation of the world-illusion, its flourishing, and its dissolution, in a recurrent cycle. It is somewhat like the recurrent cycle of breath, which we, as creatures, experience. In something similar to an exhalation, the Lord

manifests and plays out the drama of the universe; and, in something similar to an inhalation, He draws it all back into Himself once again. In just one breath, the whole universe is created, evolves, and is ultimately withdrawn again into its Source. From the perspective of God, it is but a fleeting breath; from our temporal perspective, it is an unimaginable immensity of time. Perhaps our own breath, which seems to us but momentary, is an eternity to certain sub-atomic particles, whose life span is measured in millionths of a second. See how relative our concept of time and space is!

While Maya is the breath of God by which the universe of time and space is created, from our own temporal perspective, that breath manifests as ‘the Great Radiance’ or ‘Big Bang’ from which and by which all else is produced. That ‘Great Radiance’, last occurring fourteen billion years ago, is an immense burst of high frequency electromagnetic radiation that rapidly transforms into quantum wave/particles which, combining with other such wave/particles, produce the appearance of the various forms of matter which constitute this vast universe. The production of this ‘illusory’ universe of discreet material forms within an infinitely extended space also creates the illusion of time. Our experience of the passage of time, as Albert Einstein showed us, is relative to our positional perspective, so that years may seem to pass which, from another perspective, are but passing moments—just as in a dream. Let me tell you a story from the Vedantic tradition, which illustrates this phenomenon:

Once, the legendary sage, Narada, was out walking with Krishna, who is, of course, representative, in literature, of God. In the course of their conversation, Narada asked God to explain to him the mystery of His Maya. And the Lord said, “Alright—but before I do, since my throat is a little dry, please fetch me a drink of water.” So, Narada ran off to find some water for the Lord. In the course of his search, he came to a pleasant little hut, where he stopped to get directions to the nearest water, but when the door to the hut was opened, there stood a most beautiful young maiden with whom Narada was immediately smitten. As she invited him inside, Narada forgot all about his mission to fetch some water for his Lord; and, as the days passed very pleasantly, Narada fell more and more in love with his beautiful hostess, and soon they were wed.

Before long, the blissful couple had children, and Narada toiled in the field to grow food for his growing family. He was extremely happy with his new family and thought himself to be surely the most fortunate of men to have such a beautiful wife and such fine children. But, one day, a great monsoon rain fell; and for many days thereafter the rain continued. The riverbanks overflowed, and the little hut was filled with water. Narada climbed, with his family, to the top of the hut, clinging with one hand to the roof, and with the other to his wife and children. But the rains continued, and the hut began to collapse from the flooding waters. First one child, then another, was swept away in the raging torrent; and finally, Narada felt his darling wife slip away from his grasp as well. Then, he too was swept away in the flood, crying out in the darkness for his wife and children.

At last, nearly unconscious, and completely exhausted, Narada found himself washed up on a wreckage-strewn shore. And, as he lay there desperately lamenting the loss of his family, he suddenly looked up to see the feet of Krishna at his head. Quickly, he struggled to his feet, and Krishna, with an ironic smile, asked, “Where have you been, Narada? I sent you for water nearly ten minutes ago!” It was in this way that the Lord showed to Narada His power of Maya. Indeed, this life *is* much like a dream, in which we become entirely involved and embroiled, forgetful of our real purpose, only to wake to find that the people, things, and events we thought real were, in fact unreal—a mere play of thought.²

“All this [world],” said the insightful sage, Shankaracharya, “from the intellect to the gross physical body, is the effect of Maya. Understand that all these and Maya itself are not the absolute Self, and are therefore unreal, like a mirage in the desert.”³ “Real,” for Shankaracharya, meant “eternal,” That which always was and always will be. This phenomenal universe obviously does not fit this definition of “real,” and is therefore “unreal”—like a mirage. It is only God’s imagination—similar in some ways to a dream. Do you remember the following song?

Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily—
Life is but a dream.

That song conveys the idea of Maya. And this is a great understanding to have of the world. But, of much more significance is the understanding that the Dreamer of the dream, the divine Consciousness, is ultimately the only Reality, and is therefore, without doubt, our own ultimate Identity. And so, whatever apparently desirable conditions we become attracted to, and whatever nightmarish conditions manifest before us, if we are able to remain conscious of that eternal Identity, we will always remain fearless and unmoved, confident that we are above and beyond whatever conditions that may confront us in this dream-like world. The realization of God, the realization of our eternal Self, is an experience very similar to awaking from a dream in the sense that one who has awakened to the eternal Self is then able to re-experience the dream from a new perspective and enjoy the play fearlessly and with great enjoyment.

When I was a child, I remember I would sometimes have disturbing dreams in which some creature of my imagination would chase me and would be just at the point of gobbling me up, when I would pinch myself in the dream, and wake myself, thus escaping the beast by withdrawing suddenly from the dream to my warm and safe bed. Once I discovered this handy trick, I would taunt the villains in my dreams, secure in the knowledge that, just at the critical moment, when they had me cornered with no apparent exit, I could pinch myself, and disappear from their clutches just like that.

The same kind of confidence belongs to the one who has realized the Self, through contemplation. Just as, when a dream-character awakes, he realizes he is, in fact, the dreamer, likewise, when we, who experience ourselves as manifestations of God's imagination, awake from this dream of a world, we realize that, in fact, we are the Imaginator, the pure Consciousness from whom all this imagined universe sprang. We realize that we are, and have always been, the one eternal Self of all; that we have always been safe and secure as the all-inclusive One.

Once we have awakened to the Self, then, when we find ourselves back in the dream, we can share our knowledge with everyone else in the dream. This is what the mystic does; he returns to the dream, the world, and tells everyone, "Hey! This is just a dream. Each of us is really that one Dreamer; He is the Self of all of us. And, if you really want to enjoy the dream in the

best possible way, and at the same time know that you're free from the dream, then wake up and realize who you really are!"

This brings to my mind the parable told by Socrates, called "The Analogy of The Cave."⁴ Socrates, who was an enlightened man, attempted to illustrate his own state by asking his listeners to imagine a world in which there were some people chained in a cave far underground, with their backs to a fire before which some other people were parading back and forth. The people chained are facing toward a cave-wall on which the images of the people parading in front of the fire are cast as shadows. The images on the wall are all that they can see, and so they take that to be the reality. Then, one day, one man escapes from his chains. He discovers the fire and the figures marching in front of it and realizes how mistaken he had been in regarding only the shadows as the reality. Then, he discovers a way out of the cave, and he climbs up, out of the cave, into the sunlight, and discovers the real source of light in the world. He is overjoyed, and elated, and he returns to the cave, telling everyone, "Look, this is only shadows, illusions! Break your bonds; come up out of the cave and see the reality!" The problem, of course, is that no one believes him. They think him mad; they curse him and stone him and ostracize him from their company while remaining ensnared in their false shadow world.

That was the analogical story Socrates told as a way of explaining the idea of Maya. But, just as the unchained man in his story was brutally treated by his brothers when he attempted to lead them to freedom, so was Socrates brutally treated in his own life. When he tried to explain the Truth that he had seen to the people of Athens, they scorned him and condemned him to death, and eventually murdered him. Many year later, Jesus of Nazareth also experienced his eternal identity through God's grace, and, like Socrates, was persecuted and murdered for attempting to show people the way out of the cave, out of Maya's snare of illusion, so that they too could know the Truth and be free.

Just as the people living in the underground cave in Socrates' story were unaware that they were even bound by Maya, we also live in Maya's world of duality without even being aware of our enslavement. In fact, it is only when God's grace reveals our true nature that the duality in which we had previously been living also becomes revealed. In the 7th chapter of the

Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, “The whole world is under the delusion of my Maya; for this Maya of mine is very difficult to penetrate. Only those who take refuge in Me go beyond it.”⁵ In other words, it is only by intense devotion and the grace of God that we are released from the delusive power of Maya. If we think of this release as the awakening from a dream, we can easily understand that it is not just the person within the dream who must awake, but the Dreamer must also deliberately reveal Himself. There must be a complicity, or grace, extending from the Dreamer to the dreamed. It’s not as though one can awake from the cosmic dream simply by pinching oneself. But, through a strong desire for liberation, with a focused mind intent on God, with an all-consuming will and devotion, it is possible to draw that complicity, that grace, and bring about an “awakening.” Then you will be free—even though you still live within Maya’s cosmic dream.

Though everything in the world will remain the same after such an awakening, for you, all will be quite different; for your vision of the world will be very different. The clear, perfect nondual awareness shines without blemish, illuminating the mind with its light. But it is not permanent; one does not remain in that nondual state continually thereafter. Still, it is an experience that cannot be forgotten, and the radiant memory of its revelation permeates one’s consciousness ever after. That divine awareness remains as the underlying content of one’s mind, an ever-present certainty upon which one constantly dwells. From that moment on, you will carry with you the awareness of your eternal Self, and you will view all this dream-like world as your own glorious play. Maya will no longer bind you in any way, for you’ll know that you are, in truth, the Lord of Maya. As the great Shankaracharya said, “Maya is destroyed by the realization of the One without a second.” The revelation of your true nature destroys all previous limited notions of your identity, just as awaking from a dream destroys the illusory reality of the dream.

Swami Vidyanarany, another of the great Vedantic sages, wrote, “Maya is called ‘the wish-fulfilling cow.’ It yields milk in the form of duality. Drink as much of it as you like; but the Truth is non-duality.”⁶ Final release from all duality—including life and death—is obtained only through the knowledge of the Self. One does not come to the end of dreaming until one awakes to that Self.

All the Self-realized sages agree: the knowledge of the Self is the only means to transcend the ignorance in which we are enmeshed due to the veiling power of Maya. Once a person has awakened from the dream-world of Maya, he may enter back into the dream, with the awareness of his eternal Identity, and he is never troubled by the occurrences within the dream-world again. He is aware that he *is* everything that appears before him, that everything that happens is a mere imagination, and that he can never be threatened or destroyed. All is himself; and, at the same time, he is quite free and safe, beyond the effects of all this temporal phantasmagoria of things and events. He knows within himself: “I am the Absolute; I am completely independent, ever-pure, eternal and free. I pervade everything; I am everlasting, undefiled, pure Existence, beyond Maya, without cause or limitation. I alone am. I am the one eternal Consciousness.”⁷

NOTES:

1. *Bhagavad Gita*, 18:61.
2. Who has not fallen at least once into the snare of Maya, just as Narada did? No one, I'd wager. Not even the greatest saint has managed to entirely escape Maya's seductive spell of illusion.
3. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:7; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, *Shankara's Crest-Jewel Of Discrimination*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1978, pp. 51-52.
4. Plato, *Republic*, Book VII
5. *Bhagavad Gita*, 7:14
6. Vidyanarany, *Panchadashi*, 6:236; H.P. Shastri (trans.), *Panchadashi by Vidyanarany*; London, Shanti Sadan, 1965, p. 161.
7. It is because of Maya that the One appears to be two. The one eternal *I*, when seen through the dualistic perspective of Maya, becomes divided into an 'I' and a 'Thou' to whom it relates. Only when, by God's grace, Maya is transcended, are we able to become aware of ourselves as the one eternal *I*. Without that grace, we remain confined to the perspective of Maya, dividing ourselves into an 'I' and a 'Thou'. From that dualistic perspective, 'Thou' art the transcendent Lord, and 'I' am Thy servant, an individual soul among other souls. Most of our time on earth, therefore, is experienced from the perspective of Maya. The undivided Self is always the ultimate Reality, but only rarely are we granted the nondual vision of that one true Self.

The Appearance of Duality

It is well known that the Self of man and the ultimate transcendent Reality known as God are not two. This is the perennially acceptable view of “Nonduality”. But it must also be acknowledged that there is an *apparent* duality which has a certain phenomenal reality to it as well. For, during the “mystical experience” one experiences a noumenal and eternal ‘I’ who manifests this universe in which lives a phenomenal and temporal ‘I’. The ‘I’ is the same, yet different. The difference between the two ‘I’s is that the real ‘I,’ the eternal one, projected Himself as the temporal one into this world of time and space; the temporal one did not project himself into eternity.

So, God, by His very *projection* of this temporal universe, establishes an *apparent* duality for those living within this projection. This is not difficult to understand: If there is a dreamer and his dream, there *appears* to be two. But are there really two? The truth is that there is still only one; the other is only an imagination, and though the consciousness in the dream seems to be an ‘other,’ it is in fact the consciousness of the dreamer. But some would argue that “The other still *exists* as a phenomenon, and therefore constitutes a second. It is a question of perspective, is it not? At least we may be certain that, once the dreamer awakes and the dream is no more, then only one remains. The Nondualist would no doubt remark that there was *always* only one.

We dream-images enclosed within this illusory universe of time and space, are similarly “phenomena”, and therefore *appear* to exist. And so, as *images* of God (who is our *true* Self), we regard God as separate, ‘other’. For, while *we* are enclosed within the world of time and space which is His projection made of His Consciousness, *He* is the One in whom we and all else is contained. He is the eternal Mind that projects this space/time continuum, this form-filled world, as a construct of thought. He is indeed the Consciousness which animates us, and which lends us consciousness. He is our very Self; He is the one and *only* Reality. But it is not wrong to acknowledge the *apparent* duality which He brings to pass in the act of projecting this world of beings within Himself.

Ultimately, when we pass from space-time to the unlimited Reality, we shall recognize the eternally inseparable oneness of God and our Self; nonetheless, while living as separate beings within this worldly illusion, it is quite understandable if we call out to Him as though He were separate, or 'other,' just as dream figures might call out within themselves in an effort to contact the dreamer, who is indeed their own essence, a one who becomes an *apparent* two.

Some hold exclusively to the eternal truth of unity, declaring their single and only identity to be 'the One'; these are the *jnanis* (or "knowers"). Others, acknowledging the *apparent* duality between themselves and God, worship the One as other than themselves, as the Exemplar of which they are mere images. These are the *bhaktas* (or "lovers"). And both are perfectly correct and valid pathways to the realization of God, the knowledge of the eternal Self. The *jnani* says, "I am That"; the *bhakta* says, "O Lord, Thou alone art!". And within themselves both arrive at the selfsame realization of the Real.

'And what of the apparent duality of body and spirit?' we may wonder. We all know what Descartes thought about it. But I would ask, 'Have you ever seen ice cubes floating in water? Are they two things or one?' There seems to be two different substances, since each is clearly separate from the other; but no, it is one substance in two different states. When I was immersed in the unitive vision, I wondered "Where is the temple (of the body)? Which the imperishable, which the abode?" For there was to be seen no separate body-temple with an imperishable soul within! There was no division to be found at all. All is Consciousness-Energy in this dream-universe! And all of it is imperishable. It is only the various shapes that are so changeable, so very perishable; but the Essence is one.

Think of your own dream-creations! Is your dream-character divided into a consciousness and a body-form? No. It is one thing: the form and its limited self-consciousness are one projected creative mind-stuff. Likewise, for us here on earth. We live and move and have our being within the Mind-stuff of God. It is His drama, and He is the Self-consciousness of each of us. When we ultimately awake, we shall know the Source of all selves, the Source of all forms; we shall know that we were, are, and ever shall be, the One who lives in eternal bliss.

But what of the separation between the ‘soul’ and the body at death? It seems quite certain that consciousness withdraws from the body when the heart stops beating, that consciousness and the solidified energy that is our body then go their separate ways. And that seems to imply a real, absolute, duality. But it is just the magic of the One. Think of what happens when you wake from a dream: Your own consciousness of Self remains even when the dream vanishes. Who you thought you were in the dream is seen to have been an illusory identity; but *You* remain. The dream scenery is vanished too. Where did it go? It never really was. It too was only your own consciousness, *appearing* as form. Likewise, in this universe, matter is consciousness appearing as energy, appearing as form.

The universe itself is occurring *as a whole* within the one Consciousness. It is an integral dream-like phenomenon. He is always One, even while projecting the universal dream with His Consciousness-Energy. When each of the dream-like images awakes, they awake to the One. Then, at the end of the universal ‘dream’, all forms revert to Energy, which ceases its transformations and becomes merely the potential Energy (Creative Power) of the one Consciousness. Consciousness ceases its play, resolving quietly into Itself. They were never two; they are merely twin aspects of His projective Power. The Supreme Consciousness will rest now, prior to projecting once again an apparent universe of conscious forms, another seeming duality upon His oneness.

Keeping in mind this unity-in-duality, or duality-in-unity, please reconsider the remarkable text from the Gnostic seer, Simon Magus (*fl. ca.* 40 C.E.), entitled *The Great Exposition*, which so ably explains the apparent duality within the Nondual reality:

The Great Exposition
by Simon Magus

There are *two* aspects of the One: The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought (*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists.

The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the Divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

Since He, Himself, brought forward Himself, by means of Himself, manifesting to Himself His own Thought, it is not correct to attribute creation to the Thought alone. For She (the Thought) conceals the Father within Herself; the Divine Mind and the Thought are intertwined. Thus, though [they appear] to be a pair, one opposite the other, the Divine Mind is in no way different from the Thought, inasmuch as they are one.

Though there appears to be a Higher—the Mind, and a lower—the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [i.e., the universe] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two.

[Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [apparently] divided as Higher and lower; generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence. ¹

NOTES:

1. Simon Magus, *Apophysis Megale* (“The Great Exposition”), quoted by Hippolytus of Rome, in *Refutatio Omnium Heresium* (“The Refutation of All Heresies”), VI. 8; adapted from Roberts, Rev. A. & Donaldson, J. (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol. VI; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; pp. 208-210. This text was previously cited in Abhayananda, Swami, *History of Mysticism*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1987, 2000; p. 132.

29. RENUNCIATION

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 3-13-18

(last revised, 4-9-20)

The Conflict Between Nature And Grace: A Study of The Theology of Thomas á Kempis

One of the most beloved Christian texts outside of the Holy Bible is the Imitation of Christ by Thomas á Kempis. It is this book that held the primary place in my early years of devotion and holds a central place in my heart to this day. I even published a condensed version of that book which I entitled Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God.¹ In a few chapters of the Third Book of my edition of this classic devotional text, Thomas describes the differences between Nature and Grace. This analysis plays a great part in Thomas' theology, and it had a great effect on me in those early years in my Santa Cruz cabin, and has continued to hold great significance for me up to the current time.

When I think about this conflict between Nature and Grace, many questions come up in my mind. And, so, I would like to focus on this theology of Thomas' for a time to see if I can resolve some of those questions: First, it is necessary to acknowledge that Nature is God's creation, and so, if His Grace is contrary to our Nature, then, it is contrary to what He Himself has produced. Has He not, through the process of biological evolution, instilled in us the procreative urge, the instinct for self-preservation, and a love for the pleasures of life? And while most people would object that the following of these instincts and urges is only 'natural', it is these very natural instincts and urges that, while they are conducive to a 'natural' life, are, in Thomas' theology, in conflict with Grace.

So, is this notion of a conflict between Nature and Grace, then, simply a carryover from an anachronistic medieval Christian ascetic ideal, or is it is a universally valid observation? In the Vedanta tradition, Nature and Grace are represented as Maya and Brahman, or Prakrti and Purusha; in Sufi theology, they are Khalq and Haqq; in Buddhism, they are samsara and

nirvana (Tathata). And, though the notion that these two are opposed cannot be understood or accepted by everyone, it is a timeless spiritual truth that in order to fully love God, one must renounce the love of the world; to ascend to the Creator, one must transcend the [attractions of the] Creation. Only those who aspire to God and are familiar with the interior operation of God's Grace will understand what Thomas intends to communicate regarding the opposition of Nature and Grace. Here, let him explain it himself in the following passage:

Chapter II.
That Grace Will Not Be Mixed
With Love Of Worldly Things

“My son, Grace is a precious thing and will not be mixed with any private love nor with worldly comforts. It behooves you to cast away all hindrances of Grace if you will have the gracious gift thereof. Choose therefore a secret place and love to be alone and keep yourself from hearing of vain tales and fables. Offer to God devout prayers and ask earnestly that you may have a contrite heart and a pure conscience. Think all the world is nothing and prefer My service before all other things; for you may not have your mind on Me and therewithal delight in transitory pleasures. It behooves you, therefore, to withdraw yourself from your dearest friends, and from all your acquaintances, and to sequester your mind wholly from the inordinate desire of worldly comfort as much as you may.

“O how sure a trust shall it be to a man at his departing out of this world, to feel inwardly in his soul that no earthly love nor yet the affection of any passing or transitory thing has any rule in him! But a weak person, newly turned to God, may not so easily have his heart severed from earthly desires, and the worldly-living man knows not the freedom of a man who is inwardly turned to God. And, therefore, if a man will perfectly be spiritual and holy, he must as well renounce strangers as kinsfolk; and especially before all others he must be most wary of himself, for if he overcomes himself perfectly he shall the sooner overcome all other enemies. The most noble and most perfect victory is for a man to have the victory over himself. He, therefore, who holds himself so much subject that sensuality obeys to reason, and reason in all things is obedient to Me, is the true overcomer of himself and the lord of the world.

“But if you covet to come to that point, you must begin manfully, and set your axe to the root of the tree and fully cut away and destroy in yourself all the inordinate inclination that you have to yourself or to any private or material things. For of that vice, that a man loves himself inordinately, depends nearly all that ought summarily to be destroyed in man. And if that is truly overcome, immediately shall follow great tranquility and peace of conscience. But inasmuch as there are but few who labor to die to themselves, or to overcome themselves perfectly, therefore many lie still in their fleshly feelings and worldly comforts, and may in no way rise up in spirit above themselves; for it behooves him who will be free in heart and have contemplation of Me, to mortify all evil inclinations that he has to himself and to the world, and not to be bound to any creature by an inordinate or private love.”

The above passage should give the reader a sense of the great difficulty and hardship undertaken by a soul in pursuit of the intimate contemplation of God. Indeed, it could not be done at all were it not for God’s Grace that buoys and uplifts the devout soul, preventing it from reverting to its inherent Nature. Nonetheless, just as, from the perspective of Vedanta, Maya claims many victims, it is not surprising that, in the Christian context, many spiritual aspirants occasionally succumb to Nature—since Maya and Nature are one and the same. Here, in the following passage, Thomas goes on to explain more fully the need to renounce the things of Nature in order to embrace more fully the things of God:

Chapter III.

How We Should Forget All Created Things In Order That We Might Find Our Creator

“Lord, I have great need of Thy grace, and of Thy great singular grace, before I may come thither where no creature shall hinder me from the perfect beholding of Thee; for as long as any transitory thing holds me or has rule in me, I may not fly freely to Thee. He coveted to fly without hindrance who said: ‘Who shall give me wings like a dove that I may fly into the bosom of my Lord!’

“I see well that no man is more restful in this world than is that man who always has his mind and his whole intent upward to God, and nothing desires of the world. It behooves him therefore who would perfectly forsake himself and behold Thee, to rise above all creatures,

and himself also, and through excess of mind to see and behold that Thou, maker of all things, hast nothing among all creatures like Thyself. Unless a man is clearly delivered from the love of all creatures, he may not fully tend to his creator, and that is the greatest cause why there are so few contemplatives; that is to say, because there are so few who will sequester themselves willingly from the love of created things.

“For contemplation great grace is required, for it lifts up the soul and ravishes it up in Spirit above itself. And unless a man is lifted up in Spirit above himself and is clearly delivered in his love from all creatures and is perfectly and fully united to God, whatsoever he knows or whatsoever he has, either in virtue or learning, is worth but little before God. Therefore, he shall have but little virtue and long shall he lie still in earthly pleasures, who accounts anything great or worthy to be praised but God alone; for all other things besides God are nothing and are to be accounted as nothing. There is great difference between the wisdom of a devout man, enlightened by grace, and the learning of a subtle and studious scholar; and that learning is much more noble and much more worthy that comes by the influence and gracious gift of God than that which is gotten by the labor and study of man.

“Many desire to have the gift of contemplation, but they will not use such things as are required for contemplation. And one great hindrance of contemplation is that we stand so long in outward signs and in material things and take no heed of the perfect mortifying of our body to the spirit. I know not how it is, nor with what spirit we are led, nor what we pretend, we who are called spiritual persons, that we take greater labor and study for transitory things than we do to know the inward state of our own soul.

“But alas for sorrow, as soon as we have made a little recollection to God, we run forth to outward things and do not search our own conscience with due examination, as we should, nor heed where our affection rests, nor sorrow that our deeds are so evil and so unclean as they are. In ancient times, the people corrupted themselves with fleshly uncleanness, and therefore followed the great flood; and truly, when our inward affection is corrupted, our deeds following thereon are also corrupted, for of a clean heart springs the fruit of a good life.

“It is oftentimes asked what deeds such a man has done, but of what zeal or with what intent he did them is little regarded. Whether a man is rich, strong, fair, able, a good writer, a good singer, or a good laborer, is often inquired; but how poor he is in spirit, how patient and meek, how devout, and how inwardly turned to God, is little regarded. Nature beholds the outward deed, but grace turns her to the inward intent of the deed. The first is often deceived, but the second puts her trust wholly in God and is not deceived.”

And here, in this beautiful chapter, Thomas sets down the foundation for his theology as he explains more intricately how Nature and Grace differ from and oppose one another:

***Chapter IV.
Of The Differences
Between Nature And Grace***

“My son, take good heed of the motions of Nature and Grace for they are very subtle and much contrary, the one to the other, and hardly may they be known asunder, unless it is by a spiritual man who is inwardly illumined in his soul through grace. Every man desires some goodness and pretends somewhat of goodness in all his words and deeds, and therefore under pretense of goodness many are deceived.

“Nature is wily and full of deceit and draws many to her whom she oftentimes snares and deceives; and ever she beholds her own wealth as the goal of her work. But Grace walks simply without deceit, she declines from all evil, she pretends no guile, but all things she does purely for God, in whom finally she rests.

“Nature will not gladly die, nor gladly be oppressed or overcome; neither will she be gladly under another nor be kept in subjection. But Grace studies how she may be mortified to the world, and to the flesh; she resists sensuality, she seeks to be subject, she desires to be overcome, she will not use her own liberty. She loves to be held under holy discipline and covets not to have lordship over any one creature but to live and to stand always under the fear of God, and for His love is always ready to bow herself meekly under every creature.

“Nature labors for her own profit and advantage, and much beholds what winning comes to her by others. Grace beholds not what is profitable to herself, but what is profitable to many. Nature gladly

receives honor and reverence, but Grace refers all honor and reverence to God. Nature dreads reprovings and despisings; but Grace joys, for the name of God, to suffer them both and takes them, when they come, as special gifts of God. Nature loves idleness and bodily rest; but Grace cannot be idle without doing some good deed, and therefore she seeks gladly some profitable labors.

“Nature desires fair and curious things. But Grace delights in meek and simple things; she despises not hard things, nor refuses to be clad in poor clothing and simple garments. Nature gladly beholds things temporal, she joys at worldly winnings, is heavy for worldly losses, and is quickly moved by a sharp word. But Grace beholds things everlasting. She trusts not in things temporal, and is not troubled with the loss of them, nor grieved by an angry word; for she has laid her treasure in God and in spiritual things, which may not perish. Nature is covetous and more gladly takes than gives; she loves much to have property and private things. But Grace is piteous and liberal to the poor, she flees singular profit, she is content with little and judges it more blessed to give than to take.

“Nature inclines to the love of creatures, to the love of the flesh, to vanities and runnings-about, and to see new things in the world. But Grace draws a man to the love of God and to the love of virtues; she renounces all created things, she flees the world, she hates desires of the flesh, she restrains liberty and wandering-about, and avoids as much as she may to be seen among gatherings of people. Nature gladly has some outward solace wherein she may delight in her outward senses. but Grace seeks only to be comforted in God and to delight her in His goodness above all things.

“Nature does all things for her own winning and singular profit; she may do nothing free, but hopes always to have the same back again, or more, or applause, or favor of the people; and covets much that her deeds and works be greatly pondered and praised. But Grace seeks no temporal thing, and no other reward for her hire but only God. She will have no more of temporal goods than shall be needful for the getting of the goods everlasting, and cares not for the vain praise of the world.

“Nature joys greatly in many friends and kinsfolk, and glories much in a noble place of birth and in her noble blood and kindred; she joys

with mighty men, she flatters rich men, and is merry with those who she thinks similar to her in nobleness of the world. But Grace makes a man to love his enemies, she has no pride in worldly friends; she regards not the nobleness of kin, nor the house of her father, unless the more virtue is there. She favors more the poor than the rich, she has more compassion for an innocent than for a mighty man; she joys ever in truth and not in falsehood, and always comforts good men more and more to profit and grow in virtue and goodness, and to seek daily more high gifts of Grace, that they may through good virtuous works be made into the sons of God.

“Nature immediately complains for the wanting of a very little thing that she would have or for a little worldly sorrow. But Grace bears gladly all neediness and wantings of the world. Nature inclines all things to herself and to her own profit as much as she may; she argues for herself and strives and fights for herself. But Grace renders all things to God, of whom all things flow and spring originally; she ascribes no goodness to herself and presumes not of herself; she strives not and prefers not her own opinion before other men’s, but in every sentence, she submits her meekly to the eternal wisdom and judgment of God.

“Nature covets to know and to hear new secret things. She will that her works be showed outwardly and will have experience of many things in the world by her outward senses; she desires also to be known and to do great things in the world, whereof applause and praising may follow. But Grace cares not for any new things nor for any curious things, whatsoever they may be; for she knows well that all such things come of vanity, and that no new things may long endure upon earth.

“She teaches to restrain the outward senses and to avoid all vain pleasure and outward show, and meekly keeps secret things that in the world would be greatly marveled at and praised. And, in everything and in every science, she seeks some spiritual profit to herself, and praise and honor to almighty God. She will not that her good deeds nor her inward devotion be outwardly known, but most desires that our Lord be blessed in all His works, who gives all things freely of His great and excellent love.

“This Grace is a light from heaven and a spiritual gift of God. It is the proper mark and token of elect people and a guarantee of the everlasting life. It lifts a man from love of earthly things to the love of heavenly things and makes a carnal man to be a man of God. And the more that nature is oppressed and overcome, the more Grace is given, and the soul through new gracious visitations is daily shaped anew and formed more and more to the image of God.”

Thomas continues in this vein, reiterating the great value of God's Grace in bringing the soul to a transcendence of its own Nature, so that it may become the true servant of God and know its identity in Him:

Chapter V.
Of The Corruption Of Nature
And Of The Worthiness Of Grace

“O Lord God, who hast made me to Thine image and likeness, grant me this Grace that Thou hast shown to be so great and so necessary to the health of my soul, that I may overcome this wretched Nature which draws me always to sin and to the losing of my own soul. I feel in my flesh the law of sin fighting strongly against the law of my spirit, which leads me as a slave to obey my sensuality in many things; nor may I resist the passions thereof unless Thy grace doth assist me.

“I have therefore great need of Thy grace, and a great abundance of it, if I shall overcome this wretched nature which always from my youth has been ready and prone to sin. In my inward self, that is, in the reason of my soul, I delight myself in Thy laws and in Thy teachings, knowing that they are good, righteous and holy; and that all sin is evil, and to be fled and avoided. Yet in my outward self, that is to say, in my fleshly feeling, I serve the law of sin when I obey my sensuality rather than my reason. And of this it follows also that I will good, but I may not for weakness perform it without Thy Grace. And sometimes I intend to do many good deeds but, because the Grace that should help me is lacking, I go backward and fail in my doing. I know the way to perfection, and I see clearly how I should do; but I am so oppressed with the heavy burden of this corrupt body of sin, that I lie still and rise not to perfection. O Lord, how necessary

therefore is Thy Grace to me, to begin well, to continue well, and to end well; for without Thee I may do nothing that is good.

“O heavenly Grace, without which our merits are worth nothing, and the gifts of nature to be considered nothing; and beauty, strength, wit, and eloquence may avail nothing! Come Thou, shortly, and help me! The gifts of Nature are common to good men and to bad; but Grace and Love are the gifts of elect and chosen people, whereby they are marked, and made able and worthy to reach the kingdom of God. This Grace is of such worthiness that neither the gift of prophecy, nor the working of miracles, nor the gift of wisdom and knowledge, may avail anything without it; nor yet may faith, hope, or other virtues, be acceptable to Thee without Grace and Love.

“O blessed Grace, that maketh the poor in spirit to be rich in virtue and him who is rich in worldly goods to be meek and low in heart! Come and descend into my soul, and fulfill me with Thy spiritual comforts, so that I do not fail and faint for weariness and dryness!

“I beseech Thee, Lord, that I may find Grace in Thy sight, for Thy Grace shall suffice to me; though I am tempted and vexed with troubles on every side, yet I shall not need to fear while Thy Grace is with me. For she is my strength, she is my comfort, my counsel and help. She is stronger than all my enemies and wiser than all the wisest of this world. She is the mistress of truth, the teacher of discipline, the light of the heart. She is the comfort of trouble, the driver-away of heaviness, the avoider of dread, the nourisher of devotion, and the bringer-in of sweet tears and devout weepings. What am I then, without grace, but a dry stock to cast away! Grant me, therefore, that Thy Grace may prevent me and follow me, and make me ever busy and diligent in good works unto my death. So, may it be!”

And here, in the following chapter, Thomas brings to a close his impassioned rationale, and ends with a paean of praise for God:

Chapter VI.
That It Is Sweet And Delectable To
Serve God, And To Forsake The World

“Now shall I speak yet again to Thee, my Lord, and not cease. And I shall say in the ears of my Lord: My God and King who is in heaven! O how great is the abundance of Thy sweetness which Thou hast hidden and kept for those who dread Thee! But what is it then to those who love Thee? Truly, it is the unspeakable sweetness of contemplation that Thou givest to those who love Thee. In this, Lord, Thou hast most showed the sweetness of Thy love to me, that when I was not, Thou madest me; and when I wandered far from Thee Thou broughtest me again to serve Thee, and commandest me to love Thee.

“O fountain of love everlasting, what shall I say of Thee! How may I forget Thee who hast promised thus lovingly to remember me! When I was about to perish, Thou hast shown Thy mercy to me above all that I could have thought or desired, and hast sent me of Thy grace and of Thy love above my merits. But what shall I give to Thee again for all this goodness? It is not given to all men to forsake the world and to take a solitary life and only to serve Thee. And yet it is no great burden to serve Thee, whom every creature is bound to serve. It ought not therefore to seem any great thing to me to serve Thee, but rather it should seem a great wonder to me that Thou wilt receive so poor and so unworthy a creature as I am into thy service, and that Thou wilt join me to Thy well-beloved servants.

“Lo, Lord, all things that I have and all that I do Thee service with is Thine. And yet Thy goodness is such that Thou rather servest me than I Thee. For behold, heaven and earth and the planets and stars, which Thou hast created to serve man are ready at thy bidding and do daily that which Thou hast commanded. And Thou hast also ordained angels to the ministry of man. But above all this, Thou hast promised to serve man Thyself and hast promised to give Thyself unto him.

“What then shall I give to Thee in return for this thousand-fold goodness? Would to God that I might serve Thee all the days of my life, or at the least that I might one day be able to do Thee faithful servicem for Thou art worthy all honor, service, and praising, forever.

Thou art my Lord and my God, and I Thy poorest servant, most bound before all others to love and praise Thee; and I never ought to grow weary of the praising of Thee. This is what I ask and desire, that I may always laud Thee and praise Thee. Promise therefore, most merciful Lord, to supply whatsoever is lacking in me; for it is great honor to serve Thee, and for Thy love to despise all earthly things.

“They shall have great Grace who freely submit themselves to Thy holy service. And they shall find also the most sweet consolation of the Spirit and shall have great freedom of spirit here who forsake all worldly business and choose a hard and strict life in this world for Thy name.

“O glad and joyful service of God, by which a man is made free and holy, and blessed in the sight of God! O holy state of religion, which makes a man similar to the angels, pleasing to God, dreadful to wicked spirits, and to all faithful people very highly commendable! O service much to be embraced and always to be desired, by which the high goodness is won, and the everlasting joy and gladness is gotten without end!

NOTES:

13. My book, *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God*, from which these excerpts are taken, is available as a free downloadable PDF document on my website at www.themysticsvision.com.

* * *

I Have Given Sweets That Decay

In the gracious revelation given on November 18, 1966, the Lord said:

“I have given sweets that decay to those that crave them,
I have given my wealth unto the poor and lonely.
My hands are open; nothing is concealed.”¹

In this brief exposition, the Lord explains that all that He offers is displayed openly, and that it is we who must choose. In the one hand lies the material world and all that’s in it—the delights of the flesh, and all the luxurious objects that appeal to the senses. You may choose this if you wish, but understand that it provides but a momentary satisfaction, and that all these ‘sweets’ will rapidly decay and vanish, leaving you with nothing.

In God’s other hand lay all His true wealth: the blissful awareness of His all-embracing presence. If you choose this, you must renounce self-interest, and become His instrument; you must make His will your own. This bestows a wealth of happiness that only the blessed of heaven know. For when you give over your individual self to Him, you become Him. Then all the riches of heaven and earth are your own.

Why is His divine wealth given only to the poor and lonely? Because the self-interested pursuit of worldly wealth and the freedom to attend to God are mutually opposed to one another. Poverty is not in itself a necessity, but for one who has renounced self-interest, whose mind is busy solely with the things of God, and whose heart longs only for the company of God, some degree of poverty and solitude become likely and welcome companions.

The true poverty of the saints, the poverty to be embraced, is not the poverty of goods at one’s disposal, but a poverty of distractions, poverty of concerns, poverty of worldly responsibilities—so that one is free to attend to the responsibility of remaining conscious of the Divinity in oneself and in serving that Divinity in the world. To be poor in the world’s wealth is no virtue if there is no devotion to God; the true poverty is to be poor in needs, having but one need only: to be aware of the presence of the Divine at every moment. A lack of necessities will not make you holy, but a lack of desires will make you free. With no other goal or wish but to serve as God’s instrument, a man becomes a millionaire.

The poverty that acquiesces to indolence and squalor is ugly and demeaning to man; but that poverty which is undertaken for the sake of contemplating the Divine essence of the soul and serving as its instrument is very beautiful and praiseworthy, and much to be desired. It is such as these who are the blessed poor. It is they who shall inherit not only the earth but the infinite cosmos; and they shall live throughout their days in the wakeful knowledge of God's sweet presence.

NOTE:

1. "I have given sweets that decay to those that crave them.
I have given my wealth unto the poor and lonely.
My hands are open; nothing is concealed."

Some might feel that this statement is unjustifiable; but they are the words of the Divine Self, written while in union. Quoted from 'The Song of The Self' in my book, *The Supreme Self*, Atma Books, Fallsburg, N.Y., 1984.

**What Should Be The Life Of A True Religious Person
(from Thomas á Kempis, *On The Love of God*)¹**

It behooves you to break your own will in many things if you will have peace and concord with others. It is no little thing to be in monasteries or in congregations, to continue there without complaining or gainsaying, and faithfully to persevere there unto the end. Blessed are they who live there well and make a good end. If you will stand surely in grace and much profit in virtue, hold yourself as an exile and as a pilgrim here in this life, and be glad, for the love of God, to be held in the world as a fool and a vile person, as you are.

The donning of religious clothing helps little, but the changing of life and the mortifying of passions makes a person perfectly and truly religious. He who seeks any other thing in religion than God and the health of his soul, shall find nothing there but trouble and sorrow; and he may not stand long there in peace and quietness who does not labor to be least and subject to all.

It is good, therefore, that you remember often that you came to religion to serve, and not to be served, and that you are called thither to suffer and to labor, and not to be idle nor to tell vain tales. In religion a man shall be

proved as gold in a furnace, and no man may stand long there in grace and virtue unless he will, with all his heart, humble himself for the love of God.

NOTE:

1. Thomas á Kempis, *On The Love of God*, Book One, Chapter XV, ed. by Swami Abhayananda, Olympia, Washington, Atma Books, 1992, pp. 33-34.

* * *

30. THE MYSTERY OF GRACE

A Compilation of Articles from *The Mystic's Vision*

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

Enlightenment And Grace

In his several books, the highly respected psychologist and philosopher, Ken Wilber, offers a detailed and well-thought-out conceptual framework for understanding and talking about the fundamental levels of experience: spiritual, mental and physical, corresponding to mystical, psychological, and scientific (empiric) knowledge. I wish to acknowledge Mr. Wilber's superior analytical vision and the very helpful framework of understanding which he has provided. However—and there is always a “however”—we are individuals with decidedly different personal proclivities, sensibilities, and styles, and there are bound to arise a number of areas in which we see things slightly differently.

Wilber stresses in most of his writings that the perennial vision of the mystics is of a hierarchic (or, more accurately, *holarchic*) reality, which he refers to as ‘the great Chain of Being’, in which each whole is nested in its higher (subtler) level of reality, with the non-dual One at its summit. The one absolute Source, being unqualified and indivisible, is the Ground and hierarchical whole (holon) of all that follows from It; but It is also the evolutionary Goal toward which all conscious beings are drawn. Thus, there is an involution of Spirit that can be described, in its simplest form, as a descent from Spirit to mind, to matter. And evolution is the process in reverse. We may regard this Spiritual paradigm as “the perennial philosophy”.

What, then, are the implications of the perennial philosophy (as derived from spiritual vision) for empirical science? In other words, how can we reconcile the data derived from the subtle vision of the mystics with the data of scientific theory? Is Einstein's Theory of Relativity compatible with the vision of the mystics? Is quantum theory? Or does Heisenberg's

Uncertainty Principle and the stochastic nature of quantum data preclude any possible comparison of ‘scientific’ theory with the data perceived in the mystical vision? Does the mystic’s vision of the universe as a Thought-construct offer any useful insights into an explanation of the four forces of nature? Does it offer any insights into the nature and behavior of wave/particles? At present, it yet remains to be seen whether or not all these theoretical ‘phenomena’ can be reconciled with the mystic’s vision.

One of the difficulties in reconciling observable phenomena and physical laws with the subtle universe described by the mystics is the fact that there are subtle “layers” of reality within the mystic’s universe which are not observable or verifiable in any way—such as the *soul* and *karma*; i.e., invisible causal factors (hidden variables) which are thought to largely determine space-time realities, but which themselves are unobservable, and therefore undemonstrable, and unverifiable. The empirical ‘laws’ of physics bear no recognizable relationship to the ‘laws’ of psychology—if there are any such laws; why then should the laws of physics bear any relationship to the laws of *Spirit*, which is a yet subtler holarchic level? Of course, they are all interrelated; the physical is nested in the mental, and the mental is nested in the Spiritual. The Spiritual world is the greater holon in which these other levels reside. So, it would seem that, ultimately, both the psychic (mentally perceived) and the physical (sensually perceived) worlds must be directly relatable to and consistent with the data obtained in the Spiritual vision.

Ultimately, science and gnosis *must* coincide in an, eventually formulated, *complete* model of reality! But empirical science can never succeed in formulating a ‘complete’ model of reality until it takes into account the mental and spiritual aspects of reality as a whole. Even if it comes up with a ‘Theory of Everything’, as it frequently does, it actually means by that term ‘a Theory of Everything Phenomenal’. And even if that Theory were to be empirically demonstrated to be accurate and consistent, it would then have to recognize that only a small part of the larger reality had been explained, and that an explanation must now be found for the existence of those phenomena and noumena existing in the higher (subtler) levels of psychic (mental) and Spiritual reality. For, the perceivable, phenomenal, universe is simply an epiphenomenon of the two subtler realms. Each is related to the other, holarchically, and none may be regarded as an isolated field of enquiry.

It's a top-down universe, each level dependent on its holarchic precedent; and, ideally, knowledge of this universe must also be top-down. Ideally, we must first know the Source, the Cause; then the products, the effects, will become correctly known and understood. It is true, as Mr. Wilber points out, that the knowledge of the Source takes place, not on the sensual or mental levels, but on the spiritual level; and not with physical or psychic vision, but with spiritual vision. But there must be a means to correlate (on the mental level) the data obtained in these apparently disparate realms. If we start at the bottom, with the empirical data of the phenomenal universe, and attempt to infer from it the higher holons of reality, the mental and the spiritual, we have no consistent and reliable clues by which to infer those higher realities. In other words, when we ignore or deny the Source, as many scientific materialists and materialistic scientists presently do, it is little wonder that the theories of empirical science often go so incredibly far astray of the truth of reality as perceived in the Spiritual vision. Our understanding of the manifest, phenomenal universe requires a context; and that context can only be found at the summit of the holarchic reality, i.e., in the Spiritual vision. With that as the starting point, one may then comprehend the phenomenal reality; without it, one is left with no contextual framework at all. And that epitomizes the state of confusion and alienation prevalent in the exclusively empirical view of the world currently embraced by contemporary science.

However, in the past and in the present, Spiritual knowledge—*direct* Spiritual knowledge—has been, and it appears that it will continue indefinitely to remain, a kind of knowledge obtained by the very, very few. It is no doubt the 'highest' knowledge possible, providing a direct subjective apperception of the summit of the holarchy of knowledge, and doubtless represents the eventual summit of human evolution; but the *universal* human apperception of the spiritual reality is a culmination that remains a long, long way off. For now, the revelation of that direct unitive knowledge occurs only in isolated instances, and the recipients of that knowledge are nearly as culturally isolated as was Jesus and Philo Judaeus two thousand years ago; though there is possibly some increase in the *philosophical* (mental) interest in mysticism in today's world.

As I stated earlier, there are some areas in which Mr. Wilber and I differ slightly. It is evident that his concern over the current emphasis in our society on the validity of empirical (scientific) knowledge to the complete exclusion of other areas of knowledge, and the failure of the representatives of empirical knowledge to acknowledge the validity of the transcendent knowledge of the mystics, is a concern that we both share. However, one of the differences between our views that comes to mind involves Mr. Wilber's notion that there is a tried and true 'scientific' methodology for producing mystical experience, or 'the vision of God'; namely, the practice of meditation or contemplation. In several of his books, Mr. Wilber makes the pertinent point that, just as an empirical scientist must perform an experiment in accordance with the scientific "injunction" to abide by the prescribed conditions of the experiment, so must a spiritual experimenter conform to the injunction setting out the conditions of the spiritual experiment, namely, the practice of meditation or contemplation, in order to obtain the experiential results; i.e., spiritual vision.

This analogy to scientific empirical experimentation provides a great corrective to those who might say, 'I have not experienced spiritual vision'; whereupon one may counter, 'Well, have you conformed to the conditions prescribed for obtaining spiritual vision? Have you practiced meditation?' And if they cannot answer, 'Yes' to that question, then they simply have not fulfilled the conditions necessary for obtaining the desired results. This is all well and good. But I would like to suggest that the acquisition of spiritual knowledge through spiritual vision is not *entirely* analogous to the acquisition of empirical knowledge; and I would like to point out, in the interest of clarification, the ways in which they are different, so as to alleviate any misunderstandings resulting from the omission of this information.

What is wrong with the logic of the following statement? 'All those who have experienced the unitive vision have done so while in a state of meditative or contemplative awareness; therefore, if you practice meditation or contemplation, you will experience the unitive vision.'? It should be clear to everyone that the concluding portion of this statement is a *non sequitur*. It just does not follow logically. It seems evident to me that if spiritual knowledge were simply a matter of fulfilling the conditions necessary for its occurrence, such as establishing a disciplined program of meditation, the

world would already be filled with enlightened souls. But it is not simply a matter of fulfilling conditions, comparable to the requirement for obtaining empirical results. I do indeed wish it were true, Mr. Wilber; but it is not—and that’s been the fly in the ointment all along. Is spiritual knowledge really an objective obtainable, and “perfectly repeatable”, by anyone simply by setting up the prescribed conditions? Because I have ‘known’ God, the absolute Ground of all reality, does that mean that, by following my ‘methodology’ you also will come to know God? In other words, can anyone obtain the same resulting spiritual knowledge as another simply by following certain conditional injunctions, or is the acquisition of spiritual knowledge much more dependent upon a ‘Higher Will’ than upon our own determined will and actions?

Einstein knew the mathematical proof of the constancy of the speed of light, and the variability of the measurement of time relative to an observer; but can you also know what he knew? And the answer, it seems to me, is “Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of mathematical training to investigate these matters, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge. Otherwise, you must simply take it on faith that the constancy of the speed of light is known.” What about Beethoven? He knew how to create extraordinary music; does that mean that you also know how to do that? Same answer: ‘Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of musical training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge.’ Darwin knew that various species were related, but evolved differently through the process of natural selection; but can you also discover previously unknown laws of nature? Only if, by the grace of God, you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of scientific training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge. This same line of reasoning may be applied to Jesus, the Buddha, Plotinus, and all other seers of the ‘spiritual’ reality. You may know what they knew only if you have the same innate inclination and the same degree of spiritual training, *and* you follow the necessary injunctions for obtaining that knowledge, *and* it is God’s will.

It should be clear to everyone that we are not all equally capable of ‘knowing’ what has been known by uniquely extraordinary beings. Everything depends on our innate inclination and our specialized training,

and of course the grace of God. By “innate inclination” I mean the soul-driven proclivities and talents constituting the karmic tendencies possessed by each soul. These ‘innate inclinations’ are wholly dependent upon the evolutionary development of our souls; which are, in turn, dependent upon, not only our own wills, but the grace of God. And so, we must acknowledge that the subtle spiritual knowledge that has been obtained by a few extraordinary men and women is not necessarily available to everyone; there must be a congruence of inclination, training, and God’s grace, along with the practice of meditation or contemplation. The assertion by many spiritual teachers that the realization of God, the knowledge of the Source and Goal of all existence, is available to everyone simply by following certain precepts and injunctions, is not at all an accurate assessment. One’s soul, which is itself a product of God’s grace, must contain an innate inclination to the acquisition of such knowledge, must follow a regimen of introspection, and, by the grace of God, be placed in the most timely and appropriate cosmic circumstances to receive such knowledge. Then, and only then, will it be able to ‘know’ God. Is God-realization available to everyone? Sorry, no. I think that, not only spiritual knowledge, but each kind of knowledge—sensory, mental, or spiritual—is available only to those whom God has made distinctly fit for it. It is misleadingly inaccurate to say that such knowledge is available to everyone.

The injunctions given by Jesus, “Seek and ye shall find,” “Knock, and the door shall be opened to you”, has inspired many followers to seek and to knock, and yet we must wonder, how many of those millions of followers were enlightened with the unitive vision of God after seeking and knocking? I can think of only a handful of Christians who seem to have obtained this vision over the past twenty centuries. The injunctions given by the Buddha, “Meditation brings wisdom; therefore, choose the path of wisdom”, has drawn many to meditation; and some have become illumined—but only a small percent. My point is that there is no guaranteed means or methodology for obtaining the unitive vision. It seems to me to depend on many factors, not all of which are within the purview of one’s own will.

It would certainly be wonderful if one could truthfully and confidently say ‘Do this, and you will experience the unitive vision’, but in spiritual matters there is no direct causal relationship between voluntary acts and revelation such as there is between empirical injunctions, spelling out the conditions of

the experiment, and the produced results. ‘Do this, and that will result’ is sound and dependable advice when we are advising “release the ball, and you will see that it falls to earth”; but not necessarily as truthfully predictive when we are advising “practice meditation, and you will become enlightened”. If it was an easily reproducible experience, it is likely that enlightenment would have been widely accepted as a readily obtainable and commonly repeatable experience by now—which is certainly not the case.

It is no doubt true that one living in an environment conducive to meditation has an advantage over one who is immersed in a turbulent and disturbing environment, but we must not leap to the conclusion that all the monks in the temple, monastery or ashram are therefore enlightened. The one thing we can say for certain is that they are exposing themselves to the lifestyle and practices conducive to the unitive vision. It is not because the Buddha sat down under a Bo tree to meditate that he became enlightened; it is not because Jesus went alone into the wilderness to pray and contemplate God that he became illumined; it is not because John of the Cross gave himself to introspection and prayer within his Toledo cell that he was united with God. All of these mystical seers found themselves drawn to conditions that were amenable to that experience, but the underlying Cause was the grace of the all-governing Spirit, which called each soul from within to evolve toward the egoless reception of that non-dual revelation; in other words, it was God’s singular grace which was the ultimate causative factor in that revelation. I am aware that this is an unpopular stance; but experience has taught me that the revelation of the unitive vision cannot be reduced to a causal act initiated by the individual.

Indeed, we need to ask ourselves, “Who is this ‘I’ who thinks it can bring about the realization of the transcendent God by its own efforts?” It is well known that only when this false and limited ‘I’ vanishes is the revelation of God at all possible! And by whose grace do you suppose the death of that false ‘I’ is accomplished? Whose love wells up in the soul and draws it to that immolation? And whose ‘I’ is revealed in the unitive vision as the Ground and essence of all ‘I’s? If you think you can bring this about by your own efforts, go right ahead. As Saint Nanak has said, eventually, ‘suffering will teach you wisdom’.

The ‘causes’ of grace cannot be discussed, of course; because only the One is privy to the factors that go into its bestowal. However, I am of the opinion, based on my visionary experience, that, in His universe, “all things move together of one accord”, and that many elements must come together in the production of the revelation of the soul’s higher Identity. There is a coordinated unfoldment in the manifested world of one’s mental, emotional, and karmic conditions along with the conditions of the physical environment, and the positions of the planets in the cosmic environment—all under the watchful and governing eye of the Spirit—to bring about that unitive vision. In other words, man purposes, but God disposes. None may deliberately, willfully transcend and supercede His unerring Will. When it is that soul’s time for enlightenment, he will be drawn from within to seek it; he will be drawn to the conducive location; he will be drawn into spiritual communion, and he will be illumined in his soul by the Light of the one Spirit.

Innumerable saints and seers have declared their utter dependence upon God’s grace in obtaining spiritual vision; here are just a couple: Saint Nanak, the *Adi* (original) *Guru* of the Sikh tradition (1469-1539 C.E.), who said, “By God’s grace alone may God be grasped. All else is false, all else is vanity.” In one of his songs, addressing God, he reiterates this conviction:

He whom Thou makest to know Thee, he knows Thee,
And his mouth shall forever be full of Thy praise.

... Liberation and bondage depends upon Thy will;
There is no one to gainsay it.
Should a fool wish to, suffering will teach him wisdom.¹

Another seer, named Dadu (1544-1603 C.E.), was also eloquently unambiguous in declaring this truth:

Omniscient God, it is by Thy grace alone that I have been
blessed with vision of Thee.
Thou knowest all; what can I say? ²

These examples could be multiplied extensively, and I would add my own declaration to the list. However, I think one could compile a much longer

list of those who, having practiced meditation for many years, did *not* experience an enlightening revelation, who, after their best efforts, did *not* obtain the unitive vision. So, I feel that the suggestion that enlightenment follows a cause-effect sequence that anyone may experientially prove to his or her own satisfaction simply by the practice of meditation is a useful tool for encouraging the search for enlightenment (which is no doubt its function), and it may indeed prove fruitful in specific instances. But it is also unrealistic and unreliable as an unqualified injunctive rule—unless, of course, we leave the time frame open-ended. I know of one spiritual teacher who used to tell his followers that, if they continued to practice meditation, they would be enlightened in eight, ten, or twelve lifetimes, depending on their effort. Looked at from that time frame, the guarantee appears much more plausible. The fact is, we are all, in our spiritual essence, identical with the one Spirit, the transcendent Lord of the universe; and one day all, by the grace of God, must come to know it. On that you may rely. Meanwhile, we remain as consciously aware of His presence within us as we are able and strive to become ever nearer to the clear realization of that one indivisible Self with every breath.

NOTES:

1. Singh, Trilochan, et al. [eds.], *Selections From The Sacred Writings Of The Sikhs*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1960; *Rag Asa*, pp. 57, 42 (or see Abhayananda, S., *History of Mysticism*, London, Watkins, 2002; pp. 335-344).

1. Orr, W.G., *A Sixteenth Century Indian Mystic*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1947; p. 142 (or see Abhayananda, Swami, *History of Mysticism*, London, Watkins, 2002; pp. 345-356).

The Celestial Dynamics of Grace ¹

Nearly ten years had passed since my experience of enlightenment in the Santa Cruz mountains, when I began to be interested in the peculiar claims of astrology and came to have an understanding of the “celestial dynamics,” not only of my own personal characteristics, but of all the ordinary and extraordinary day-to-day transient conditions of the mind, the body, and the soul. There were, no doubt, some “celestial influences” accompanying that

dawning interest in astrological correspondences, but I was unaware of them; all I knew was that, at this time, I had become fascinated with the clearly meaningful connections between my own natal planetary positions and my personal characteristics and fluctuating mental states; and as I eagerly consumed what literature I found on the subject, I became more and more convinced of the validity of the astrological principle of correspondence between the planetary positions and the varying conditions of my psyche.

According to the principles of astrology, one can discover the secrets of a soul's unique characteristics (the psychology of a personality) by drawing a map of the heavens as it appeared at the exact moment and place of birth, which serves as a sort of blueprint of that particular soul. But how, when, and in what sequence the events of the person's adventure on earth will take place is told in the *progressions* of the planets (one day in the ephemeris represents one year in the life), and by the daily *transits* (actual transitory positions) of the Sun, moon and planets as they pass through and relate to the natal map.

All of the planets move (transit) through the twelve signs of the zodiac which comprise the 360° of the ecliptic; some slowly, some more rapidly. The Sun moves approximately one degree per day, and the moon one degree approximately every two hours. The outer planets take weeks or months to move through a degree. But always the overall architecture of this "atom" which we call the solar system is altering the structure of its design moment by moment. And we, who are within the confines of this "atom" are continually experiencing the changes in our own energy-patterns according to, and corresponding with, the changes in the angles from which the various planets and stars relate to us.

This implies, of course, that *everything* that happens to us in our lives will be accompanied by a planetary arrangement, which, in its relationship to the positions of the planets at the moment of our birth, will symbolize that event. One day, it occurred to me that, if these principles were true, there would have to have been a configuration in the progressed and transiting positions of the planets on the night of my "mystical experience" that was significantly extraordinary. In other words, that Divine experience which we refer to as "*grace*" must also have been signified in the planetary patterns in effect for me on that very night.

This was a mind-boggling concept that was to stand many of my most cherished presumptions on their heads. In order to explain why this should be so, let me take a moment to describe some of those presumptions regarding that mysterious thing called “grace,” which is, from the standpoint of its recipient, a new and radical change in consciousness, and, subsequently, in the personality, which arises seemingly from out of nowhere:

From the moment my soul first awakened with “spiritual” understanding, and the love and desire for God first entered my heart, I had attributed that awakening to God’s grace. And there was no question in my mind that my later, “mystical,” experience was the gift of grace, for there was absolutely no denying the fact that this experience had been *given* to me. I had not earned it; I had practiced no technique, no method; by no means could I be said to have produced it. There was no other word to describe this gift other than “grace.”

Traditionally, grace—the grace of God—was thought of as the freely-given intercession of God to a humbled soul, lifting it momentarily to mergence in the universal Consciousness. In this experience, the false, but insistent, illusion of a separate soul-identity, or ego, is dissolved, and the Divine Intelligence, which is the infinite and eternal Self of all, is revealed. How could the illusory, individual self imagine that it had accomplished this feat? Let those who think they can accomplish it do so. When the eternal Self is realized, that separate individual self is no longer even there! The eternal Self appears only at its demise. And it has not the ability to slay itself; it is only the divine revelation of God that, in an instant, dissolves that tenacious illusory ego. It is grace.

Listen to what that enlightened 15th-century monk, Thomas á Kempis, had to say about grace:

“When spiritual comfort is sent to you of God, take it meekly and give thanks humbly for it. But know for certain that it is of the great goodness of God that it is sent to you, and not of your deserving. And see that you are not lifted up therefore unto pride, nor that you joy much thereof, nor presume vainly therein, but rather that you be the more meek for so noble a gift, and the more watchful and fearful in all your works; for that time will

pass away, and the time of temptation will shortly follow after. When comfort is withdrawn, despair not therefore, but meekly and patiently await the visitation of God, for He is able and of sufficient power to give you more grace and more spiritual comfort than you had first. Such alteration of grace is no new thing, and no strange thing to those who have had experience in the way of God; for in all great saints and in all lovers of God similar alteration has often been found.

“... If almighty God has done thus with holy saints, it is not for us, weak and feeble persons, to despair, though we sometimes have fervor of spirit, and are sometimes left cold and void of devotion. *The Spirit comes and goes according to His pleasure*, and therefore Job said: ‘Lord, Thou graciously visitest Thy lover in the morning, that is to say, in the time of comfort; and suddenly Thou provest him in withdrawing such comforts from him.’

“...He who knows the comforts that come through the gift of grace and knows also how sharp and painful the absenting of grace is, shall not dare think that any goodness comes of himself; but he shall openly confess that of himself he is very poor and naked of all virtue.”²

What Thomas said conformed to my own experience. The fervor of devotion was not always the same; it came and went, apparently according to its own pleasure. Likewise, the clarity of understanding was sometimes absent, and at other times inspiration seemed to flood my mind with the wisdom of God. One day I might be filled with love and fervor; another day I might be dry or lethargic, or physically energetic, or contemplative. One day I might be bubbling with creative energy; another day I would be dry as a bone. There was no telling what kind of inner state each day would bring.

The experience of union, or Unity, had come to me only once. Why on that day, at that time? I could only explain it, as Thomas á Kempis did, as God’s inexplicable grace. But now I was beginning to understand something of the celestial dynamics of grace, i.e., the principles of astrological correspondence. And so, I drew up a chart for that night of November 18, 1966.

What a revelation it was when I beheld that chart! The correspondence was undeniable. Here before my eyes was clear and unequivocal proof of the “science” of astral correspondences. Any impartial astrologer viewing the

progressions and transits to my natal chart which occurred on that evening would have to acknowledge that this was indeed a night of destiny, an undeniably magical night of mystical vision, a once-in-a-lifetime night of incredible potential for the meeting with God. The extraordinary emphasis on the planetary position of Neptune (known as the planet of mystical experience) at that particular time is eloquently conclusive.

If—as many people think—there is really no correlation between the planets and the human psyche, then what an extraordinarily grand coincidence it was, what a marvelous accident of nature, that at the same moment that I was experiencing the Godhead, the planets were proclaiming it in the heavens! I think any reasonable person with even a little astrological acumen, on viewing the “influences” in effect for me that night, would have to acknowledge that the significant planetary picture at the time of my “enlightenment experience” does, in fact, seem to provide evidence of the validity of the contents of that experience, confirming that all things do indeed “move together of one accord,” that nothing happens that is not ordained to happen, that the universe is one coordinated Whole. (*For details on the Astrological conditions existing at the time of my “Enlightenment,” see the Appendix at the back of The Supreme Self, or you can view the charts at “The Celestial Dynamics of Grace” on my companion website at: www.theastrologersvision.weebly.com.*)

But, along with the excitement of discovery and validation which I felt on viewing this chart, there was a nagging question that left me baffled and confused: If this “mystical experience” was described in the heavens since the beginning of time, and therefore entirely predestined, where was “grace”? Where was the freely given gift of God that I had experienced as occurring at just that moment? If everything was strictly predetermined, where was grace and free will and the possibility of spiritual endeavor?

Where was choice or merit or virtue? Where was blame or culpability? And where was the hope or possibility of “spiritual experience” for those in whose astrological forecast the prerequisite planetary conditions were *not* present? If God’s universe is merely the mechanistic unfolding of an undeviating script, then are we all merely mechanical pawns, and our trials and triumphs, our perseverings and defeats, merely dramatic plot-twists in a story that’s already written, typeset and published?

It is important to emphasize at this time that the planets, in themselves, do not have the power to *cause* either good or ill-fortune, though many (including myself) habitually speak of “planetary influences” as though they were *independent causes* determining our fate. In ancient times, of course, as planetary configurations were seen to correspond to definite kinds of psychological and behavioral effects, the naive supposed that planets were therefore independent forces, responsible for the destiny of man. Each planet was fitted out with its own individual personality and was assumed to have independent power to affect events on earth. This was the basis for the myths of the “gods.”

The great Roman mystic, Plotinus, writing in the 3rd century C.E. on the subject of *Are The Stars Causes?* noted that a belief in the independent power of the planets is “tenable only by minds ignorant of the [true] nature of a Universe which has a ruling Principle and a First Cause operative downward through every member.”³ He explained:

“Each [planetary] entity takes its origin from one Principle and, therefore, while executing its own function, works in with every other member of that All. ... And there is nothing undesigned, nothing of chance, in all the process: all is one scheme of differentiation, starting from the First Cause and working itself out in a continuous progression of effects.”⁴

This perfectly unfolding progression of effects from the one all-ruling Cause is clearly seen by all who have been graced with “the vision of God.” It is that “vision” which is the experiential basis for the assertion that “all things move together of one accord”; that “assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Still, the question of *how* the transiting “planetary influences” operate, i.e., by what process Neptune or any other planet transmits to individual souls its effects, is a legitimate one. And the matter of how *progressions* operate (which are not even present-time events, but “symbols” of planetary events already past) is even more perplexing. These questions cannot be answered by present-day knowledge, but many astrologers guess that something like the following is the case:

As the planets of the solar system change their angles to one another and thus rearrange the structural design of the entire system and its relationship to the design at one’s nativity, there is a corresponding change in the pattern of conscious energy (*Shakti*) which makes up our psychic and phenomenal

reality. The energy-pattern (produced by the angular positions of the Sun, Moon and planets), which exists at the time of an individual's birth, corresponds to the conscious energy-pattern, or aggregation of qualities, of that individual soul. And the subsequent alterations of the planetary positions after that moment spell out in decipherable terms his or her destiny.

It seems to me, however, that the search for a *cause-effect* relationship between the transits and progressions of planets and the lives of individual souls on earth is indicative of humanity's long-standing mistaken view of reality. Plotinus saw in the 2nd century what is true eternally—that there is *one* Cause, and all else is Its effects. The planets do not focus beneficent or malevolent rays or forces in our direction; they do not put forth any fields of influence that impinge on us at all. In short, they are not causes at all, but merely *signs* of the activity of the one Cause, which is God, revealed to those who can read them.

I believe it is very important to understand that, although the planets *signal* psychic and physical events experienced on earth, they are not themselves responsible; they are not the *cause* but are only coincident effects that serve as 'markers', and are synchronous with the perceived effects upon our earthly lives. In short, the "influences" of the planets are really the influences of the unbroken Whole, manifesting locally as specific patterns of relationships. The planets do not determine our fate; they merely reveal it. Our lives are determined by the One in whom the planets move. This is a view consistent with the view of Plotinus, and I believe it will be consistent with the enlightened understanding of the future.

The evolution of the soul occurs over many lifetimes, with its summit being the full openness to self-surrender in the Love of God, and the subsequent realization of its supreme Identity. And because the evolution of the universe reflects the evolution of each soul, the stellar and planetary positions, which signal that soul's enlightenment, will coincide perfectly with that moment in the soul's evolutionary summit. And the question of whether it is the soul's evolutionary struggle or the planetary alignments, which brings about enlightenment must be answered, "Neither." They are coordinated events in the unfolding of God's cosmic drama; both events are simultaneous effects of the one Cause, occurring in Himself in the ordered

unfoldment of His will. All is one coordinated whole, and all that occurs within it is a manifestation of His grace.

The complexity of such a universe—a universe in which the destiny of each succeeding manifestation of a soul on earth is in synchronization with the ongoing motions of planetary bodies—is indeed beyond our present ability to conceive or visualize. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that it is impossible to separate the birth of any individual from the cosmic conditions in which it occurs. For the universe is an integral Whole, and every event in it is in interlocking agreement with every other; not even the tiniest, most seemingly insignificant, event may be considered as an isolated phenomenon.

Within this Whole, where “all things move together of one accord,” the division of small-scale events into categories of *cause* and *effect* is imaginary and has no real meaning. For it is the Lord, God, *Shiva*, Self—call Him what you will—who, by means of His Power of Will (*Shakti*), is the sole Cause of the entire manifested array of the cosmos and therefore of every single event which takes place within it. This truth is seen clearly and unmistakably in the unitive experience of the mystic.

NOTES:

1. This article is a compilation of excerpts from my book, *The Supreme Self*, London, O Books, 2005. I have omitted here the astrological charts drawn for the time of my mystical experience. Anyone interested in seeing these charts may find them on my website in the PDF version of *The Supreme Self* available there.
2. Abhayananda, Swami., *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1992; pp. 74-75, 78
3. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II:3:6
4. *Ibid.*, II:3:7

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31. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AS FUTURE SCIENCE

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 3-18-18

(last revised, 1-12-2021)

Mystical Experience As Future Science

I find it interesting that the mystical realizations that occurred to me in 1966 are now showing up in Western civilization's developing scientific view of the universal reality! Here are a few of the revelations experienced in my mystical experience that are currently being formulated as emerging elements of the scientific paradigm:

I. Identity Complementarity

The term, *complementarity*, as coined by Niels Bohr, refers to the wave-particle duality of quantum physics: that light/matter may appear as either wave or particle, depending on the experiment designed to measure it. It appears now as a wave, now as a particle—but not both, at the same time. And yet, to frame a *complete* definition of the structure of light or matter, both wave and particle are required. Thus, they are considered *complementary* structures. This characterization is carried over in the definition of consciousness, as It contains a similar dual nature. It is revealed in mystical experience that, in a manner very similar to the complementarity of wave and particle in the examination of matter, the universal undifferentiated Consciousness (God) and the individual mind/body (Soul) are complementary states of the same indivisible spiritual reality. In other words, we—you and I—are both the one universal Consciousness and the limited individual consciousness; we can experience ourselves now as one, now as the other—but not both at the same time. Mystical experience is possible only because of that complementarity, as

mystical experience is nothing more nor less than the transition from one state of being to its complementary state.

This nondual view of the one reality is solely a metaphysical one at this time—it has long been a feature of Eastern metaphysics—but it seems certain that, in the course of time, this view will become accepted on a broad cultural scale in the West, even in the sciences. Mystical experience is the empirical (albeit subjective) proof of this complementary view. It is the experiential basis for the Vedantic expression, “I am That”, and, once experienced, is the foundation of certainty in the mind of the experiencer. In my own case, this experience began with the realization that:

O my God, even this body is Thine own!
 Though I call to Thee and seek Thee amidst chaos,
 Even I who seemed an unclean pitcher amidst Thy waters—
 Even I am Thine own.

Does a wave cease to be of the ocean?
 Do the mountains and the gulfs cease to be of the earth?
 Or does a pebble cease to be stone?
 How can I escape Thee?
 Thou art even That which thinks of escape!

...I am the pulse of the turtle.
 I am the clanging bells of joy.
 I bring the dust of blindness.
 I am the fire of song.
 I am in the clouds and in the gritty soil.
 In pools of clear water my image is found...¹

II. The Inseparability of Mind And Body (Consciousness And Matter)

In the clarity of that mystical revelation which I experienced, *I* (the one Consciousness) was aware that *I* pervade all existence: “I am in the clouds, and in the gritty soil.” In addition to this, I was unable to discern any

categorical separation between my mind and my body. It is a common convention that the body is ‘the temple’ in which the spirit (mind or soul) resides. But, from the vantage of that integral Consciousness, I could see no separate encasement. “Where is the temple?” I exclaimed; “Which the Imperishable? Which the abode?” But there was no duality. It was clear that body and mind were not two things, but one—like a figure in a dream, or a mentally projected character in a waking fantasy, consisting of a unified mental and physical reality. This is not only counter-intuitional, going against our religiously inculcated bias concerning the separation of soul and body at the moment of death; it also denies the conventional Cartesian duality that constitutes the Western philosophical rationale for the conceptual separation of mind and body— and, by implication, the separation of consciousness and matter on a cosmic scale. But the mystical experience reveals that these two are inseparable, one. How is this possible?

For long it had been assumed that consciousness was an epiphenomenon of the evolving complexity of matter; but eventually the illogic of that assumption became apparent. Today, precedence is being given to the consideration of the supposition that Consciousness is the primary Essence in which and from which the entire universe of Matter evolved. Many theoretical physicists are now convinced that these two long-divided categories are in fact integral. And, though there is as yet no empirical proof (aside from mystical experience) to warrant scientific certainty, there is growing inferential evidence to support this supposition.

III. The Cyclic Universe

There has also been much speculation and inference in recent years concerning the origin of the cosmos, but little in the way of scientific evidence, or certainty. In recent years, Cosmologists have proposed a theory sometimes known as the ‘Cyclic’ or ‘Oscillating’ Universe Theory. A number of scientists, including Albert Einstein, were enamored of this theory, but it was eventually regarded as flawed. This was because the theory posited by physicists was a purely physical system, governed by purely physical laws required to restart the ‘Big Bang’ after each ‘Big Crunch’. But, of course, the Source and Governor of the universe is not physical, but noumenal, not to mention omnipotent.

The Divine Mind is not limited to relying on the laws of physics to recreate the universe; It creates in accord with Its own will. That Divine Mind is alive and conscious throughout the universe, and beyond the universe; and It remains so when the universe is withdrawn. It is not some insentient mechanical force. It is the Inventor of mechanical force; and It is the Intelligence of which our own meager intelligence is but a limited facsimile, possessing but a hint of the power, living clarity, alertness, and efficacy of the universal Mind. It is He who, of His own will, breathes forth the conscious universe initially as a brilliant transformative light.

This vision of the repetitive nature of universal creation in a cyclic, breath-like manner was first depicted in the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* (“Song of God”) was written ca. 500 B.C.E., as part of a larger work, the Mahabharata, (reputedly written by the legendary sage, Vyasa), as a dialogue between Krishna (an incarnation of God) and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. And it is Krishna who, speaking as the Divinity itself, teaches to Arjuna the perennial philosophy, explaining that in His Divine unmanifest state He manifests the entire universe, which he describes as his ‘lower’ nature;² and He manifests this ‘lower nature’ in a cyclic fashion, periodically creating, then dissolving the manifested universe:

“At the end of a cycle, all beings, ... enter into My *Prakriti* [His creative Power], and at the beginning of a cycle, I generate them all again. Controlling My own *Prakriti*, I send forth, again and again, all this multitude of beings, helpless under the sway of Maya.”³

My own acceptance of this cosmic scenario did not come about from the theories of physicists, nor from the Hindu scriptures, but from my own indubitable vision, a vision granted me by the Divine Self. In that transformed state of consciousness, during which I experienced the integral Consciousness as my own, *I* (Universal Consciousness) periodically exhale the universe in the manner of an expanding breath alternating with an inhalation in which the universe is then withdrawn back into its source. While immersed in this clear awareness, I/He stated: “I have but breathed, and everything is rearranged and set in order once again. A million worlds begin and end in every breath, and in this breathing, all things are

sustained.” This utterance I regarded then, and I regard to this day, as the very word of God.

IV. Non-Locality

The common-sense view of the world accepts the principle of *Locality*: that objects are only directly influenced by their immediate (local) surroundings. This includes the possibility that an action at one point may have an influence at another point, if something in the space between the points, such as a field, mediates the action. To exert an influence, something, such as a wave or particle, must travel through the space between the two points, to carry the influence. But *Non-Locality* is a developing scientific view that has come about through the hard-won conceptual battles between the great intellects of the twentieth century, Bohr, Einstein, Heisenberg, Born, Schrödinger, etc. My ‘mystical’ realizations, on the other hand, were the result of a direct clarified *perception* of reality itself. In that direct clarified perception, it was perfectly clear to me that “all things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” I saw, in other words, that all that is in the universe is integrally coordinated by a single will, so that ‘all things move together of one accord’. This view of physical reality, translated into the terminology acceptable to the scientific community, states that there are no independent causes or effects occurring solely in a local setting, but everything is interconnected, coordinated universally—that is to say, non-locally. Here is a particularly well-expressed version of that understanding presented by David Bohm and his co-author, Basil Hiley, in a 1975 article:

“The world which we perceive cannot properly be analyzed into independently existent parts with fixed and determinate dynamical relationships between each of the parts. Rather, the ‘parts’ are seen to be in immediate connection, in which their dynamical relationships depend, in an irreducible way, on the state of the whole system (and indeed on that of broader systems in which they are contained, extending ultimately and in principle to the entire universe). Thus, one is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separately and

independently existent parts. We have reversed the usual classical notion that the independent ‘elementary parts’ of the world are the fundamental reality, and that the various systems are merely particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather, we say that inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.”⁴

“...Ultimately, the entire universe (with all its particles, including those constituting human beings, their laboratories, observing instruments, etc.) has to be understood as a single undivided Whole, in which analysis into separately and independently existent parts has no fundamental status.”⁵

While the question of non-locality originally arose from the thought-experiment outlined in the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen (EPR) paper in which Einstein entered into his historical debate with Neils Bohr in 1935 in the attempt to prove Quantum Theory incomplete, the technological means to actually perform the empirical tests needed to determine the scientific basis for non-locality, proving Bohr correct and Einstein incorrect, did not present themselves until long after Einstein had passed away. In 1964, the theoretical physicist, John Bell, and experimenters Alain Aspect (1982) and Nicolus Gisin (1997) conclusively proved both by theorem and by empirical methods that the existence of “non-local” influences is a real scientific fact, and this fact has been universally accepted by the community of physicists throughout the world.

Nonetheless, there remains a wide gulf between the direct ‘mystical’ knowledge of reality and a conceptual scientific knowledge based on empirical proofs. Mystical experience is a direct revelation of the living Self who is the Source and Director of the universal array. It is not a linguistically framed theory of universal mechanics, but rather a living confirmation of the one divine Mind who both contains and *is* everything that exists, including oneself. No amount of familiarity with or proficiency

in the understanding of the theorems of quantum physics is capable of producing that *direct* knowledge.

The scientific principle of *Non-locality* simply expresses in an oddly roundabout way the fact that has been known for millennia by the faithful of all religions that we exist within a ‘reality’ imaged forth by the one Divine Mind, and in which everything that occurs is His doing and occurs within Him according to His omnipotent Providence. Of course, the activities taking place within the universe are not dependent upon ‘local’ causes; there are no local causes or effects. Causation begins with Him and extends in an infinite network of effects throughout the universe to bring His purposes to fruition. We are simply His eyes and ears, His instruments of knowing and exultation, His singers and worshippers, His imagined others. We too are non-local, rooted in the infinite and eternal Cause, and extending throughout the expansive universe as wave-particles of the one living Being. Halleluia!

1. NOTES:

1. For a complete account of my own ‘mystical’ experience, see my book, *The Supreme Self*, Winchester, U.K., O Books, 2006; or download it from my website at: www.themysticsvision.com.
2. *Bhagavad Gita*, VII.5; Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita*, New York, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1944, 1987; p. 83.
3. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX.7, 8; *Ibid.*, p.103.
4. Bohm, David and Hiley, Basil, “On The Intuitive Understanding of Non-Locality as Implied By Quantum Theory”, London, Foundations of Physics journal, Vol. V, 1975; pp. 96, 102.
5. Bohm, David, *Wholeness And Implicate Order*, London, Routledge, 1980.

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Mystical Experience And David Bohm's Implicate Order
(8-26-2016, revised 1-9-2021)

1. I

Science—empirical observation—tells us that we live in a universe of material phenomena—stars, planets, nebulae, gas clouds, black holes, and all that is manifest to the human senses. But the mystic's vision (Gnosis) reveals that, at a subtler, more primal level, we are living in a universal Consciousness in which every individual constituent is interconnected.

That universal Consciousness is an integral noumenon underlying the phenomenal universe and is the Creative Source and substance of all that we experience as the material universe and its contents, including our bodies and all the objects in our environment.

That universal Consciousness is the sole primary reality, and It is therefore also our primary identity. What we know as the phenomenal universe of time, space, and individual forms exists only as an appearance projected within and upon the one universal Consciousness.

This phenomenal universe, existing as it does, as a projected appearance within the universal Consciousness, is thereby imbued with, permeated by, and identical with the all-pervading universal Consciousness.

Each and every one of the separate constituents of this phenomenal universe are participants in that universal Consciousness and operate in accordance with the will of that universal Consciousness. In other words, as I observed while in a state of union with the universal Consciousness, "All things move together of one accord. Assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain."

But for many of us, *reality* is synonymous with merely the phenomenal appearance of the physical universe that we perceive through our senses. And yet, in the metaphysics of numerous sacred spiritual traditions from antiquity to the present, *reality* is understood to consist of at least *three* consecutive layers or levels of subtlety. These metaphysical systems invariably describe the *subtlest* primary level as:

1. **The One.** This is the divine Source of all, the Absolute, the universal Consciousness that we refer to as “the Godhead.” It is eternal, noumenal, inactive, transcendent to the phenomenal creation, undifferentiated, and ineffable.

That is followed by:

2. **The Divine Mind.**¹ This is **the One’s Creative Power**, and It is integral to and never separate from **the One**. It is the Creator of the universe that we refer to as “God.” Periodically, **The Divine Mind** breathes forth the Light (the Great Radiance or ‘Big Bang’) that becomes manifest as time, space, and the material elements that make up this evolving world of form, including the bodies of all creatures. And then, periodically, after a great period of time has elapsed, the Divine Mind absorbs that Light back into Itself, and that cycle of manifestation and reabsorption continues to repeat itself indefinitely.

3. **Soul.** Plotinus envisioned **Soul** as an emanate of **The Divine Mind**, but **Soul** is in fact the all-pervasive field of Consciousness—**the One**—as It pervades and permeates the forms that have been created within It by Its own *Creative Power*, the Divine Mind. It is **the One** as **Soul** that imparts Its Life and Intelligence to individual human forms by virtue of their presence within It, rendering them composites, consisting of both Matter and Mind/Spirit, both body and soul, both phenomenon and noumenon.

These three levels of subtlety are similarly described in Platonist and Vedic literature going back many centuries,² and in each of these traditions, the three levels of are said to exist, not as separate entities, but integrally and simultaneously. We, in our human make-up, are said to be a reiteration of that triune cosmic reality: As conscious beings within the one Divine Reality, our identity consists simultaneously of (1) a Divine essence—thanks to the all-pervasive universal Consciousness, (2) an individualized mind/soul by virtue of the individuation of forms produced by the Divine Mind, and lastly, a physical body. Hence, the universal Consciousness is the ultimate source and core of our being; we are also manifest on a subtle level as souls; and we are manifest in the phenomenal world as separable physically embodied individuals.

In recent times, the twentieth century theoretical physicist, David Bohm (1917-1992), has similarly described the one reality as consisting of these three levels of subtlety, but he does so with some newly coined terms. He refers to the primary divine Source, the universal Consciousness, (“the One” of Neoplatonism, or “Brahman” of Vedanta) as “**the Superimplicate Order.**” The secondary level (corresponding to “the Divine Mind” in the above scheme) he refers to as “**the implicate order,**” and the last, physical level (corresponding to the phenomenal universe in which souls are manifest as embodied beings), he refers to as “**the explicate order.**”

Bohm approaches this analysis of reality from the perspective of a scientist, a Quantum Physicist, though traditionally, the description of reality as consisting of these three levels of subtlety exists only in the mystically derived *metaphysical* systems. Conventional empirical *science* does not ordinarily describe reality in terms of these three causal levels. To do so would entail the acknowledgment of a Divine Source, a supernatural and noumenal causal agent, which would fly in the face of science’s professed empirical bias.

Physics, as an area of scientific study, delves into the microphysical in the study of Quantum physics, but it has never allowed for the positing of a source of physical reality from outside of the natural (physical) realm; nor does it ever assume a subtle intermediate ideational realm. The suggestion of any such invisible or supernatural causal realm underlying the Material World would flatly contradict the empirical requirements of science.

So, as we can see, science does not provide a clear conception of the original causal Source of the universe, and yet it *does* provide a means for the objective confirmation of its materialist theories through empirical proofs. Metaphysics, on the other hand, with its three-leveled causal progression, *does* posit a plausible Source for the manifest universe, though it does not provide any *objective* confirmation through empirical demonstrations, but only a convincing *subjective* confirmation through what is known as “mystical experience.”

I, for one, having directly experienced that subjective (mystical) confirmation, must side with the metaphysical systems (and with David Bohm) in asserting that there is indeed a subtle ideational level of reality³ underlying, forming, and supporting the Material World. It is an integral but non-physical continuum, the origin of which is a yet subtler noumenal dimension, a “Superimplicate Order” which we may regard as ‘the transcendent Absolute’, ‘the One,’ or ‘the universal Consciousness.’⁴

If we accept that the three metaphysical levels of subtlety do indeed exist as simultaneous constituents of our Reality, we have to ask, ‘How is that three-leveled constituency compatible with the traditional scientific theory of the origin of the universe by means of the Great Radiance (the Big Bang)?’⁵ It is a question that reminds us of the unfathomably complex mystery faced by anyone attempting to comprehend the Divine creation. In the sudden universal manifestation known as ‘the Big Bang’ or ‘Great Radiance’, God’s inherent Creative Power did not manifest simply as matter-bearing Light but, clearly, was suffused in some manner with divine Consciousness. The fact that Life and Consciousness appears in creatures evolved from that Light gives indication that the wave-particles which constitute the material constructs of that budding universe had to be permeated and ordered by a noumenal Intelligence, a subtle-level dimension, not particularized, but wavular, continuous, and conscious. And yet, how can we comprehend it?

Who indeed can begin to imagine the complex wizardry of the Divine Mind in forming and constituting this amazing extravaganza that is our universe? The poor human mind is helpless to conceive it. In the past, religious writers have suggested that God imparted His breath, and thereby His Consciousness, directly into the mouths of the original humans, thus giving them a living soul; others suggested that it seemed more likely that God’s Spirit was in some way imparted to *all* of Creation. But there has never been a concurrence of opinion as to how this was accomplished.

But here’s an explanation that should be considered: Let us agree to assume that the divine Thought produced by the Divine Mind, which manifested as The Great Radiance—that burst of divine Light which became our phenomenal universe—occurred *within* the all-pervading Consciousness that is the Absolute One. And because that spreading universe is *within* that divine Consciousness, it is evident that the entire universe is thereby

permeated and wholly governed by that divine Consciousness, just as the thoughts existing within our own individual minds are pervaded and governed by the consciousness of those minds. Such an evident explanation obviates the need to invent any further machinations by which God may have imparted Life and Consciousness to His Creation. Also, it is a solution that is clearly born out in St. Paul's statement, "In Him we live and move and have our being."

We may readily accept and acknowledge that we consist of the above mentioned three levels of subtlety, but it is well known that words do not adequately represent these subtle levels of reality, rather, these realms are to be *experienced* as real conscious states of being, not simply labeled and defined for purposes of philosophical speculation. Whether the subtle ideational reality underlying the physical reality is called "the Divine Mind", "*Ishvara*", "the implicate order", or anything else, matters but little from the mystic's perspective. What is of importance is to *experience* that subtle reality (*the implicate order*), and to experience firsthand its source, the One, the Absolute Ground (the Superimplicate Order), who is the ultimate Self of all existence. It is only His gracious gift of that liberating mystical experience that is capable of revealing to us the glorious truth of our ultimate divinity, and of freeing us from the limitations and sorrows attendant upon the false illusory sense of a separate isolated identity.

Having been gifted by God with divine vision and having seen into the hidden realm where all is one conscious continuum, where the only identity is that one all-inclusive Consciousness, I have to declare that, underlying this many-formed world of separate distinct entities and personalities, is a Divine Reality in which nowhere is there any separateness, in which there is only the one 'I' manifest in and as everything everywhere. How, then, can we know It? How can we experience It? This indivisible continuum of Consciousness can be known by our human intelligence only when we are brought by God's grace to a higher subtler level of consciousness. Only then is it possible to perceive It. There is no other way to know It. It has no time-space coordinates but is revealed only in the unfathomably clear depths of the Divine Mind.

II.

“Relativity and, even more important, quantum mechanics have strongly suggested (though not proved) that the world cannot be analyzed into separate and independently existing parts. Moreover, each part somehow involves all the others: it contains them or enfolds them.... This fact suggests that the sphere of ordinary material life and the sphere of mystical experience have a certain shared order and that this will allow a fruitful relationship between them.”⁶

--David Bohm

According to the mystics who have seen into the nature of reality, the one absolute Consciousness is the Source and Cause of all phenomena, manifesting the universe by Its Creative Power in a manner similar to the way an individual consciousness projects a thought within itself. This Divine Thought contains implicit within it the entire design and evolution of the universe, from its initial coming into being to all the refinements and transformations necessary in the process of its ultimate evolutionary development. And since that Divine Thought is projected in a field of Consciousness, that Thought is itself permeated by Consciousness, lending consciousness to all its elements.

Science does not recognize such a scenario as tenable but relegates the visionary knowledge of the mystics to the category of speculative metaphysics. However, one brave scientist stepped forward to acknowledge the possibility that the mystic’s vision could provide a basis for a true and consistent scientific worldview; his name is David Bohm.

David Bohm (1917-1992) was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on December 20, 1917. His father was a Jewish furniture dealer, but David went to college, receiving his B.Sc. degree from Pennsylvania State College in 1939 and his Ph.D. in physics at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1943. At U.C. Berkeley, he studied with Robert Oppenheimer; and when Oppenheimer went to Los Alamos to work on the “Manhattan Project”, Bohm remained at Berkeley as a research physicist. There, he worked on the Theory of Plasma and on the Theory of Synchrotrons and

Syndrocyclotrons until 1947, when he took a position as an Assistant Professor at Princeton University, working on Plasmas, Theory of Metals, Quantum Mechanics and Elementary Particles. It was there he met and had regular meetings with Albert Einstein.

In 1949, during the repressive McCarthy era, Bohm was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and he was asked to testify against Robert Oppenheimer who was being accused of Communist sympathies. Bohm refused to testify and was thereafter tried and acquitted. But the damage had been done; he was fired from his position at Princeton University, and was unable to find work in this country. He then moved to Brazil where he taught briefly at the University of Sao Paulo. He also taught for a brief time in Israel before moving to Bristol, England in 1957. In 1961, he became professor of physics at the Birkbeck College of the University of London, and remained there for the next 30 years, writing and publishing his several books: *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics* (1957), *The Special Theory of Relativity* (1966), *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980), and *Science, Order and Creativity* (1987). David Bohm died in 1992.

In the 1950's David Bohm was widely considered one of the most talented and promising physicists of his generation. But his primary work from the 1950's to the 1990's—the ongoing development of his “causal interpretation” (which he later referred to as an “ontological interpretation”) of quantum mechanics as an alternative to the standard ‘Copenhagen Interpretation’—was met with dismissive hostility by the majority of the world physics community. In his attempt to provide a scientific formulation of quantum physics consistent with the mystic’s vision of a Divine source from which our world becomes manifest, Bohm presented his ‘ontological theory’ in a book entitled, *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*.

The first part of the title of Bohm’s book, “*Wholeness*,” reflects a theme that grew out of his long familiarity with Quantum Physics. It is ordinarily true that, when we seek for causes of isolated events or things, we settle arbitrarily on a preceding local event or state which we designate as the *cause* of the present event or state. But as scientific investigations into the Quantum reality tend to show, the internal web of relationships between events and between things is endless. Not only from the point of view of Quantum mechanics, but also from the point of view expressed by the

mystics, isolated things and events are not caused by other things and events but are rather linked in a complex web of relationships within a larger common Whole whose nature in turn determines the nature of those constituent things and events. In other words, the material reality is no longer thought to be the independent bits of which the Whole is constituted, but rather the other way around: the overall condition of the universal Whole governs the functions and interrelations of all constituent parts within the Whole.

Here is how Bohm and his co-author, Basil Hiley, explained this understanding in a 1975 article:

“The world which we perceive cannot properly be analyzed into independently existent parts with fixed and determinate dynamical relationships between each of the parts. Rather, the ‘parts’ are seen to be in immediate connection, in which their dynamical relationships depend, in an irreducible way, on the state of the whole system (and indeed on that of broader systems in which they are contained, extending ultimately and in principle to the entire universe). Thus, one is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separately and independently existent parts. We have reversed the usual classical notion that the independent ‘elementary parts’ of the world are the fundamental reality, and that the various systems are merely particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather, we say that inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within this whole.”⁷

The second part of Bohm’s book’s title, “*The Implicate Order*,” refers to his unconventional suggestion, inspired by the mystic’s vision, that the phenomenal world is “unfolded from a subtler “enfolded order”—in other words, from an underlying noumenal Source. He refers to that noumenal

Source as “the implicate order” and he refers to the phenomenal world manifested by that noumenal source as “the explicate order”.

According to his theory, *the implicate order* is an invisible substratum containing the archetypal template for the emergence and dynamic unfoldment of both matter and consciousness, much the way an individual’s mind is the archetypal template of conscious thoughts produced from it. And in his wonderfully lucid writings Bohm endeavored to explain in the context of quantum mechanics how the *explicate order* (this perceived phenomenal universe) has its source in and unfolds from an (invisible) implicate, or enfolded order. The implicate order produces from itself the explicate order, and the explicate order manifests as the phenomenal reality.

Bohm theorized that, in the implicate order, all things—matter as well as consciousness, body as well as mind—are integrally interconnected in a way that transcends space and time. This is because the implicate order is a noumenal substratum resembling a transcendent Thought-matrix which generates, forms, and organizes the constituents of the explicate order. These constituent elements, or quanta, appear wavelike until they are observed; that is, witnessed by a conscious observer. Then they appear to those observers as particulate, i.e., as individualized ‘entities.’ Bohm suggests that this wave/particle complementarity can be explained by the implicate-explicate order duality: The *implicate order* is one indivisible continuum, a noumenon consisting of waves; but the *explicate order* is perceived by the human consciousness as congregates of particulate, individualized elements, such as electrons, protons, etc. This, he suggests, is the basis for the well-known wave-particle duality.

Together, the implicate order and the explicate order comprise what Bohm regards as *the holomovement*, which he describes as “the unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders”.⁸ From the point of view of the mystic, the One, the transcendent Absolute, is the supreme Source (the ultimate Cause), and it is the divine Mind (the implicate order), which is the active causal principle of the Absolute One. But in David Bohm’s ontological theory, nowhere is there any indication of a primary origin for this “undivided flowing movement”. He does suggest, however, that the ultimate source of the *holomovement* might include a “superimplicate order”, which in turn may

result from a “super-superimplicate order”, and so on indefinitely. In his theory, Bohm does not explicitly define these possible primary causal orders, but he suggests that, ultimately, underlying all noumenal implicate orders, there must presumably be an Origin, an eternal Intelligence, or Divine Ground, something along the lines of an Absolute, the “Brahman” of Vedanta, or “the One”, of Neoplatonism. But Bohm, as a scientist dedicated to the empirical method, seems to prefer to remain wholly noncommittal regarding the distinct nature of any primary supernatural cause.

For the mystic, informed by direct visionary experience, the perceivable phenomenal world is the manifestation of the Creative Energy of God. That Creative Energy (which Plotinus called *Nous*, “the Divine Mind”) is the Source of all phenomenal manifestation. The One, the all-pervading Consciousness, is inherently implicit in Its Creative Energy. It fills all animate and inanimate beings, to varying degrees according to their evolution, with Its own Consciousness and Joy. Thus, the manifested beings, who are the evolutes of Its Creative Energy, are able to know within themselves Its being, Its freedom, Its Consciousness, Its Joy. They are able, by the power of God’s Grace, to transcend the limitations of the egocentricity imposed on them in the process of manifestation and are able to ascend to the very Consciousness of God, knowing Him as their own original and authentic Self.

In that mystical ascension to the Divine Mind (*the implicate order*), the manifest souls are able to perceive the perfection of the universal manifestation in which all created things are linked in a wonderful unity of being and becoming.⁹ Like the atoms in a cresting wave, or in the flowering of a rose, they are participants in a synchronous dance of movement toward their intended evolutionary culmination. How vast and perfect in every way is their dance! It is indescribably wonderful! In the mystic’s vision, the unfolding of the universe and all that unfoldment entails is seen to be a coordinated and integrated presentation wherein “all things move together of one accord;” and wherein “assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.”

If David Bohm experienced at some time in his career such a mystical revelation, I have not been able to find any mention of it in his writings.

Nonetheless, his exposition of “The Implicate Order” offers many similarities to the direct perceptions frequently reported by many well-known mystics. In David Bohm’s broad suppositional theory, causality is seen to reside in the ideational substratum (the implicate order), and then becomes manifest in all its effusive multiplicity as a universe of time and space (the explicate order). Events in the explicate order are merely manifest expressions of an implicit noumenal order. And, while this ‘ontological interpretation’ of David Bohm’s is a marvelous restatement of the expressed vision of the mystic, it remains, from the standpoint of conventional science, merely another speculative philosophy, unprovable (unfalsifiable) by science’s criterion of proof. Bohm’s work, however, is ground-breaking proof that gnosis is indeed a fruitful source for scientific investigation and understanding. Perhaps other scientists will follow the path he has shown, expanding on his vision, and bringing us closer to a science that corresponds with the declarations of the gnostics of every generation.¹⁰

NOTES:

1. To many, the notion of a distinction between the Absolute Ground (the One, Pure Consciousness) and the Creative Power (the Creator, the Divine Mind) seems to be a false distinction, establishing a Duality between The Godhead and God, which is nonexistent. But it is, in fact, a necessary distinction, not only from a logical theological standpoint, but from an experiential standpoint as well. Given that we are made in His image, I think we can get a sense of this distinction by examining our own conscious makeup, wherein our ever-present substratum of conscious awareness and our creative faculty of thought-production, though interrelated, are nevertheless distinguishably separable from one another.

Likewise, the Godhead, which is the Ground and Source of all activity, is itself inactive, and is sometimes referred to as “pure Consciousness.” Its active, Creative Power, is The Divine Mind, or God, and is sometimes referred to as “the Creator.” They are two, but they are one. They are one, but they are two. This is why, in every metaphysical description from every religious tradition, these two are distinguished by separate names: Purusha-Prakriti, Brahman-Maya, Shiva-Shakti, Tao-Teh, Jahveh-Chokmah, Theos-Logos, and on and on. The distinctive nature of these dual aspects of Divinity requires recognition of the unique and separate nature of each.

2. For Plato and Plotinus, the three levels of reality were *the One, the Divine Mind (Nous), and Soul*. *The physical cosmos* was produced by *the Divine Mind*. For the authors of the Upanishads, the three levels of reality were *Brahman/Atman, Ishvara/Maya, and jiva*. For the Buddhists, it was *Tatatha/Dharmakaya, ekachittakshan, and samsara*.
3. I use the term, 'ideational' to describe the secondary subtle level of reality that Bohm calls "the implicate order" only because I don't have a better or more fitting term... It is 'ideational' in the sense that it is non-physical, and non-individualized; the separate forms of this ideational reality may be perceived (by the divine eye), but they are constituents of a single continuum. That continuum is subtler than physical reality, but we have no acceptable term to describe it, except for 'spirit,' 'soul,' or 'idea'. It is not a humanly produced 'idea', but a divinely produced 'idea'. It might be construed as equivalent to Plato's 'Forms' or David Bohm's 'implicate order' of reality, containing no individuation or material substance.
4. 'The transcendent Absolute,' 'Supreme Cause,' or 'universal Consciousness,' is the uncreated Source, beyond time and space, the Godhead, the imperceptible and inconceivable Self of all.
5. For references to 'the Great Radiance', please see my article, "How God Made The World (6-07-2013)", or "The Phenomenon of Light (10-15-2014), or "First Light (4-12-2013)" all available at my website: www.themysticsvision.com.
6. Bohm, David; quoted in Friedman, Norman, *Bridging Science And Spirit*, St. Louis, Missouri, Living Lake Books, 1994; p. 95.
7. Bohm, David and Hiley, Basil, "On The Intuitive Understanding of Non-Locality as Implied By Quantum Theory", London, Foundations of Physics journal, Vol. V, 1975; pp. 96, 102.
8. David Bohm, *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 172.
9. The mystical experience is frequently referred to as "the unitive experience" because it reveals the identity of the experiencer to be identical with the one all-pervasive Reality, i.e., it reveals that 'I and the Father are one.' This nondual 'mystical' experience occurs because it is, in fact, a revelation of the subtle level of reality, what Plotinus called *Nous* (the Divine Mind), or what David Bohm calls 'the implicate order.' Previous to the "unitive experience", the 'explicate order', which had been the experiencer's former "reality", appeared to consist of separate individual things and beings in a world of incredible diversity and

multiplicity of identities. But now, suddenly awakened to this subtle level of reality (the implicate order), there is but one identity spreading everywhere; ‘I’ am in the clouds and in the gritty soil; ‘I’ am the pulse of the turtle; ‘I’ am the clanging bells of joy. In that implicate order, one ‘I’ is all-pervasive, constituting the one and only identity of everything everywhere.

10. For a first-person account of ‘the mystical’ or ‘unitive’ experience, see my book, *The Supreme Self*, Atma Books, 1984, available as a free PDF document downloadable from: www.themysticsvision.com.

* * *

Freedom Or Determinism?

In the field of physics, the dispute over whether light is particulate or wavular played out over several centuries. Isaac Newton (1642-1727) asserted that light was particulate; Michael Faraday (1791-1867) and James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879) showed that it was wavular. In the twentieth century, Max Plank and Albert Einstein demonstrated that it was particulate, while Louis DeBroglie and Erwin Schrödinger showed that both light and matter (electrons) were wavular. Eventually Neils Bohr broke new ground in attempting to settle the matter by declaring that light and matter are *both* wavular *and* particulate, depending on how you go about measuring them; and he declared them to be “complementary” phenomena, each contributing to the total information about light and matter.¹ As a result, today we speak of “wave-particles” or “wavicles”, and the phrase “wave-particle duality” is a commonplace one.

For physicist David Bohm (1917-1992), this wave-particle duality indicates that there are at least two different planes or levels of reality: the (particulate) phenomenal reality that we experience through our senses and a subtler, underlying, invisible (wavular) reality that is the source of the phenomenal reality. The phenomenal, material reality he calls “the explicate order;” and underlying that, he suggested, was a creative thought-matrix that is invisible and beyond time and space, which he named “the implicate order.”² This ‘implicate order,’ he says, is a noumenal *wavular* substratum to the phenomenal ‘explicate order’ which we experience as the *particulate*

physical world. As for the source and origin of ‘the implicate order,’ Bohm suggests the possibility of a yet subtler realm from whence the implicate and explicate orders arise, a “superimplicate order,” but he is unwilling to specifically define it.

Though Bohm’s scheme is intended to explain the subtleties of Quantum physics, we can easily see that his scheme goes beyond empirical science and enters into the realm of theoretical metaphysics. Bohm’s three-leveled reality is simply a reiteration of the familiar metaphysics of the Neoplatonist, Plotinus, or that of the Vedantic scriptures. His ‘implicate order’ is simply another name for a subtle and supernatural level of spiritual reality similar to Plotinus’ “Divine Mind,” or Vedanta’s “Brahman,” neither of which is demonstrable by the methods of empirical science.

In the realm of metaphysics, another dispute similar to the wave-particle debate had also been going on for centuries: it was between the advocates of causal determinism and the advocates of free will or choice. The question is “Are we entirely governed by the will of our supernatural Creator, or do we have an independent free will to choose and act? Do we move in accordance with the will of an invisible supernatural causal tide, or do we each have the ability to determine our own fate according to our own wholly independent choices?” Through the centuries, this dispute has gone back and forth in a manner reminiscent of the wave-particle dispute, with no resolution. And no one seems to have noticed that this metaphysical dispute was directly linked to the wave-particle dispute of physics!

As David Bohm theorizes, in the invisible contiguous (wavular) field or continuum (*the implicate order*), everything consists of ripples or waves—there are no distinct individual entities; everything is interconnected within the whole, and is governed by the whole, as waves spreading on the ocean consist of the ocean and are integral to the ocean. But in the phenomenally manifested *explicate order*, occurring in time/space, things are individualized, particularized, each thing or being having its own separate and distinct identity or soul.

If David Bohm is correct in his interpretation of the wave-particle duality, then, in a way similar to, and directly related to, the wave-particle complementarity, there is a complementarity in our self-identification: In

other words, we are both the one universal (implicate order) Self and the particularized (explicate order) self; and our possession of free will (in the implicate order) and our determinism (in the explicate order) are also complementary states. In other words, since we are both wavular and particulate—both identical to the universal Consciousness and distinct as individual souls—we are also *both free and determined!* As the eternal Self, we are free; and as the individualized soul, we are determined by our source. Just as light and electrons—viewed from different perspectives—appear to be either wavular or particulate, our identities—viewed from different perspectives— appear to be either contained in and identical with the universal Consciousness or manifest as distinct individual and independent souls. Likewise, viewed from those different perspectives, we may have either a free will or we are totally determined by subtle universally interconnected causal factors.

The notion that we, and everything else in the universe, are both wave and particle (quantum) has not yet sunk into the collective psyche; imagine how difficult it will be for humanity to come to terms with the understanding that, on one plane of reality, we are, in fact, the one Spirit, entirely free; and on another plane, we are an individual soul at the mercy of the universal causal fiat. We are *both* the wavular manifestations of the one nondual continuum in the superimplicate and implicate orders, *and* we are particulate as individual souls in the explicate order; in other words, our wills are *both free and determined!* ³

Mystical experience such as that of my own and others, along with the experimental findings of respected physicists, leads us to acknowledge that the wave-particle duality is not just a curious paradox; it represents a new paradigm whose implications haven't quite yet dawned on the scientists and psychologists—let alone on the public. The fact that light and matter reveal themselves to be particulate in some experiments and wavular in others suggests to some physicists, like David Bohm, that there are two separate (levels/kinds of) realities overlapping—a wavular one and a particulate one—even if the particulate reality turns out to be merely an induced subjective illusion.

So far, humanity has been stumped concerning the question of whether we are determined or free in our willing; but perhaps through a comprehension

of the principles of contemporary physics we will arrive at and accept the understanding that the freedom-determinism duality, like the wave-particle duality, is in fact a complementarity. This would require the recognition that we consist of waves on the one ocean of Consciousness, and are, at the same time, individualized entities, independent souls—that we are *both free and* causally determined at the same time. Such an understanding, acknowledging that these two apparently opposing notions are in fact complementary to one another—however challenging that may be to our current worldview and to everyone’s sanity—would go a long way to resolving this long-standing metaphysical dispute.

NOTES:

1. Neils Bohr: “Evidence obtained under different experimental conditions cannot be comprehended within a single picture but must be regarded as *complementary* in the sense that only the totality of the phenomena exhausts the possible information about the objects.” This quote is from: “Discussions with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics”. In P. Schilpp. *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*; New York, Open Court Publishing, 1949.

2. In the “mystical” experience that occurred to me in November of 1966 (see my book, *The Supreme Self*), I did indeed feel as though I had entered a different dimension, a different reality, from the one experienced ordinarily in which my identity was uniquely my own, separate and distinct from all others. It was as though these two dimensions, or realities, existed alongside each other, but at uniquely different levels of consciousness, whereas in the one I played my accustomed role in the physical world of distinct individual beings, and in the other I was omnipresent as a single non-physical continuum extending within and throughout all things.

From my individual perspective, the transition from the consciousness of myself as a distinct individual to that of an all-embracing and pervasive presence was not in my power to accomplish. By some power other than my own, it had just happened. Yet, in that transition, I had become eternal, all-pervading and perfectly whole and complete. For that few minutes, I had become God—or, as David Bohm might say, ‘my consciousness had

become one with the superimplicate Consciousness that manifests and upholds both the implicate and the explicate orders.’ And so, I know, as few others do, that these two intersecting realities—by whatever names they are called—do indeed exist and constitute the foundation and fabric of all existence.

3. Ultimately, of course, the one ‘I’ is the *sole* reality. It is both Determiner and determined. The question of who is determined by whom thus becomes moot.

The Moving And The Moved

Empirical observation tells us that we live in a universe of material phenomena—stars, planets, nebulae, gas clouds, black holes, and all that is manifest to the human senses. But the mystic’s vision reveals that, at a subtler, more primal level, we are living in a universal Consciousness in which all Its individual constituents are interconnected and possess the same identity.

That Consciousness is an integral noumenon underlying the phenomenal universe and is the Creative Source and substance of all that we experience as the material universe and its contents, including our bodies and the objects in our environment.

That universal Consciousness is the sole primary reality, and It is therefore also our primary identity. What we know as the phenomenal universe of time, space, and individual forms exists only as an appearance projected within and upon the one universal Consciousness.

This phenomenal universe, existing as a projected appearance within the universal Consciousness, is thereby imbued with, permeated by, and identical in every respect to the all-pervading universal Consciousness.

Each and every one of the separate constituents of this universe are participants in that universal Consciousness and operate in accordance with the will of that universal Consciousness. In other words, as I observed while

in a state of union with the universal Consciousness, “All things move together of one accord. Assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” But it should be remembered that there exists only One; It is not only the eternal Source; It is “all things,” and it is by Its accord that those things are all moving together. That One is who you are: You are both the moving and the moved, both the Governor and the subject, both the Determiner and the determined. In short, that you and I are anything but Divine Bliss is simply an illusion.

* * *

Mystical Experience And Near-Death Experience

Have you ever noticed the difference between the descriptions of the spiritual world by the so-called ‘mystics’ and the descriptions by people who claim to have had a ‘near-death’ experience? Have you ever wondered how these stark differences can be explained or reconciled? Is it possible that both perspectives are true? The vast majority of those people who claim to have had a ‘near-death’ experience speak of having gone out of their bodies, of having perceived a loving light at the end of a tunnel, and of having moved rapidly through that tunnel toward the light. They experienced themselves as being outside of their body, sometimes hovering over it, and observing the occurrences taking place in the physical world around them. While they were out of their bodies, they sometimes perceived deities or messianic figures, or experienced meetings with relations and loved ones who had ‘passed over’. They sometimes experienced visions of beautiful ethereal landscapes to which they became attracted; and then came the sudden, often non-volitional, return to their body.

The mystic, on the other hand, experiences no such out-of-body excursions, no soul-travels or events relating to an individual ‘me’ at all. Rather, he experiences a sudden shift of consciousness wherein he becomes the all-pervading spiritual identity, in which there is neither subject nor object, neither an ‘I’ nor a “Thou”, but rather a blissful awareness of identity with the one eternal Being. The mystic experiences that he *is* that eternal Being (‘I and the Father are one’), and often is able to see clearly into the workings

of that eternal Being as well. How can we possibly explain the vast differences between these two descriptions of spiritual experience?

First of all, we must come to recognize that there are at least three distinct levels of subtlety, not only in the world, but in ourselves. These three levels of subtlety are simply progressively subtle elements of the one conscious Being who is the sole reality.¹ Our own human make-up is a reiteration of that triune cosmic reality; in other words, as conscious beings within the divine reality, we have our origin in the eternal Being—the Divine Mind; and secondly, within that Divine context, we exist as an individual soul; and lastly, we have a transient association with a physical body. On the physical level, we see each other solely as physical bodies; but the awareness of one who experiences a ‘near-death’, no longer identifies himself as a body, but sees himself and experiences existence as an individual soul, living and operating on what some call ‘the astral plane’. As a soul, he is free of the body, and yet retains all the memories of the people and past events associated with it.

However, at the highest, or deepest, spiritual level, there are no souls, and no individual perceptions; there is only the divine Self, the Eternal, wherein all the various levels of manifestation—including the material and the astral—are merely potential. This ultimate reality has been called the One, Brahman, the Godhead, the Self, the Void, the Tao, and many other names; and is realized by enlightened sages to be the highest truth, the sole source and origin of all the manifest planes of existence, and everyone’s ultimate Identity.

The Near-Death experience and the mystic’s unitive experience are different because the focus of our attention is different. A focus on the state of one’s personal well-being will likely result in an experience of the Soul, whereas a focus on God and the determination of His will would likely result in a unitive Mystical experience. People often experience themselves in a near-death situation as souls moving about in the astral realm at a very crucial time regarding their personal well-being; some few, whose focus is on God and His service, are blessed to experience the eternal Being as their true Self. But understand — there is no contradiction implied between these two experiences. The Self may reveal Itself as one’s eternal Identity, or it may present Itself as a disincarnate soul on the astral plane or as a soul associated

with a body in the manifested plane. Many, including myself, have seen disembodied souls on the astral level; and many, including myself, have experienced the universal Spirit, the divine Self, as the ultimate Identity. The soul and the Absolute Self are not mutually exclusive. He is all, and all is He—including souls. He also transcends all. The Godhead, Brahman, the one Spirit, is the ultimate Reality and Source of all that exists and constitutes the ultimate knowledge to be attained. But, at a grosser level of consciousness, each of us is an individual soul, just as we are temporarily—at a yet grosser level—manifested in this phenomenal world as a *material* body.

The Creator and the created, manifesting as our divine Self and the individual soul, are not two; there is only the One, appearing in many forms, and as the many varied souls. And yet, since most of us do not frequently experience an intensely intimate level of consciously relating to God, we seldom experience ourselves as the divine Self; instead, we experience ourselves as individual souls with distinctly unique attributes, and we deal with others as individuals with unique attributes—though in fact, there is only the one Divinity living and acting in the world as manifold individual souls. Look more deeply into the truth! Lift the veil! See God in each other! There is no one here but God—appearing as you and as all in this world. This is the highest knowledge and the highest attainment. Identify with the attributeless Self and become free of the limiting soul attributes. Once you've known your divine Identity, those soul-attributes may or may not continue. No matter. Know that you are free. Know that you are the one Divine Reality.

Realization of the eternal Self does not put an end to one's soul or one's body, just as, in other cases, knowing or recognizing the whole does not negate or destroy the constituents within that whole. We, as souls, live within Him, even while being aware of our oneness with Him; and we partake of that vision by His loving Grace. So, let us put away our arguments, acknowledging that we are both the divine Self and a uniquely individual soul, and that we may rightly experience ourselves as either the one or the other. These two, Self and soul, are complementary aspects of our own conscious identity; they are, in fact, complementary aspects of the one all-inclusive Divinity in which we live and breathe and have our being.

NOTES:

1. The three levels of subtlety were described by Plato, and by the 3rd century Roman Neoplatonist mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, as consisting of *the One*, followed by Its Creative Power, *the Divine Mind*, and thirdly, the *Soul*. As for our bodies: according to Plotinus, our material bodies consist of an illusory substance produced by *the Divine Mind* by which the *Soul* is ensnared and with which the *Soul* then becomes identified. Our modern understanding of the nature of *Matter*, by which we recognize that the phenomenal world is comprised of electromagnetic impulses masquerading as substance, would seem to reinforce Plotinus' notion of *Matter* as an illusory substance.

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32. THE WESTERN MYSTICAL TRADITION

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

(last revised 5-18-22)

Historical Roots of Western Mysticism

From what we presently know, a mystical theology first appeared in India with the writings that were later gathered into the collection that we now call the *Upanishads* (ca. 800-500 B.C.E.), and in the chapter of the epic *Mahabharata* that we know as the *Bhagavad Gita* (ca. 500 B.C.E.). It is possible that this Eastern mystical literature influenced the mysticism of the early Greek philosophers, but it is also possible that a mystical theology arose in Greece independently. There is no way to know for sure. Though the Buddha lived and taught around this same time, there was no Buddhist literary representation until many centuries thereafter; and the Biblical literature of the Middle Eastern Jews, whose culture was somewhat closed to outside influences, shows no clear signs of a mystical strain until the accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus written by his followers in the first and second centuries—and even then, the mysticism of Jesus was widely unrecognized and misinterpreted. The most easily traced early historical development of a mystical theology is that appearing in Greece in the Platonist and Neoplatonist traditions, and it is that development which we shall here consider.

Since the beginning, men have been gathering knowledge about the world in which they live in the effort to answer such questions as: ‘Where did this world come from?’ ‘Who made it?’ and ‘What is it made of?’ The earliest efforts to formulate a cosmogony came in the form of simple stories, myths, which were necessarily vague. Hesiod’s *Theogony* (7th or 8th century B.C.E.), for example, posited the originating agent as “Chaos”, a primordial abysmal condition from which all else mysteriously arose. But, by the 6th century B.C.E., enquiring minds had become a bit more sophisticated; and as

the ancient philosopher, Xenophanes (580-480 B.C.E.) observed, “Not at first did the gods reveal all things to mortals, but in time, by inquiring, they make better discoveries.” And this gathering of knowledge through ‘better discoveries’ tended to be cumulative over the ages, though inquiry led only very slowly and laboriously toward a true understanding.

It had been clear, even to men of more primitive societies, that mind and matter, soul and body, were two very different categories of being. Then, as now, men struggled to understand the nature of the material world and the nature of their minds or souls as well. In answer to the question, ‘What is the world made of?’ ancient Greek thinkers, like Thales or Anaximenes, became convinced that everything in the sensible world was made from water or from air, respectively. But these theories were unsatisfying, and the search for the ultimate irreducible ‘stuff’ composing all matter continued in earnest during those early centuries with little success. For some thinkers, it had become increasingly evident that *in addition* to the physical world, the world of ‘nature’, there had to be an intelligent cause *behind* the manifestation and development of this complex and manifold universe. Matter itself was devoid of life and awareness; there had to be an intelligent Cause of this universe, pervading, guiding and developing the intricacies of its design, and accounting for the inherent life and consciousness of mankind and of all living creatures.

At first, the early poets and mythologizers, such as Hesiod and Homer, dreamed up gods who were styled after mankind, possessing both the noble and the ignoble characteristics of mortal men and women. But there were some who contemplated a God who was incorporeal and all-pervading, an eternal, noumenal Reality whose consciousness filled the entire Cosmos.

Xenophanes (580-480 B.C.E.) was one of those who, whether he had experienced it in vision or simply inferred it through his faculty of reason, thought that there *was* a non-material, i.e., supernatural, cause behind this world of sense experience, who exists within the world as the Intelligent creator, guide and controller. He said:

“There is one God, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body or in mind. He sees as a whole and hears as a whole. And without toil He sets everything in motion, by the thought of His mind. And He always remains in the same

place, not moving at all, nor is it necessary for Him to change His place at different times.”¹

A contemporary of Xenophanes who knew something of the Divine Thought pervading the universe was Heraclitus (540-480 B.C.E.), who, utilizing the Greek word, “logos”, to represent that all-pervading Intelligence, gave eloquent expression to his philosophical vision. Indeed, Heraclitus seems to have experienced a personal mystical vision, revealing to him the one Mind whose presence (as *Logos*) fills the entire universe, and who comprises the underlying identity of all men. However, due to the ignorance of unenlightened commentators, of whom there are always plenty, Heraclitus was much misunderstood and maligned, both in his own time and ever since. But judge his vision for yourself; here is a reconstruction of Heraclitus’ thought, based on existing fragments from his book, *On Nature*:

“I have explained the Logos, but men are always incapable of understanding it, both before they have heard it, and after. For, though all things come into being in accordance with the Logos, when men hear it explained—how all things are made of it, and how each thing is separated from another according to its nature—they seem unable to comprehend it. The majority of men are as unaware of what they are doing after they wake from sleep as they are when asleep²...Everyone is ruled by the Logos, which is common to all; yet, though the Logos is universal, the majority of men live as if they had an identity peculiar to themselves.³ ...Even when they hear of the Logos, they do not understand it, and even after they have learnt something of it, they cannot comprehend; yet they regard themselves as wise.⁴

“Those who believe themselves wise regard as real only the appearance of things, but these fashioners of falsehood will have their reward.⁵ Though men are inseparable from the Logos, yet they are separated in it; and though they encounter it daily, they are alienated from it.⁶ What intelligence or understanding do they have? They believe the popular orators and are guided by the opinions of the populace; they do not

understand that the majority of men are fools, and the wise few.⁷

“Of all the wise philosophers whose discourses I have heard, I have not found any who have realized the one Intelligence, which is distinct from all things,⁸ and yet pervades all things.⁹ That Intelligence is One; to know It is to know the Purpose which guides all things and is in all things.¹⁰ Nature has no inherent power of intelligence; Intelligence is the Divine.¹¹ Without It, the fairest universe is but a randomly scattered dust-heap.¹² If we are to speak with intelligence, we must found our being on THAT which is common to all. ...For that Logos, which governs man, is born of the One, which is Divine. It [the Divine] governs the universe by Its will and is more than sufficient to everyone.¹³

“One should not conjecture at random about the Supreme [Truth].¹⁴ The eyes are better witnesses to the truth than the ears;¹⁵ but the eyes and ears are bad witnesses for men if their souls cannot understand.¹⁶ You could not in your travels find the source or destination of the soul, so deeply hidden is the Logos.¹⁷ [But] I searched for It [and found It] within myself.¹⁸ That hidden Unity is beyond what is visible.¹⁹ All men have this capacity of knowing themselves,²⁰ [for] the soul has the Logos within it, which can be known when the soul is evolved.²¹ What is within us remains the same eternally; It is the same in life and death, waking and sleeping, youth and old age; for It has become this world, and the world must return to It.²²

“The best of men choose to know the ONE above all else; It is the famous “Eternal” within mortal men. But the majority of men are complacent, like well-fed cattle.²³ They revel in mud;²⁴ like donkeys, they prefer chaff to gold.²⁵ [The Eternal is attained only by those who seek It with all their desire;] for if one does not desire It, one will not find the Desireless, since there is no trail leading to It and no path.²⁶ Such a man is satiated with things seen and kindles his inner light during the night. While living, he is like a dead man; while awake, he is

like a man asleep.²⁷ But such men, the best of men, are one in ten thousand.²⁸

“You needn’t listen to me; listen to the Logos [within]. When you do, you will agree that all things are One.²⁹ This ordered universe, which is the same for all, was not created by any one of the gods or by man, but always was, is, and shall be, [similar to] an ever-living Flame that is first kindled and then quenched in turn.³⁰ [The universe bursts forth and then is reabsorbed, yet its Source is ever-living, like a Sun that never sets;] and who can hide from that which never sets? ³¹ [That eternal Intelligence in man] is forever beyond change; ³² [It is God.] To God all things are beautiful, good and just, but men see some things to be just, and others unjust. ³³

“One should understand that the world appears by the opposition of forces; order exists in the world by this play of contraries.³⁴ We would never have heard of “right” if we did not know of “wrong;” ³⁵ whole and not-whole, united-separate, consonant-dissonant, —all these are interdependent.³⁶ [But] in the One, above and below are the same, ³⁷ [just as] beginning and end are one in the circumference of a circle. ³⁸ That, which is in conflict is also in concert; while things differ from one another, they are all contained in the most beautiful Unity.³⁹

“[Yet the philosophers cannot understand this;] they do not understand how that which contains differences within it is also in harmony, how Unity consists of opposing forces within Itself, just as the strings of a bow or a lyre [produce harmony while being pulled by opposing forces.] ⁴⁰

“[When one’s mind becomes stilled, the soul separates from the world-appearance;] just as a mixture of wine and barley meal separates when it is not stirred. ⁴¹ [The impulses of the mind must be stilled;] though it is difficult to fight against impulse. [The impulses of desire arise, but] whatever the mind wishes, it purchases at the expense of the soul. ⁴²

[Such desires feed on pride and arrogance, and] it is a greater task to quench one's own arrogance than it is to quench a raging fire.⁴³ Pride is the greatest hindrance to the progress of the soul.⁴⁴ Moderation is the greatest virtue, and wisdom is to speak the truth and to act in accordance with nature, while continuously attending to one's own Self.⁴⁵ [A man should see to his own character,] for a man's character is his destiny."⁴⁶

Not long thereafter, Anaxagoras (500-428 B.C.E.) came to a similar conclusion. The universe, he said, began as a primordial, undifferentiated and chaotic mass—he doesn't even attempt to guess at its origin; but he states that this chaotic mass was then arranged and organized by "Thought". He doesn't say "Divine Thought" or "the Thought of God", but that is clearly what he intended. He speaks of a "limitless and independent Thought" that is:

"The finest of all things and the purest, and it possesses all knowledge about everything, and it has the greatest strength. And Thought has power over all those things, both great and small, which possess soul. ...And Thought knows everything ...what was to be and what was and what now is and what will be. ...Thought has power over whatever exists and now is where the other things also are [i.e., it permeates all things]."⁴⁷

Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.) was a contemporary of Anaxagoras and was the student and beneficiary of all previous philosophical enquiry. It seems that he had also been the beneficiary of a personal mystical vision in which the Divine had made itself known to him. However, since he wrote nothing, but preferred to teach men face to face, we must rely upon his student, Plato (d. 347 B.C.E.), for our knowledge of his thought. Plato's various *Dialogues* purport to be conversations between Socrates and his many admirers; but it is impossible to separate out the thought of Socrates from the thought of Plato; and so, we must treat them as one.

By the time of Plato, belief in the *Psyche*, or "Soul" as the eternal and incorporeal essence of one's being was implicit, as was the belief in the soul's ability to reincarnate. Plato saw the soul as tripartite, being made up of *logos*, the mind or reason; *thymos*, emotion; and *eros*, or desire. For both Socrates and Plato, Soul was seen as the entire inner consciousness of man,

synonymous with the very fact of life. It was soul that gave life to the body, and without which the body was merely a corpse. It was Plato who introduced Socrates' idea that, through introspection, a man's soul was able to ascend in spirit and directly perceive and know the Divinity within himself; and it was for that reason that Socrates had so emphasized the need to care primarily for "the greatest improvement of the soul."

Here are a few illustrative excerpts from the Dialogues of Plato that purport to be the words of Socrates:

"As for the sovereign part of the human soul, we should consider that God gave it to be the Divinity in each one, it being that which, inasmuch as we are a plant not of an earthly but a heavenly growth, raises us from earth to our brethren in heaven.

"When one is always occupied with the cravings of desire and ambition which he is eagerly striving to satisfy, all his thoughts must be mortal, and, as far as it is possible to become such, he must be mortal every whit, because he has made great his mortal part. But he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and true wisdom and has exercised his intellect more than any other part, must have thoughts immortal and divine. If he attains Truth, insofar as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal. And since he is ever cherishing the divine power, and has duly honored the Divinity within, he will be supremely happy. ⁴⁸

"The true lover of knowledge is always striving after Being—that is his nature; he will not rest at those multitudinous particular phenomena whose existence is in appearance only, but he will go on—the keen edge will not be blunted, nor the force of his passion abate until he have attained the knowledge of the true nature of all essence by a sympathetic and kindred power in the soul. And by that power, drawing near and becoming one with very Being, ...he will know and truly live and increase. Then, and only then, will he cease from his travail. ⁴⁹

“The immortality of the soul is demonstrated by many proofs; but to see it as it really is—not as we now behold it, marred by communion with the body and other miseries—you must contemplate it with the eye of reason in its original purity; and then its beauty will be revealed.⁵⁰ ...When a person starts on the discovery of the Absolute by the light of the reason only, without the assistance of the senses, and never desists until by pure intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute Good, he at last finds himself at the end of the intellectual world...⁵¹

“Of that Heaven which is above the heavens what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe; for I must dare to speak the truth, when Truth is my theme. There abides the very Being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colorless, formless, intangible Essence visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul. ... Every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it rejoices at beholding Reality. ...She beholds Knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or of relation, which men call existence, but Knowledge absolute in Existence absolute. ⁵²

“To find the Father and Maker of this universe is most difficult, and, to declare Him, after having found Him, is impossible.⁵³

“A man must have knowledge of the Universal, formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many particulars of sense; this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw while following God—when, regardless of that which we now call being, it raised its head up towards true Being. And, therefore, the mind of the philosopher alone has wings; and this is just, for he is always, as far as he is able, clinging in recollection to those things in which God abides, and in beholding which, he is what He [God] is. And he who employs aright these memories is ever being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect. But since he stands apart from human interests and is rapt in the Divine, the vulgar deem him mad and do not know he is inspired. ⁵⁴

“He who would be dear to God must, as far as is possible, become like Him. Wherefore the temperate and just man is the friend of God, for he is like Him. And this is the conclusion—that for the good man to ... continually hold converse with God by means of prayers and every kind of service, is the noblest and the best of things, and the most conducive to a happy life.
55

“This is that life above all others which man should live, ...holding converse with the true Beauty, simple and divine. In that communion only beholding Beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but Reality [Itself]; ...and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue, to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?”⁵⁶

For all his high-mindedness, and his great effect on all subsequent philosophy, Plato gives no indication in his writings that he himself had experienced the unitive knowledge of God. In fact, he departed from the simple ideas of Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Anaxagorus regarding the guidance and direction of the universe by means of Divine Thought, emphasizing instead the theory of the dependence of all objects in the material world upon the intelligible *Forms*, or *Ideas (ideai)*, that he saw as constituting their archetypal essence and reality. This theory was born, however, not of mystical vision, but of Plato’s speculative imagination.

Democritus (468 B.C.E.-?), though not a mystic, nonetheless plays a minor role in our story. He was a contemporary of Socrates, though not of his circle. He wrote many books, on many subjects, none of which has survived; but he is best known for anticipating our current atomic theory. He, and perhaps his teacher, Leucippus, as well, held that all things are made of tiny entities imperceptible to the senses, that were of many geometric shapes, which he called “atoms”—meaning ‘irreducible elements’. Though he had no means of discovering or proving this through empirical means, he nonetheless hit upon a conception that seemed reasonable at the time, and which, only twenty-five hundred years later would be shown to be, if not wholly accurate, an amazingly prescient theory of the atomic nature of matter, the intricacies of which were ferreted out in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of our current era. Of course, Democritus could not have

dreamed that these tiny ‘irreducible elements’ were really electrically charged wave-particles formed of the intense energy generated by the immense burst of divine Light that created the universe.

Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.E. to 40 C.E.), an Alexandrian Jew of the first century, was a follower of Plato; but he didn’t subscribe to Plato’s concept of the individual *Forms* or *Ideas* underlying each physical object. Rather, he saw the *Idea* of the universe as inhering entire in the Divine Mind, and which, borrowing from Heraclitus and the Stoics, he called the *Logos*. Philo explains, in the Platonist manner, that God has two aspects: the transcendent, of which nothing at all can be said; and the immanent aspect, the *Logos*, by which He is the governing Thought or Idea filling all the material universe:

“God is high above place and time ...He is contained by nothing but transcends all. *But though transcending what He has made, He nonetheless filled the universe with Himself.* [My italics.] ...When, therefore, the God-loving soul searches into the nature of the Existent, he enters on a quest of That which is beyond matter and beyond sight. And out of this quest there accrues to him a great boon—to comprehend the incomprehensible God.”⁵⁷

The *Logos*, as Philo describes it, is the Idea in the mind of God which is the archetypal pattern from which the design of all the physically manifested universe is produced. It is, in effect, the directive and organizational Intelligence of God that permeates all matter, bringing all into conformity with Its will and design. For Philo, God *thinks* the universe; He is continually *thinking* the universe. It is this underlying Thought which is the *Logos* of God, the subtle guide and governor of the material universe of our experience.

“The supremely generic is God, the next is the *Logos* of God; ⁵⁸ ...That which comes after God, even if it were the most venerable of all other things, holds second place, and was called feminine in contrast to the Creator of the universe, who is masculine. ⁵⁹

“That aspect of Him which transcends His powers cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure Being; but that power of His (the *Logos*) by which He made and ordered all things ...pervades the whole and passes through all the parts of the universe.”⁶⁰

Philo had experienced the unitive vision, and understood the spiritual foundation of our world; and he knew that that vision was not of his own making, but was a gift of God’s grace:

“Without Divine grace it is impossible to leave the ranks of mortality; [but] when grace fills the soul, it is possessed and inspired, ...and hastens to that most glorious and loveliest of visions, the vision of the Uncreated.⁶¹ The soul, stirred to its depths and maddened by heavenward yearning, [is] drawn by the truly Existent Being and pulled upward by Him.⁶²

“It is the characteristic of him who would see God not to leave the holy warfare without his crown, but to persevere till he reaps the prize of victory. And what victory garland more fitting or woven of rarer flowers than the clear and unalloyed vision of Him who IS. It is a worthy conflict that lies before the striving soul: to win eyes for the clear vision of Him Whom alone it is worth man’s while to see.⁶³ ...Go up, then, O soul, to the vision of Him who IS—go up quietly, mindfully, willingly, fearlessly, lovingly⁶⁴...[for] to know God is the highest happiness, and immortal life.⁶⁵ ...It is worth more than all wealth, private or public. For if the sight of elders or holy teachers, rulers or parents, moves one to reverence and modesty and zeal for a pure life, how great a support for virtue in our soul shall we find, who have learnt to pass beyond all things created, and to see That which is uncreated and divine, the highest good, the greatest Joy; nay, to speak the truth, That which is greater than the greatest, more beautiful than the greatest beauty, more blessed than the most blessed, more joyful than the joyfulest; aye, more perfect than any words such as these [can tell].”⁶⁶

The Wisdom of Solomon, an apocryphal book of the Bible,⁶⁷ written around the same time and place in which Philo flourished, speaks of the governing Spirit of God not as *Logos*, but as *Sophia*, or “Wisdom.” Wisdom, according to the anonymous author of this book, is “the artificer of all; ...[she] pervades and permeates all things...”

“She is an exhalation from the [creative] power of God, a pure effluence from the glory of the Almighty; therefore, nothing tainted insinuates itself into her. She is an effulgence of everlasting light, an unblemished mirror of the active power of God, and an image of His goodness. Though but one, she can do everything, and abiding in herself she renews all things; ...She is brighter than the sun and surpasses every constellation; compared to the light of day she is found more radiant; ...She stretches in might from pole to pole and effectively orders all things.”⁶⁸

According to this unknown author, *Wisdom* is the breath of God by which the universe comes into being. It is a breath of “everlasting light”, more radiant than the sun and all the constellations, that forms and effectively orders all things. Philo and the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* are in full agreement that the Divine Mind (as *Logos/Sophia*) directs, orders and controls every facet of the material universe. It is also she who graces the pure-hearted, bringing them to enlightenment through union with herself.

“She is an inexhaustible treasure for mankind, and those who acquire it attain friendship with God, commended by the gift derived from her instruction. ...I learned both what is hidden and what is manifest, for *Wisdom*, the artificer of all, taught me.
⁶⁹ ...Generation by generation she enters into holy souls and renders them friends of God and prophets ...”⁷⁰

Like Philo, the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* appears to have been graced with the vision of God, and he had seen that God breathes the universe into being with a tremendous effluence of light that becomes the vast universe. And that God’s very breath has inherent within it the power and wisdom to fashion matter and to bring the cosmos into order, to initiate life and bring intelligence to mankind. According to him, the material universe, formed of God’s light is governed by His inherent *Wisdom*, by which He organized and arranged the universe, and fashioned all life and

mankind to His will. In our modern conception as well, informed as it is by empirical science, we may come to understand that God manifested matter through His emanation of light, and permeated that universe of matter by virtue of His omnipresent Spirit, effectively informing all matter, directing its evolution, and fashioning all things according to the coordinated beauty of His design.

Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) is credited with ushering in a new perspective on Platonism—a “Neoplatonism”, based on his own mystical experience, but utilizing the terminology of Plato to give it a familiar expression. Though Plato had hinted of the ascent of the mind (soul) to God, Plotinus was the first to describe that mystical experience of union with the Divine in great detail. Like everyone else prior to the twentieth century, Plotinus was unclear about the origin and nature of matter, but he clearly delineated the spiritual hierarchy to which Plato had pointed. He reiterates and confirms, from his own unitive vision, a transcendent Godhead, an absolute Source of all Being, which he calls “the One”. Arising from that ineffable Godhead is a creative Power, which he calls *Nous*, “The Divine Mind”. The Divine Mind is the executive power of the One; It is God, the Creator, the initiator of the Light that forms the universe. And from that omniscient and omnipotent Power is emanated an extension of Itself, which Plotinus, like Plato, calls *Psyche*, or “Soul.” Soul is the immanent Divine Spirit that permeates the universe, guiding it, inspiring it, and bringing to it life and awareness, and leading each individual soul to awaken to its essential identity as the Divine Mind, its eternal source and Self.

Here are a few choice quotes from **Plotinus**:

Plotinus On The One:

“Deriving then from nothing other, entering into nothing other, in no way a comprised thing, there can be nothing above It. We need not, then, go seeking any other Principles. This—The One and The Good—is our First. Next follows the Divine Mind, [which is] the Primal Thinker. And upon this follows Soul. Such is the order in nature. The Spiritual realm allows no more than these and no fewer.⁷¹

“The One is all things and none of them. The Source of all things is not all things; and yet It is all things in a transcendental sense.⁷²

“It is infinite by right of being a pure Unity with nothing towards which to direct any partial content. Absolutely One, It has never known measure and stands outside of number, and so is under no limit either in regard to any external or within Itself; for any such determination would bring something of the dual into It. And, having no constituent parts, It accepts no pattern, and forms no shape.

“Reason recognizing It as such a nature, you may not hope to see It with mortal eyes, nor in any way that would be imagined by those who make sense the test of reality and so annul the supremely Real. For what [appears to us and] passes for the most truly existent is most truly non-existent—the thing of extension least real of all—while this unseen First is the source and principle of Being and sovereign over Reality.⁷³

“He is the First, the Authentic, immune from chance, from blind effect and happening. God is [the] cause of Himself. For Himself and of Himself, He is what He is, the first Self, the transcendent Self.”⁷⁴

Plotinus On The Divine Mind:

“There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is The One, whose nature we have sought to establish insofar as such matters lend themselves to proof. Upon The One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Divine Mind. Third comes the Principle, Soul. ...Thus, our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; ...⁷⁵

“From such a Unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence—any multiplicity, dyad, or number? Why has the Primal not

remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute Unity? ⁷⁶ ... [In other words, how does there come to be] a universe from an unbroken Unity, in which there appears no diversity, not even duality?

“It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It. In order that Being may be brought about, the Source must be no Being but Being’s generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed; and Its exuberance has produced something new; [and] this issue has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and so a Divine Mind.⁷⁷

“Here [in the Divine Mind] is contained all that is immortal: there is nothing here but Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. Here is rest unbroken: for how can that seek change, in which all is well? What need that reach to, which holds all within itself? What increase can that desire, which stands utterly achieved? All its content, thus, is perfect, that Itself may be perfect throughout, as holding nothing that is less than the Divine, nothing that is less than Intellective. Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired. For all belongs to it eternally and it holds the authentic Eternity imitated by Time which, circling round the Soul, makes towards the new thing and passes by the old. Soul deals with thing after thing—now Socrates, now a horse: always some one entity from among beings—but the Divine Mind is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity. This is pure Being in eternal actuality. Nowhere is there any future, for every then is a now; nor is there any past, for nothing there has ever ceased to be. Everything has taken its stand forever, an identity well pleased, we might say, to be as it is. And everything, in that entire content, is Divine Mind and Authentic Existence; and the total of all is Divine Mind entire and Being entire.⁷⁸

“The Divine Mind is the first Act of The Good [the One] and the first Existence; The Good remains stationary within Itself, but the Divine Mind acts in relation to It and, as it were, lives about It. And the Soul, outside, circles around the Divine Mind, and by gazing upon it, seeing into the depths of it, through it, sees God.”⁷⁹

Plotinus On The Soul:

“The authentic Reality [the One] gives life to the Intelligible [Spiritual] realm. The Divine Mind is the noblest of Its content, but It contains also souls, since every soul in this lower [earthly] sphere has come from there. *There* is the world of unembodied spirits, while to our world belong those that have entered body and undergone bodily division. *There* the Divine Mind is a concentrated all; nothing of it is distinguished or divided. And in that unitive realm all souls are concentrated also, with no spatial discrimination.

“The Divine Mind is forever repugnant to distinction and to partition; however, Soul, though without distinction and partition there, has a nature lending itself to divisional existence, and this division is secession, entry into body. [And so] in view of this seceding and the ensuing partition we may legitimately speak of it as a partible thing. But if so, how can it still be described as indivisible?

“[It remains indivisible] in that the secession is not of the entire Soul; something of it holds its ground: that in it which recoils from separate existence. The entity described as “both the undivided soul and the soul divided among bodies,” is a Soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius from a center.

“Thus, it is that, entering this [earthly] realm, it possesses still the vision inherent in that superior [indivisible] phase by virtue of which it maintains its integral nature unchanged. Even here

[on earth] it is not exclusively the partible soul: it is still the Impartible as well.⁸⁰

Soul, therefore, is, in this definite sense, one and many; the Ideal-Form [soul] residing in the body is many and one. Bodies themselves are exclusively many; the Supreme is exclusively one.⁸¹

“The souls of men ...have entered into that realm in a leap downward from the Supreme. Yet even they are not cut off from their origin, from the Divine Mind. It is not that they have come bringing the Spirit down in their fall; it is that though they have descended even to earth, yet their higher part holds forever above the heavens.⁸²

“Let every soul recall ...the truth that Soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all—whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky. It is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion. And it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as Soul brings them life or abandons them, but Soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.⁸³

“Once pure in the Spirit realm [within the Divine Mind], the soul too possesses that same unchangeableness: for it possesses identity of essence. When it is in that region it must of necessity enter into oneness with the Divine Mind by the sheer fact of its self-orientation, for by that intention all interval disappears; the soul advances and is taken into unison, and in that association, it becomes one with the Divine Mind—but not to its own destruction: the two are one, and [yet] two. In such a state there is no question of stage and change. The soul, motionless, would be intent upon its intellectual act, and in possession, simultaneously, of its self-awareness; for it has become one simultaneous existence with the Supreme.”⁸⁴

Plotinus On The Return:

“That which the soul must seek, That which sheds Its light upon the Divine Mind, leaving Its mark wherever It falls, surely we need not wonder if It has the power to draw [all back] to Itself, calling [the soul] back from every wandering to rest before It. From It came all and so there is nothing mightier; all is feeble before It. ⁸⁵

“This Light [from the Highest] shining within the soul enlightens it; that is, it makes the soul intellective, working it into likeness with itself, the Light above. Think of the traces of this Light upon the soul, then say to yourself that such, and more beautiful and broader and more radiant, is the Light itself. Thus, you will approach to the nature of the Divine Mind and the Spirit-realm, for it is this Light, Itself lit from above, which gives the soul its brighter life. ⁸⁶

“We may know we have had the vision when the soul has suddenly taken Light. This Light is from the Supreme and is the Supreme. ...The soul remains unlit without that vision; lit, it possesses what it sought. And this is the true end set before the soul, to take that Light, to see the Supreme by the Supreme and not by the light of any other principle: to see the Supreme which is also the means to the vision; for that which illumines the soul is That which it is to see, just as it is by the Sun’s own light that we see the Sun.

But how is this to be accomplished?

Let all else go. ⁸⁷

“Suppose the soul to have attained: The Highest has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence; she has turned away from all about her and made herself apt, beautiful to the utmost, brought into likeness with the Divine by those preparings and adornings which come unbidden to those growing ready for the vision. She has seen that presence suddenly manifesting within her, for there is nothing between. Here is no longer a duality but

a two-in-one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades. It is as lover and beloved here [on earth], in a copy of that union, long to blend. The soul has now no further awareness of being in body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being, not Being, not All. Any observation of such things falls away; the soul has neither time nor taste for them. This she sought and This she has found and on This she looks and not upon herself; and who she is that looks she has not leisure to know.

“Once There she will barter for This nothing the universe holds; not though one would make over the heavens entire to her. There is nothing higher than this, nothing of more good. Above This there is no passing; all the rest, however lofty, lies on the downward path. She is of perfect judgment and knows that This was her quest, that nothing is higher. Here can be no deceit; where could she come upon [something that is] truer than the Truth? And the Truth that she affirms, she is herself; but all the affirmation is later and is silent. In this happiness she knows beyond delusion that she is happy; for this is no affirmation of an excited body but of a soul become again what she was in the time of her early joy. All that she had welcomed of old—office, power, wealth, beauty, knowledge—of all she tells her scorn as she never could, had she not found their better. Linked to This she can fear no disaster, not even if she has had the vision but once. Let everything about her fall to pieces, she wouldn’t mind if only she might be wholly with This, so huge [is] the happiness she has won to.”⁸⁸

It was these early figures, then, who helped to establish the foundations of Western mystical theology that would be reiterated and expanded upon by the Christian and Islamic mystics of later centuries.

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* * *

The Mystical Tradition of Platonism

The twentieth century philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, said that “all philosophy is but so many footnotes to Plato”—and it’s certainly true that Plato furnished many of the core ideas upon which all subsequent Western philosophy draws. Plato’s main teacher and predecessor, Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.), himself drawing on the Orphic and Pythagorean teachings, had apparently been disinclined to set his thoughts in writing; rather, it was his student, Plato (427-347 B.C.E.), who, by putting his master’s teachings into

the form of written conversations, or dialogues, gave voice to the Spiritual philosophy that has come to be known as Platonism.

Plato established the notion of the immortality of the Spirit, or soul, and its distinction from the body, in his Dialogue, *Phaedo*, where Socrates, while awaiting execution, assures his companions that his impending departure, as a soul, from the body was not a matter for sadness or regret:

Socrates: "In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body, and are not surfeited with the bodily nature, but keep ourselves pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And thus, having got rid of the foolishness of the body, we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere, which is no other than 'the light of truth.'

"...But O my friend, if this be true, there is great reason to hope that, going whither I go, when I have come to the end of my journey, I shall attain that which has been the pursuit of my life. And therefore, I go on my way rejoicing, and not I only, but every other man who believes that his mind has been made ready and that he is in a manner purified."

"Certainly," replied Simmias.

"And what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body, as I was saying before; the habit of the soul gathering and collecting herself into herself from all sides out of the body; the dwelling in her own place alone, as in another life, so also in this, as far as she can; —the release of the soul from the chains of the body?"

"Very true," he said.

"...And the true philosophers, and they only, are ever seeking to release the soul. Is not the separation and release of the soul from the body their especial study?"

"That is true."

"And, as I was saying at first, there would be a ridiculous contradiction in men studying to live as nearly as they can in a state of death, and yet repining when it comes upon them." ¹

While here and there throughout the meandering Dialogues of Plato we may find sparkling jewels of mystical insight, we find nothing like a systematic metaphysics, or even a clear outline of a consistent metaphysical vision. But more than five hundred and fifty years after the death of Plato, the great mystic-philosopher, Plotinus (205-270 C.E.), born in Lycopolis, Egypt, and transplanted to Rome, would formulate a more comprehensive metaphysics, a spiritual perspective, based, not only upon the teachings of Socrates cum Plato, but upon his own visionary experience as well. It is this mystical perspective which would ultimately be labeled by scholars as *Neoplatonism* ("the new Platonism").

In the centuries prior to Plotinus, the subject of the human experience of the Divine had always been shrouded in secrecy. In ancient Greek and Roman societies, the rare and subtle experience referred to as 'mystical experience' was regarded as belonging exclusively to the secret 'mystery' schools such as the Eleusinian, Mithraic, and Orphic mystery schools. Teachings about mysticism or mystical experience could be found only among the Adepts and initiates of those secret schools. Plotinus, living in Rome in the third century of the Current Era, repeated the ancient warning that matters relating to mystical experience were "Not to be told, not to be written." The obvious reason for this is that, in the hands of the unlearned, the uninitiated, mystical knowledge is very likely to be misinterpreted and misrepresented, and those who spoke of it ran the risk of being persecuted by the ignorant. No doubt, in those times, the example of Jesus was a strong deterrent to any mystics who might have thought of going public.

Though his own interior experience was certainly comparable to that of Jesus, Plotinus (only a couple of centuries after him) knew that he could not openly announce his mystical experience to the commoners of Rome; rather, he spoke of his own mystical experience with only a

few close students of philosophy, and his circle was very exclusive and very secret. Even to this day, only the few, the elite among spiritual seekers, are able to access, appreciate, and find joy in the great spiritual wisdom of Plotinus. And yet, it seems to me, there is so much benefit to be had by the entire society through an open sharing of spiritual knowledge by those to whom it is revealed, and so much loss accrued to the whole society without it, that I believe the benefit of sharing this knowledge greatly outweighs the risk of its corruption by the foolish. Great, liberating, knowledge is not to be hidden and relegated to whispers behind doors. The more it is shared, the more accepted it will become, and understanding will increase in even greater circles, expanding to benefit more of those who would, otherwise, suffer in the dark and lonely blindness of ignorance. It seems to me that the world has already done that for long enough!

Both Jesus and Plotinus had experienced the union of the soul with God. Jesus attempted to explain his experience in the language and context of his Judaic heritage; Plotinus attempted to explain it in the language and context of Platonist philosophy. Plotinus had experienced 'the vision of God', and, in his attempt to explain it, he formulated a metaphysics relying heavily upon the terminology of Plato that was still current at the time. However, it is not a metaphysics based *solely* on a prior metaphysics or on rational speculation, like some others, but one that is based primarily on his own unitary vision in the contemplative state, which vision he is said to have experienced on at least four occasions.

Following Plato's metaphysical lead, Plotinus describes the one Spirit as emanating or radiating itself in every direction to inhabit the subtle and manifest universe. He describes the successive realms of Spirit as three: The One, The Divine Mind (*Nous*), and Soul, in a manner analogous to the successive stages of radiation expanding from the Sun. Here are his own words:

"There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is The One, ... Upon the One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Divine Mind. Third comes the Principle, Soul. ... Thus, our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; ²

"There is, we may say, something that is the Center; about It, a circle of light shed from It; then, around Center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light ..." ³

It must be noted that, in this representation by Plotinus, these three "principles" are not to be thought of as separate, independent entities; it is a *causal* progression only. It is the One whose creative Power is called 'the Divine Mind'; and it is the creative Power of the One whose radiance spreads as Soul. Despite the names given to these "layers", there is never anything but the One, and only the One, filling all.

'The One' represents for Plotinus the transcendent Absolute, the Unmanifest Ground. It is prior to the creative activity of the Divine Mind; and so, in the One, the universe of time and space does not even exist. The One is the absolute Void, the indescribable Godhead. It is the ultimate Identity of all. In the Vedic tradition, It is called "Brahman", in the Taoist tradition, the "Tao," and in the Christian writings of Meister Eckhart, "*Gottheit*". The *active* principle, the creative Power of the One, Plotinus calls 'The Divine Mind' (*Nous*). And 'Soul' (*psyche*) is the radiation of the Divine Mind into the intelligible as well as the phenomenal universe.

Plotinus pointed out in his *Enneads* that the Absolute, who is the ultimate Source and foundation of all, cannot be described or even named accurately, since He/It is prior to all qualities, prior even to the designation of 'Being'. Nonetheless, he names It "the One", or he uses Plato's previous designation, "the Good." But he is always quick to stipulate that any descriptive name limits and qualifies the Absolute, and thereby misrepresents It:

"The All-Transcendent, utterly void of multiplicity, is Unity's Self, independent of all else... It is the great Beginning, wholly and truly One. All life belongs to It. ⁴ ...The One is, in truth, beyond all statement; whatever you say would limit It; the All Transcendent has no name. ⁵ ... [It] is That which is the truly Existent. ... It is the Source from which all that appears to exist derives that appearance. ⁶

"... Everywhere one and whole, It is at rest throughout. But, ... in Its very non-action It magnificently operates and in Its very self-being It produces everything by Its Power. ⁷

"... This Absolute is none of the things of which It is the Source; Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It—not existence, not essence, not life—It transcends all these. But possess

yourself of It by the very elimination of [individual] being, and you hold a marvel! Thrusting forward to This, attaining, and resting in Its content, seek to grasp It more and more, understanding It by that intuitive thrust alone, but knowing Its greatness by the beings that follow upon It and exist by Its power." ⁸

Today, we use the word "Godhead", after Meister Eckhart's *Gottheit*, to represent the Absolute, ineffable One, with the understanding that this too is merely a shorthand pointer to That which can never be conceived or expressed by the human mind. God may be directly *experienced*, but never adequately captured in thought or language. For this reason, a clear and rational comprehension or description of the One is concealed from our understanding. An ancient saying, quoted by both Plato and Saint Paul, reminds us that "We see now but vaguely, as through a darkened glass; but then (meaning: 'when we have direct *vision* of God') we shall see as though face to face."

While the One cannot be described or clearly comprehended by the intellect, nonetheless, we can get a sense of It by analogy with our own nature, since we are made in Its image. Like the eternal Consciousness, our own individual consciousness is one and unchanging, while the energetic outpouring of thought is multiple and subject to flux. Our thoughts are contained as potentiality in our own consciousness, which is their substratum and source, and yet these thoughts, even when given expression, do not in any way affect that consciousness, any more than clouds passing through the sky alters or affects the sky. This, I believe, is analogous to the unity of the One and Its Creative Power; for while the One remains transcendent, unaltered, and unaffected, Its energetic outpouring of creativity continues apace.

And so, we are able to recognize these two aspects of our own minds as in some way comparable to the two aspects of God: The One (the pure Absolute), and His Creative Power. They are not two separate entities, of course, any more than those two aspects of our own minds are separated. They are one, yet they have a semblance of duality, since one is causally primary to the other, just as, while the Sun and the light it radiates are one, the Sun is primary to its radiance.

"The Divine Mind is the first Act of The One and the first Existence; The One remains stationary within Itself, but the Divine Mind acts in relation to It and, as it were, lives about It. And the Soul, outside, circles around the Divine Mind, and by gazing upon it, seeing into the depths of it, through it sees God." ⁹

According to Plotinus, we may think of Soul as a spreading Field radiating from the Divine Mind. It is the outspreading light of Divine Intelligence, the invisible radiation of the Divine Consciousness, that manifests as the intelligible (spiritual) world. Soul is one undivided radiance, and though it contains souls, they are as yet unmanifest, undifferentiated. We must remember that, for Plotinus, Soul does not consist of an ethereal substance; it is a projection of the conscious intelligence of the Divine Mind.

Unlike the conception of Moses, in which God's Spirit, or Soul, had been imparted to man alone, Plotinus regarded Soul as a radiation of God's Spirit imparted to the entire universe, permeating and residing in every existent form. Here is Plotinus' vision of this Divine Soul emanation in his own words:

"Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky; it is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion; and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them life or abandons them, but soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.

"How life was purveyed to the universe of things and to the separate beings in it may be thus conceived:

"...Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoils stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens. Into that heaven, all at rest, let the great Soul be conceived to roll inward at every point, penetrating, permeating, from all sides pouring in its

light. As the rays of the sun throwing their brilliance upon a lowering cloud make it gleam all gold, so the Soul entering the material expanse of the heavens has given life, has given immortality. What was abject it has lifted up; and the heavenly system, moved now in endless motion by the Soul that leads it in wisdom, has become a living and a blessed thing. The Soul domiciled within, it takes worth where, before the Soul, it was stark body—clay and water—or, rather, the blankness of Matter, the absence of Being...

"The Soul's nature and power will be brought out more clearly, more brilliantly, if we consider how it envelops the heavenly system and guides all to its purposes: for it has bestowed itself upon all that huge expanse so that every interval, small and great alike, all has been ensouled.

"...By the power of the Soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit; through Soul this universe is a god. And the sun is a god because it is ensouled; so too the stars; and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of Soul...

"This, by which the gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all: and our own soul is of that same Ideal nature, so that to consider it, purified, freed from all accrument, is to recognize in ourselves that same value which we have found Soul to be, honorable above all that is bodily." ¹⁰

For us, the most obvious manifestation of God's Spirit, or Soul, is our very life and consciousness; but if Plotinus is correct—that Soul is the guiding Intelligence in all of creation—then Spirit, or Soul, must be regarded as a presence informing the very evolution of matter and the cosmos from the Beginning. For Plotinus, Soul is the intelligent organizing principle that impresses its order upon all the matter in the universe. In the language of contemporary knowledge, we would say that Soul is the all-pervading Intelligence that coalesces wave-particles into structures such as atoms, molecules, cells; and organizes them into microbiological structures such as amoeba and bacteria, into photosynthesizing vegetation and aquatic creatures, becoming the very life-pulse of all that lives and moves. Matter alone has no abilities such as these; it is Soul that permeates the expanding heavens and earth, bringing living organization into matter and enabling

replication and evolutionary change. Soul is the guiding intelligence, the evolutionary force, and the breath of Life permeating all the universe.

The organizing influence of Soul in the structuring of the material universe, on either the microcosmic or macrocosmic level, is not empirically evident; but cumulatively, the various “fine-tuned” developments in the ordering of the simplest atoms to the grandest galaxies leads us to discern a purposeful intelligence at work that has been recognized even by hardened empiricists, who have dubbed it “the anthropic principle”. This principle derives from the increasing recognition on the part of scientific observers that nature appears from the beginning, at every step, and in countless ways, to be teleologically structured with an innate intention toward the emergence of human life-forms. May we not accept this principle as evidence of the presence of an invisible guiding intelligence such as that Plotinus labeled “Soul”?

We may also wonder if Soul, the all-pervading Intelligence of God, is, indeed, the “unified force” responsible for the manifestation of the weak, strong, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces, binding the elements of this universe together. Could it also explain the phenomenon of quantum interconnectedness known as ‘quantum entanglement’, which requires a medium of transmission allowing for the instantaneous relaying of information? Mightn’t this currently unexplained phenomenon also be attributable to an all-pervading consciousness extending throughout the universe, such as that Plotinus refers to as ‘Soul’?

An all-pervading consciousness permeating all the universe may be difficult to recognize in what we regard as *inert* matter, but what of living forms? A mother’s ovum becomes impregnated by the father’s sperm, and a single cell is formed in her uterus. The cell divides and divides again and again. Some of the cells become eyes; others become fingers; others become brain cells, others blood or ears. Who tells each cell what it is to become? How does it know where to go, and what form it is to take? Biologists haven’t a clue. Perhaps it is an invisible intelligence that operates within each cell of the nascent embryo to direct and guide its formation—something akin to what we’ve described as an all-pervasive Soul.

And if that conscious Soul lives throughout the universe, in the billions of galaxies, and in the countless stars and planets, then our own soul is

connected to and part of that universal Soul. No doubt, it will one day be universally understood that the archetypal energies and angular relationships of the proximate heavenly bodies do indeed correspond meaningfully to the physical and psychical activities of humanity on earth through the medium of an all-pervasive Soul. Such correspondences do not operate by any law of physics, but by a universal sympathy too subtle for physical measurement. There have always been a few who have been aware of and understood these meaningful correspondences, but the universal comprehension of their full significance we must leave to future generations.

What is currently apparent to most of us, however, is that Soul is the life-force that transforms inert matter into living, breathing entities; and that Soul is the conscious intelligence that stirs the minds of men, acting as an evolutionary force to lead them to the knowledge of their true source and being, their own all-pervading Divine Self. This pervasion of the material universe by Soul is at the foundation of Plotinus' metaphysical vision. In his vision, Soul, emanated from the Divine Mind, has no physical parameters; It does not consist of mass or energy; It is not a substance that extends as a radiation into space. It is entirely beyond comparison with physical spatio-temporal phenomena. And yet, because our language is grounded in phenomenal temporality, and we have only these language tools in use when attempting to convey the concept of a noumenal Soul, we are often at a loss to even formulate a clear conception of Soul.

One might reasonably ask, "Is it even necessary for God to extend throughout space as Soul in order to manifest in bodies? Isn't He already all-pervasive, and inherent in everything that exists?" And the answer is "Yes, He is all-pervasive throughout the universe—and it is just this all-pervasiveness of God that we call 'Soul.'"

Unfortunately, however, "Soul" is a word that carries with it some negative overtones for many of us. To many, it suggests a distinct personal entity; or we may be reminded of the misty imaginings conjured up during the religious instructions of our childhood. It is a word that has dwindled from our modern vocabulary due to such associations, and due also to its seeming vagueness. But let us understand "Soul", as Plotinus did, as a term intended to represent the ineffable Intelligence that wafts from the Divine Mind, pervading everything, invisibly present in every place, enlivening every life-

form, imbuing us with vitality, consciousness and intelligence; and constituting the medium connecting us to God. Soul is invisible and immaterial; it cannot even be conceived of or imagined, and yet it is impossible to deny that such a Divine principle exists, and operates, and rules over all. It is in fact the one Consciousness in which the universe and all its contents resides. And so, if we must represent this Divine universal presence with a word, let us agree to call it “Soul.”

Soul pervades, and it is the universe of time, space and form that is pervaded; and that too is His production. But, unlike Soul, which is the eternal radiance of God’s very Consciousness and Being, the material universe is made of a transient form-producing burst of Divine Energy.

So, we must see that, in Plotinus’ vision, as well as that of the Judaic scriptures, it is not the material form that constitutes our true and eternal identity, but it is, rather, the Divine Soul that is our eternal source of life and joy, and is indeed a ray of the one eternal Consciousness, and the link by which we are connected to the one eternal Self, by which we may, with His grace, ascend to the knowledge of our identity with that highest Divinity.

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10. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.2-3; *The Three Initial Hypostases*.

The Hermetics

One of the authentic mystical traditions, which historians now include under the heading of “Gnostic”, is the Hermetic tradition. While the Hermetic tradition appears to have originated in Egypt, it had its greatest influence on the scholars and philosophers of the West. Up until the 17th century, when a Greek scholar named Isaac Casaubon (d. 1614 C.E.), corrected their dating, the body of writings called the *Corpus Hermetica* was considered to be of very ancient origin. They are purportedly the writings of Hermes (the Egyptian Thoth, identified with Mercury), who is usually given the title, “Trismegistus” (thrice great). He was said to be a great mystic and prophet, descended from Atlas and Prometheus, who lived only shortly after Moses (ca. 1200 B.C.E.). This ancient genealogy was believed to be accurate even by such Christian notables as Lactantius and, later, St. Augustine. It is now clear, however, that *the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were written during that mystically prolific period from the 1st to the 3rd centuries of the Current Era*. Therefore, they must be regarded as a portion, though a distinct portion, of the Gnostic movement of that time; and their author must be considered to have had access to the writings of Philo, and perhaps even to the Neoplatonist writings of their contemporary, Plotinus.

In its Greek form, the *Corpus Hermetica* was known and widely influential during those early centuries, but fell into obscurity during later centuries, until it was translated from a Greek manuscript into Latin by Marcilio Ficino in 1463. Ficino brought the Hermetic writings into great prominence during the early Renaissance period, still believing it to be the work of a pre-Christian and pre-Socratic Egyptian sage of great antiquity. The diverse body of writings known as *Hermetica* is divided into two main books: *Asclepius* (“On The Divine Will”) and *Poimander* (“On The Power And Wisdom Of God”). They vary in content from purely mystical theology to the lore of magic and astrology. It is not within our province to examine here the astrological and magical elements of the *Corpus Hermetica*, but the mystical portions, among the most noteworthy writings of this period, deserve extensive quotation. The dialogues between God and Hermes and between Hermes and his son in *Poimander* are some of the most beautiful and authentic mystical utterances ever written.

Unlike the degenerate forms of Gnosticism, in which a Dualistic cosmology is asserted, the Hermetic writings are predominantly Nondual, and are based on genuine mystical vision. In the *Poimander*, Hermes experiences God as an infinite Light, which he describes as “That which is unpolluted, which has no limit, no color, no form, is motionless, naked, shining, which can only be apprehended by Itself, the unalterable Good, the Incorporeal.” That infinite Light is the Divine Mind (*Nous*), which speaks to Hermes, telling him, “This Light is I, Myself, thy God ... and the luminous Word (*Logos*) issuing from Me is the Son of God.”¹ This characterization of the creative Power of God as “the Son” is also mentioned in *Asclepius*:

“The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have the right to call God, ... made the second God [the Logos] visible and sensible... He made him first, and alone, and one only; and he appeared to Him beautiful, and most full of good things; and He hallowed him and altogether loved him as His own Son.”²

As we have seen, the designation of God’s creative Power as God’s “only begotten Son” did not originate with the early Christians but was a designation popular since Philo; and is merely another analogical attempt to differentiate the creative Impulse of God from the primal Essence, universally designated as the “Father” of all. The “Son” is that divine creative Power which, in many other traditions, is called the “Mother”; but, of course, these designations of gender are figurative only, being merely arbitrary symbols of That which is beyond all gender. They represent the mystic’s attempt to portray, with anthropomorphic symbols, the bond of relationship existing between the primal Source and Its Creative Power.

The Divine Mind, continuing to speak to Hermes, explains how It manifests the world through Its Logos:

“The eternal [Logos] is the Power of God, and the work of the eternal [Logos] is the world, which has no beginning, but is continually becoming by the activity of the eternal [Logos]. Therefore, nothing that constitutes the world will ever perish or be destroyed, for the eternal [Logos] is imperishable. All this great body of the world is a Soul, full of intellect and of God, who fills it within and without and vivifies everything.

“Contemplate through Me [the Divine Mind], the world and consider its beauty. ... See that all things are full of light. See the earth, settled in the midst of all, the great nurse who nourishes all earthly creatures. All is full of Soul, and all beings are in movement. Who has created these things? The one God, for God is one. You see that the world is always one, the Sun, one; the moon, one; the divine activity, one; God, too, is one. And since all is living, and Life is also one, God is certainly one. It is by the action of God that all things come into being...

“...All that is, He contains within Himself like thoughts: the world, Himself, the All. Therefore, unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand God; for like is not intelligible save to the like. Make yourself grow to a greatness beyond measure; by a leap [of intellect], free yourself from the body; raise yourself above all time, become Eternity; then you will understand God.

“Believe that nothing is impossible for you; think yourself immortal and capable of understanding all, all arts, all sciences, the nature of every living being. Mount higher than the highest height; descend lower than the lowest depth. Draw into yourself all sensations of everything created, fire and water, the dry and the moist, imagining that you are everywhere, on earth, in the sea, in the sky; that you are not yet born, in the maternal womb, adolescent, old, dead, beyond death. If you embrace in your thought all things at once—all times, places, substances, qualities, quantities—you may understand God. Say no longer that God is invisible. Do not speak thus, for what is more manifest than God? He has created all only that you may see it through the beings. For that is the miraculous power of God, to show Himself through all beings. For nothing is invisible, not even the incorporeal. The intellect makes itself visible in the act of thinking; God makes Himself visible in the act of creating.”³

In yet another dialogue, this time between Hermes and his son, Tat, the identity of God, man, and the world is further elucidated:

“HERMES: The intellect, O Tat, is drawn from the very substance of God. In men, this intellect is God; and so, some men are gods, and their humanity is near to the Divine. When man is not guided by intellect, he falls below himself into an animal state. All men are subject to Destiny, but those in possession of the Logos, which commands the intellect from within, are not under it in the same manner as others. God’s two gifts to man of intellect and the Logos have the same value as immortality. If man makes right use of these, he differs in no way from the immortals.

“The world, too, is a god, image of a greater God. United to Him and performing the order and will of the Father, it is the totality of life. There is nothing in it, through all the duration of the cyclic return willed by the Father, which is not alive. The Father has willed that the world should be living so long as it keeps its cohesion; hence the world is necessarily God. How then could it be that, in that which is God, the image of the One, there should be dead things? For death is corruption, and corruption is destruction, and it is impossible that anything of God could be destroyed.

“TAT: Do not the living beings in the world die, O father, although they are parts of the world?

“HERMES: Hush, my child, for you are led into error by the appearance of the phenomenon. Living beings do not die, but, being composite bodies, they are dissolved; this is not death but the dissolution of a mixture. If they are dissolved, it is not to be destroyed but to be renewed... Contemplate then the beautiful arrangement of the world and see that it is alive, and that all matter is full of life.

“TAT: Is God then in matter, O father?

“HERMES: Where could matter be placed if it existed apart from God [who is infinite]? Would it not be but a confused mass, unless it were ordered? And if it is ordered, by whom is it ordered? The energies which operate in it are parts of God.

Whether you speak of matter or bodies or substance, know that all these are the energy of God, of the God who is all. In the All there is nothing which is not God. Adore this teaching, my child, and hold it sacred.”⁴

This teaching is, indeed, the perennial teaching of all mystics; we find it in the Upanishads, in the words of the Buddha, Jesus, and all others who have seen the unitive Truth of all existence. And while these teachings, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, are not as ancient as once believed, they are nonetheless remarkable for their brilliant clarity, depth of knowledge, and uncompromising wisdom. Many times, throughout the course of history, they have been rediscovered, reexamined, and re-appreciated; and, even today, they wield great fascination for students of mystical theology. However, we still know very little about the real Hermes—if he existed at all, and nothing of the 2nd or 3rd century author who wrote such magnificent examples of the perennial philosophy under his name. We cannot even be certain of whether he was an Egyptian, Greek, or Jew. But we are grateful for his testimonies and count him among the greatest and wisest of the seers of God, whose teachings have served to illumine countless generations along the way.

NOTES:

1. *Corpus Hermeticum, Poimander*: 1.11; based on Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno And The Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1964; p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, *Corpus Hermeticum, Asclepius*: II; pp. 42-43.
3. *Ibid.*, *Corpus Hermeticum, Poimander*: 1.11; pp. 31-32.
4. *Ibid.*, *Corpus Hermeticum, Poimander*: 1.12; pp. 33-34.

* * *

33. THE MYSTICAL TRADITIONS OF INDIA

**A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision
by Swami Abhayananda
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(last revised, 7-3-20)**

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PART ONE HINDUISM

I. The Vedic Hymnists

When we attempt to discover the origins of mysticism, previous to the existence of written testimonies of mystical experience, we enter a dim, dark realm. For it is extremely difficult to ascertain whether or not a mystical philosophy was possessed by men living in a preliterate period. Without the evidence of written documents, one must rely only on the slim evidence provided by the scattered artifacts taken from the ruins of ancient cities. In the case of India, the surprisingly large and elaborate cities unearthed at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro prove the existence of the remarkably developed civilizations of the Dravidian people who lived in the Indus Valley perhaps as far back as 2500 B.C.E.

Among the artifacts found in these cities was a seal containing a male figure which may be the prototype of the Father-God, Shiva (*Figure 7*), whose epithets are *Pashupati*, "Lord of all creatures," *Maheshvar*, "Great Lord", and *Yogeshvar*, "Lord of yoga." He is shown in his three-faced aspect, with a large crown of horns, sitting cross-legged in contemplation, with an erect penis; and he is surrounded by Shiva's traditional symbol, the bull, and other animals. In addition, there were found a number of phallus-shaped stones, known as *lingams*, which are also traditionally representative of Shiva, the world-transcending Absolute.

Along with these representations of the Father-God, however, were found a number of figurines and emblems of the Mother-Goddess, identifiable as Shakti, the fertile Mother of all creation. She is shown in one figure in a dancing pose, and in a seal from Harappa she is shown standing on her head, her legs apart, with a plant or tree growing from her womb (*Figure 8*). There were also found a number of ring-shaped stones, called *yonis*, which are traditionally associated with Shakti, the Female principle of generation. And even a few figurines were found which appear to be androgynous, having breasts as well as what appear to be male genitals.

From the scant evidence found in these excavations we may assume that a mystical religious view which recognized the dual principles of the Absolute and Its creative manifestory-Power as complementary aspects of the one Reality existed and flourished even in so remote a time. We are led to

believe, therefore, that the religious view of these ancient peoples was inspired by one or more seers of the ineffable duality-in-Unity which has been described in more explicit and intelligible terms by mystics of a later era. Yet, however convincing this evidence may be, it cannot be considered conclusive, but must remain forever a matter of conjecture.

Nevertheless, if we do accept this evidence, from the pre-Aryan (Dravidian) civilization, of a full-blown Shiva-Shakti mythology, we may trace the manifestation of the Shaivite tradition to these pre-Aryan peoples, and account for the appearance of two separately developing traditions among the early Indian peoples: one, the long-established (*Shaivite*) tradition of the aboriginal races, and the other, the imported Vedic pantheon of the invading Aryans. For the Dravidian population, the Absolute Being was, or became, known as *Shiva*, and His world-manifesting Power was called *Shakti*; while the Aryan tradition eventually adopted the name, *Brahman* for the Absolute principle, and *Maya* for Its world-manifesting Energy. And, while these two traditions eventually intermingled and became recognized by the wise as representative of a common and identical worldview, for many centuries each retained a semblance of independence while coexisting alongside one another.

The earliest written records from India to convey the mystical view of Unity are found in the collection of songs of devotion and ceremonial liturgy known as the *Vedas* (“Wisdom”). The Vedas were originally part of an orally transmitted legacy of the Aryans, dating from 2000-1500 B.C.E., which was only transmitted to writing centuries later. The *Aryans* (“Kinsmen”) entered India from the northwest via Persia and Afghanistan, originating, it is believed, from somewhere in Central Asia. They were a light-skinned race who conquered and absorbed the earlier Indus Valley civilization of the dark-skinned Dravidian peoples, the builders of the vast complex cities at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. What later came to be called the civilization of the “Hindus” (a corruption of *Sindhu*, the name of the river which once served as the nation’s northernmost perimeter), is an amalgam of these two cultures, a sifting and blending of two independent traditions whose individual traces can still be found in the divergent racial and religious traditions of present-day India.

For the early Aryan interlopers, the one God of all was called by a great variety of names, according to the qualities intended to be praised. Here, for example, in the following Vedic verses, He is addressed as *Visvakarma* (“the all-Creator”):

O Visvakarma, Thou art our Father, our Creator, Maker;
Thou knowest every place and every creature.

To Thee, by whom the names of the gods were given,
All creatures turn in prayer. ¹

The Female Divinity was called *Prthivi* (“Nature”); and in a prayer to Her, the seer cries:

May Earth pour out her milk for us, as a mother unto me her son.

O *Prthivi*, beautiful are Thy forests, and beautiful are Thy hills and snow-clad mountains. ²

In yet another song from the Rig Veda, in which the Father-God is spoken of as *Prajapati* (“Lord of all creatures”), His Female Power of manifestation is called, not *Prthivi*, but *Vac* (“Speech” or “Word”):

In truth *Prajapati* is the Father of the world; With Him was *Vac*, the other aspect of Himself. With Her, He begat life.

She conceived; and going forth from Him, She formed all creatures. And then, once again, She is re-absorbed into *Prajapati*. ³

This is a depiction of Creation almost identical to the Egyptian and Judaic ones appearing around the same time (ca. 1500 B.C.E.) and is amazingly similar to the opening paragraph of the Fourth Gospel by the Christian evangelist, John. Here, once again, we have a symbolic representation of the perennial vision of the mystic who perceives the Absolute and Its manifestory Power as an ineffable duality-in-Unity and characterizes It as the universal Father-Mother.

We find in the Vedas many different names for the Father-God, each representative of a special power or quality of the one Being. Sometimes He was called *Dyaus*, “the Almighty”, or *Varuna*, the power of the wind; sometimes He was *Indra*, whose thunderbolts brought the rain. But as time went on, these various epithets came to be recognized as but various aspects of the same one Lord:

They call Him *Indra*, *Mitra*, *Varuna*, or *Agni*, or *Garutmat*, the heavenly bird. Reality (*Sat*) is one; learned men call It by various names, such as *Agni*, *Yama*, or *Matarisvan*. ⁴

Too often, men take the names of God, which accumulate over the centuries to represent separate and distinct entities, and then pit them one against the other. This was true of the early poets and mythologizers of the Vedas as well. As soon as one tribe or civilization absorbed another, it established its own name for God as the superior and relegated the subjugated people's name for God to an inferior position. In this way, a polytheistic mythology accumulated in no time, peopled with all manner of anthropomorphized gods. This, however, is the work of the priests and mythologizers, not of the seers. As one Vedic mystic put it:

With words, priests and poets make into many the hidden
Reality, which is but One. ⁵

The Vedas are an amalgamated collection of many songs written by priests, sages, legalists, rulers and poets of the early Aryans, and they run the gamut from lyrical devotion to ceremonial doctrine, from primitive superstition to high philosophy. They represent not only a broad extent of time—perhaps a thousand years of development—but also a wide divergence of intellects. It was the poets and priests contributing to the Vedas who fashioned the liturgical and legal traditions of subsequent generations, but it was some unnamed mystic or mystics who gave expression to the exalted vision of Unity which is the cornerstone of the Vedas and the foundation upon which rests the great Nondual tradition of Vedanta.

Others may attempt to speak of such things, but it is only the mystic whose words are capable of conveying the certainty and authority which is born of true experience. Here, in the *Creation Hymn* (X:129) from the Rig Veda, we have a description of the primal Reality prior to the manifestation of the world by a sage who had seen It for himself. In one of the oldest extant declarations of a true mystic, that one Beginning place of all things is described:

1. Then, neither the non-Real (*asat*) nor the Real (*sat*) existed. There was no sky then, nor the heavens beyond it. What was contained by what, and where, and who sheltered it?

What unfathomed depths, what cosmic ocean, existed then?

2. Then, neither death nor deathlessness existed; Between day and night there was as yet no distinction.

That ONE (*tad ekam*), by Its own power (*svadha*) breathlessly breathed. ⁶

First, let us understand that prior to the existence of all the pairs of opposites, such as “the Real” (*sat*) and “the unreal” (*asat*), “death” and “deathlessness”, “day” and “night”, there was only the “ONE”. Nothing else existed. Then the Hymnist explains how, within *tad ekam*, that ONE, that Nondual Existence, a creative impulse arose, giving expression to both the Real and the unreal, both the Divine Source and the manifestation of the illusory universe:

3. In the beginning, darkness lay wrapped in darkness; All was one undifferentiated (*apraketa*) sea (*salila*). Then, within that one undifferentiated Existence,

[Something] arose by the heat of concentrated energy (*tapas*).

4. What arose in That in the beginning was Desire (*kama*), [Which is] the primal seed of mind (*manas*). The wise, having searched deep within their own hearts, Have perceived the bond (*bandha*) between the Real (*sat*) and the unreal (*asat*).

Mystics of succeeding generations, who have seen THAT in the depths of contemplation for themselves, have recognized the author of the above Hymn as one who had also known “the mystical vision.” He was, himself, one of those sages he describes, who, searching deep within themselves, perceived “the bond between the Real and the unreal.” He had seen THAT from which all Creation emanates; for in that mystical experience of unity, one goes back—not temporally, but causally—to the Beginning of things, to that eternal, unmoving Consciousness from which the world-manifestation springs forth. There, in that perfect Stillness, night and day, life and death, do not exist; they are indistinguishable in that state prior to the coming into being of all such opposites. All these opposites, these complements, rely for their existence on an initial differentiation within the One, creating a perceiver and a perceived.

The subtle source of that differentiation, says our mystic, is “Desire;” i.e., the impulse within the One to create within Itself an object, an “other,” for the purpose of experiencing enjoyment. Is it not the same with us? Does not the same subtle process occur in all our own mental constructions? First, arises a desire, followed by the formation of a thought or fantasy to gratify the desire, and then delectation. It is this subtle movement of desire which comes into expression as mind (*manas*) or mentation; and, by the production of mental imagery, we have created within our integral consciousness an artificial duality: a *seer* (the witnessing subject) and a *seen* (the object of inner vision). And so, within ourselves, we experience a microcosmic reproduction of the process, which occurs as universal Creation within the one Mind. Universal Destruction is likewise mirrored in the dissolution of a thought within the mind, as we return to self-awareness.

5. They (the wise) have stretched the cord (*rashmi*) of their vision [to encompass the Truth],

And they have perceived what is higher and lower: The mighty powers [of Nature] are made fertile By that ONE who is their Source.

Below [i.e., secondary] is the creative Energy (*svadha*), And above [i.e., primary] is the Divine Will (*prayati*).

It is, we are reminded, the one Divine Consciousness, which is the primary Reality (*sat*); the thought-creation is but illusion (*asat*). The Divine Will (*prayati*) is superior, or above; and the creative energy (*svadha*) of thought-imagery is subordinate, or below. This has been seen in contemplation by all the mystics of every time.

6. [But, after all,] who knows, and who can say whence it all came, or how this creation came about?

The gods, themselves, came later than this world’s creation, so who truly knows whence it has arisen?

7. Whence all creation had its origin, only He, whether He fashioned it or not—

He, who surveys it all from highest heaven—He knows. Or perhaps even He does not! ⁷

Why on earth, we must all wonder at some time or another, would God have given birth to this dream-like realm, where individualized souls struggle for wisdom and contentment while continually buffeted by passions, blinded by ignorance, assailed by pain, and threatened with death? What could be His motive? As there were no witnesses to the initial Creation, there is no one to tell. But what of the mystic? Surely, while he is lost in the depths of the Eternal, he is in a unique position to explain the ‘why’ of Creation! Unfortunately, even the mystic perceives no ‘why’. For, in that unitive vision, He alone is. The joyful expression, which is the universal drama, radiates from Himself, the one Mind. He alone is the one Cause. There is nowhere else to look for causation, for whatever appears from Him and before Him is His own most natural and unquestionable radiation of Bliss.

Another way of expressing this truth is to say that the appearance of the world-manifestation in and on the one Consciousness is simply the nature of That. All questions regarding the how and why of it are therefore alogical. It is like asking, “Why does light shine?” or “Why does a mind think?” Who knows why a desire arises? Who knows how a thought is formed? We are aware that our thinking processes are distinguishable from our background consciousness, which is merely a witness to the mind’s activity. We are aware that the thought-producing aspect of our mind is superimposed on our consciousness, but we don’t know how or why. It simply occurs. We say that it is merely the nature of consciousness to manifest as thought. Similarly, the nature of That, the one Consciousness, is to manifest as the phenomenal world. “Perhaps,” says our Vedic author, “even He doesn’t know the how or why of it.”

Here is another passage from the Rig Veda (X: 90:1-5) that points up the difficulty of explaining the relationship between the two complementary aspects of Reality:

All this is He—what has been and what shall be. He is the Lord of immortality. Though He has become all this, in reality He is not all this. For truly, He is beyond the world. The whole series of universes—past, present, and future—express His glory and power; but *He transcends His own glory*. All beings of the universe form, as it were, only a portion of His being; the greater part is invisible and unchangeable. He who is beyond all predicates *appears* as the relative universe; He *appears* as all sentient and insentient beings. ⁸

In the above Hymn, we are taught the perennial paradox of duality-in-Unity: “Though He has become all of this, in reality He is not all of this.” He is the transcendent, the Unchangeable, the Eternal; yet conjunctive with the absolute, unqualified voidness of that one Consciousness, is the shining forth of His “glory.” This ‘shining forth’ as the universe of forms is not He, yet it is He. His “glory” stands in relation to the Absolute as the Sun’s radiating light stands to the Sun. They are different, yet they are one. The rays of the Sun have no independent existence and exist only because of the Sun; the glory of God, which appears as the phenomenal universe, also has no independent reality, but exists only as a radiation or emanation from that pure Sun of Consciousness. “He transcends His own glory,” says the seer; remaining forever One, unchanging and pure, He appears as the multiform universe.

Such an understanding comes not from the mind of a speculative philosopher, but from the vision of the mystic. Only one who has plumbed the depths of his own mind and passed beyond the mind to the Source of all mind and all manifestation, can know the truth of this unity- in-duality, this duality-in-unity. It is the knowledge of the Vedic seer, which, as we shall see, has been throughout the ages the common knowledge of all who have passed beyond the “glory” of God, and have seen in the depths of inner contemplation the one Beginning and Ending of all things.

NOTES:

1. *Rig Veda*, x.82
2. *Rig Veda*, v.84
3. *Tandya Maha Brahmana*, xx.14.2
4. *Rig Veda*, i.164.46
5. *Ibid.*, x.114
6. *Ibid.*, x.129.1
7. *Ibid.*, x.129.2-7
8. *Ibid.*, x.90.1-5; Prabhavananda, Swami, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1963; p. 32.

II. The Upanishadic Seers

In India, sometime during the first millennium B.C.E., the Vedas were finally collected and put into an organized written form; and an additional, much later, collection of philosophical writings by the *rishis*, or seers, who had known God, were appended to those earlier hymns and religious precepts, and thereafter regarded as an integral part of the *Vedas*. These philosophical appendages, addressed to a more learned and intellectually sophisticated audience, were called the *Upanishads*. The Sanskrit word, *upanishad*, means “sitting beneath,” and refers to those teachings which are received at the feet of a spiritual Master, or *Guru*. The Upanishads are also “sitting beneath” the Vedas as the final portion of the collection and are therefore known as the *Vedanta*: the end (*anta*) of the Vedas.

Of the one hundred and eight Upanishads said to exist, twelve are regarded as of primary importance and merit. In philosophical purity and persuasiveness, these few represent what, for most of us, are the Upanishads. Their names are the *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Chandogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Aitareya*, *Taitiriya*, *Svetasvatara* and *Maitri Upanishads*. The authors and exact date of authorship of these separate spiritual treatises are unknown; we know only that they were written, by various anonymous sages who had realized that Truth of which they speak, sometime between ca. 1200 and 400 B.C.E. While they vary in length and in style, their one common theme is the inner realization of the identity of the *Atman* (Self) and *Brahman* (the one universal Consciousness). We may strive to know God, or we may strive to know our Self; but, say the Upanishads, when you find the one, you shall also find the other; and it is this discovery which constitutes Enlightenment.

It has long been recognized as a fact of mystical psychology that, as a man comes to know God in the unitive vision, he knows in that some moment, his own true Self. This intriguing fact is expressed most succinctly in a passage from the ancient Indian epic, the *Ramayana*; in it, Rama, who represents the Godhead incarnate, asks his servant, Hanuman, “How do you regard me?” And Hanuman replies:

dehabhavana daso'smi
jivabhavana twadamshakah
atmabhava twamevaham

(When I identify with the body, I am Thy servant; When I identify with the soul, I am a part of Thee; But when I identify with the Self, I am truly Thee.)¹

These three attitudes represent progressively subtler stages of self-identification: from the identification with the body, to identification with the soul, until, finally, one comes to know the Divine, and thereby one's eternal Self. While each of these three relational attitudes finds expression as the prevailing attitude within various individual religious traditions, they are essentially representative of the viewpoint from these different stages of self-awareness.

We have seen, in the Vedas, how religious thought progressed from a primitive sort of nature-worship to monotheism, and finally to a monistic conception of reality. This progression of understanding is a duplication of the progression of understanding that takes place in the mind of every individual as well. We all begin as materialists, taking for granted that the phenomenal world before us is the sole reality. The idea of a transcendent God, or a unifying Principle inherent in the world, seems but a remote and hazy notion. Then, as our religious sense awakens, perhaps through some shocking reminder of our mortality, or a dawning clarity of mind while viewing the starry heavens or some quiet stretch of seacoast, we begin to reflect. And some inner logic seems to demand a Creator for so vast and mysterious a universe. We begin to sense an Intelligence beyond our own, an Intelligence with whom we can communicate, and of whom we are increasingly aware in all our thoughts and actions.

The second stage of our religious development comes when, after some deliberation and inner probing, we come to the conclusion that there is something within ourselves, a moral spirit, a guiding light, which is, itself, Divine, and partakes of God Himself. We call it our "soul," and we sense the longing of that soul to rejoin the Divine beauty and goodness from which, like a spark from a blazing fire, it emanated.

Finally, we experience the third stage in our journey when, in a moment of longing, contemplating our Divine Source, we know “the peace that passes all understanding,” and suddenly, in a moment of unprecedented clarity of Intelligence, we know that one Divinity face to face. In that clear knowing, we realize that the seeker and the Goal, the knower and That which it sought to know, are one. Like the king of a vast kingdom, awakening from a dream in which he is poor and lost, we awake to the realization that we were never separate from the One, but only imagined a separateness where none existed. Then we know who we have always been: we are the one all-pervading Being, who, while transcending this world of light and shadow, is Itself the substratum and essence of all being.

It is in the Upanishads that we first hear from those fully illumined seers who have reached the final stage of knowledge regarding God and the Self, declaring to us that the Self and God are one:

Even by the mind this truth is to be learned:
There are not many, but only ONE. ²

We are easily able to understand the idea of an underlying Unity intellectually, but that remains an imperfect and ultimately unsatisfactory knowledge so long as we do not directly experience that Unity as *I*. Our very knowledge stands in the way of experiencing the Truth, because we retain the limited awareness of “I know”. That very intellect which knows establishes a separation between the knower and what is known. Hear what the seers of the Upanishads say on this point:

He is known by those who know Him beyond thought, not to those who imagine He can be attained by thought.

If you think, “I know Him well,” you do not know the Truth. You only perceive that appearance of Brahman produced by the inner senses. Continue to meditate. ³

What cannot be thought with the mind, but That whereby the mind thinks: know That alone to be Brahman.

... It is not what is thought that we should wish to know; we should know the thinker. “He is my Self!”

This one should know. "He is my Self!" This one should know. ⁴

And *that* knowledge, of the Self, or *Atman*, is obtained only through the direct experience that occurs when the knowing mind is transcended, and the knower and the known are directly realized to be one. No amount of reasoning, no amount of philosophical understanding, can approach this directly apprehended knowledge:

He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be realized by the senses, or by austerity or the performance of rituals. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen in the silence of contemplation. ⁵

When a sage sees this great Unity, and realizes that his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow could ever approach him? ⁶

When awake to the vision of one's own Self, when a man in truth can say: "I am He," what desires could lead him to grieve in fever for the body?

... When a man sees the *Atman*, his own Self, the one God, the Lord of what was and of what shall be, then he fears no more. ⁷

This "vision" of the Self is described in the Upanishads as Liberation (*moksha*). It is a freedom, a release, from doubt, from uncertainty, from the fears attending ignorance, forever. All questions are answered; all desires and causes for sorrow are put to rest; for thereafter, a man knows the secret of all existence. All previous notions of limitation and mortality, all darkness of ignorance, is swept away in the all-illuminating light of Truth:

When the wise man knows that it is through the great and omnipresent Spirit in us that we are conscious in waking or in dreaming, then he goes beyond all sorrow. When he knows the Self, the inner Life, who enjoys like a bee the sweetness of the flowers of the senses, the Lord of what was and what will be, then he goes beyond all fear. ⁸

When a man has seen the truth of the Spirit, he is one with Him; the aim of his life is fulfilled, and he is ever beyond sorrow.

... When a man knows God, he is free; his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more. When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where man possesses all—for he is one with the ONE. ⁹

It is these truths, that “Brahman is the Atman,” ¹⁰ “Atman is Brahman,”¹¹ and that the realization of Atman/Brahman is man’s ultimate “Liberation,” which constitute the great message of the Upanishads. But a further question remains: “How is this realization to be attained?” In answer to that question, the various authors of the Upanishads offer various answers, which to a perplexed student may appear contradictory and mutually exclusive. But, with a little explanation, it can be easily understood that their directives are not contradictory at all, but complementary. For example, in the *Katha Upanishad*, we are given three different explanations of the way to know God. The first is “by the grace of God”:

The man who surrenders his human will leaves sorrows behind and beholds the glory of the Self by the grace of God.

... Not through much learning is the Atman reached, nor through the intellect and the sacred teachings. It is reached by those whom He chooses; to His chosen the Self reveals His glory. ¹²

The second is “by purity of heart”:

He is seen by a pure heart and by a mind whose thoughts are pure.

... When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal, and even in this world he is one with Brahman. ¹³

The third is by “one-pointed contemplation”:

Not even through deep knowledge can the Self be reached, unless evil ways are abandoned, and there is rest in the senses, concentration in the mind, and peace in one’s heart.

... When the wise man rests his mind in contemplation on our God beyond time, who invisibly dwells in the mystery

of things and in the heart of man, then he rises above both pleasures and sorrows. ¹⁴

These three, apparently diverse, methods or means to attain the realization of God appear in one form or another throughout all the Upanishads. And, in order to understand the integral relationship of these three apparently different “paths,” we must examine them in the light of the experience of those who have reached the goal of Self- realization. First, let us understand what is meant by “the grace of God.”

Those who have known that absolute Self realize that whatever exists, and whatever occurs in this universe, is His doing. There is nothing whatsoever that is apart from Him. This the sages have clearly seen. Where, then, is that which is outside of His doing? Can we suppose that the awakening of our understanding about God is something apart from His doing? Or that our efforts, our devotion to Truth, our desire for knowledge, is something other than His own activity within ourselves? It is God’s grace which inspires within us the effort, the desire. The vision of God is not attained without effort, but the effort itself is a manifestation of His grace. And the revelation of Himself—could that be accomplished without His doing it? We are within God, and everything—even our doubting, our rejection, our foolishness—is He. Can that inward journey to Self-realization be inspired by someone other than He?

Regardless of what steps we take toward the realization of God, it is God Himself who is playing out the drama. The light that fills a room is nothing but light; how could we find a portion of that light that is acting independently from the rest? Likewise, all this universe is the glory of God, and nothing but Him. What, then, is not Himself? What is not a manifestation of His grace? The authors of the Upanishads, like all true seers of God who have come after them, have acknowledged the fact that, ultimately, their turning to God, their thirst for Him, and their eventual Self-realization, are all inspired and accomplished by His grace. “He is indeed the Lord supreme whose grace moves the hearts of men. He leads us unto His own joy and to the glory of His light.”¹⁵

Now, in the light of this understanding, let us examine the qualification of “purity of heart.” Though it is a vague and broadly generalized phrase, it is one used repeatedly by the sages of the past and present, including Jesus of Nazareth, to describe the state of mind prerequisite to the “vision” of God.

Pure heartedness suggests guilelessness, simplicity and childlike humility. “He is unknown by the learned and known by the simple.”¹⁶ It implies tenderness, compassion, sincerity, and all those qualities we associate with “goodness.” It is the state of the heart of one who knows that God is universally present, and who regards nothing in this world as divorced from, or other than, God.

“Purity” suggests a single, uncontaminated, element or quality. “Purity of heart,” therefore, is an undeviating regard to God alone, who has become the center and focus of all one’s thoughts, words and actions. Only by such purity of heart is the mind of man readied and prepared for the perfect concentration of mind, which is known as contemplation.

The mind of man is of two kinds: pure and impure. It is impure when in the grip of worldly desire, and pure when free from such desire. ... If men thought of God as much as they think of the world, who would not attain liberation?¹⁷

Contemplation, the third stipulated precondition, is the result of mental purity, and the open gateway to the experience of the Eternal. It is not attained by allowing the mind to dwell on sense-pleasures, nor by the calculating of philosophers, nor by the proud and complacent; it is attained by the mind that dwells solely and intently on God, who knows its own darkness, and longs solely and purely for the light of clear vision.

When a wise man has withdrawn his mind from all things without, and when his spirit has peacefully left all inner sensations, let him rest in peace, free from the movement of will and desire.... For it has been said: There is something beyond our mind, which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one’s mind and subtle spirit rest upon that and nothing else.

...When the mind is silent, beyond weakness and distraction, then it can enter into a world, which is far beyond the mind: the supreme Destination Then one knows the joy of Eternity.

...Words cannot describe the joy of the soul whose impurities are washed away in the depths of contemplation, who is one with the Atman, his own Self. Only those who experience this joy know what it is.

...As water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the infinite Mind, and thus attains Freedom. ¹⁸

If we are to know that Freedom, say the authors of the Upanishads, we must leave behind the world of speculation and philosophizing, and enter into the devout life of grace, purity of heart and contemplation. Thus, they assure us, with a full trust in His loving guidance, with a sincere and naked surrender of all thoughts not of God, and all actions not in His service, and finally in the constant flow of the mind to Him in the intimacy of silent contemplation, we shall enter the depths of our being, and know the glory of our own eternal Self.

When first one discovers these exalted thoughts in the Upanishads, one is startled and wonderstruck that such sublime thoughts were penned so many hundreds of years ago—long before anyone in the West had come near to such heights of knowing. We discover that the knowledge of the Spirit is not dependent upon the so-called “progress of civilization,” but has always been the same for all humanity in every age.

In the annals of spiritual knowledge, the testimonies of the *rishis* who authored the Upanishads may perhaps be equaled, but they have never been, nor will ever be, surpassed. They have the last as well as the original say in spiritual knowledge. All that has been said since regarding the Source, nature, and final Goal of man is but so many footnotes to the Upanishads; for, in them, the furthest reaches of knowledge have been explored. They have reduced all existence to One, the final number beyond which there is no more reduction. And they have shown the path whereby this supernal knowledge may be attained. Whatever came after the Upanishads, in the way of spiritual knowledge, is only the echoing cries of those who have rediscovered the same Truth, by the same path, and have raised their voices to sing the same joyous song.

NOTES:

1. Valmiki, *Ramayana*
2. *Katha* Upanishad, IV; based on Mascaro, Juan, 1965
3. *Kena* Upanishad, II; *Ibid.*
4. *Kaushitaki* Upanishad, III.8; *Ibid.*
5. *Mundaka* Upanishad, III.1; *Ibid.*
6. *Isha* Upanishad, I.7; *Ibid.*

7. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, IV.4.25; Ibid.*
8. *Katha Upanishad, IV; Ibid.*
9. *Svetasvatara Upanishad, II.1; Ibid.*
10. *Taittiriya Upanishad, I.5; Ibid.*
11. *Ibid., II.6; Ibid.*
12. *Katha Upanishad, II; Ibid.*
13. *Ibid., VI; Ibid.*
14. *Ibid., II; Ibid.*
15. *Svetasvatara Upanishad, III; Ibid.*
16. *Kena Upanishad, II; Ibid.*
17. *Maitri Upanishad, VI.24; Ibid.*
18. *Ibid., VI.19-23; Ibid.*

* * *

III. Oneness

The one Reality is called, in a Sanskrit phrase, *Chit-Shakti Vilas*, “the play of Consciousness-Energy.” This phrase, *Chit-Shakti*, is an interesting one, in that it stands for the one Reality, and yet it is made up of two words: *Chit* (“Consciousness”) and *Shakti* (“Energy.”) These are the two aspects of Reality with which we have become familiar as *Shiva-Shakti*, *Brahman-Maya*, *Purusha-Prakrti*, *Theos-Logos*, etc. *Chit*, or Consciousness, is called in other contexts by the name of *Shiva*, the absolute and formless aspect, the transcendent Godhead; and *Shakti*, or Energy, is the creative aspect of that one Consciousness which manifests as the multi-formed universe. They are one, but they appear to be two. The two are but complementary aspects of the same one indivisible Truth.

These complimentary aspects are frequently symbolized as Male and Female. He—the masculine aspect of God—is the world-transcending Absolute. He is the pure and stainless Consciousness that is the source of His own manifestory Power. He is the eternal One, beyond all dualities, beyond all predication; He is known by those to whom He reveals Himself as the Unmanifest. But this stainless Consciousness possesses a Creative Power. And with that Power It periodically produces an Energy that manifests as a universe of time, space, and material forms. That Power of manifestation could be characterized as the Breath of God, which is in turn

exhaled and then inhaled back again. Between the contraction and re-expansion of this universal manifestation, there is a period of stillness, in which His manifestory Power rests within Himself. This manifestory Power, this Matter-producing faculty, is often regarded as the Female aspect of God. It is the creative movement that arises within the Absolute Mind, and it is everything that this creative movement produces. Within this creative production, which we call the universe, these two aspects of God are given symbolic representation in the form of creatures designated as male and female.

Though a universe of form is made manifest by this (Female) Power, He (the Source) never becomes anything other than the eternally pure Consciousness. Just as the human consciousness (which is His likeness) remains unaffected by the millions of thoughts that pass across its face, or as the pure sky remains unaffected by the myriads of clouds that drift by, that pure Consciousness produces a vast universe of Thought-forms, and yet remains in Himself unchanged, unmoved. Just as the human consciousness witnesses in full awareness the play of thoughts as they arise and disperse within it, so does He witness in full awareness the universal play in all its detailed convolutions. And as the human consciousness lives in its own thoughts, being their source and witness, so does He live in His creative exuberance of universal Thought-Energy. This exuberance is His own. It has no existence apart from Him; He is its Soul and substance. Still, the One has these two aspects: It is the one pure and eternal Consciousness (the "Father"), and It is the creative Power of manifestation (the "Mother"), just as we human "images" of God contain the same two aspects to our being. And so, God is both Male and Female, both God and Goddess, both *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, both *Chit* (or *Shiva*) and *Shakti*.

Listen to how the 13th century sage, Jnaneshvar, describes them:

“The Shakti cannot live without her Lord, and without her, He (Shiva, the absolute Consciousness) cannot appear. Since He appears because of Her, and She exists because of her Lord, the two cannot be distinguished at all. Sugar and its sweetness cannot be told apart, nor camphor and its fragrance. If we have the flame, we have the fire as well; if we catch hold of Shakti, we have Shiva also.

“... Shiva and Shakti are the same, like air and its motion, or gold and its luster. Fragrance cannot be separated from the musk, nor heat from fire; neither can Shakti be separated from Shiva.”¹

The whole world of apparent phenomena is the manifestation of the Shakti of Shiva. Shiva is our innermost consciousness, our very Self; and Shakti, therefore, is our own creative power, our power of will. By its very existence, an apparent duality is created in That which is one. From this original duality comes the duality of seer and seen, or subject and object. It is because of this apparent duality, this imaginary division in the One, that the world-appearance continues to exist. Nonetheless, the truth of the matter is that it is one Being who is playing all the roles; He is the Director, the stage Manager, the actors, and the scenery. He is the stage, and He is the audience of this play as well. There is nothing outside of God. This is brought out in the story of the egoistic king who asked his Minister, “Who is greater, me or God?” And the wise Minister replied, “You are, O King! For you can banish anyone from your kingdom, but God cannot banish anyone from His kingdom.”

It is not possible to leave God’s kingdom. The only thing that really *is* is that one Being; He is both the unchanging Absolute, the Unity, and the world-appearance as well. He is both Shiva and Shakti. For, as we’ve seen, you can’t have one without the other; they form an inseparable unit. And so, the question, “Who am I?” is readily answered: “I am the one Reality. I am *Chit-Shakti*, and all this is my play!” It is, of course, important to experience this truth; but it’s perhaps just as important to understand it and to make this knowledge a part of one’s being. This is not just philosophy or theorizing. It is very important to fully comprehend this; otherwise, who knows what you might imagine yourself to be? Perhaps you would regard yourself as merely a weak and insignificant creature!

Because the final and ultimate Truth is unity, is oneness, all talk of duality is misleading. In our very good intentions of making the truth understandable to others, we like to describe the dual aspects of the One in order to explain the relationship between the Transcendent and the Immanent, the Absolute and the Relative, the Unity and the Diversity. And from there we go on to delineate all the limbs and subtle layers, and so forth; and before we know what has happened, we’re immersed once again in the swamp of multiplicity.

The initial conceptual division of the One into two (*Purusha-Prakrti*, *Brahman-Maya*, *Chit-Shakti*, etc.) is the intellectually tempting pathway leading into this swamp. And almost every mystical philosopher and metaphysician finds himself beguiled by the apparent usefulness of exploring this pathway. But, since the ultimate Truth is unity, and always unity, we are much better off adhering bull-doggedly to One and only One, without allowing for the slightest admission of duality or mention of even an *apparent* division in It. For this reason, the author of the Biblical book of Second Isaiah, as a counter to those who would dissect reality into good and evil, Jehovah and Satan, Light and Darkness, put these words in the mouth of God: “I am the one Lord; there is no other beside Me. I form the light and create the darkness; I make peace and create evil. I, the one Lord, do all these things.”²

Let’s look for a moment, from the historical perspective, and see what happens when we begin dabbling with “two-ness.” In the *Yajurveda*, we find the statement, “The One becomes the many by Its own inherent power.” This seems innocent enough. Everyone can see that “Its own inherent power” is not an entity separate from the One; it is just an inherent quality. A little later, however, we find in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, “Brahman projects the universe through the power of His Maya. Then He becomes entangled in that universe of Maya. Know, then, that the world is Maya, and that the great God is the Lord of Maya.”

Uh oh! Now, we have established a definite pair! Here, we have the Lord *and* His Maya. From the smallest seed, duality has sprung up as a full tree of contention. We have forgotten that “Maya” simply refers to His “inherent power” of manifestation, and we have begun to see “the Lord” and “His power” as two separate and distinct entities. Do you not see how craftily and insidiously this imaginary separation has taken place? Once you have a “Lord,” you have a “servant” as well.

By the time of the *Bhagavad Gita*, this dualism has taken a firm hold on the mind. We hear Krishna saying, in the 13th chapter, to Arjuna: “He sees truly who sees that all actions are performed by *Prakrti* (i.e., Shakti, or Maya), and that the *Purusha* (Shiva or Brahman) is actionless.” Now, this is a very useful concept for understanding that one’s eternal Self remains constant, inactive, and unchanged, even while one’s body and mind engages in

actions; but a split is being established which will prove to be very difficult to patch up again.

The great Nondualist philosopher and sage, Shankaracharya, though quite aware of their underlying unity, describes “the two” in such a way as to widen the division between them. He says:

“Maya... is the power of the Lord. It is she who brings forth this universe. She is neither real nor unreal, nor partaking of both characteristics; neither the same as the Lord, nor different, nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.”³

Now, let’s look at what’s happened so far: The Lord emanates the universe by His inherent Power. And suddenly, we are saying that He is real, but the universe and the Lord’s Power by which the universe exists are both unreal! Can we say that the Sun is real, but its rays are unreal? No; of course not. But, let’s not be unfair to Shankaracharya; it should be perfectly clear that he was merely pointing out that the Godhead, the formless Absolute, is *eternally* real, while the manifestation known as “the universe” is only *temporarily* real. And, to this, we all agree. But, can we say that the Lord’s inherent “Power of manifestation” is also only temporarily real? No. His Power, His *Shakti*, His *Maya*, though it may indeed become inactive and dormant, is co-eternal with Shiva; it is inherent. It is never something separate or independent of the Lord, any more than wetness can be thought of as separate or independent of water, or any more than the power to think can be thought of as independent of the mind. He, the Lord, and She, His Power, were never divided, were never two; and only confusion can result by allowing this mistaken impression to stand.

It was with just such an objection to Shankara’s descriptive language that, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the authors of the literature of Kashmir Shaivism began to rephrase and reformulate the philosophy of Unity. As we shall see, however, there is really no satisfactory solution to the problem of expressing in language That which exceeds the capabilities of language. In every time, in every culture, the seers of the One have attempted to explain in a satisfactory way the fact that the universe is God, and yet is not God; that He is eternal, and yet lives in the temporal; that He is forever unchanging, and yet is manifest as the ever-changing universe.

Jnaneshvar, in the 13th century, likewise felt impelled to object to the language of Shankara, and to attempt to do away with such concepts as “Maya,” and “superimposition.” In his *Amritanubhav*, he says:

“When it is always only the one pure Consciousness seeing Itself, why postulate the necessity of a superimposition? ... By His very nature, He *is* whatever He sees. Whatever form appears, appears because of Him. There is nothing else here but the Self.

“... In the current of the river or the waves of the sea, there is nothing but water. Similarly, in the universe, nothing else exists besides the Self.

“... Therefore, whether He is the seer or the seen, it doesn’t matter; there is only the Self vibrating everywhere.”⁴

Again, in his *Changadev Pasashti*, Jnaneshvar says: “Only Oneness is real. All else is a dream!”⁵ And yet, we must ask the question, “What all else?” And the answer can only be, “the appearance of multiplicity!” And this, of course, is precisely what Shankara had said: “Only Brahman is real; the world (the appearance of multiplicity) is illusory.” So, you see, it is not possible to solve this question of how to talk about the (apparent) duality in Unity. This is why, in India, there are so many authentic schools of mystical thought. There is the *Advaita*, the Nondualism of Shankara; there is the *Dvaita*, or Dualist, school of Madhva; there is the *Vishishtadvaita*, or Qualified Nondualism of Ramanuja. All speak the truth, and yet each sees the Truth a little bit differently. But that’s okay. The built-in ambiguity of language demands alternate expressions. Still, the ultimate Truth, the final Reality, known by the seers, is One without a second. All duality is apparent only. We can say that it is simply the “Play of Consciousness-Energy,” *Chit-Shakti Vilas*.

So much for correct understanding! It is necessary to pass beyond understanding if we are to *experience* the joy of Unity, the bliss of God. This Bliss is not attained by engaging the mind in trying to comprehend the nature of God—though this has its place, of course. The bliss of God is attained through devotion. Devotion leaves the intellect far behind; in fact, it is possible only through the abandonment of the pride of intellect. It is more akin to the longing of a child for its mother than to the ratiocination of

the adult. Devotion begins with the awareness of one's utter dependency upon God for everything, and an open upturning of one's mind and inner gaze to the Source of all mind and all vision.

We engage our minds so often in circuitous analysis and repetitious thought-patterns. Far better would it be if we could build into our minds the thought-pattern of calling on God for our succor and support. He is capable of filling the mind and body with ecstasy and light, and of setting our minds at peace in perfect understanding. All that is required is a pure and innocent heart, and a simple and steady regard to Him for all our satisfaction and reward.

As the mind becomes steady and one-pointed on God, all questions become answered automatically. A mind at peace is a mind illumined by Truth. Let there be an apparent duality between you and your Lord! But keep on trying to close the gap through love. Talk to Him. Pray to Him. Give all your life and love to Him. And the God within you will manifest the more as you become engrossed in Him. You become what you meditate on; so, meditate on God. Regard Him as the only Reality and become as a moth dancing about His flame. Yearn to be immersed in His perfect light, His perfect love, and He will draw you into Himself and make you know your eternal oneness with Him.

NOTES:

1. *Jnaneshvar: The Life And Works of The Celebrated 13th Century Indian Mystic-Poet, Amritanubhav*: I:21-24, 41, 42; Abhayananda, 1989, p. 116.
2. Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Bible: 45:6-7.
3. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:7; Prabhavananda, & Isherwood, Vedanta Press, 1978, p. 49.
4. Jnaneshvar, *Amritanubhav*, 7:165, 233, 235, 237, 244; Abhayananda, 1989, pp. 186, 193-195.
5. Jnaneshvar, *Changadev Pasashti*, 25; Abhayananda, 1989, p. 240.
6. The book, *The Wisdom of Vedanta*, containing this and many other excellent articles, may be downloaded in its entirety as a PDF document from the "Read or Download" page of my website: www.themysticsvision.com.

Meditation

The Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum*, is the motto of our country. It means, “Of many, one.” But we would be more accurate in saying, “Of One, many.” This simple formula explains everything we need to know about the Reality in which we live. For, just as the one white light is refracted to appear as the entire spectrum of colors in a rainbow, so does the one undivided Existence appear as a multitude of forms. Just as a sunflower spreads itself out in its many tender petals, so God spreads Himself out into this variously formed creation. Just as the ocean raises up from itself a tossing surface of countless waves, so the ocean of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss raises up from Itself countless individual forms of life from shore to shore.

In every single form the One alone exists; it is He alone who lives in every life. However wise, however foolish, however attractive, however repulsive—the tiger and the scorpion, the spider and the snake—all is His Life, playing in a million fantastic forms. And we, children of His mind, images projected from His light upon Himself, wander here and there upon His screen, playing out our roles, forgetful of the One in whose dance of Light we live. But when we turn within, behold! We discover as our very essence that One who lives as many, the heart and soul of all that lives, the blissful God whose life and breath we are. ⁵

* * *

IV. Kapila

The seers who authored the Upanishads had known in themselves the great Unity and had declared for all to come thereafter that the soul of man and the Lord of all creation were one and the same; *Tat twam asi!* was their repeated cry: “That Thou Art!” And more, “All this universe is That!”

‘But how,’ the uncomprehending mind questions, ‘can this be so? How can the Unmoving be identical with the incessantly fluctuating universe? How can this world of transient phenomena, where all things and beings are born, suffer and die, be identical to the God who is said to be formless, unchanging, and eternally One? And how is it possible to reconcile that eternal Self with what we experience as our separate transient selves existing

in the world? Are there two selves, or is our personal self merely an illusion that we are experiencing in this world of birth, suffering, and death?’

‘It cannot be understood through reasoning or subtlety of intellect,’ reply the sages of the Upanishads; ‘only those who see It in the depths of contemplation know the secret.’ And yet, still, the uncomforted mind strives to grasp it with the intellect, and those sages who have seen It continue in their steadfast endeavor to describe It, in order to provide to those who have not seen It some idea of just what It is like.

One such sage, named Kapila, who lived around the 8th or 9th century B.C.E. in the northeastern part of India, after realizing in himself the Truth of existence, made a valiant and brilliant attempt to explain the mysterious Unity-in-duality to the satisfaction of those who had not known It. Like all attempts before or since, it failed to accomplish its purpose, and mainly served only to foster more misconceptions and misinterpretations. Still, it is a perfectly true and simple description from the vantage point of one who has seen the Truth, and for that reason, Kapila’s beautifully formulated description of Reality has lived on for centuries and centuries, providing the foundation and framework for description by the many seers of the Truth who came after him.

Kapila’s explanation of Reality came to be known as the philosophy of *Samkhya*, a word which, like *Veda*, means “knowledge” or “wisdom.” To designate the all-pervading eternal Consciousness, Kapila used the word, *Purusha*; it is a word, which had appeared previously in the Vedas to mean “the universal Self,” or “Person.” And to designate the creative Energy, which emanates from *Purusha* and manifests as the phenomenal world, he used the word, *Prakrti*. *Prakrti* is identical with Shiva’s *Shakti*, Brahman’s *Maya*, or *Prthivi*, the earth Mother of the Vedas. *Prakrti* is the Divine Energy which appears as atoms, molecules, and all the sentient and insentient world.

These two, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, are what we today might call “spirit” and “matter,” except that *Prakrti* is more than what we regard as matter; it is the substance of all forms, including thought-forms, dream-images, and the individual psyche. It is everything that is experienced as “the world”—on both the subtle and gross levels, from both the subjective and the objective perspectives. *Purusha*, on the other hand, is the Eternal, the unmanifested Essence, the unstained and unchanging Consciousness. It is the light of conscious Awareness, which not only illumines but also allows us to

perceive the world of *Prakrti*. *Purusha* is the one cosmic Consciousness; *Prakrti* is the Energy-production of that Consciousness. Our own individual consciousness mirrors *Purusha*; and our power of thought-production mirrors *Prakrti*.

Those who have known the experience of Unity realize these two to be complementary aspects of one indivisible Reality; but, as both of these aspects of the One possess mutually exclusive qualities, it is necessary—in order to differentiate them by quality—to give them separate and distinct names. This division of names and qualities gives the impression of an ultimate duality; but that is an impression due merely to the nature of language. These two Divine aspects must, in language at least, remain apparently distinct simply in order to explain their unity. And that unity is realized only in the transcendent “vision” of the mystic, who knows them to be, beyond all doubt, inseparably One.

Kapila’s categorization and analysis of the two aspects of Existence, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, had a vast influence on later thinkers, yet many who had not experienced that Unity for themselves corrupted his vision into a Dualistic philosophical system wherein the two came to be regarded, not as complementary aspects of the One, but as two eternally separate and irreconcilable Principles at odds with one another. It was just such a dualistic view, which was also espoused by the followers of Zoroaster in Persia, and later by the Manichaeans Gnostics. It seems there has never been a scarcity of unenlightened men and women at the ready in this world to corrupt the words of the enlightened to fit their own pitifully childish views. Today we see the same delusion upheld by those who see existence as an eternal struggle between Jehovah and Satan.

While these two terms, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, may appear foreign to the Western mind, we must recognize that Kapila’s conception of Reality is the essence of all mystical philosophy, past and present. We find it echoed, at least implicitly, in the conceptions of Reality formulated by all the mystics and teachers of spiritual life. This, for example, from the Bible, expresses a distinction between “the Father” and “the world”:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but of the world.”¹

Similarly, in the earlier Upanishads, these two aspects of the One, corresponding to *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, were not referred to by name, but were merely inferred:

“The Immortal is veiled by the world. The Spirit of Life is the Immortal. Name and form are the world, and by them the Spirit is veiled.”²

“Behold the glory of God in the universe and in all that lives and moves on earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal.”³

But in the later Upanishads, written after the time of Kapila, such as the *Svetasvatara*, the Samkhya terminology is used:

“*Prakrti* is changing and passing; but *Purusha* is eternal. ...By meditation on Him, by contemplation of Him, and by communion with Him, there comes in the end destruction of earthly delusion.”⁴

In the same Upanishad, the author refers to the names used by the older Vedic tradition for these two to show that they are synonymous terms:

“With Maya, His mysterious power, He made all things, and by Maya the human soul is bound. Know therefore that *Prakrti* is Maya, and *Purusha* is Rudra (Shiva), the ruler of Maya. All beings in our universe are contained in His infinite splendor.”⁵

“...He is the Eternal among things that pass away, pure Consciousness of conscious beings, the One who fulfills the prayers of many. By the wisdom of Samkhya and the practice of yoga (contemplation), a man knows the Eternal; and when a man knows the Eternal, he is free from all fetters.”⁶

The great contribution which Kapila made to philosophical thought was to define and examine in unprecedented detail the nature and qualities of each of the two aspects of Reality, so that the mind could easily distinguish between them. *Prakrti*, he tells us, is the undifferentiated field of Energy, which transmutes itself into the elements that make up the entire world of forms. The primary process of this transmutation is described by Kapila as a self-division into three separate modes of Energy, which he calls *gunas*

(strands). These correspond to what scientists today would call “positive,” “negative,” and “neutral” energy-charges. Kapila calls them *rajas*, *tamas*, and *sattva*. They are the three “strands” which, woven together, constitute the fabric of *Prakrti*; and which, by their incessant interaction, form the manifold universe, including all sentient and insentient beings.

According to Kapila, we experience these three modes of energy in the following ways: *rajas* as passion, restlessness and assertive activity; *tamas* as dullness, lassitude and inertia; and *sattva* as clarity, refinement of intellect, and tranquility. *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are constantly alternating, which accounts for the changes we experience in mood and functional ability. Thus, *Prakrti*, composed of the three *gunas*, is both the cause and the substance of the entire vast range of experiential phenomena, which we call “the world.” Yet, while this transient and ephemeral drama of thought, form, and movement goes on, there is a steady, unchanging and eternal Consciousness, which remains ever aloof as the Witness of the drama; that is *Purusha*. *Purusha* is the universal Self, the light of Consciousness, which illumines *Prakrti* and which, standing distinguishably separate from *Prakrti*, exists as the unchanging witness-consciousness in every individual being.

Today, many would consider Kapila’s metaphysics to be anachronistic. Our current (scientific) view sees the world in quite different terms. The world is regarded nowadays as a manifestation of a fourteen billion-year-old burst of Energy that gradually solidified over time into a material universe. But this world of energy, perceptible as matter, is still held to be contradistinguished from the one Divine Consciousness which is its Source, and which constitutes our true and eternal Self. In that respect, our current metaphysics is not so different from the view of Kapila.

All suffering, according to Kapila, is simply the result of forgetfulness of one’s true Self, or *Purusha*, while identifying with the ever-changing world of *Prakrti*, and thereby being caught up in the play of light and shadow, believing that to be one’s self. And the means of deliverance from suffering is, first of all, to distinguish between the two, and to cease to identify with *Prakrti*. Since *Prakrti* is a mere display, intrinsically transient, it is, in the final analysis, unreal. The real is *Purusha*, the eternal, unchanging Self. Kapila condenses this philosophy into four principal “truths”:

1. That from which we want to be delivered is pain.
2. Deliverance (liberation) is the cessation of pain.
3. The cause of pain is the lack of discrimination

between *Prakrti* and *Purusha*.

4. The means of deliverance is discrimination [between these two].⁷

In other words, according to Kapila, all suffering in this life is the result of wrong identification: identifying with *Prakrti* instead of *Purusha*. Suffering is inherent in *Prakrti* but does not exist in *Purusha*. *Purusha* is our eternal, and therefore real, Self. When we discriminate between them, we realize that all suffering belongs only to *Prakrti*, and cannot touch our true Self. It is this vision of Kapila's which provided the framework for that great spiritual masterpiece, the *Bhagavad Gita*.

V. The Bhagavad Gita

Sometime between the 10th and 5th centuries B.C.E., the great epic classic, the *Mahabharata*, was written by an unknown poet who was known as Vyasa. It told the story of a great war between two rival clans of ancient India, and was no doubt based in part on ancient historical events. Throughout its complex allegorical fabric of moral tales within tales, it wove the philosophical precepts of Kapila's Samkhya. By this time, the culture of India had become completely permeated and greatly influenced by Kapila's vision and terminology.

Within the marvelous poetic drama of the *Mahabharata* is found the *Bhagavad Gita*, "The Song of God." It is a philosophical dialogue, (also attributed to the legendary sage, Vyasa), which offers the most comprehensive and definitive expression of the Samkhya philosophy ever written. While it forms a segment of the *Mahabharata* story, it has become a separate and complete work in itself known for its beauty and clarity. We can only surmise that it was written in such a way that it would fit comfortably into the *Mahabharata* story as a philosophical discussion between two of its characters, in order to assure its endurance in that immortal work. Indeed, since the time of its composition, it has become the Bible of India, and one of the most sacred of holy books for students of philosophy and religion throughout the world.

In the first chapter of the *Gita*, we find Arjuna, a warrior of the Pandava clan, on the battlefield with Krishna, his chariot-driver, who happens also to be an incarnation of God. Krishna, who is only incidentally Arjuna's cousin and the king of Dwarka, represents, throughout this dialogue, the Divine Spirit in man; he is literally "the driver of the chariot" of the body. And the dialogue begins between Arjuna and Krishna as a dialogue between man and his indwelling Spirit, or Self. Arjuna, faced with the task before him, of battling to the death against his own vices and wrong notions, allegorically represented in the story as those whom he has known from childhood as friends and relatives, faces the battle of life which all men face; and he feels overwhelmed and utterly despondent. "Letting fall his bow and arrows, he sank down in his chariot, his soul overcome by despair and grief." ¹

But Krishna, the voice of the Eternal in him, prods him from his weakness and dejection, by reminding him of his unconquerable Soul. He brings to Arjuna's mind the remembrance that all this world is but a drama, a play of opposites, wherein heat and cold, pleasure and pain alternate, but can never touch the eternal Soul of man. "He dwells in these bodies, beyond time, and though these bodies have an end in time, He remains infinite and eternal. Therefore, great warrior, carry on your fight." ²

This dialogue, though set on a battlefield and forming an integral part in the story of the great war between the two factions, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, is quite evidently intended as an allegorical parable of man's struggle to conquer his own illusions and weaknesses, and to realize the Divine in himself. It is the perennial battle of life: the struggle between the darkness of ignorance, which sees only the frightening appearance of the world, and the light of wisdom, which sees the eternal Spirit in and behind all appearance. Krishna, the light of wisdom, explains to Arjuna the truth of the Spirit and exhorts him to take up his arms once again and to struggle toward the awareness of his own eternal Soul. He begins to teach him the wisdom of Samkhya and the path of yoga.

Samkhya, as we have seen, is the knowledge of *Prakrti* and *Purusha*, and the discrimination between the two; and yoga is the effort to realize the eternal Truth through the practice of serenity, steadfastness, meditation and contemplation on the Self. Says Krishna: "When your mind, confused by the apparent contradictions of the scriptures, becomes steady in contemplation of the Divine, then the goal of yoga is yours."

Through Samkhya, Krishna tells him, he will learn to understand his true Self; and through yoga, the practice of contemplating that Self, he will attain the direct realization of Truth. These two, says Krishna, go hand in hand; understanding leads to practice, or application, and the application of knowledge leads to realization.

Samkhya is the path of knowledge, what Krishna calls *jnan yoga*, "the yoga of knowledge"; and the application of this knowledge in thought, word and deed is the path of action, or *karma yoga*. We are all bound to act, Krishna reminds Arjuna; there is no way to escape from the world of action. But through knowledge, a man learns that he exists beyond *Prakrti* as the eternal *Purusha*, the constant Self, who remains unstained by the actions which he must perform in this world:

All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the *gunas* of *Prakrti*, and the deluded man thinks that he is the doer of the actions.

But the man who knows the relation between the *gunas* of *Prakrti* and actions understands that actions are only *gunas* acting upon other *gunas*, and that he is not their slave. ⁴

In other words, the man who identifies with actions, thinking he is only the body and mind, is entirely swayed by the desire for pleasures of the body and mind, and suffers through this wrong identification; but one who identifies with the Eternal, the *Purusha*, is not swayed by these desires, and thereby remains free of the suffering that accompanies this mistaken identification.

In the Fourth chapter, Krishna strips away the last vestiges of pretense in this thinly disguised parable, and openly declares that his character represents the *Atman*, the Divine Self in all men. He is the *Avatar*, the manifestation of God, appearing within His own drama in order to give concrete utterance to the unspoken wisdom that teaches itself from within all men. By this literary device, he becomes the voice, not of Krishna, the king of Dwarka, but of the all-pervading, all-inclusive God. "By whatever path men love Me," he tells Arjuna, "by that path they come to Me. Many are the paths of men, but they all in the end come to Me." ⁵ By "Me," he refers, of course, to the one supreme Self of all.

Krishna, now speaking as the Divine Reality, explains to Arjuna that, while He acts in the world (as *Prakrti*), He is ever beyond action (as *Purusha*). He works, but He is ever beyond work, in the freedom of eternity. And He asks Arjuna to perform all his actions in the same spirit, understanding that he must continue to do actions for the good of all, while remaining aware that he is entirely unaffected by his actions. In this way, says Krishna, you will remain unattached to and unaffected by the success or failure of your actions. You will enjoy the peace and freedom of your eternal Self even while engaging in actions.

Arjuna is not yet clear on this point, however, and he questions Krishna further, just as all men deliberate with themselves on the facts of life and how they must behave in accordance with the Truth. Krishna explains to Arjuna that it is not action that is to be renounced, but wrong identification that is to be renounced; for it is wrong identification which causes a man to be attached to desire for the fruits of his actions:

When a man knows himself to be Brahman, his reason is steady, and all delusion is gone from him. When pleasures come, he is not moved; and when pain comes, he is unmoved. He is not bound by things without; within himself he enjoys happiness. His soul is one with Brahman, and so he enjoys eternal bliss. ⁶

This perfect state is attained through understanding and through practice. "Such a man is a yogi," says Krishna; "he is one with Brahman and lives in Brahman." ⁷

Krishna then explains to Arjuna the practice of yoga, by which the realization of his unity with Brahman is to be attained. Now that Arjuna has learned the renunciation of attachment and desire, he is ready to learn the path of meditation. Says Krishna:

When the mind of the yogi is in peace, focused on the Self within, and beyond all restless desires, then he experiences Unity. His mind becomes still, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the winds.

When the mind rests in the prayerful stillness of yoga, by the grace of the One, he knows the One, and attains fulfillment.

Then he knows the joy of Eternity; he sees beyond the intellect and the senses. He becomes the Unmoving, the Eternal. ⁸

... In this experience of Unity, the yogi is liberated, delivered from all suffering forever. The yogi whose heart is still, whose passions are dissolved, and who is pure of sin, experiences this supreme bliss and knows his oneness with Brahman. ⁹

Krishna then goes on, in the Seventh chapter, to describe the ways that He (the supreme Self) appears in this world:

I am the fragrance of the earth and the light of the fire; I am the life of all beings, and the austerity of the yogis.

... I am the intelligence of the intelligent, and the beauty of all things beautiful.

... I am the strength of the strong, ... and the purity of the pure.¹⁰

And yet again, Krishna reminds Arjuna that while all these qualities exist in Him, He remains ever beyond all manifestation:

The three gunas comprising Prakrti come from Me, but I am not in them; they are in Me. The whole world is under the delusion of My Maya (appearance), and know not Me, the Eternal. This Maya of Mine is difficult to penetrate, but those who know Me go beyond My Maya. ¹¹

Here again, the author is presenting that most difficult of truths to comprehend—that the universe is the "appearance" of God, His *Prakrti*, or *Maya*, and not God Himself. The world is His "glory," but it is merely an appearance; He exists beyond His appearance, as the pure Absolute:

I am hidden by My veil of Maya, and the deluded people of the world do not know Me, the Beginningless, the Eternal. ¹²

... But the man of vision and I are one. His Self is Myself, and I am his sole trust.

At the end of many lives the man of vision comes to Me. "God is all," this great man declares. But how rarely is such a man found! ¹³

Krishna then explains to Arjuna how the world (His Maya) evolves into appearance and “involves” back into Himself. The 'day' of world-manifestation lasts for eons upon eons, and alternates with the 'night' of dissolution:

When that 'day' comes, all visible creation arises
from the Invisible; and when the 'night' of
dissolution comes, all creation disappears. ¹⁴

Such a cyclic beginning and ending of the universe of appearance is no mere theory; in the experience of Unity, this recurrent creation and dissolution is seen quite clearly. From the standpoint of Eternity, it occurs in the blinking of an eye; it is like the breathing in and breathing out of *Prakrti*; but from the viewpoint of time and mortals, it is a cycle that takes billions of years to complete. Only now, the scientists who study the motions of the heavens are beginning to surmise from their observations that this is the case, but to one who has seen it and experienced it, there is not the slightest doubt about it.

In the experience of Unity, when one knows his eternal Self, this expansion and dissolution of the universe is recognized as only an appearance. It is like a thought-production that exists for a while, and then is withdrawn. The eternal Self is not affected in the least by it:

...Beyond this appearance and dissolution of the world, there is an invisible, higher, eternal Principle. And when all things in the world pass away, THAT remains forever. ¹⁵

THAT remains pure and infinite, an eternal Consciousness, beyond all manifestation or non-manifestation. "This invisible and supreme Self," says Krishna, "is everlasting. ...This is My highest Being." ¹⁶ As a further explanation of how the cycle of universal creation and dissolution is a function of *Prakrti*, and not of *Purusha*, the Unchanging, Krishna continues:

At the end of the 'night' of time, all things return to My Prakrti; and when the new 'day' of time begins, I bring them again into manifestation. Thus, through My Prakrti, I bring forth all creation, and all these worlds revolve in the cycle of time. But I am not bound by this vast display of creation; I exist alone, watching the drama of this play. I watch, while Prakrti brings forth all that moves and moves not; thus, the worlds go on

revolving. But the fools of the world know Me not; ...they know not the supreme Spirit, the infinite God of all.

Still, there are a few great souls who know Me, and who take refuge in Me. They love Me with a single love, knowing that I am the Source of all. They praise Me with devotion; ...their spirit is one with Me, and they worship Me with their love.

They worship Me, and work for Me, surrendering themselves in My vision. They worship Me as the One and the many, knowing that all is contained in Me. ¹⁷

This is the sublime theme that one hears throughout the *Gita*, in which knowledge, action, love and contemplation, all are synthesized in one vision. To love God is to dwell on Him. For what else is love but the constant flow of thought and desire toward the object of love? In the *Gita*, we find the summit of universality, an all-embracing concern for every tradition, every temperament, every degree of comprehension. For those who require a tangible form of God for worship, the adoration of the loveable Krishna is offered; for those who seek Him in the world through good works, the path of *karma* yoga is proffered; for those who are determined to wend their way to Him through understanding and Self-knowledge, the path of *jnan* yoga is opened wide; and for those who, having understood, and whose actions are ever directed toward Him, and whose love is solely for Him, the path of meditation and contemplation is the royal road, the *raja* yoga, which leads to union with Him. Of such devotees, Krishna says:

Their thoughts are on Me, their life is in Me, and they give light to all. They speak always of Me, and in Me they find peace and joy.

To those who focus their minds on Me, who worship Me with their love, I give the yoga of vision whereby they come to Me. ¹⁸

Give Me your mind and give Me your heart; give Me your offerings and your adoration. Thus, with your soul focused solely on Me as your supreme Goal, truly, you shall come to Me. ¹⁹

Throughout every chapter of the *Gita*, there is this interweaving of love, action, knowledge and contemplation, harmonized to comprise the full tapestry of the life of the spirit. No one single thread of this finely woven

fabric is emphasized or exalted above another, but all facets and needs of the human spirit are equally represented and interrelated. We find precisely the same message in the *Gita* as was found in the Upanishads; but whereas the Upanishads shine as a single bright beacon of pure white light, the *Gita* is refracted into a spectrum of living color and brilliant detail.

When Arjuna begs Krishna to reveal to his eyes the vision of His manifold splendor, Krishna consents, granting to him a divine eyesight whereby he can view the infinite creative effusion of God:

If the light of a thousand Suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendor might be compared to the radiance of the supreme Spirit. And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its infinite variety, standing in one vast Unity as the body of God. ²⁰

In this vision, Arjuna sees all the worlds and all the gods and demons and peoples of the universe rising up from the one Source and then being devoured by It. Overwhelmed by this vision, and trembling in awe and terror, Arjuna bows before Krishna, and cries out:

Adoration unto Thee who art before me and behind me!
Adoration unto Thee who art on all sides, O God! All- powerful
God of immeasurable might, Thou art the Destination of all,
and Thou art all! ²¹

Then, when Krishna had once again resumed his human form, he explained to Arjuna that His vision is not given to the religionists with their reverence for rituals and legal formulas, nor to the self-torturers, nor to those pious people who imagine that devotion consists merely of the dutiful giving of alms; but only to those who long for God with true love in their hearts:

Only by love can men see Me and know Me, and enter into Me.
He who works for Me, who loves Me, whose supreme Goal is
Me, free from attachment to all things, and with true love for all
creation, he, truly, becomes one with Me. ²²

The author of the *Bhagavad Gita*, who put these words into the mouth of Krishna, seems never to tire of repeating his explanation of the primal duality-in-unity; for once again he makes Krishna say:

Prakrti is the source of all material things; it is the creator, the creating, and the creation. *Purusha* is the Source of consciousness. The Purusha in man, united with Prakrti, experiences the ever-changing conditions of Prakrti. When he identifies with the ever changing, he is whirled through life and death to a good or evil fate. But the Purusha in man is ever beyond fate. He is the supreme Lord, the supreme Self.

That man who knows that he is the Purusha, and understands the changing conditions of Prakrti, is never whirled around by fate, wherever he may be.²³

This theme of *Purusha* and *Prakrti* is so crucial to the understanding of Reality and the spiritual life that it is explained again and again throughout the *Gita*. In chapter Thirteen, Krishna attempts this explanation in a novel way, by introducing two new terms. Here, *Prakrti* is referred to as *kshetra* ("the Field"), and *Purusha* is referred to as *kshetrajna* ("the Knower of the Field"). "Whatever is born in this world," says Krishna, "comes from the union of the Field and the Knower of the Field."²⁴ But when a man knows that he is the eternal Knower, the Experiencer of the Field, and not the Field alone, he knows his eternal freedom:

He who knows that he is, himself, the Lord of all, and is ever the same in all, immortal though experiencing the Field of mortality, he knows the truth of existence. And when a man realizes that the Purusha in himself is the same Purusha in all, he does not hurt himself by hurting others. This is the highest knowledge. He who sees that all actions, everywhere, are only the actions of Prakrti, and that the Purusha is the witness of these actions, he sees the Truth.

... Those who, with the eye of inner vision, see the distinction between the Field and the Knower of the Field, and realize that the Purusha is free of Prakrti, they attain the Highest.²⁵

As we shall see in later chapters of this book, the conception of these two Principles of existence is a perennially recurring one, not only in the religious and philosophical literature of India, but in every mystical tradition throughout the world, in every time. And, in nearly every tradition in which these two Principles appear, the eternal, imperishable Principle is universally characterized as Male, the Father; and the Principle of creative energy, out of which is formed the world of matter, is universally characterized as His Female consort, the Mother. Even today, in our own culture, we say that it is our "Father" in heaven who is our Source and Governor; but it is "Mother Nature" who feeds us and nourishes us in this phenomenal world.

These same appellations of gender are applied by the ancient seers of India to the two complements of Reality. The very word, *Purusha*, means "the Man"; and *Prakrti*, like *Prthivi* before, is a noun of the female gender, as is *Durga*, *Maya* and *Shakti*. They are synonymous terms, though stemming from disparate traditions; and each represents the Goddess, the great Mother-Womb of all creation. It is not surprising, therefore, to see that the author of the *Gita* has Krishna say:

Wherever a being may be born, Arjuna, know that My Prakrti is his Mother, and I [Purusha] am the Father who gave him life. ²⁶

The suggestion that we are born of the union of *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, as a child is born of the union of a father and mother, may seem only an extension of a simile; but the Samkhya philosophy means by this "union" something more literal than figurative. These two are really one Reality. *Prakrti* and *Purusha* are merely abstractions designed to separate out these two aspects of the One in order to understand It in Its fullness. Their "union" is in fact a "unity"; they overlap, as it were, like superimposed images on a photographic film. We say at times that *Purusha* is "within" *Prakrti*, or that God is "within" Nature; but that is only a figure of speech. They are locked in an embrace so absolute that they have never been, nor ever can be, separated. Our existence is their interlocking existence. It is in this sense that we are born of their union.

The author of the *Bhagavad Gita* has, through his character, Krishna, stated this truth in many ways to Arjuna, the disciple. But in the Fifteenth chapter, in which Krishna speaks of *Prakrti* and *Purusha* as "the perishable" and "the Imperishable," he states in an unequivocal manner that the ultimate Reality

(the supreme Self) is a Unity which, containing within Itself both of these complementary aspects, supercedes them both:

There exists two Principles in this world: *kshara* (the perishable) and *akshara* (the imperishable). The imperishable is the Unchanging, the Eternal. But the highest Reality is something else; It is called *Paramatman* (the supreme Self).

It is *both* the Eternal *and* that which pervades and sustains all this universe. ²⁷

When one experiences the mystical vision of Unity, he experiences not merely *Prakrti*, the undifferentiated world-energy, nor merely *Purusha*, the unmanifested Absolute; he experiences the one Reality, which is both of these at once. It is called *Paramatman*, "the supreme Self." Here is seen no distinction between *Prakrti* and *Purusha*, the perishable and the imperishable; the ONE contains no such division. By transcending *Prakrti*, one realizes the eternal *Purusha*, but in that realization, *Prakrti* and *Purusha* no longer have any separate, independent, existence. They are one.

This great Unity cannot be easily explained; that is why It must be experienced to be known. It is eternal and unchanging, yet It appears as the phenomenal world of change. It is only as a means of explaining Its two aspects that the names, *Prakrti* and *Purusha*, are invented. In fact, the Creative Energy, of which this body and all this universe is composed, is just as imperishable and eternal as the one Consciousness which supports it. They are the same; and in this one Imperishable, there is no differentiation between Energy and Consciousness, *Prakrti* and *Purusha*.

Nothing at all ever perishes—except the images and forms, which *Prakrti* constructs of herself. And because we identify with the perishable body-form, we make a distinction between the perishable body and the "spirit" within us; we regard this body as the vessel or abode of the "spirit." But when the realization of the ONE dawns, then one looks about in awe, declaring, "O my God, even this body is Thine own!" And then one asks, "Which the Imperishable, which the abode?"

Because I am beyond the perishable, and even beyond the imperishable, in this world and in the Vedas, I am known as 'the Supreme.' One who, with a clear vision, sees Me as "the Supreme," knows all there is to be known; his soul is merged in

Me. I have revealed to you the most secret teaching, Arjuna. He who has realized it has realized the Truth, and his task in his world is done.²

To one who knows his own supreme Self, there is no longer a witnessing subject and an acting object, no longer a *Purusha* and a *Prakrti*. All his actions are the actions of the ONE. He can no longer say, "*He* guides me," or "*He* does everything through me." His breathing is God's, his work is God's; there are no longer two. "He is the only ONE in all, but it seems as if He were many." ²⁹

In the Eighteenth and last chapter, Krishna reiterates and sums up all that he has taught to Arjuna, with a special emphasis on the nature, necessity, and goal of all man's works. It is a message of relevance to every man, but most especially to those who would learn the secret of spiritual harmony and happiness in this world. It is the message of *svadharma*.

Dharma is, of course, translated as "duty," but *svadharma* is not simply the duty to perform works in the world, but the necessity of performing one's own special God-given duty. It is not often easy to know exactly what one's *svadharma* is. Is it simply to work at that occupation which brings the greatest material gain? No. Nor is it simply the serving of others. Rather, it is the serving of God, the Self, who is the indwelling, guiding, joy of man. No matter what a man might do in this world, no matter how respectable or charitable or unselfish, if it is not his *svadharma*, he will be miserable; he will feel frustrated, unfulfilled and dissatisfied. This is especially true for the sincere aspirant to Truth, for he will feel most keenly the disharmony between his spirit and his actions.

Oftentimes, however, there are great obstacles, great temptations, in the way of performing one's *svadharma*. Those whose *svadharma* is to do the work of God know this well. The necessities of the body, the pressures of society, and the loneliness and effort involved in following our *svadharma* are often troublesome obstacles to the following of our God-ordained path. Who cannot imagine how difficult was the path ordained for a Jesus or a Buddha, or for the author of the *Bhagavad Gita*? To follow their *svadharma* required great sacrifice and surrender of all that men regard as good and wholesome in this world. Yet it is to the great benefit of the world that they chose to surrender all else in order to perform their *svadharma*. For them, having known their eternal Identity, there was no other course but to share that

knowledge with all humanity. No other duty could possibly hold sway over them. Had they denied or suppressed their *svadharma*, how miserable, how wretched a life would they have had—even if they had been surrounded with all luxuries and wealth!

It is by this a spiritual man knows his *svadharma*; if his soul is happy and delighted in its performance, and if the very thought of diverting from that path makes him sick at heart and despondent, he may be sure that it is his *svadharma*.

It is not right to leave undone the holy work which ought to be done. Such a surrender of action is a delusion of darkness.

And if a man abandons his *svadharma* out of fear of pain, truly, he has no reward. ³⁰

The reward of performing the work appropriate to one's own *svadharma* is the peace and joy of God. By renouncing all other concerns but the performance of the work God has ordained for you, you will feel and know His confirmation within you.

A man attains perfection when his work is worship of God, from whom all things come and who exists within everyone. Greater is your own work, even if it is meager, than the work of another, even if it is great. When a man does the work that God gives him, no sin can touch him.

And a man should not abandon his work, even if he cannot achieve it in full perfection; because in all work there is some imperfection, as in all fire there is some smoke. ³¹

...It is better to perish in your own work, than to flourish in another's. ³²

In earlier chapters, Krishna has already taught Arjuna the way that a man should work:

Set your heart upon your work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do your work. ³³ ...When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart, and by the grace of God finds the joy of God in himself, then his soul has indeed found peace. ³⁴

The man who has found the joy of the Spirit and in the Spirit has his satisfaction and his peace, that man is beyond the law of karma (actions and rewards). He is beyond what is done and not done. He is beyond the world of mortal beings. In freedom from the bonds of attachment, do, therefore, the work to be done; for the man whose work is pure attains indeed the Supreme. ³⁵

Therefore, offer to Me all your works and rest your mind on the Supreme. Be free from vain hopes and selfish thoughts, and with inner peace fight your fight. ³⁶

The *Bhagavad Gita* has stood the test of time and is so beloved among men of all nations because its author was steeped in wisdom, a wisdom that is applicable to the seekers of God, the lovers of Truth, at every level of understanding. The devotee finds in it the summit of devotion; the intelligent find in it the heights of wisdom; the servant of God finds in it the supreme path to victory; and in it the yogi reads the secrets of inner union.

Whoever the great sage was who wrote it, he was a man of truly universal and all-embracing wisdom. He had attained both the height and breadth of Self-knowledge; he knew the supreme Reality, both at Its Source and in Its manifestation. And his guidance, the sharing of his knowledge in the *Bhagavad Gita*, is now and for all time a source of life and joy for all who have the good fortune to read it. When a book is truly inspired and filled by the grace of God, it shines so brightly into the hearts and minds of men that it becomes universally revered as a holy receptacle of God's word. Such a book is the *Bhagavad Gita*, "the Song of God"; it is a never-failing wellspring of the water of life for all thirsty travelers on the road to Truth.

NOTES:

1. *Bhagavad Gita*, 1:47; based on the translation of Juan Mascaro; Mascaro, Juan, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1962.
2. *Ibid.*, 2:18
3. *Ibid.*, 2:53
4. *Ibid.*, 3:27-28
5. *Ibid.*, 4:11
6. *Ibid.*, 5:20-21
7. *Ibid.*, 5:24
8. *Ibid.*, 6:18-21
9. *Ibid.*, 6:23-27

10. *Ibid.*, 7:9-11
11. *Ibid.*, 7:12-14
12. *Ibid.*, 7:25
13. *Ibid.*, 7:18-19
14. *Ibid.*, 8:18
15. *Ibid.*, 8:20
16. *Ibid.*, 8:21-22
17. *Ibid.*, 9:7-15
18. *Ibid.*, 10:8-10
19. *Ibid.*, 9:34
20. *Ibid.*, 11:12-13
21. *Ibid.*, 11:15
22. *Ibid.*, 11:54-55
23. *Ibid.*, 13:20-23
24. *Ibid.*, 13:26
25. *Ibid.*, 13:27-34
26. *Ibid.*, 14:4
27. *Ibid.*, 15:16-17
28. *Ibid.*, 15:18-20
29. *Ibid.*, 13:16
30. *Ibid.*, 18:7-8
31. *Ibid.*, 18:46-48
32. *Ibid.*, 3:35
33. *Ibid.*, 2:47
34. *Ibid.*, 2:55
35. *Ibid.*, 3:17-19
36. *Ibid.*, 3:30

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VI. Tantra

The word, “Tantra,” appears as early as the 4th century B.C.E., in a work called the *Apastamba-Srauta Sutra*, where it is used to signify any ritual procedure containing a number of aspects. Kautilya, in the 3rd century B.C.E., used the word in the sense of ‘fundamental canons of a system of thought.’ But by the early centuries of the Current Era, the word, *Tantra*, had come to be associated with a distinct metaphysical view complete with its own unique terminology. It is a metaphysic based on mystical

experience, and is essentially identical to the viewpoint of Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga. It is, indeed, yet another expression of the age-old and perennial vision of a primal and essential Unity self-divided into Male and Female principles.

Since the earliest utterings of man, the primal Unity, experienced by the mystic, has been characterized as dual-faceted; one aspect being transcendent, the other immanent as the world; one absolute, the other relative; one eternally unchanged, the other a panoply of movement. And since earliest times these two aspects have been designated as Male and Female: The Absolute, the supreme Consciousness, is the Father, the male sovereign and Lord; His creative Energy, which gives birth to the universe, is the Mother-power, the bountiful Goddess, queen Maya. Put in less figurative terms, the constant Awareness, which is realized in the experience of Unity to be the one eternal and indivisible Reality, is also realized to be the very One who projects His own living light in the form of the universe. That light is not separate from Himself, nor does it, in fact, go out from Him; but in order to speak of it at all, it is necessary to differentiate it from the constant Awareness, the unchanging Absolute. Thus, the primal Awareness is spoken of as “He”; and the light that forms the mutable world is called “She.” But they are never two. He is the universal Mind; She is His Thought. He is the Speaker; She is the Word. He is the Seed; She is the Tree. They are complementary aspects of one indivisible Reality.

It is not very difficult to see how these two purely abstract principles came to be represented by artists and poets since primitive times as two independent objects of worship, humanized according to the characteristics described by the sages. “He” was the remote, unapproachable, Absolute, and was therefore portrayed by the Dravidian peoples of ancient India as a totally indrawn ascetic, a naked yogi, seated in perpetual contemplation of eternity atop the icy peaks of Mount Kailas. He sat on the ground with his long, untended hair piled on his head, a cobra draped ‘round his neck, and his face and body covered with the ashes of the world, which, in his own mind, he had reduced to nothing. In his hands he held a trident and a conch; his mount was the great white bull, Nandi; and his symbol was the phallus-shaped stone, called the *lingam*. Such an hyposticized representation of the absolute Being has existed in India since the most ancient of times, long before the Aryan invasion; and over the centuries, “He” has been called by many different names. In Vedic times, he was referred to as *Pashupati* (“Lord of *pashus*, or sentient creatures); when associated with the angry and

destructive forces of nature, he was *Rudra*. One of Rudra's epithets was *Shiva*, meaning "auspicious" (even today, in India, a great rainstorm is considered "auspicious"); and eventually, *Shiva* came to be the name for God most prominently used among the Dravidian peoples. Frequently, Shiva, himself, is referred to by such epithets as *Mahadev*, "the great God," or *Maheshvar*, "great Lord."

Simultaneous with the early development of this God-symbol among the rural populace consisting mostly of the aboriginal races of India, was the similarly symbolic representation of the one God among the Aryan population as *Vishnu*. Vishnu, one of the names for God appearing in the Vedas, was pictured as a golden-robed sovereign who lived in splendor in the heavenly realm of Vaikuntha. It was he who became incarnated as Krishna, the cow-herd boy who later became the great king and sage of Dwarka in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and also as Rama, the brave warrior-king of the epic, *Ramayana*. Shiva and Vishnu, though obviously dissimilar in characteristics, are both symbols of the one Godhead. Shiva represents the qualities of eternity, detachment, immovability; while Vishnu stands as a symbol of the power, glory and sovereignty of the one all-governing Lord. From both the predominantly Dravidian Shaivites and the predominantly Aryan Vaishnavites, a vast body of mythology arose around both these symbols as their ritual worship spread throughout the land of India, and as many temples and statues (*murtis*) were built commemorating one or the other of these two representations of God. But, of course, the poets and artists had not forgotten the Female aspect of Reality.

The *shakti*, or manifestory-power of God, was symbolized as the female counterpart to the male deity. The consort of Shiva, his *shakti*, was *Sati* (feminine form of *Sat*, or "Truth"), the beautiful nymph-like daughter of king Daksha, whose seductive charms moved Shiva to awake from his profound contemplative state. In yet another mythological representation, She was called *Parvati*. As the hypostacized and deified Power of Shiva, She was also called *Durga*, *Kali*, or *Ambika*. She too was represented by statues and worshipped in temples devoted to her alone. She was usually depicted as many-armed, displaying both her beneficent and her destructive aspects, holding out one hand in a gesture of gentleness and compassion, while in another she wielded a sword. She was garlanded with skulls, and daubed with blood, as she rode forth astride a ferocious lion or tiger.

For those who preferred the Vishnu-personification of God, the Female principle was the goddess, *Lakshmi*, also known as *Shri*. She was the source of all wealth and good fortune. She was the jewel-bedecked Mother who granted to her children whatever boons they asked of her. It was she who took the form of Radha, the paramour of Krishna; and Sita, the faithful wife of Rama. While the female counterpart to Shiva was associated more prevalently with the angry, destructive, aspects of nature, and was pictured as a bloodthirsty she-demon, Vishnu's consort was the compassionate and gracious bestower of gifts and was pictured as the epitome of feminine beauty and grace.

Between the 1st and 5th centuries of the Current Era a vast body of mythological literature was written about these two pairs of gods. Hundreds of stories were written to describe their lives and exploits, and, mingled with these stories were the philosophical explanations of the abstract principles, which they represented. These philosophical mythologies were all the rage, as they reached to the non-intellectual populace in a way that purely didactic treatises could not. They were called by the generic name of *Puranas*; there was the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Shiva Purana*, the *Shakti Purana*, the *Bhagavat Purana* (which told the legends of Krishna), a *Skanda Purana*, and many, many others.

By this time and probably long before, there were large magnificent temples dedicated to Shiva all over the country. Some of the grandest were the Badrikashrama and Somnath temples in the north, Vishvanath temple at Benares, Nakulishvar temple at Calcutta and Rameshvaram temple in the south. Great yogis of the time, such as the illustrious Gorakshanath and Manikka-vachakar, sang the praises of Shiva, and imitated Him in their outer appearance and appurtenances. Temples and *murtis* dedicated to Vishnu in the form of Rama and Krishna also dotted the country in every town and city. The spread of the Puranic legends aroused devotion to one or another of these "gods" in the hearts of the simple populace, and every facet of their lives became permeated with devotion to these legendary beings, who represented, of course, the one Divinity.

Shakti, too, had her own temples, and her own worshippers. According to Farquhar, the medieval historian, the period ranging from 500 to 900 C.E. was called "the Shakta period," a time in which Shakti worship became widely prevalent throughout India. But even as early as the 2nd century it is apparent that She was the object of a widespread cult. In the *Mahabharata*

(2nd-3rd century C.E.), She is described as Durga, and prayers are offered to Her. And in the *Markandeya Purana*, compiled during the Gupta period (ca. 4th century), Mahadevi, the great Goddess, is treated quite extensively in one complete book of thirteen chapters, called the *Devi Mahatmyam* (“Praise of the Goddess”). There She is described as identical with Purusha’s Prakrti, Vishnu’s Maya, and Shiva’s Shakti. She is also referred to as *Chiti*; i.e., pure Consciousness, a manifested aspect of the Absolute. The *Devi Bhagavata Purana* is entirely devoted to Her; there She is referred to as *Mahashakti*, *Mahalakshmi*, *Mahakali*, and *Mahamaya*.

The great Goddess also appears in the *Agni Purana*, *Bhagavat Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, and others of this genre. In the 8th and 9th centuries, lesser Puranas were written in sole dedication to the Goddess; these were the so-called *Upa-Puranas*: the *Devi Purana*, *Kalika Purana*, and *Mahabhagavata Purana*. Here, as a representative sample, is how She is described in the *Vishnu Purana*:

“Shri [epithet of Lakshmi], the bride of Vishnu, the mother of the world, is eternal, imperishable. As He is all pervading, so also is She.... Vishnu is the meaning, She is speech (*Vac*). Vishnu is consciousness; She is intellect. He is Goodness; She is devotion. He is the Creator; She is the creation. Shri is the earth; Hari (Vishnu) is the substratum. The God is utter stillness; She is surrender.

“...Lakshmi is the light; and Hari, who is the All and the Lord of all, is the lamp. She, the mother of the world, is the creeping vine; and Vishnu, the tree around which She clings. ... He, the bestower of blessings, is the bridegroom; the lotus-throned Goddess is the bride. ...Govinda (Vishnu) is love; and Lakshmi, his gentle spouse, is [the] pleasure [of love]. But why go on listing the ways in which they are present? It is enough to say, in a word, that of gods, animals and men, Hari is all that is called male; Lakshmi is all that is termed female. There is nothing other than these two.”¹

It was by such figurative language that the mystic’s profound vision of a unitive duality was conveyed to the populace. In art, the one self-divided Reality was sometimes portrayed as a god and goddess locked in a passionate embrace. In some medieval sculptures, Shiva is portrayed as a

corpse (dead to the world), with Shakti, in the dreadful form of Kali, sitting on him in an act of sexual union, or dancing in abandon on his outstretched body. What the Chinese symbolized in the Yin-Yang circle, which is both divided and undivided, the Indians preferred to represent as male and female joined in a loving union. Some of the most beautiful and erotic representations of this union were sculpted by the Buddhists in the 9th century and are in evidence to this day in the caves of Orissa and at Khajuraho. Many Tibetan figurines of the same period, which are called *Yab-Yum* (Father-Mother), also represent in erotic copulative poses these two principles of the one Reality. The inseparability of these two is expressed in the statues of Shiva as *Ardhanarishvara*, a being who is half male, half female. The predominant pictographic symbol of this duality-in-unity, however, has been since pre-Aryan times, the *lingam* in the *yonis*, a symbol found in almost every Indian temple, comprised of a stone phallus symbol accompanied by a base in the form of the female sex organ. The two together form a recognizable symbol of the complementarity of the two inseparable aspects of the One.

We are now ready, after this long preamble, to understand the expansive development of Tantra during this same period. Tantra is the yoga of the union of Shiva and Shakti. Of course, they are already one, but in order to *experience* this unity, certain practices are prescribed whereby the illusory and separative ego is dispelled and the awareness of the eternal unity dawns within. Where the Upanishadic philosophy leaves off, spiritual practice, or *sadhana*, begins; and it is this *sadhana*, which is the province of the Tantric scriptures.

From the earliest times, the Tantric *sadhana* has coexisted with the Vedantic philosophy in the mainstream of Indian spiritual teaching. But only around the 5th or 6th centuries did it become disseminated in literary form; thereafter, the principles of Tantra are to be found in nearly every subsequent piece of spiritual literature, and in the teachings of India's saints and sages. If the Vedanta represents the exoteric teaching, the Tantra represents the esoteric teaching; it is the guide to the culmination of the spiritual journey begun with the comprehension of nondualistic philosophy.

Some of the earliest of the literary expressions of Tantra were the *Apabhramsa dohas* and the *Charyagitis* of the Siddhas, and the Yogic texts of the Nathas, such as that of Gorakshanath. In Kashmir, a number of Tantric writings appeared in the 7th and 8th centuries, which are called

Agamas, regarded by their proponents as divinely inspired scriptures. As they extol the Absolute by the name of Shiva, they are also known as *Shaivagamas*. They contain the precepts of what is now known as Kashmir Shaivism. Among these scriptural writings are the *Shiva-sutras* of Vasugupta, the *Shiva-drshiti* of Somananda, the *Tantraloka* of Abhinavagupta, and the *Pratyabijna-hridayam* of Kshemaraj. Immensely popular, these Tantric texts were immediately copied both in Sanskrit and in the regional Dravidian languages such as Telugu, Tamil, and Kanarese.

By the 8th century, Tantrism was widely taught by Brahmin and Buddhist teachers alike. In 747 C.E., Padma Shambhava, a professor at the Buddhist university of Nalanda, took the Tantric philosophy to Tibet where he founded his monastery; and around the same time a Mahayana Buddhist in Bengal was publishing his *Hevajira Tantra*. Shankaracharya, the great exponent of *advaita* (Nondualistic) Vedanta, is also said to have written at least two Tantric works, the *Sundaryalahari*, and the *Prapanchasara*. In the 10th century, while a Shaivite yogi was writing his Tantric works, the *Kalika Purana* and the *Rudrayamala*, a Jain monk of Aysore was writing his *Jvalini Tantra*. Today, the treatises on Tantra by the representatives of various religious sects are too numerous to mention.

While Tantra is primarily a *sadhana*, that is to say, a prescribed system of practice, nonetheless, in order to understand the reasoning behind the *sadhana*, it is necessary to understand not only Tantra's metaphysics, but its conception of the psychophysical nature of the human body as well. It is the teaching of Tantric yoga that the Shakti, which is the universal creative force manifesting as all sentient and insentient beings, is the projected "Power" or "Will" of Shiva, the pure Absolute:

"He knows the true Reality who sees the entire universe as the play of the supreme Shakti of supreme Shiva ²

"...Throughout all these forms, it is the Lord alone; He illumines His own nature. In truth, there is no other cause of all manifestation except His Will (Shakti), which gives existence to all worldly enjoyment and liberation as well. ³

"...In truth, there is no difference between Uma (Shakti) and Shankara (Shiva); the One consists of two aspects; of this there is no doubt." ⁴

Such statements reveal that the Tantric metaphysic is identical to the Vedantic view and to that of all its mystically inspired predecessors. What is unique in Tantrism, and what constitutes its most significant contribution to mystical thought is its conception of man's subtle psychophysical nature. Like all mystical philosophies, Tantra recognizes that man's essential being is identical with the ultimate Being; i.e., Shiva. But, according to the Tantric scriptures, man remains ignorant of his Godhood and identified with the body and mind, so long as the Shakti residing in him remains unawakened and unevolved.

According to the Tantric scriptures, Shakti exists in man in an involuted state, whose purpose it is to evolve toward the realization of its identity with Shiva. This Shakti resides in man in a concentrated state in the subtle body, at a location corresponding to the perineum (shown in diagrams as being at the base of the spine). To differentiate this involuted Shakti-within-man from the all-inclusive Shakti, it is called *Kundalini-Shakti* ("the coiled energy"). This *Kundalini* energy can be compared to a watch-spring which is involuted to a state of potential release, and which, according to its own timing, acts as the evolutionary force which eventually brings all mankind to a complete expansion of consciousness. When, however, it is activated (awakened), by any of several methods, it becomes quickened, rapidly increasing its activity, and leads a person to enlightenment within one lifetime.

The Tantric seers say that the subtle body is composed of a complex network of subtle nerve-filaments (*nadis*) through which the life force, called *Prana-Shakti*, flows. This *Prana-Shakti* (called *Chi* by the Taoists of ancient China) is the current, as it were, which operates to enliven the body and mind and to regulate the functions of the internal organs. When the involuted *Kundalini Shakti* is aroused, it infuses the *Prana* current with a newly intensified potency, by which the evolutionary process is greatly accelerated.

The *Prana-Shakti* normally flows evenly through two main *nadis*, which parallel either side of the spinal column; these are called *Ida* (on one's left) and *Pingala* (on one's right). But when the *Kundalini-Shakti* is activated, this current finds its way through a subtle middle passage, called the *Sushumna*. Within this central *nadi*, through which the activated *Prana* current flows, there are six ascending nerve-plexuses, called *chakras* ("wheels"). It is the purpose of the awakened *Kundalini* energy to cleanse

and purify the *nadis*, which in unregenerate man, are clogged and constricted by immoderate living, and to pass through each of the *chakras* as it ascends from the base of the spinal column to the crown of the head. Its final goal is the seventh nerve-plexus at the top of the head, called *Sahasrar* (the thousand-petalled lotus), where *Kundalini-Shakti* is said to attain its union with Shiva. When this occurs, a person experiences the Absolute, the Godhead:

“As long as the *prana* does not flow in the Sushumna and enter the Sahasrar, ...as long as the mind does not become absorbed in the Self, so long those who talk of spiritual knowledge indulge only in boastful and false prattle. ⁵

“...The rush of bliss that ensues upon the meeting of the Pair, the supreme Shakti and the Self above, is the real joining; all other joinings are mere copulation.” ⁶

The *Kundalini-Shakti* is ordinarily in a dormant, regulated-function state; only when it becomes awakened, or activated, does it begin its accelerated work. This awakening is said to be achieved by several different methods: the *Kundalini* may be forcefully awakened through the regimen of postures (*asanas*) and breathing techniques (*pranayama*) prescribed by *Hatha-Yoga*; through intense devotion to God; through concentration of the mind upon the inner Self; through the practice of chanting or reciting the *mantram* given by a qualified Master (*Sadguru*); or simply by coming in contact with and receiving the graces of one who has already accomplished the full ascendancy of the *Kundalini-Shakti*. Such a person, who is in the state of enlightenment and capable of transmitting *Kundalini-Shakti* from his own accumulated fund, is called the *Guru*; and the transmission of his grace in the form of Shakti is called *Shaktipat*. According to the Tantric *shastras*, or scriptures, such a Guru is able to thus awaken the dormant *Kundalini* of those he deems prepared for it, by a mere glance, a word, a touch, or simply by his very thought or will. Such an “initiation” by the *Guru* is regarded as synonymous with receiving the grace of God:

“The learned men of all times always hold that the descent of grace does not have any cause or condition but depends entirely on the free will of the Lord. ⁷

“...From his transcendent station, the Lord in the form of the Guru frees one from all bondage. ⁸

“...The Guru is the means [to enlightenment].⁹

“... Initiation [by the Guru] is the first ladder to the terrace of Liberation.¹⁰...The touch of the hand of the Guru destroys the impurities of the world and converts the base metal [of the disciple] into gold.”¹¹

When the *Kundalini-Shakti* is thus awakened, certain initial symptoms occur. They are evidenced physically, mentally, and emotionally. Physical symptoms include increased internal body heat, involuntary shaking of the spine and limbs (*kriyas*), and the spontaneous occurrence of *asanas* and vocal productions. Physical pain may be experienced at the base of the spine, or one may experience alternating heaviness and lightness of the body, or a stimulation of the sexual glands, or merely a great increase in vitality. One may also have the sensation of a darting, or crawling, energy rising up the spine, or experience the movement of the activated *Prana-Shakti* moving about in various parts of the body.

It is said that when a person’s Shakti is operating in the lower three *chakras* — *Muladhar*, *Svadhithana*, and *Manipura* (corresponding to the coccyx, the sex organ and the navel) — sleep, sex, and food are one’s main concerns. But when the *Kundalini-Shakti* reaches the heart-center, the *Anahat chakra*, one begins to feel intense devotion and longing for God. As the *Kundalini-Shakti* rises higher to the throat region, the *Vishuddha chakra*, then one begins to hear different inner sounds and taste inner nectars; and at the forehead, the *Ajna chakra*, one sees delightful lights and visions. When the Shakti reaches the crown of the head, the *Sahasrar*, the individual consciousness merges into super-consciousness, and the aspirant reaches *samadhi*, the pure awareness of the transcendent Self:

“From the element earth in the Muladhara,
 To the element fire in the Svadhithana,
 To the element water in the Manipura,
 To the element air in the Anahata,
 To the element ether in the Vishuddha,
 To the element of mind in the Ajna,
 You travel, O Mother, to keep your secret rendezvous
 With your Lord in the thousand-petalled lotus, Sahasrar.”¹²

“...When the bliss of Consciousness is attained, there is the

lasting acquisition of that state in which Consciousness is one's only Self, and in which all that appears is identical with Consciousness. Even the body is experienced as identical with Consciousness. ¹³

"...Awareness of the perceiver and the perceived is common to all beings. But with Self-realized yogis it is different; they are aware of them as one." ¹⁴

Thus, the whole purpose of the Tantra scriptures is to elucidate the means whereby one may experience the union of Shakti and Shiva, and thus know the transcendent Unity in *samadhi*. This Tantric *sadhana* takes many forms, from the ritualized worship of Shiva and Shakti (with flowers and fruit offerings, etc.) to austere yogic practices, to the actual sexual union of male and female practitioners in the symbolic enactment of the transcendent union of the God and Goddess. This last, however, is a degenerate form of Tantra, known by the name of *Vamachara*, or "left-hand path," to distinguish it from the "right" (*Dakshina*) or pure Tantric path. It was just this degenerate form of Tantra which led Kumarila, in the 6th century C.E., to write that Tantra was "only for the degraded, the uneducated, the fallen, and the infirm, and is fraught with much danger." The "pure" form of Tantric *sadhana* aims at transforming the individual through a harnessing of his inherent energy (*shakti*), and by a concentrated confinement of that energy within, forcing it to rise Godward. It is the focusing of this psychic energy, which is the entire purpose of Tantric *sadhana*; and the goal of this *sadhana* is Self-realization.

In the Tantric, as well as the Vedantic, view, Self-realization is synonymous with Liberation. "Liberation," said the Shaivite sage, Abhinavagupta, "is nothing else but the awareness of one's own true nature." He was stating in effect what Jesus of Nazareth had said many centuries previous: "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free." Always we are Consciousness. That is our continually undeviating Reality. We are the Witness of the play of our own Shakti, which is forming this entire universe. It is the *knowing* of this, the direct realization of the Self, which constitutes the soul's liberation. For the Self, of course, there is no liberation; the Self is always free. It has never been bound. It is only our "illusory" self, our limited soul-identity that experiences bondage and liberation:

"Though in reality there is no bondage, the individual is in bondage as long as there exists the feeling of limitation in him.

...In fact, there never has been any veiling or covering anywhere in reality. No one has ever been in bondage. Please show me where such bondage exists. Besides these two false beliefs, that there is such a thing as bondage and such a thing as an individual mind, there is no bondage for anyone anywhere.”¹⁵

“...The individual soul (*jiva*) is Shiva; Shiva is *jiva*. When in bondage, it is *jiva*; freed from bondage, it is Shiva.”¹⁶

“...The knowledge of the identity between the *jiva* and Shiva constitutes liberation; lack of this knowledge constitutes bondage.”¹⁷

The eternal Self is always free; yet so long as we are unaware of that freedom, we are bound. Liberation is therefore a state of awareness. So long as we are aware of the ever-free Self, we are entirely unconditioned by external circumstances or states of the mind. For, one who has realized that Self possesses a certainty, a permanent underlying confidence, that can never be erased, and which allows him to retain an inner peace and joyfulness regardless of circumstances of destiny or the transient fluctuations of the mind:

“The yogi who knows that the entire splendor of the universe is his, who rises to the consciousness of unity with the universe, retains his Divinity even in the midst of various thoughts and fancies.¹⁸ ...This entire universe is a sport of Consciousness.

“One who is constantly aware of this is certainly a liberated being (*jivanmukta*).¹⁹ ...The individual who has the cognition of identity, who regards the universe to be a sport and is always united with it, is undoubtedly liberated in life.”²⁰

Such “liberation” is the ultimate goal of all knowledge-seeking. It is the inner freedom which all men seek, a freedom from doubt, from the barbs of worldly misfortune, from the deadly sting of sorrow to which all those ignorant of their true nature must be subject. For one who has attained this liberating knowledge of his eternal Self, neither bodily affliction, nor worldly circumstance, nor even death has the power to afflict him with fear; he is fearless, (*abhaya*), for he is grounded and established in the unshakeable certainty of his permanent immortality and incorruptible bliss.

NOTES:

1. Vishnu Purana, I.8
2. Spanda karika
3. Paramartha-sara
4. Linga Purana
5. Hatha Yoga Pradipika
6. Kularnava Tantra, 5.111-112
7. Malini Vijaya Vartika
8. Kularnava Tantra, 12.25
9. Vasugupta, *Shiva Sutras*, 2.6
10. Paramananda Tantra
11. Jnanarnava Tantra, 24.41
12. Shankara, Sundaryalahari
13. Kshemaraj, Pratyabijnahridayam
14. Vijnanabhairava
15. Tripurarahasya
16. Kularnava Tantra, 9.42
17. Ishvarapratyabijna Vimarshini
18. Ishvarapratyabijna, 11-12
19. Spandakarika, 3:3
20. Kshemaraj, Pratyabijnahridayam

* * *

VII. Dadu

In India, during the 16th century, there lived many great illumined saints. We have already mentioned Kabir and Nanak; there was also Chaitanya (1485-1533), the love-intoxicated *bhakta* of Bengal; Vallabha (1479-1531), the great mystic-philosopher and *acharya*; and Eknath (1548-1609), the gentle Maharashtran mystic and poet. But there was one who is especially worthy of inclusion in our story for the simple clarity of his vision and the universality of his message: his name was Dadu. Like Kabir and Nanak, he stood quite alone between the quarrelling factions of Hinduism and Islam and proclaimed the unity of all men in God and the universality of the message of all who have known Him. "Ask of those who have attained God," he said; "all speak the same word. All the saints are of one mind; it is only those in the midst of the way who follow diverse paths. All the enlightened have left one message; ...It is only those in the midst of their journey who hold diverse opinions." ¹

Dadu (1544-1603), whose name is an affectionate diminutive of the common Muslim name, Allahdad, was born at Ahmedabad, on the banks of the Saraswati river, to a Muslim merchant named Lodi Ram and his wife, Basri. From his early youth, Dadu was gifted with a curious intellect and a love of learning. It is said that, at the age of eleven, he received the blessing of a wandering holy man, and from that time began to take interest in the knowledge of God.

At the age of eighteen, he left his home to live the religious life of prayer and meditation. He wandered from city to city between the regions of Gujerat and Rajputana as a mendicant, until, sometime around the age of twenty-five, he took up his abode in the town of Sambhar, on the shores of the Salt Lake, in the Moghul province of Ajmer. There, he came into contact with a number of spiritual teachers and came under the tutelage of one called Shaikh Buddhan; but he was to claim no lineage from any tradition save the one common tradition of all mystics, and no teacher save the one interior Teacher common to all.

It was at Sambhar that Dadu became married and fathered four children: two sons and two daughters. As a householder, he practiced the trade of a cotton-carder; yet the holiness and authority of his discourses among his friends quickly earned for him a reputation as a holy man, and he began to attract a following of devoted disciples. Like Kabir, whom he greatly

admired, Dadu knew both the Muslim and Hindu mystical traditions, and preferred not to be associated exclusively with either. He had experienced the One to whom both Muslims and Hindus aspire, and attempted, by his teachings, to reconcile them in understanding of their common pursuit. He had known God directly, and had seen, therefore, how foolish are those who squabble over their petty ideas of God, and their various modes of external worship and behavior:

“One says ‘Swami,’ one says ‘Shaikh’; neither grasps the mystery of this world. One speaks of ‘Rama’ and the other of ‘Allah,’ but they have not known either Rama or Allah! ...Says Dadu: I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. I follow none of the Six Systems [of philosophy]; I worship the Merciful. Dadu belongs to neither faction: he is the slave of Allah-Rama. He who is without form or limitation, He alone is my Guru.” 2

Naturally, such words as these were offensive to the orthodox Muslim legalists; and soon Dadu became a controversial figure in Sambhar and found he had as many enemies as friends. A Muslim official, by the name of Buland Khan, assaulted Dadu, beat him, and had him jailed for his self-proclaimed infidelity to the doctrines of Islam. Shortly thereafter, Dadu decided to leave Sambhar. At the age of thirty-five, he moved to Amber, and was well-received there by the local Hindu ruler, Raja Bhagwan Das, and was supplied by him with a comfortable retreat on the shores of Lake Maota.

Bhagwan Das, while a Hindu, was brother to one of the wives of the Muslim emperor, Akbar; and was a commander of the royal armies. While at the emperor’s court one day, he had occasion to mention to the emperor the presence in his kingdom of Dadu; and Akbar, who was always eager to meet with the saintly of all religious persuasions, remarked that he would like to meet him. Soon thereafter, a meeting was arranged between Dadu and Akbar at the emperor’s palace at Sikri. To appreciate this historical meeting, it is necessary to know something about Akbar.

Padashah Akbar (d. 1605) was a descendent of the great conqueror, Babur (d. 1530). Babur, in whose veins flowed the blood of the Turkish ruler, Timur (the Tamerlane of English literature) and Genghis Khan, the Mongol, was succeeded by his son, Humayun, who was twenty-three when he

ascended the throne as emperor of Hindustan. Humayun's son, Akbar, then came into power in 1556, at the age of thirteen, after his father fell from his library staircase and died as a result. Thereafter, Akbar proved himself a superior Commander-in-chief of the armies, and an indefatigable ruler of an ever-widening empire.

Akbar was an ambitious and ruthless warrior, and a crafty administrator, who accomplished the conquest and consolidation of nearly all of India under his rule; but he was also a man of unusual curiosity and tolerance concerning all religious traditions—a trait highly uncharacteristic of Muslim rulers of India up to that time. It is said that he had been influenced from his early youth by the teachings of the Sufis, and that he, himself, sought “to attain the ineffable bliss of direct contact with the Divine reality.”

In his eagerness to know as much as possible about the religious traditions of the various factions existing in his Empire, he met frequently with representatives of Sufism, Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. His interest was no doubt partly spiritual, partly intellectual, and partly political. In the naive hope of establishing a religious synthesis in which all religious ideals would be reconciled in one universal religion to be adopted throughout India, he built a universal “House of Worship,” and proclaimed his new religion, with himself as its titular and infallible head.

While this “new religion” was not to last beyond his own rule, it must be conceded that it had widespread beneficial effects throughout India, in establishing, at least, a temporary truce between the various warring religious factions. Though his attempt to form a universal religion, founded on Imperial decree rather than on direct spiritual experience, was naive and doomed to failure, it had the value of fostering a time of peace and tolerance between the Muslim and Hindu populations. It was, thus, under such tolerant and generous conditions, that Dadu was welcomed to the palace of Akbar in the Spring of 1584.

According to the account preserved by Dadu's followers, when Dadu arrived at the palace, he was first met by the emperor's representatives whose custom it was to interview those with whom Akbar was to meet. These representatives were Shaikh Abu-l Fazl and Raja Birbal. Abu-l Fazl, one of Akbar's closest and most trusted advisors on religious matters, was himself a true Sufi. He greeted Dadu with these words: “We esteem you highly, O saintly Dadu, and desire to know more of your teaching. What God do you

worship, and what is the manner of your worship?"

"The God we worship," said Dadu, "is the Creator of all things. Our teaching is to hold Him in constant remembrance. Our mode of worship is to subdue the senses and sing the praise of Rama. To be sure, God is other than His name; He can neither be uttered nor comprehended. But men, for their own purposes, have given Him various names. Beholding in Him some attribute, they have given Him the name of that attribute. He deals graciously, and they call Him *Dayal*, the Gracious; as Protector of His creatures, He is styled *Gopal*, the Cowherd; as dwelling within the heart, He is known as *Rama*; as showing mercy, He is *Rahim*, the Compassionate; as He who is beyond man's reach, He is called *Allah*; as unseen, He is known as *The Invisible*; as fashioner of all things, He is *Creator*; as transcending all limitation, He is the *Absolute*; as drawing men's hearts to Himself, He is *Mohan*, the Charmer; as pervading the universe, He is the *Omnipresent*. He accepts the homage of His true worshippers, and they witness His presence in the world." 3

Abu-l Fazl and Birbal were delighted with Dadu's conversation, and immediately made arrangements for him to see the emperor, Akbar. When, at last, Dadu was ushered into the royal presence, Akbar, after greeting him courteously, asked about his religious views, and Dadu explained to him the inner state of constant recollection of God. "But how," Akbar asked, "is this inner state to be attained?" And Dadu replied, quoting a Persian verse:

"The soul, filled with passionate yearning, stands expectant at the door of vision; The surrendered heart dwells every moment in the Divine Presence, watchful, alert." 4

"First," said Dadu, "a man must cease from the indulgence of the body, which binds him to the world. He must abandon all hope in the three worlds, and the Changeless One will surely reveal Himself." They continued to talk of spiritual matters in this manner for some time, and, at the close of their interview, Akbar invited Dadu to return another time; but Dadu declined the invitation.

Nonetheless, before Dadu returned to Amber, Akbar sent for him to bid farewell, and Dadu went as bidden. "Tell me," said Akbar, in this, their last meeting, "how one so enmeshed in the world's affairs as I am may find God. I am ready to love Him with every power of my being, and to school my heart in truth, if thus I may learn His secret."

“Well spoken!” said Dadu; “Well spoken, indeed! That is the sum of all I have to say. May God keep you ever in this frame of mind.”

Akbar bowed his head. “Swami,” he said, “you have given, and I have received.”

With this, Dadu returned the emperor’s bow, and bestowed the blessing hitherto withheld: “I pray the indwelling God to keep you continually in His protection and favor.”⁵

That evening, everyone gathered together to sing religious hymns, and to honor Dadu before his departure. And in the morning Dadu returned to Amber, where he was congratulated by Bhagwan Das on the splendid impression he had made on the emperor. This little scenario of Dadu with the emperor Akbar is interesting as a look into the court life of the time, but even more so as a portrait of Dadu, who appears as natural and sincere in the emperor’s presence as on the dusty roads with his disciples. We see these same qualities in the many songs and utterances of Dadu, which were collected after his death. Dadu had set down in written form, at different times throughout his life, his thoughts, convictions, and experiences of God. Extending over a long period of time, they vary from prayers to spiritual directives, from yearning for God to proclamations of His unity. In all of these songs and utterances, one senses a real man, blunt and ordinary at times, but always totally honest with himself, and utterly impatient with phoniness and pretense.

Dadu’s songs remind us a good deal of those of Kabir or Nanak, but they have a quality of roughness and independence which is wholly his own. He was openly critical of all that smacked of “the business of religion,” and most especially of those who paraded as Gurus and accumulated disciples for their own aggrandizement, wealth and power. “The disciple is the cow,” said Dadu; “and the Guru is the milker of the cow. Great care does he take of his cow, and well he might, when he makes his living by him!”

Dadu, himself, was a true Guru, in the best sense of the word. He had attained the Highest, yet he never seemed to posture or lose sight of his own humble station before God. Some of his songs of yearning for the vision of God, for example, remind us of the tenderest of the Hebrew Psalms, or the writings of the Christian saint, Juan de la Cruz:

“Ah me! oft do I feel such pangs of separation from my

Beloved that I am like to die unless I see Him.
 Maiden hearken to the tale of my agony; I am restless without
 my Beloved.
 “In my yearning desire for the Beloved I break into song day
 and night.
 I pour out my woes like the nightingale.
 Ah me! Who will bring me to my Beloved?
 Who will show me His path and console my heart?
 Dadu says: O Lord, let me see Thy face, even for a moment, and be
 blessed.”⁶

“He sits close at hand; he hears everything, yet He doesn’t
 answer me.
 Dadu casts himself on Thee; take away this life of mine.
 Everyone I see is happy; no one is in distress.
 Yet sore distressed is thy servant Dadu, because I see Thee not
 face to face.
 No one in all the world is in such deep distress as I;
 I weep floods of tears in my longing to meet the Beloved.
 I find Him not, neither can I find peace without Him.
 Tell me, how can I continue to live?

“He who wounded me is the only one who can heal me.
 Sighing for the vision, this lonely one lives apart.
 Enduring the pangs of separation, Dadu awaits Thy coming, O Hari!
 He who ardently yearns for the meeting, like a fish taken out of water,
 He alone beholds Thy vision; he is joined to Thy Spirit.
 This lonely one, separated from Rama, does not find Him.
 Dadu writhes like a fish, till Thou hast mercy upon him.”⁷

Dadu continued to live in Amber for many years, teaching his disciples and writing his songs of love to his Lord. But, as at Sambhar, there were many of the orthodoxy, Hindu and Muslim alike, who resented his words, which they interpreted as critical of their beliefs. And so, after fourteen years in Amber, Dadu was forced to leave that city, and for nearly ten years thereafter, he moved from town to town and city to city with his close disciples, welcomed everywhere he went by both peasantry and royalty; until, at the city of Nairana, in the year 1603, in the company of his many beloved disciples and his two sons, he passed away.

The many songs and utterances (*Bani*), which Dadu left behind, comprise today the holy book of the Dadu-panthis. Here are just a few:

“Be done with self and worship Hari; cast off worldly desire in mind and body.

Cherish goodwill towards every living creature; this, says Dadu, is the sum of religion.

“He is the true saint who bears enmity to none;

There is but one Spirit, and he has no enemy.

I have made diligent quest: truly, there is no second.

In every man is the one Spirit, whether he be Hindu or Muslim.

Both brethren have alike hands and feet, both have ears.

Both brethren have eyes, be they Hindus or Muslims.

When you look in the mirror of ignorance, there appears to be two.

When error is dispelled and ignorance vanishes, there is no ‘other.’

To whom then will you bear enmity, when there is no other?

He from whose Being all sprang, the same One dwells in all.

In every man is the one Spirit; hold Him therefore in reverent respect.

Recognize that Spirit in yourself and others; it is the manifestation of the Lord.

Why give pain to any when the indwelling Rama is in every man?

O revered Self, give peace and contentment,

for there is none but Thee in all the three worlds.

When the soul perceives the one Self, then are all souls brethren.

Give your heart to Him who is the Creator of all.

When a dog wanders into a palace of mirrors,

it sees its own reflection everywhere and begins barking.

See how the One has likewise become many, and angrily seeks to destroy itself.

“All souls are brother-souls, the offspring of one Womb.

Consider this truth! Who, then, is the other, O foolish man?

All came in one likeness; it was the Lord who sent them.

They have all taken different names, and thus become separate.

Worship the divine Self, and bear hatred toward none.

In this worship you will find peace, in hatred only sorrow.”⁸

“Teach me, O Hari, to reverence Thy pure Name,
that my heart may be glad in Thy worship.

Make my heart to overflow with love, devotion, yearning, O
Hari!

“Make me gentle in speech and humble of bearing, rejoicing in
Thy presence, O Rama!

Fill me with spiritual longing, detachment from the world, and
a loving heart.

May I steadfastly cherish the desire to remain ever devoted to Thy
feet.

Grant me quiet contentment and self-control,
and keep my heart firmly directed toward Thee.

O Ever-Present, awaken me to the sense of Thy constant presence.

O Mohan, grant me knowledge, and the power of meditation,
that my mind may continually turn to Thee.

O Lord of the humble, grant that the Light of lights may
illumine Dadu’s heart.”⁹

“While the mind is unstable, there can be no union.

When the mind becomes stable, He will be found with ease.

How can the mind remain firm without some resting place?

It merely keeps wandering here and there.

It will become stable only when you settle it on the
remembrance of God.

“Where you hold fast to His Name with a steadfast mind—
there, says Dadu, is Rama.

Delight in the remembrance of Hari; then will the mind become
steadfast.

When it has tasted the fellowship of love, it will not move away
a single step.

When it is fixed on the One within, it finds no joy in other attractions.

“Fixed firmly there, it does not wander anywhere else.

Like a gull, perched on a boat’s mast in mid-ocean, the mind,
After it has grown weary of flying here and there, has found its
resting-place.

“Then only does my soul find peace and happiness, when my
mind has become stable, steadfastly fixed on Rama.

If only one could learn this secret!

The pure mind is stable; its joy is in the name of Rama.

In this way, you too shall find the vision of Him who is supreme and perfect Bliss.”¹⁰

“Wonderful is the Name; it holds the truth of the three worlds.
 Considering this, O heart, repeat it night and day.
 Wonderful is the Name; let the heart never forget Hari.
 Let His image dwell in the heart; cherish it with every breath.
 When you cherish Him with every breath, one day He will
 come to meet you.
 ... Abandon all other means of approach and devote yourself to
 the Name of Rama.”¹¹

“... The Creator has many and diverse names:
 Choose the name that comes to mind; thus, do all the saints
 practice remembrance.
 The Lord who endowed us with soul and body—worship Him
 in your heart.
 Worship Him by that name which best suits the moment.”¹²
 “Many great scholars there are, and brave imparters of wisdom.
 Religious garbs are endless. But rarely is one found who is
 wholly devoted to God’s service.
 ... If you can understand, I will speak: There is one ineffable Truth.
 Be done with the leaves and branches and go for the root.
 What does mere garb signify?

“Devising all manner of costumes, men array themselves [as
 devotees],
 Yet how few take the way of self-effacement and the worship of Hari!
 All the world are actors; rare is the real sadhu.
 ... There is but one Spirit; the Lord is in all.
 Therefore, let your union be with the Lord, not with a sect or
 mode of dress.

“Rosaries and sect-marks are of no avail; what have I to do with
 them?
 Within me is One who is mine; day and night I take His Name.
 All look to the outward appearance, and do not perceive what is
 within.
 The outward is what is shown to the world, but Rama reveals

Himself within.

Hari, the all-knowing Lord, accepts only what is of the heart.

To Rama, the truth is dear, despite a thousand pretenses.

“Hari receives, not the word spoken by the lips, but the intent of the heart.

... True love is the most wondrous of signs.

the soul who aches for the vision of God is the true sadhu.”¹³

“Without a torturing thirst, how should one drink the bliss of communion with the Lord?

O God give me an aching desire to behold the vision of Thee!

Desire [for God] does not arise without the pain of separation.

How could love exist without this pain?

Without love all is false, try however hard you may.

The pain of separation is not born of words; desire [for God] is not born of words.

Love cannot be found through words. Let no one put his faith in them.”¹⁴

“Where Rama is, there I am not; where I am, there Rama is not.

This mansion is of delicate construction; there is no place for two.

While self remains, so long will there be a second.

When this selfhood is blotted out, then there is no other.

When I am not, there is but One; when I obtrude, then two.

When the veil of “I” is taken away, then does the One become as It was.”¹⁵

“Have done with pride and arrogance, conceit, envy, self-assertion.

Practice humility, and obedience; worship the Creator.

When a man has abandoned false pride, arrogance, and vainglory, when he has become humble and meek, then does he find true bliss.

Prince and beggar alike must die; not one survives.

Him you should call “living” who has died and yet lives.

My enemy “I” is dead; now none can smite me down.

‘Tis I who have slain myself; thus, being dead, I live.

We have slain our enemy, we have died; but he is not forgotten.
The thorn remains to vex us. Consider and lay this truth to
heart:

You will only find the Beloved when you are as the living dead.
Only by losing yourself can you find Him who knows all.
When you regard yourself as nothing, then you will find the Beloved.
Recognize, therefore, by quiet reflection, from whence this
thought of self arises.
Becoming as the living dead, enter onto the path.
First bow down your head, then may you venture to plant your
foot [on this path].

“Know that the path of discipleship is exceedingly hard.
The living dead walk it, with the Name of Rama as their guide.
So difficult is the path, no living man may tread it.
He only can walk it, O foolish man, who has died and lives.
Only he who is dead can tread the path that leads to God.
He finds the Beloved and leaps the fearsome gulf.
He that is alive shall die; and only by dying inwardly shall he
meet with the Lord.
Forsaking His fellowship, who could endure when trouble comes?
O when will this dominion of self pass away? When will the
heart forget every ‘other’?
When will it be made wholly pure? When will it find its true home?
When I am not, then there is One; when I intrude, then two.
When the curtain of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ is drawn aside,
then do I become as I was [in the Beginning].” ¹⁶

“My enemy ‘I’ is now dead; now none can slay me.
‘Tis I who have slain myself; I have died, and yet live.
While the thought of self remains, so long are there two.
When this selfhood is destroyed, then there is no second.
Then only will you find the Beloved, when ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are
wholly lost.

“When ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are no more, then shall you find the pure vision.
‘I’ and ‘mine’ are a load upon the head; you die with the weight of it.

By the grace of the Master, remove it and lay it down.
 In front of [the true] I, stands the [false] I; for this reason, He remains hidden.

“When this [false]selfhood passes away, the Beloved is revealed.
 Hide yourself where no one can see you.
 See and show forth only the Beloved.
 Then you shall find eternal happiness.
 If there is no inward thought of self, but the mouth still utters the words, ‘I’ and ‘Thou,’
 Let no one make this a matter of reproach; for it is in this way that they [‘I’ and ‘Thou’] hold communion with one another.
 When others see that devotee who, having abandoned self, is wholly devoted to Rama,
 Then they too are led toward the Lord.”¹⁷

“Omniscient God, it is by Thy grace alone that I have been blessed with vision of Thee.
 Thou knowest all; what can I say?
 All-knowing God, I can conceal nothing from Thee.
 I have nothing that deserves Thy grace.
 No one can reach Thee by his own efforts; Thou showest Thyself by Thine own grace.
 How could I approach Thy presence?
 By what means could I gain Thy favor?
 And by what powers of mind or body could I attain to Thee?
 It hath pleased Thee in Thy mercy to take me under Thy wing.
 Thou alone art the Beginning and the End; Thou art the Creator of the three worlds.
 Dadu says: I am nothing and can do nothing.
 Truly, even a fool may reach Thee by Thy grace.”¹⁸

“Many have spoken and passed on, but the mystery remains unsolved.

We too speak, but what more can we say?
 What do I know, what can I speak, concerning that almighty

One?

What knowledge have I of His manner of being?

It utterly passes my comprehension.

How many have spoken and passed on; even the wisest have spent their powers in vain.

...There, neither silence nor speech exists.

No 'I' or 'Thou', no self or other, neither one nor two.

If I say "One," there are two; if I say "two," there is but One.

The Magician who devised this play—go and enquire of Him.

How He fashioned the many from the One, let the Master Himself make plain.”¹⁹

NOTES:

1. Bani 190, 191; Orr, W.G., *A Sixteenth Century Indian Mystic*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1947; pp. 93-94. This article on Dadu is taken from my book, *History of Mysticism*, which contains many other articles on the world's great mystics and their teachings. *History of Mysticism* may be downloaded as a free PDF document from the 'Downloads' page on my website: www.themysticsvision.com.
2. *Ibid.*; p. 62.
3. *Ibid.*; pp. 32-33.
4. *Ibid.*; p. 33.
5. *Ibid.*; p. 33-34.
6. Psalm 7, Pad 151; *Ibid.*; p. 66.
7. *Ibid.*; pp. 174-175.
8. *Ibid.*; pp. 191-192.
9. Psalm 181, *Ibid.*; p. 124.
10. *Ibid.*; pp. 170-171.
11. *Ibid.*; p. 141.
12. *Ibid.*; p. 140.
13. *Ibid.*; p. 103.
14. *Ibid.*; p. 168.
15. Parcha, *Ibid.*; p. 66.

16. Jiwat Mritak, *Ibid.*; pp. 105-106.

17. *Ibid.*; pp. 162-163.

18. *Ibid.*; p. 142.

19. Hairan, *Ibid.*; p. 101.

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PART TWO

BUDDHISM

I. The Buddha

In the 6th century B.C.E. the main center of Indian civilization was in the Ganges plain, or the 'middle country,' from what is now Delhi eastward to Bhagalpur. From June to September, during the monsoon season, a river that is only a couple hundred feet wide in the preceding hot season becomes two miles wide. The Ganges, having its source in the melting snows and glaciers of the Himalayas, never dwindles away; for that reason, the surrounding plain is always fertile. And during the cooler winter months, from October to January, the Spring-harvested crops of wheat, barley, and linseed and mustard, for their oil, are grown in abundance.

During that time long ago, the land was far more fertile and the forests far more extensive than today. Surrounding the villages were the cultivated fields; further outward were the pastures, and beyond them were the forests, deep and lush. Accounts of the time speak of the forests as places of easy retreat, where mango, banana, date, jackfruit, and coconut trees were in bloom, and the banyan, palmyra, acacia and ebony trees housed the wild and colorful birds and monkeys.

The town of Kapilavastu (named for Kapila), in the kingdom of Koshala, lay just due north of Benares, and just west of the great capital city of Shravasti, containing 57,000 families. It was positioned along a major trade route from Shravasti to Rajagriha, the capital city of the neighboring Magadhan kingdom. It was therefore a center of business and trade, and also a place of much activity, culture, and entertainment. Then, as now, cities were distinguished from the country villages by their sophistication and diversity of lifestyles. It was here, in Kapilavastu, that Siddhartha of the Gautama clan, who was to become known as "the Buddha," was born to Suddhodana and his wife, Maya, around 586 B.C.E.

Suddhodana was the elected ruling citizen of the small republic of Shakya of which Kapilavastu was the capital. He was a wealthy aristocrat, and lived in a sumptuous and elegant home, where he raised his son, Siddhartha, amid

the splendor and wealth, which his position provided. When Siddhartha was but sixteen, he was married to the princess, Yashodara; and by her he had a son, named Rahula. But this life of comfort, wealth and pleasure was not to last. At the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha, who was of a philosophic turn of mind, having studied many doctrines and having reflected on the perplexities of life and death, resolved to quit the home of his father and the company of his wife and child, to enter into a life of solitude in the forests, where he might resolve his questions in the supreme inner knowledge of which the sages of old had spoken.

From that time, he became a homeless wanderer, one among many of the monks, ascetics and solitary hermits who frequented the forests and riversides. He met, during his wandering, many brother monks, *sannyasins*, and would-be teachers; and he experimented with many different practices, including austere penances and discursive reasonings; but he felt as empty, as unfulfilled, as before.

After six years of study and wandering, Siddhartha had become intensely focused on the attainment of his goal of knowing the ultimate Truth. And so, one day, he took his seat beneath a peepul (Bo) tree on the banks of the Nairanjana river, near Uruvela, the present city of Bodh-Gaya, and resolved to meditate there, and not to leave his place until he had attained what he had come to the forest to attain.

Then, one morning, just before dawn, like a flash, enlightenment came. According to the *Dhammapada*, which was written much later, Siddhartha exclaimed at that time:

Looking for the Maker of this temple (referring to his body), I have run through a course of many births, not finding Him; and painful is birth again and again. But now, Maker of this temple, Thou hast been seen; Thou shalt not construct this temple again. All Thy rafters are broken, Thy ridgepole is sundered; the mind, approaching the Eternal, has attained *nirvana* [the extinction of the ego illusion].¹

In that transcendent experience of Unity, which the Buddha refers to as *nirvana*, he knew himself to be the one Consciousness who is manifesting as the entire universe. All forms, though transient, he knew as his own, with no division anywhere. Yet, when his mind returned to its normal state, once again he was associated with a particular form within the transformative world, called *samsara*, “the ocean of phenomenal appearance.” As he sat beneath the Bo tree, Siddhartha reflected on what he had seen in that revelation, and perhaps mused within himself thusly:

‘From this state of limited consciousness, I appear once again to be a separate form within *samsara*; but from the state of expanded awareness, all of *samsara* is a manifestation of myself. I am a single, undifferentiated Mind, yet I shine forth, like the radiant beams of the Sun, as a universe of countless living beings, all made of my light. All beings are united in me, for I am their consciousness, their form, their very being. Never are there any separate selves; that is only an illusion produced by the limiting of consciousness. All are but players in the outflowing radiance of the one Being. These transient forms live but for a moment, but I, the One, live forever. Though I appear as many, I am forever One, forever serene.’

‘Yet, who would believe such a story?’ he wondered. ‘It is so implausible, so utterly fantastic and radical a revelation, so completely opposite to what men believe, that no one, unless they too had seen it, would be able to give any credence to it at all.’ Siddhartha realized that this transcendent knowledge could never be adequately communicated by words but was attainable only through such diligent effort as he himself had put forth. According to a later Buddhist text, called the *Agama Sutras*, he deliberated within himself at this time, questioning the wisdom of attempting to teach such knowledge:

My original vows are fulfilled; the Truth I have attained is too deep for the understanding [of men]. A Buddha alone is able to understand what is in the mind of another Buddha. In this age of the five-fold ignorance, all beings are enveloped in greed, anger, folly, falsehood, arrogance, and flattery; they have few virtues and have not the

understanding to comprehend the Truth I have attained. Even if I revolve the wheel of Truth [by teaching it], they would surely be confused and incapable of accepting it. they might, on the contrary, misinterpret it, and thereby fall into evil paths, and suffer therefore much pain. It is best for me to remain quiet and enter [once again] into nirvana.²

In the same vein, another Buddhist text has Siddhartha reflecting at this time:

Why should I attempt to make known to those who are consumed with lust and hate This which I've won through so much effort! This Truth is not a truth that can be grasped; it goes against the grain of what people think; it is deep, subtle, difficult, delicate. It will be cloaked in the murky ignorance of those slaves of passion who have not seen It.³

All those who have experienced this amazing revelation of the true nature of Reality have recognized the impossibility of expressing to others what they had come to know and have held serious doubts as to the wisdom of speaking of it at all. Chuang Tze, the Chinese sage of the 3rd century B.C.E., for example, debated with himself on this same quandary, and wrote:

Great truths do not take hold of the hearts of the masses. And now, as all the world is in error, how shall I, though I know the true path, how shall I guide? If I, while knowing I cannot succeed, still attempt to force success, this would be but another source of error. Better, then, to desist and strive no more. *Yet, if I do not strive, who will?*⁴

Siddhartha, pondering on these questions in his forest retreat, apparently reached the same conclusion, and, armed with a firm decision to serve as a guide to suffering mankind, set out on his illustrious teaching career. To many hundreds of generations thereafter he would be known as *the Buddha*, “the enlightened”; the *Tathagata*, “the attainer of Truth”; the *Shakyamuni*,

“sage of the Shakyas.”

The Buddha, having grown up in an environment where the Vedantic mystical tradition had been subverted by the priestly class, saw around him only a ritualistic religion presided over by an unenlightened Brahmin priesthood. He had seen how the talk of “God” by the unenlightened led men to a false understanding of the Divine Reality and fostered a philosophical Dualism between man and God; and he determined, therefore, to explain the knowledge of Unity in a way radically different from his Vedic predecessors. He would eschew the old traditional terms for the One, such as “Brahman,” “Shiva,” “Purusha,” etc.; for when one spoke of “the knowledge of God,” a duality was implied between the knower and the object of knowledge, which was not in fact the case. The very nature of language is such that it relies for meaning upon the normal subject/object relationships. But, in the experience of Unity, there is no such separation. Thus, simply by naming It, that Unity is misrepresented.

In the eyes of the Buddha, it was just such graphic objectifications of the Reality in terms such as “Shiva,” “Vishnu,” etc., which fostered a mistaken notion of the Truth, and perpetuated the present degenerative state of religion. For this reason, he refused to apply any name at all to the transcendent Reality; he preferred to refer to the *experience* of the eternal Unity, rather than apply to It an objective noun. The experience of Unity he named *nirvana*, a word which signifies “extinction,” or “non-being.” What was extinguished in this experience was the false sense of a separative ego, and hence the subject/object relationship. Though misinterpretation was unavoidable in any case, the Buddha felt that the term, *nirvana*, was less likely to misrepresent his meaning than those many objectified nouns, which had been for so long used to signify the one Reality.

He was keenly aware of the inability of language either to express the Truth or to bring about Its realization. He had seen how little true knowledge was obtained by those proud Brahmin scholars who continually discussed and debated every fine point of metaphysical doctrine. As for himself, the Buddha would refuse to engage in any metaphysical discussions at all, insisting that all such harangues were worthless to effect enlightenment, and that if one sincerely wished to know and understand the nature of Reality, it was necessary to engage oneself seriously in the practice of meditation and

inner reflection.

When asked by the idly curious such questions as, “Is the universe eternal or non-eternal? Is it finite or infinite? Is the soul real or unreal?” the Buddha would reply:

Such questions are not calculated to profit and are not concerned with the attainment of Truth; they do not lead to the practice of right conduct, nor to detachment, nor to purification from lusts, nor to quietude, nor to tranquilization of the heart, nor to real knowledge, nor to insight into the higher stages of the path, nor to nirvana. This is why I express no opinion on them. ⁵

It is, perhaps, this reluctance on the part of the Buddha to describe the Reality in objective terms, or to engage in metaphysical discussions, which has led many to view the Buddhist and Vedantic perspectives as irreconcilably antagonistic, when, in fact, they are identical. We are accustomed by unenlightened scholars and partisan religionists to think of Vedanta, Taoism, Buddhism, and the other “isms,” as separate and distinct religious philosophies; but they are, in fact, but different names for the one perennial philosophy of the mystics. Having originated independently in different lands and different times by different seers, each of these “isms” possesses its own idiosyncratic language, its own literary heritage; yet the message of the mystics remains undeviatingly the same. All true mystics have accentuated the need for that personal enlightenment or realization by which the true nature of Reality becomes self-evident. And all have stressed that this enlightenment is attainable, not through much learning, alms-giving, or through following the precepts of ritualized religion, but only through devotion to and contemplation of one’s own essential Being.

Shortly after his enlightenment, and his subsequent decision to share his wisdom with other sincere seekers of Truth, the Buddha journeyed to a large deer park near Benares, where many of his fellow monks congregated. And there he addressed his brothers, explaining to them that excessive asceticism, scriptural recitations, sacramental offerings, and other such practices were as futile to the attainment of freedom from suffering as were the opposite

extremes of revelry, and the wanton gratification of the senses. He spoke to them of a 'Middle Path' by which one could approach true knowledge and a harmonious life. Like Kapila before him, he offered no religious platitudes, no fanciful gods, but spoke to his hearers of "what pain is, and the method by which one may reach the cessation of pain."

And when he spoke to them, the gathered monks recognized his attainment of enlightenment, and herded around him to listen to his teaching, his Sermon. The Buddha's Sermon at Benares was the first of many to follow; and it contains for his followers the same profound meaning that the Sermon on the Mount holds for followers of Jesus. It contains in brief form the entirety of the Buddha's message, the authentic version of which we may only assume has been passed down to us, as the Buddha wrote nothing himself. What we possess of his teachings were handed down orally until they were committed to writing in the 2nd century B.C.E., nearly 300 years after his death.

Sitting before the gathering of monks, the Buddha began his Sermon by saying:

Whatever is originated will be dissolved again. All worry about the self is vain; the ego is like a mirage, and all the tribulations that touch it will pass away. They will vanish as a nightmare vanishes when a sleeper awakes. ⁶

This first statement of the Buddha's that "whatever is originated will be dissolved again," is particularly obvious to anyone in the 20th or 21st century who is familiar with the findings of modern physics regarding the nature of matter. All matter, we know, is constituted of one undifferentiated Energy, which 'condenses' or integrates into different congregate forms which then disintegrate once again, only to take on new forms. This statement of the Buddha's is true on all levels of reality, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic, but here it is intended to refer to the ephemeral nature of the individual body and personality.

Bodies are originated, and must one day be dissolved; therefore, "all worry about the self is vain," says the Buddha. He had seen the Truth, and knew

that the sense of an individual self, or ego, was an illusion, a mirage, and that all the troubles and worries that afflict one during the course of a life vanish when that false sense of ego vanishes.

One whose mind awakes to the realization that it is the one Mind and is not in any way affected by the manifestation or de-manifestation of forms within this world of *samsara*, sees this world as a kind of dream. And just as one no longer fears the evil monsters of a dream once he awakes and realizes that he is the dreamer, the awakened Buddha can never again be drawn to identify himself with the body or mental images that exist only in the world of *samsara*.

He who has awakened is freed from fear; he has become a Buddha; he knows the vanity of all his cares, of his ambitions, and also of his pains.⁷

From the time we are infants and discover this body and mind that manipulates us and in turn is manipulated by us, we feel certain that this body and mind is our self, is who we are. That identification becomes so strongly rooted in us, that never once do we doubt that we are this particular mind and body limited in space and time, and any suggestion to the contrary strikes us as bizarre and absurd. But, say the seers, the Buddhas, it is merely a case of mistaken identity; that which is born, thrives for a while, and then decays, is not who you are. You are the one Mind of the universe, which is the cause and the witness of all this world of changing forms but is never affected by it. You are the Eternal, but you see this transient world of forms and think, "This form is me!" It is like a man who, dreaming that he is being roasted alive, suffers the pain from the heat of the imagined flames; or like a man who is frightened by a snake which, on closer inspection, turns out only to have been a piece of rope.

It sometimes happens that a man, when bathing in the river, steps upon a wet rope and imagines that it is a snake. Terror will overcome him, and he will shake with fear, anticipating in his mind all the agonies caused by the serpent's venomous bite.

What a relief does this man experience when he sees that the rope is no snake. The cause of his fear lies in his error, his ignorance, his illusion. If the true nature of the rope is recognized, his tranquility of mind will come back to him; he will feel relieved; he will be joyful and happy. This is the state of mind of one who has recognized that there is no selfhood (ego), and that the cause of all his troubles, cares, and vanities is a mirage, a shadow, a dream. ⁸

Here, in his first Sermon, the Buddha gives the essence of his teaching, and the teaching of all the seers. It should be apparent, of course, that the “selfhood” to which the Buddha here refers is not the Self (*Atman*) of the Upanishads, which is synonymous with the Eternal, but is the false sense of self, the ego. When the Truth is realized, the false idea of an individual self is dissolved, like the idea of the snake which is really a rope. Then it is seen that no separate self exists or ever existed; it is a mirage, a mistaken interpretation of one’s own awareness, which is really the immortal and eternal Self, the Absolute. Only that One is real; It is the Self of the universe, the universal Being which manifests as all beings, all things. It is the knowledge of this Self, which is the source of the joy and happiness of the enlightened.

Happy is he who has overcome his ego; happy is he who has attained peace; happy is he who has found the Truth.⁹

Some, when they hear of the Truth from one who has seen It, immediately recognize it as the truth, and are overjoyed to learn of It. But some others who hear of It, say, “How unconvincing, how unappetizing!” To them, the Buddha says:

Have confidence in the [eternal] Truth, although you may not be able to comprehend It, although you may suppose Its sweetness to be bitter, although you may shrink from It at first. Trust in the Truth. ...Have faith in the Truth and live [in accordance with] It. ¹⁰

Sooner or later, we must acknowledge that what keeps us from the

enjoyment of peace, of happiness, of freedom, is the sense of selfhood, the false ego, by which all pain, all suffering, comes to us. It is the mistaken identification with the transient that must eventually cause us much sorrow.

[The illusion of] self is a fever; self is a transient illusion, a dream; but Truth is sublime, Truth is everlasting. There is no immortality except in [the eternal] Truth. For Truth alone abides forever.¹¹

The Buddha explained his message as the way to the cessation of suffering. He did not promise heavenly rewards, or a place at the right hand of the Lord, nor did he claim that he was sent from God; he claimed only that his was the way to the cessation of suffering:

He who recognizes the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation, has fathomed the four noble truths. He will walk in the right path.¹²

Here, the Buddha introduces his formula of the “four noble truths”:

1. There is suffering, i.e., humans suffer.
2. There is a cause of suffering; namely ignorance.
3. There is a remedy to suffering; namely enlightenment.
4. The cessation of suffering results from the destruction of ignorance.

If we pay close attention to the words of the Buddha’s Sermon in the above passage, his message is clear and unequivocal: the cause of all suffering is the ignorance by which we believe we are an individual self, limited to a particular body and mind. This ignorance is inherent in existence and has no cause or beginning. Yet it can be dispelled, and thus ended, by the realization of Truth. In this sense, it is both real and unreal; while it exists, it is experienced as real, and when it is dispelled, it is recognized to be unreal, non-existent—like the snake in the rope. Release from suffering, then, is attained by the direct realization of our eternal Being. To understand this is to possess the right understanding:

Right understanding will be the torch to light the way of one who seeks to realize the Truth. Right aims will be his guide. Right speech will be his dwelling-place on the road. His path will be straight, for it is right behavior. His refreshments will be the right way of earning his livelihood. Right efforts will be his steps; right thinking his breath; and peace will follow in his footsteps. ¹³

In this metaphor of the Buddha's, in which he likens the moving of a man's awareness toward enlightenment to a man walking toward his destination, he outlines the right means by which a man reaches to the realization of Truth. "Right" simply means that which is conducive to success. This "eight-fold path" of the Buddha reiterates, in its own way, the *yogas* of the *Bhagavad Gita*: jnan, bhakti, karma, and raja. As a man is a thinking, speaking, acting and contemplating being, all facets of his nature must be coordinated toward the attainment of his goal.

Following naturally from right knowledge, is the second means, right aims, which is to say, the aspiration to know the Truth, to renounce all other pursuits, which might detract from the single-minded pursuit of one's goal. Without such unflinching determination, and utter disregard for all the trouble, opposition, and deprivation encountered, a man cannot hope to attain to it. The Buddha's "right aspiration" is really not different from the *Gita's* "devotion to Truth." Devotion to the Truth, or God, is devotion to the Eternal in oneself; aspiration toward the attainment of *nirvana* is also devotion to the Eternal in oneself. The mental restraint, renunciation of self (ego), and inward attentiveness required by the one is the same as that required by the other. They are, in aspiration, practice, and result, identical. Only the words are different.

The third means, right speech, is merely an extension of right thinking; it is that speech which is truthful, sincere, and cognizant of the oneness of all beings. Untruthful speech betrays an untruthful mind and is entirely incompatible with the mind's attainment of the ultimate Truth. Never, in a million years, will untruthfulness lead to the Truth. "Truth," says the Mundaka Upanishad, "is the way that leads to the region of Truth. Sages travel therein free from desires and reach the supreme abode of Truth."

The fourth means, right action, is also simply an extension of right thought. That action which is inspired by and leads to the awareness of Truth, is the right action. It is action that stems from peace of mind, and whose result is peace of mind. Whatever defiles and disturbs the quiet awareness of Truth cannot be right action. This “right action” of the Buddha may be compared to the karma yoga of the *Gita*. It is action, whose sole aim is the awareness and promotion of Truth. It is action that stems not from egoistic desire, but from the awareness that all this world of *samsara* and all beings in it are identical in the one Mind. Such actions flow forth naturally as expressions of service to the One in all.

The fifth means, right livelihood, may be viewed in the same way that Krishna, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, viewed the necessity of following one’s own *svadharma*, or personal duty. Men of differing stations in life are obliged by their differing aspirations to differing livelihoods. The livelihood of the householder is in accordance with his aspirations; the livelihood of the student is in accordance with his aspirations, and the livelihood of the realized sage is in accordance with his aspiration. For one, the “right” is not the same as the “right” for another. What conduces harmoniously to one’s aspirations is the right livelihood. For the spiritual seeker, that work, which is conducive to the meditative life, is the “right” livelihood; and for the sage who has no aspiration but to share his knowledge to relieve the suffering of the world, the need for livelihood is not so great; he accepts what comes to him in the course of his mission.

Right effort is the sixth means, and it follows from right aspiration. If right aspiration is determination to attain enlightenment, right effort is the application of that determination. The conquest of the sense of selfhood requires great effort. It is the most difficult of all battles. According to the *Dhammapada*, “If one man conquers in battle a thousand men, and if another conquers himself, the second is the greatest of conquerors.”¹⁴

Lao Tze, the great Chinese sage, said this as well: “He who conquers others may be strong, but he who conquers himself is stronger.”¹⁵ To conquer oneself is, in effect, to reduce oneself to nothing. For, as the Buddha tells us, that self is not only an illusion, but an obstacle to the realization of Truth. Only when it is reduced to nothing, shall we find that greater Self which is the one all-pervading Reality, the Buddha-Mind, the Truth.

The seventh means—right mindfulness, or recollection—is the mental aspect of right effort. It means the continual watchfulness of the mind over itself. The pure mind is itself *nirvana*; the illusions that continually becloud its surface serve only to obscure the Truth. Right mindfulness is therefore the retention of the pure mind. It might just as well be spoken of as surrender of the separative will, for it is just that will which obscures the awareness of Unity. Jesus of Nazareth taught the surrender of the will to God; the Buddha taught the surrender of the will to Truth. Who can find any difference between them? That to which the will is surrendered is the one pure Mind. Right mindfulness is simply the retention of the pure Mind.

Right concentration is the eighth and final means; it is an extension or intensification of right mindfulness, which can only be achieved during times of silent meditation. It is the final step toward the threshold of *nirvana*. What is the object of the mind's concentration? Itself. Let it become still and concentrated, and it reverts to its original, pure Mind, state. In this state is all knowledge, all peace, all satisfaction. It is this utter one-pointedness of mind which lifts it to its ultimate state, that state in which it knows itself as the one Mind of the universe.

The Buddha's message is so clear and straightforward that, to the wise, it needs no further clarification or elucidation. But there has been, over the years, no dearth of clarification; for it is the delight of all who have attained the knowledge of Truth to speak of It. Many brilliant followers of the Buddha, who lived much later, have offered their own insights into the Truth and Its attainment. Among these, was an enlightened sage of the 2nd century of the Current Era, called Ashvagosha, whose poetic work, *Buddha-Karita*, tells, in a picturesque fashion, the life of the Buddha. Ashvagosha also wrote a Mahayana treatise called, "The Awakening of Faith," in which he offered his insights into the nature of Reality. Like Kapila, the author of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and so many others, Ashvagosha attempted to explain the two, absolute and relative, aspects of the one universal Soul, or Self:

In the one Soul we may distinguish two aspects. The one [aspect] is the Soul-as-Absolute (*Tathata*); the other is the Soul-as-relative-world (*samsara*). Each in itself constitutes all things, and both are so closely related that one cannot be separated from the other.

What is meant by “the Soul-as-Absolute” is the oneness of the totality of things, the great all-inclusive Whole.... This essential nature of the Soul is uncreate and eternal. Therefore, all things in their fundamental nature are not nameable or explicable. They cannot be adequately explained in any form of language. ...They possess absolute sameness. They are subject neither to transformation nor to destruction. They are nothing but the one Soul, for which “Absolute” is simply another designation.

The Soul-as-the-relative-world comes forth from the Womb of the Absolute; but the immortal Absolute and the mortal relative world coincide with one another. Though they are not identical, they are not two. ¹⁶

It should be evident that, in this explanation by Ashvagosa, these two, *Tathata* and *samsara*, are precisely those same two aspects of Reality described in earlier chapters as Brahman & Maya, Purusha & Prakrti, Shiva & Shakti, Tao & Teh, etc. They “coincide,” as Ashvagosa says, in the experience of *nirvana*.

Another great sage of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition was Nagarjuna, who lived in the late 2nd century C.E. He too placed great emphasis on the understanding of these two aspects of Reality, insisting, in his “Discourse On The Middle Way,” that:

The Buddha’s teaching rests on the discrimination between two aspects of Reality: the Absolute and the relative. Those who do not have any adequate knowledge of them are unable to grasp the subtle and profound meaning of Buddhism. ¹⁷

Yet, in the same Discourse, he acknowledged the fact that *samsara* is an activity of *nirvana* (in this sense, the Absolute) itself; not the slightest distinction exists between them.”

It is only from the viewpoint of the enlightened that *samsara* and *nirvana* (or *Tathata*) no longer appear as two. One who has seen the Truth sees only oneness everywhere. He knows himself to be that One who exists eternally, beyond all manifestation of *samsara*; yet he knows also that *samsara* is his own appearance, a play of changing forms on the one ocean of Existence. When a man awakes to *nirvana*, behold! Suddenly he knows himself as the Absolute, the one eternally pure, unblemished Consciousness. And there, also, shining forth from him is the world of *samsara*, with all its creatures and objects. Like a movie shown on a screen, or like a fantasy-image on one's own mind, the two exist at once. It is ONE, but It has these two aspects.

Those who have seen It realize better than anyone the impossibility of explaining this duality-in-unity to those who have not experienced It, yet they realize, too, that nothing can be said about enlightenment without referring to It. Here, on this same subject, is the master, Padma-Shambhava, who took his Buddhism to Tibet in 747 C.E., and wrote a book entitled, "The Yoga of Knowing The Mind, And Seeing The Reality, Which Is Called Self-Realization." In it, he wrote:

Although the wisdom of nirvana and the ignorance of samsara illusorily appear to be two things, they cannot truly be differentiated. It is an error to conceive them as other than one.¹⁸

Those, like the Buddha, who have realized the Truth, tell of It to others and outline a path to that realization as a way of explaining what happened to themselves and describing the pattern of their progress to it. They are practical scientists who say, in effect, 'This is what happened to me, and these are the mental refinements that lead to it. You too, by doing likewise, will reach the same inner realization.' When we examine the testimonies of those many who have described their experience of Unity and their progress to it, we have to be struck by the remarkable agreement evidenced in all their testimonies. Their lives, their methods, their enlightenment, reveal so undeviating a sameness, so compelling a unanimity, that we must be convinced of the universality of their experience, and the universality of the path to it. We must come to the conclusion that the Truth is

one, that the way is clear, and that the choice is our own.

The Buddha continued to live and teach his disciples for forty-five years, moving about from place to place, proclaiming his wisdom to the people around Benares, Oudh, and Bihar. He established a monastic Order and accepted as gifts from his householder devotees many groves and monasteries where his liberating knowledge could be taught. He died at the age of eighty in 486 B.C.E. at Kusinagara, the present city of Kasia, in northern Gorakhpur. His last words to the disciples who gathered around him were: "All constituted forms pass away. Diligently work out your own salvation."

NOTES:

1. *Dhammapada*, Ch. 11, Babbitt, Irving (tr.), *The Dhammapada*, N.Y., New Directions, 1965; I.
2. *Sutra On Cause And Effect In The Past And Present*, Suzuki, D.T., *Essays In Zen Buddhism, 1st Series*, N.Y., Grove Press, 1961; p. 49f.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 121
4. Chuang Tze,
5. Suzuki, D.T., *op. cit.*
6. *Buddha's Sermon at Benares*, Stryck, Lucien (ed.), *The World Of The Buddha*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1968; pp. 52-53
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Dhammapada*, *op. cit.*
15. *Tao Teh Ching*, 33
16. Ashvagosha, Stryck, *op. cit.*, p. 285
18. Padma-Shambhava; Stryck, *op. cit.*, p. 315

II. The Ch'an And Zen Buddhists

Buddhism flourished in India until the end of the twelfth century, when the fierce Muslim invaders ravaged northern India, killing many Buddhists and forcing the remaining Buddhists to flee to Tibet. However, Buddhism had already entered China in the first few centuries of the Current Era, and, for a number of centuries thereafter, vied with Taoism for popular acceptance. Buddhism eventually prevailed, due perhaps to the already decadent condition of Taoism, and the massive proselytizing efforts of the Buddhists. There was really little to choose between the two, however; for, while the Taoist and Buddhist terminologies were different, the realization of Truth which each taught was, of course, the same. In every mystical tradition, the ultimate goal is the attainment of enlightenment, the direct perception of the one Reality. In ancient India, this realization was called *nirvana*, or *samadhi*; when Buddhism was transplanted in China, this supramental experience was called, in Chinese, *chien-hsing*, and as Buddhism became established in Japan in later centuries, this experience was called *kensho* or *satori*. The words and the languages are different, but the experience is the same.

This experience of enlightenment, of the absolute, quiescent, Source of all existence, is described by one Chinese Buddhist in this way:

In learning to be a Buddha, and in seeking the essence of the teaching of our school, man should purify his mind and allow his spirit to penetrate the depths. Thus, he will be able to wander silently within himself during contemplation, and he will see the Origin of all things, obscured by nothing.

...His mind becomes boundless and formless, ... all-illuminating and bright, like moonlight pervading the darkness. During that absolute moment, the mind experiences illumination without darkness, clarity without stain. It becomes what it really is, absolutely tranquil, absolutely illuminating. Though this all-pervading Mind is tranquil, the world of cause and effect does not cease; though It illumines the world, the world

is but Its reflection. It is pure Light and perfect Quiescence, which continues through endless time. It is motionless, and free from all activity; It is silent, and self-aware. ...That brilliant Light permeates every corner of the world. It is This we should become aware of and know. ¹

Many of the early Buddhist philosophers of India called this absolute, all-pervading Reality, *Dharmakaya*, “the Body of Truth.” Ashvagosha (2nd century C.E.) called it *Sarvasattvachitta*, “the one pure Consciousness in all.” In China, It was called *Hsin*, “Consciousness”; and in Japan, It was *Kokoro*. According to Ashvagosha, there arises, in this one pure Consciousness, a spontaneous movement, from which all the phenomenal world is produced; this aspect of Reality, he calls *ekachittakshan*, “the movement of the one Consciousness.” In Chinese, it is *nien*; in Japanese, it is *nen*. Just see how many words there are for our old friends, Brahman and Maya, Purusha and Prakrti, Shiva and Shakti!

Similarly, in every mystical tradition, the means to the realization of Reality is the same; it is an inturning of the mind in search of its root, its source; we call this process “meditation.” In India, the Sanskrit word for meditation is *dhyana*; in China, it is *ch’an*, and in Japan, it is *zen*. Ch’an, or Zen, then, is nothing but the practice of meditation toward the attainment of enlightenment. Enlightenment is the only goal of Zen; and it is meditation, or contemplation, alone which leads to it. For this reason, all the Ch’an and Zen masters incessantly point all sincere seekers of enlightenment to the meditative life. Here is an example of such pointing, from a Sermon by the Ch’an master, Szu-hsin Wu-hsin (1044-1115):

O brothers, to be born as a human being is a rare event, and so is the opportunity to hear discourses on the Truth. If you fail to achieve liberation in this life, when do you expect to achieve it? While still alive, be therefore assiduous in practicing meditation. ...As your self-reflection grows deeper and deeper, the moment will surely come upon you when the spiritual flower will suddenly burst into bloom, illuminating the entire

universe.

...This is the moment when you can transform this vast earth into solid gold, and the great rivers into an ocean of milk. What a satisfaction this is then to your daily life! Since this is so, do not waste your time with words or phrases, or by searching for Truth in books; for the Truth is not to be found there. ...They consist of mere words, which will be of no use to you at the moment of your death. ²

This, throughout the centuries, has been the perennial call of the Ch'an and Zen masters. Their message is not different from that of all enlightened seers of the One. The early Ch'an masters of China, having realized the unchanging Absolute, acknowledged the unity of the One and the many, and grappled for some time with the expression of this paradox. Reiterating the old truth of the identity of *nirvana* and *samsara*, they spoke of the Real, the unreal, and the unitive way, which embraces them both in an undivided awareness. But the Chinese had their own way of expressing this duality-in-unity, this unity-in-duality. Here, for example, is a conversation of the Ch'an master, Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi (840-901) and one of his disciples:

Monk: "Where is the Reality in appearance?"

Master: "Wherever there is appearance, there is Reality."

Monk: "How does It manifest Itself?"

Master: (The master silently lifted his saucer.)

Monk: "But where is the Reality in illusion?"

Master: "The origin of illusion is the Real."

Monk: "But how can Reality manifest Itself in illusion?"

Master: "Wherever there is illusion, there is the manifestation of Reality."

Monk: "Do you say, then, Reality can never be separated from illusion?"

Master: "Where can you possibly find the appearance of illusion?" ³

At another time, this same Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi was asked by a wandering monk,

“What is your name?”

“My name is Pen-chi,” he answered.

“Say something about ultimate Reality,” demanded the monk.

“I will not say anything,” [replied Pen-chi].

But the monk insisted; and Pen-chi said simply,

“It is not called Pen-chi.”⁴

The difficulty of expressing the paradoxical nature of the absolute Reality, which is other than, but not other than, the projected world-appearance is oftentimes illustrated in the utterances of the early Ch’an masters.

Tung-shan Liang-chieh (807-896) said:

I meet Him wherever I go.

He is the same as me,

Yet I am not He.

Only if you understand this,

Will you identify with the *Tathata* (the Truth, the Real).⁵

Ch’an and Zen Buddhism is replete with the recognition of this paradoxicality, and brings this recognition into the most ordinary experiences of life, and the most ordinary of conversations, relying often, not on words, but on wordless symbols to get across their point:

The Master asked Pai-chang, his disciple, “What will you teach others?”

Pai-chang raised his staff aloft.

The Master remarked, “Is that all? Nothing else?”

Pai-chang threw his staff on the ground.⁶

Ummon (d. 996), holding up his staff before his disciples, asked, “What is this? If you say it is a staff, you go right to hell; but if it is not a staff, what is it?” And Tokusan (799-865), who was fond of giving blows with a stick to awaken his disciples, also used to ask a similar question of his disciples, and then say, “If you say ‘yes,’ thirty blows; if you say ‘no,’

thirty blows.”

It is easy to see from these examples that, while the goal of enlightenment is the same in all mystical traditions, and the Truth experienced is always the same, the expression of that Truth is infinitely variable. What distinguishes the Ch’an and Zen Buddhist traditions from their Indian counterparts is their unique methods of teaching. They trace this “non-verbal” method of the transmission of knowledge to the Buddha himself, who, according to legend, gave his message to the gathered assemblage on the Mount of the Holy Vulture by simply raising aloft a single kumbhala flower which had been given to him by the god, Brahma. Only one disciple in the throng gave evidence of understanding the import of the Buddha’s gesture: an old man named Mahakasyapa, who simply smiled in appreciation. With this, the Buddha is said to have immediately turned over the succession of Mastership to Mahakasyapa. From this legendary non-verbal transmission, the Ch’an and Zen Buddhists find a precedent for their own tradition.

The perpetuation of this special tradition is said to have been initiated in China by Bodhidharma, who came from India to China in 520 C.E. His influence is described in a 9th century work called “The Complete Explanation of The Source of Ch’an” by Kuei-feng Tsung-mi (780-841):

When Bodhidharma came to China, he saw that most Chinese students did not grasp the truth of Buddhism. They merely sought it through interpretation of textual terminology and thought of the changing phenomena all around them as real activity. Bodhidharma wished to make these eager students see that the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. The real Truth is nothing but one’s own mind. Thus, he maintained that the real teaching must be transmitted directly from one mind to another, without the use of words.⁷

Bodhidharma and his followers rejected the necessity of the long-winded metaphysical formulations of the Indians as a means to enlightenment. They advocated instead a method of evoking an immediate perception of Truth, a sudden recognition of the nature of one’s own mind, unfettered by mental

formulations or expectations, “a special transmission outside the scriptures; no dependence upon words and letters, a direct pointing to the Soul of man; the seeing into one’s own nature and thus the attainment of Buddhahood.”

Whenever words are used, whether as tools of analysis, or to construct metaphors and analogies, they must invariably fall short of an adequate representation of the unitive Reality. To many enlightened men, the endless parade of word-pictures and attempted descriptions by the countless millions of seers over the ages appears a futile and self-defeating game. Such a recognition led the early Chinese and Japanese Buddhists to pursue a method of knowledge-awakening which transcended the impossible demands of language, which directly evoked the immediate Reality, and awakened the mind to its true nature. And over the centuries, this method has gradually become the special hallmark of the Ch’an and Zen Buddhist traditions.

Taking the rejection of metaphysical formulations as their starting point, they began to devise methods whereby they might turn, or startle, a disciple toward the direct perception of his own Self, his own Being. “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” questioned the Master; and the disciple, deprived of a verbalized answer, had necessarily to peer into the silence of his own being for the comprehension of Nonduality. Thus, instead of hoping to awaken a disciple to enlightenment through such explanations as Shankara and the Vedantists offer, and thereby leading him to delve into his own mind to experience the Truth, the enlightened seers of China and Japan practiced a non-analytical method of awakening the disciple; a method which causes the disciple to grab directly and immediately, by wordless insight, at the living truth of his own existence.

When Ummon is asked, “What is Zen?” he stares the disciple fiercely in the face, and exclaims, “That’s it! That’s it!” This method of the famous Ch’an and Zen masters is a method of shock, a startling of the mind in order to suddenly knock away the clouds of verbalized concepts in the mind of the seeker and awaken him to the immediate reality of consciousness in the here and now. But who can say whether this method is more effective than another? Who can say whether more men and women have been induced to know the Truth for themselves by Shankara’s reasonings, or by Jesus’ exhortations, or by the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, or by Ummon’s “That’s it!” We can only observe that, in China and Japan, the intellectual method

was rejected, and the “direct pointing to the Soul of man” was embraced as a method of instruction.

Teaching methods may vary; but the Truth remains one. And no one has ever realized It without an intense and arduous searching for It within themselves. In the last analysis, it is the determination and fitness of the disciple, which determines whether he will attain to the clear vision of Truth, and that, after all, is in the hands of God. Perhaps the most a teacher may do is to exhort and encourage a student to apply himself with all his might to the search for Truth within himself. With this purpose in mind, the famous Zen master, Hakuin (1683-1768), sang:

Not knowing how near the Truth is,
 People seek It far away—what a pity!
 They are like one who, in the midst of water,
 Cries imploringly for a drink of water,
 Or like the son of a rich man
 Who wanders away among the poor.
 ...Those who testify to the truth of the nature of the Self,
 Have found it by reflecting within themselves,
 And have gone beyond the realm of mere ideas.
 For them opens the gate of the oneness of cause and effect.
 And straight runs the path of Nonduality ...
 Abiding with the Undivided amidst the divided,
 Whether going or returning, they remain forever unmoved.
 Holding fast to, and remembering, *That* which is beyond
 thought,
 In their every act, they hear the voice of the Truth.
 How limitless the sky of unbounded freedom!
 How pure the perfect moonlight of Wisdom!
 At that moment, what do they lack?
 As the eternally quiescent Truth reveals Itself to them,
 This very earth is the lotus-land of Purity,
 And this body is the body of the Buddha. ⁸

The experience of *samadhi*, or *satori*, is self-revealing, self-illuminating; it effortlessly reveals the unitive Truth, and dispels all doubts. There is no difficulty of understanding involved in it whatsoever. What *is* difficult,

however, is the subsequent adjustment to living the rest of one's life with the knowledge thus acquired. It takes a good deal of reflection and getting-used-to in order to recognize only the One in all phenomenal manifestations as well. Such an acquired habitual perspective no longer distinguishes between the Absolute and the relative but focuses singly on the awareness of Unity. Such a mind takes no interest in pursuing gratification in appearances but remains unswayed from Unity-awareness by either pleasant or unpleasant circumstances.

It is this adjustment, or resolution, to life on the relative plane which, therefore, claims much of the attention of the enlightened, and which constitutes much of the written material by the Self-realized sages of every mystical tradition. The writings of the early Ch'an Buddhists are particularly replete with declarations concerning this resolution, this final state of Unity-awareness. Though the language and teaching methods of the Ch'an and Zen Buddhists are unique to themselves, the goal of enlightenment and the attainment of a perfect and lasting Unity-awareness is the same for all. In many of the poems and utterances of the memorable saints of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist tradition, we can hear something of that pure and simple state; we can hear the voice of the unfettered Self, released from all doubt and conflict.

In one of the earliest Buddhist treatises to come out of China, called *Hsin-hsin ming*, "Inscription on The Self of The Self," written by an obscure monk named Seng-ts'an (d. 606), we find an especially illuminating expression of this ultimate awareness. While it represents a movement toward the early Chinafication, or simplifying, of Buddhist ideology, it is scarcely distinguishable from the Taoism which preceded it. Its author was, undoubtedly, an enlightened man, and a Buddhist; but he was also a Chinaman with a long heritage of Taoist phraseology. In this perfect gem of wisdom, we can actually see the transformation of Indian Buddhism into something distinctly Chinese, as Buddhism blends into Taoism, and the one perennial philosophy of Unity resurfaces once more—this time, under the name of Ch'an:

The perfect Tao knows no difficulties.
It only refuses to make preferences.
When freed from hate and love,

It reveals Itself fully and without disguise.

A tenth of an inch's difference,
 And heaven and earth are set apart.
 If you want to see It manifest,
 Take no thought either for or against It.

To set up what you like against what you dislike:
 This is the disease of the mind.
 When the profound Truth is not understood,
 Peace of mind is disturbed, and nothing is gained.

[The Truth is] perfect like the vastness of space,
 With nothing wanting, nothing superfluous.
 It is indeed due to making choices
 That the One Reality is lost sight of.

Pursue not the outer entanglements,
 Dwell not in the inner Void.
 When the mind rests serene in the oneness of things,
 Dualism vanishes by itself.

When oneness is not thoroughly understood,
 In two ways loss may be sustained:
 The denial of the world may lead to its absolute negation,
 While the denying of the Void may result in the denying
 of your [true] Self.

Wordiness and intellection—The more with them the
 further astray we go.
 Away, therefore, with wordiness and intellection,
 And there is no place where we cannot pass freely.

When we return to the root, we gain the meaning.
 When we pursue the external objects, we lose the purpose.
 The moment we are enlightened within,
 We go beyond the voidness of a world confronting us.

Transformations going on in an empty world which

confronts us
 Appear real all because of ignorance.
 Try not to seek after the Real.
 Only cease to cherish opinions.

Tarry not with dualism,
 Carefully avoid pursuing it.
 As soon as you have right and wrong,
 Confusion ensues, and the mind is lost.

The two exist because of the One,
 But hold not even to this One.
 When the one Consciousness is not disturbed,
 The ten thousand things offer no offence.

When no offence is offered by them, they are as if
 non-existent.
 When the mind is not disturbed, it is as if there is no
 mind.
 The subject is quieted as the object ceases.
 The object ceases as the subject is quieted.

The object is an object for the subject.
 The subject is a subject for an object.
 Know that the relativity of the two
 Rests ultimately on the oneness of the Void.

In the oneness of the Void, the two are one,
 And each of the two contains in itself all the ten thousand
 things.
 When no discrimination is made between this and that,
 How can a one-sided and prejudiced view arise?

... In the higher realm of true Being,
 There is neither "other" nor "self."
 When a direct identification is required,
 We can only say, "not two."

In being not two, all is the same.

All that *is* is comprehended in it.
 The wise in all the ten quarters
 Enter into this same absolute Awareness.

This absolute Awareness is beyond movement and rest.
 One instant is ten thousand years.
 No matter how things are regarded— as being or non-being,
 It is manifest everywhere before you.

...One in all,
 All in One—
 If only this is realized,
 No more worry about your not being perfect! ⁹

About one hundred years later, another Ch'an master, by the name of Yung-chia Ta-shih (d. 713), wrote his *Cheng-tao Ke*, "Song Of Enlightenment," which reiterates, in equally inspiring tones, this same knowledge, this same enlightened state of awareness:

Do you know that leisurely sage who has gone beyond
 learning, and who does not exert himself in anything?
 He neither endeavors to avoid idle thoughts nor seeks after
 the Truth
 [For he knows that] ignorance is also the Reality,
 [And that] this empty, illusory, body is nothing but the
 absolute Reality (*Dharmakaya*).

When one knows the Absolute, there are no longer any
 [independent] objects.
 The Source of all things is the absolute Self of all the
 enlightened.
 The five elements are like a cloud floating aimlessly here
 and there.
 And the three passions are like the foam which appears and
 disappears on the surface of the ocean.

When the absolute Reality is known, it is seen to be
 without any individual selves, and devoid of any
 objective forms.

All past [mental and physical] actions which lead to hell are instantly wiped away.

... After the Awakening, there is only vast Emptiness; this vast universe of forms ceases to exist [outside of one's Self].

Here, one sees neither sin nor bliss, neither loss nor gain.
In the midst of the eternal Serenity, no questions arise.
The dust of ignorance which has accumulated on the unpolished mirror for ages,
Is now, and forever, cleared away in the vision of Truth.

...The people do not know where to find this precious jewel
Which lies deep within the creative Power (*Tathagata-garba*);
The activity miraculously performed by the creative Power
is an illusion and yet it is not an illusion,
[Just as] the rays of light emanating from the one perfect Sun
belong to it and yet do not belong to it.

Let us be thoroughgoing, not only in inner experience, but in its interpretation,
And our lives will be perfect in meditation and in wisdom as well—not adhering one-sidedly to Emptiness (*Sunyata*) alone.
It is not we alone who have come to this conclusion:
All the enlightened, numerous as the sands of India, are of the same mind.

I crossed seas and rivers, climbed mountains, and forded streams,
In order to interview the Masters, to enquire after Truth, to delve into the secrets of Ch'an;
But since I learned the true path from my Master [Hui-neng: 638-713],
I know that birth-and-death is not what I need to be concerned with.

For walking is Ch'an, sitting is Ch'an;
Whether talking or remaining silent, whether moving or standing still, the Essence Itself is always at rest.
Even when confronted by swords and spears, It never loses

Its way of stillness.
 Not even poisonous drugs can perturb Its serenity.

Ever since the realization—which came to me suddenly—
 that I have never been born,
 All vicissitudes of fate, good and bad, have lost their power
 over me.

Far off, in the mountains, I live in a modest hut.
 The mountains are high, the shade-trees are broad, and
 under an old pine tree
 I sit quietly and contentedly in my monkish home.
 Here, perfect tranquility and rustic simplicity reign.

[The sage] neither seeks the Truth, nor avoids the
 defilements; He clearly perceives that all dualities are
 empty and have no reality.
 And, since they have no reality, he is not one-sided, neither
 empty, nor not-empty.
 This is the genuine state of sagehood.

The one Mind, like a mirror, reflects everything brightly,
 and knows no limitations.
 It pervades the entire universe in even its minutest crevices.
 This world and all its contents, multitudinous in form, are
 reflected in the one Mind,
 Which, shining like a perfect gem, has no “outer” or “inner.”

If we hold exclusively to Emptiness, we deny the entire causal
 World.

All is then attributed to chance, with no ruling principle,
 inviting evil to prevail.

The same error occurs when one holds exclusively to the
 manifested, denying the Emptiness.

That would be like throwing oneself into the flames in order
 to avoid being drowned in the water.

...The Real need not be adhered to.

As for the non-real, there has never been any such thing.
 When both Real and non-Real are put aside, “non-real”

becomes meaningless.
 [Even] when the various means to [the attainment of]
 Emptiness are abandoned,
 The eternal Oneness of the sage remains as It has always
 been. ¹⁰

In the ongoing tradition of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism, many such declarations have been uttered; oftentimes they are but brief and simple declarations of isolation and profound contentment. And oftentimes, when we read the poems of the early Ch'an and Zen masters, such as this, by P'ang-yun (d. 811):

How wondrously supernatural,
 And how miraculous this!
 I carry water, and I carry fuel. ¹¹

Or this, by Pao-tzu Wen-ch'i (10th century):

Drinking tea, eating rice,
 I pass my time as it comes.
 Looking down at the stream,
 Looking up at the mountain,
 How serene and relaxed I feel indeed! ¹²

Or this, by Hsue-tou (950-1052):

What life can compare to this?
 Sitting quietly by the window,
 I watch the leaves fall and the flowers bloom,
 As the seasons come and go. ¹³

...we may fail to recognize the connection of these Oriental Buddhists to their parent tradition, and lose sight of the long, arduous progression of understanding which led to the apparent simplicity of the enlightened Ch'an and Zen masters. Their simple poems may seem far removed from the reasonings of the early Buddhist Fathers on the complementarity of *nirvana* and *samsara*, but they represent the ultimate synthesis of centuries of metaphysics, and the final freedom of those who have realized that synthesis in their ordinary lives. How simple seem these Buddhist sages, yet their

very simplicity is the simplicity of the blessed; it stands on the heads of the Buddhas of the past and reveals a consummation of the struggles of a thousand lifetimes.

NOTES:

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2. Suzuki, D.T., *Essays In Zen Buddhism, Second Series*, N.Y., Samuel Weiser, 1970; pp. 23-24.
3. Chung-yuan, Chang, *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism*, N.Y., Pantheon Books, 1975; pp. 72-73
4. *Ibid.*, p. 71
5. *Ibid.*, p. 60
6. Suzuki, D.T., *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, N.Y, Grove Press, 1960, p. 111.
7. Chung-yuan, *ibid.*, 1975
8. Suzuki, D.T., *Essays In Zen Buddhism, First Series*, N.Y., Grove Press, 1961; p. 336
9. Suzuki, D.T., *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, N.Y, Grove Press, 1960, pp. 76-82
10. Suzuki, *Ibid.*, 1960; pp. 89-103
11. Suzuki, D.T., *Essays In Zen Buddhism, First Series*, N.Y., Grove Press, 1961; p. 319
12. Chung-yuan, *op. cit*; p. 141
13. Suzuki, D.T., *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, N.Y, Grove Press, 1960, p. 127.

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III. Milarepa

Tibet, that mysterious world high up in the Himalayan mountains, has borrowed much of its religious tradition from India, which it borders. From very early times, the mythology and philosophy of India found its way into the highlands of Nepal and Tibet, and, in a curious mixture with peculiarly Tibetan mythologies of a more primitive culture, formed a Totemistic religion called *Bon*. When Buddhism began to infiltrate Tibet in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Current Era, Bon was slow to give way; but by the 9th century, after the coming of Padma-Shambhava and other Buddhist monks, whose esoteric teachings were flavored with much from the Yogic and Tantric traditions, Tibetan Buddhism began to take on a settled character of its own, with its own sects and sub-sects.

Tibetan Buddhism was therefore compounded of the shamanism of Bon, the mythology of the Vedas, the Nondualism of the Upanishads, the ideals of the Buddha, and the disciplines of Yoga and Tantra. One of the more esoteric of the sects, which flourished in the 9th and 10th centuries, was the Karguptya line, descended from the great Buddhist yogi, Tilopa. And in the 11th century there was born a yogi of surpassing greatness who was to fuel the fire of Buddhist faith, and invigorate the Karguptya teachings, as no other man before or since has done. His name was Jetsun Milarepa.

Jetsun Mila (later to be known simply as Milarepa, meaning, “Mila, wearer of cotton garments”) was born to Mila-Sherab Gyalt-sen (“Mila, the Trophy of Wisdom”) and his wife, Karmo-Kyen (“White Garland”), in mid-August of 1052, at Kyanga-Tsa, in the province of Gungthang on the Tibetan frontier of Nepal (about 50 miles due north of modern Katmandu, the capital of Nepal). Milarepa’s father was a wealthy and industrious trader, and a man of some influence in his village. He owned a large piece of land, with a luxuriously spacious house, and he and his family were highly respected and honored in the community. He died when Milarepa was but seven years old, leaving his vast estate, including herds of cattle and horses, farmlands and granaries, to his son. He had stipulated that all was to be held in trust for Milarepa and cared for by an uncle and aunt until the child came of age.

The uncle and aunt, however, treated Milarepa, his mother, and his younger sister, Peta, very badly, forcing them to labor hard and long in the fields, with only meager earnings, and to live in great poverty and distress. And when the time came, after a number of years, for Milarepa and his mother

and sister to receive the father's legacy, the uncle and aunt who had been entrusted with the property, refused to give it over. They had many sons and relatives, and were able, by their sheer numbers, to enforce their will upon Milarepa and his hapless family.

Milarepa's mother, Karmo-Kyen, was in such a distressed and enraged state of mind due to the perfidy of her husband's relatives that she sold what little she possessed in order to send Milarepa to a Guru who could teach him the art of black-magic, so that he could bring curses down upon the wicked uncle and aunt who had robbed them, and bring destruction to their whole family. She threatened to kill herself if Milarepa did not agree to carry out her plan. And so, the young Milarepa traveled to a village called Yarlung-Kyorpo, where he became a student of a famous black-magician called Lama Yungtun-Trogyal ("Wrathful and Victorious Teacher of Evil").

The Lama taught Milarepa everything he knew, and then sent him after one year to someone more versed in the arts of destruction—another master of the black arts called Khulung Yonton-Gyatso, in the valley of Tsongpo. Here, Milarepa learned what he needed to destroy his archrivals. And thereupon, he caused by his incantations the death of thirty-five people, all sons and friends of the wicked aunt and uncle, by bringing down upon them the house in which they had gathered for a wedding feast. After that, he caused a hailstorm to destroy the grain crops of the entire village.

After thus consummating his mother's revenge upon those who had mistreated them, Milarepa felt great remorse for his deeds, and undertook to find a Teacher who would teach him the path of religion, so that he could free himself from the evil deeds he had committed. With this objective in mind, he traveled, with his old Guru's blessings, to Rinang to see a famous Lama of the Ningma Buddhist sect. This Lama told him to go to a monastery called Dowo-Lung ("Wheat Valley") in the province of Lhobrak, where he would find his destined Guru, a disciple of the famous Naropa, called Marpa, the Translator.

Marpa was called "the translator," for his many translations of traditional Buddhist and Tantric scriptures, which he had personally brought to Tibet after a long search in India. He was a Lama; that is to say, a Guru, but he was not a monk. He was married and lived the life of a normal householder. He was the favored disciple of Naropa, who had been a disciple of Tilopa, the founder of the Karguptya school of Tantric Buddhism in the mid-tenth

century. Tilopa had claimed that his doctrines were transmitted to him by the celestial Buddha, called Dorje Chang (*Vajra Dhara* in Sanskrit).

When Jetsun Milarepa went to Marpa, his arrival had been expected, due to a dream in which it was revealed to Marpa that a great disciple was coming to him, one who would become the bearer of the banner of Buddhist teaching in Tibet, and who would be celebrated throughout the world. Marpa, however, aware that Milarepa had accumulated many sins due to his black-magic practices which had first to be expiated before he could attain enlightenment, put Milarepa to many severe tasks and trials, and dealt with him very harshly, feigning on many occasions indifference or anger toward him. Marpa withheld his oft-promised teachings from Milarepa, while for years Jetsun was made to build stone houses in different locations and according to various plans, which then, on one pretext or another, he was required to tear down again. He had to convey the building-stones from great distances on his back, causing him to suffer from numerous bloody pus-oozing sores over the extent of his back.

Many times, Milarepa despaired of ever gaining the teachings, which would lead him to enlightenment. But throughout his trials, he had the sympathy and encouragement of Marpa's wife, Damena, who nursed him and cared for his needs. On one occasion, Milarepa, through a plot hatched by Damena, pretended to leave Marpa, in despondency of ever receiving the precious teachings of his Guru, only to be beaten and kicked by Marpa, who saw through the pretense.

After much such ill treatment, and in utter frustration, Milarepa set out to find another Guru, and stayed for a time with one of Marpa's chief disciples, Ngogdun-Chudor, to whom he had falsely represented himself. But in time, Marpa learned of his whereabouts, and sent for him. Marpa then confided to Milarepa that all his apparent mistreatment of him had been for his own benefit. He had known, he said, that Milarepa was a worthy disciple who would one day bring him fame, but he had to bring him to utter despair nine separate times to expiate the sins of his past and to enable him to be fit to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. However, he had succeeded in so doing only eight times, interrupted in his last attempt by Milarepa's escape. Now, said Marpa, he would indeed attain enlightenment, but he would have to undergo yet more suffering in the attempt.

Relieved to know that his Guru had treated him so badly, not out of contempt, but out of concern for his welfare, Milarepa now began a new period in his *sadhana*. He was duly initiated into monkhood by Marpa and received from him the holy teaching. Thereafter, Milarepa lived in a cave for eleven months practicing intense meditation, while his Guru provided him with food and other essentials. At the end of this period, Marpa, who was now quite old, traveled to India to see his own Guru, Naropa; and after receiving his instructions, returned to pass the mantle of the Karguptya sect to Milarepa.

Milarepa remained several more years with Marpa, meditating in his cave, and practicing the discipline of *Tum-mo*, the awakening of the inner fire to heat his body in the severe cold of the mountains. And when he had attained proficiency in this practice, he approached Marpa, requesting that he be allowed to visit for one last time his old home, to see if his mother and sister were still alive and cared for. Marpa consented but added that he and Milarepa would never see each other again, as Marpa was nearing the time of his death. He gave thorough instructions to his disciple to remain at his ancestral home for only seven days, and thereafter to take himself to the remote caves in the mountains far from civilization, and there to continue his meditations to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all living creatures. With much show of emotion and tears from Marpa and Damena, Milarepa then set off on his journey to Kyanga-Tsa.

When Milarepa returned to his old home, he found it dilapidated and empty, and learned that his mother had been dead for eight years, and his sister, now a beggar, had disappeared and no one knew her whereabouts. After a short stay, during which he exchanged his family property for a store of barley-meal and other provisions, he retired to a remote cave where he lived for three years on the provisions that he had taken with him. Thereafter, his diet was reduced to a soup made of nettles, which he found growing in a spring-fed field.

In time, his clothes rotted off, and his body became horribly emaciated. His skin and even his hair turned dark green from the solitary diet of green nettles. But it happened that his long-lost sister, Peta, having heard of his whereabouts, came to the cave to see him, and, appalled at his sad appearance, brought him food and clothing, and nursed him back to health. Yet, despite her entreaties, Milarepa would not give up his resolve to attain

full enlightenment. And so, he continued to live in caves far from the populace, meditating steadfastly on the *Dharmakaya*, the Absolute.

Milarepa moved from cave to cave in the snowy mountain fastnesses, and, having passed through many inner trials, temptations, and visionary experiences, at last became firmly established in the highest realization of the all-pervading Consciousness. “At last,” he said, “the object of meditation, the act of meditation, and the meditator are so interwoven with each other that now I do not even know how to meditate!” He had also acquired an abundance of *siddhis* (supernormal powers), and before long, a number of disciples gathered around the now-famous yogi who had attained Buddhahood. Among his disciples, there were twenty-five accomplished yogis who, themselves, became saints through his blessings; of these, four were women.

Exhorting all his followers to spiritual endeavor, he taught them to abandon all other concerns in order to obtain enlightenment. “I have obtained spiritual knowledge,” he told them, “through giving up all thought of food, clothing and reputation. Inspired with zeal in my heart, I bore every hardship and inured myself to all sorts of privations of the body; I devoted myself to meditation in the most unfrequented and solitary places. Thus, did I obtain knowledge and spiritual experience; do you also follow in the path trodden by me, and practice devotion as I have done.”¹

Thereafter, Milarepa traveled about from mountain to mountain, community to community, to spread his teachings of enlightenment. Oftentimes, during his travels, he met with proud and learned scholars, who, having attained nothing more than book-learning, were of the opinion that their intellectual knowledge was the highest knowledge to be attained; and they attributed to Milarepa the same base motivations for fame and prestige which they themselves possessed. One such scholar, Geshe (pandit) Tsaphuwa, eager to engage Milarepa in debate, asked him to give an interpretation of some doctrines found in a certain book. Said Milarepa to the Geshe: “I have never valued the mere sophistry of intellectual knowledge, which is set down in books in order to be committed to memory. These lead only to mental confusion, and not to those practices which conduct one to the actual realization of Truth.”² Then he asked the Geshe to listen to this song:

Obeisance to the honored feet of Marpa the Translator! May I be far removed from contending creeds and dogmas. Ever since my Lord's grace entered my mind,

My mind has never strayed to seek such distractions. Accustomed long to contemplating love and compassion, I have forgotten all difference between myself and others.

Accustomed long to meditating on my Guru as enhaloed over my head, I have forgotten all those who rule by power and prestige.

Accustomed long to meditating on my guardian deities as inseparable from myself, I have forgotten the lowly fleshly form.

Accustomed long to meditating on the secret whispered truths, I have forgotten all that is said in written or printed books.

Accustomed, as I have been, to the study of the eternal Truth, I've lost all knowledge of ignorance.

Accustomed, as I've been, to contemplating both nirvana and samsara as inherent in myself, I have forgotten to think of hope and fear.

Accustomed, as I've been, to meditating on this life and the next as one, I have forgotten the dread of birth and death.

Accustomed long to studying, by myself, my own experiences, I have forgotten the need to seek the opinions of friends and brethren.

Accustomed long to applying each new experience to my own spiritual growth, I have forgotten all creeds and dogmas.

Accustomed long to meditating on the Unborn, the

Indestructible, the Unchanging, I have forgotten all definitions of this or that particular goal.

Accustomed long to meditating on all visible phenomena as the Dharmakaya, I have forgotten all meditations on what is produced by the mind.

Accustomed long to keeping my mind in the uncreated state of freedom, I have forgotten all conventions and artificialities.

Accustomed long to humbleness, of body and mind,

I have forgotten the pride and haughty manner of the mighty.

Accustomed long to regarding my fleshly body as my hermitage, I have forgotten the ease and comfort of retreats and monasteries.

Accustomed long to knowing the meaning of the Wordless, I have forgotten the way to trace the roots of verbs, and the sources of words and phrases.

You, O learned one, may trace out these things in your books [if you wish].³

It is said that this very Geshe to whom Milarepa sang this song thereafter poisoned Milarepa out of malicious envy; and Milarepa, aware that his death was approaching soon anyway, accepted it knowingly. Then, as his life was coming to its end, Milarepa called to himself all his devotees and disciples from far and wide, and gave to them his final teachings, which are, in many respects, reminiscent of the last instructions given by Gautama, the Buddha, to his own disciples:

All worldly pursuits have but one unavoidable and inevitable end, which is sorrow; acquisitions end in dispersion; buildings in destruction; meetings in separation; births in death.

Knowing this, one should, from the very first, renounce acquisitions and storing-up, and building, and meeting; and, faithful to the commands of an eminent Guru, set about

realizing the Truth. That alone is the best of religious observances.

...As regards the method of acquiring practical spiritual knowledge, if you find a certain practice increases your evil passions and tends you toward selfishness, abandon it, though it may appear to others virtuous. And if any course of action tends to counteract your evil passions, and to benefit sentient beings, know that to be the true and holy path, and continue it, even though it should appear to others to be sinful.

...Life is short, and the time of death is uncertain; so, apply yourselves to meditation. Avoid doing evil, and acquire merit, to the best of your ability, even at the cost of life itself. In short, act so that you will have no cause to be ashamed of yourselves; and hold fast to this rule.

...Works performed for the good of others seldom succeed if not wholly freed from self-interest. It is difficult to meet success in the effort to insure one's own spiritual welfare, even without seeking to benefit others. If you seek another's spiritual welfare before attaining your own, it would be like a helplessly drowning man trying to save another man in the same predicament. Therefore, one should not be too anxious and hasty in setting out to save others before one has, oneself, realized Truth in Its fullness. That would be like the blind leading the blind. As long as the sky endures, there will be no dearth of sentient beings for you to serve, and your opportunity for such service will come. Till it does, I exhort each one of you to keep but one resolve: namely, to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all living creatures.

...Maintain the state of undistractedness, and distractions will fly away. Dwell alone, and you shall find the Friend. Take the lowest place, and you shall reach the highest. Hasten slowly, and you shall soon arrive. Renounce all worldly goals, and you shall reach the highest Goal. If you follow this unfrequented path, you will find the

shortest way. If you realize *Sunyata* (the absolute Emptiness), compassion will arise within your hearts; and when you lose all differentiation between yourself and others, then you will be fit to serve others. ⁴

Milarepa, in the company of his illustrious disciples and a host of celestial beings, passed away in his mountain homeland in 1135 C.E., at the age of eighty-four. And from that time to the present, his life, his unswerving perseverance in the pursuit of enlightenment, his teachings, and his incomparable songs, have inspired millions of souls to the attainment of the liberating Truth to which he dedicated his life.

NOTES:

1. Evans-Wentz, W.Y., *Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa*, N.Y., Oxford Univ. Press, 1971; p. 234.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-247.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 261, 262, 270, 271

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IV. Vedanta And Buddhism

(from *The Wisdom of Vedanta, 1991*)

One meets with a great objection from the so-called “learned” community when one tries to explain that there are not many religions, but that “religion” is one thing taught by many different teachers. The pretenders to learning say, “That’s a very naive view of the world’s religions; Presbyterians are not the same as Catholics, nor are Christian Scientists the same as Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses—not to mention the vast differences between Christians and Hindus, Moslems and Jews, Buddhists and Confucianists, for example. How can you possibly say that all religion is one?”

In order to answer this, we must first define the word, “religion”: It is from the Latin root, *religare*, which means to re-tie or to reconnect. We find the same meaning in the word, “yoga”; it is from the Sanskrit root, *yuj*, which

gives us the English word, “yoke,” as in “Yoke the oxen to the cart.” It means to connect or fasten. And both of these words, *religion* and *yoga* mean to reunite our minds, our awareness, our souls, to our Source, to the universal Being who is our true and lasting Self.

Now, what Jesus of Nazareth taught was certainly “religion” in this true sense of the word. But, whether Presbyterians or Baptists, Mormons or Catholics teach “religion” in this same sense of the word depends, I think, on the understanding of the individuals who practice and teach these “religions.” You see, we have come to use this word in such a way that it can be pluralized as “religions,” just as the word, “yoga,” is often used to speak of various paths, or “yogas,” such as “Karma yoga,” “bhakti yoga,” etc. We’ve corrupted the meaning to the extent that our Western culture finds it difficult to define “religion.” The dictionary definition states that it is “a *belief* in” a Divine or superhuman being. This allows just about any kind of nonsense to be subsumed under the label, “religion.”

Well, for our purposes, let us understand by the word, *religion*, the attempt to reunite one’s mind with the Source of all minds. We have already determined that Jesus taught “religion” in this sense. What, then, of the teacher who became known as “the Buddha”? Did he teach “religion” in this same sense? Yes, he did. Do not believe those sectarian religionists and “learned” people who say that Buddhism is simply an atheistic, intellectual philosophy, similar to Existentialism. The Buddha did not invent a new “religion”; he merely rediscovered the eternal religion known in Sanskrit as the *sanatana dharma*, which had been established on the earth long prior to his time.

Like Jesus, the Buddha came to fulfill the ancient teachings, not to destroy them. The Upanishadic tradition of reuniting with the Divine Self had been very much alive previous to the Buddha; he only reconfirmed it in his own experience and reaffirmed it in his teachings. His experience—and this is the crux of the matter—his experience of the eternal Truth was not different from the experience of the eternal Truth known by the Upanishadic *rishis*. Is there more than one Unity to be experienced? Are there many different eternal Truths out there? What fools people are to think that the realization of Jesus or of the Upanishadic sages was different from that of the Buddha! But, of course, such people do not even accept the fact that Truth can

actually be “seen,” experienced, for oneself; they believe that each of the various religious teachers throughout history only devised in his own mind a separate truth in which he or she strongly *believed*. Or else they imagine that their representative was designated by God as the “authentic” representative of truth, and all others are phonies—but this is politics, not religion.

Those who do not understand that the eternal Truth is, and has always been, experienceable, naturally have no basis from which to recognize what true “religion” is; they imagine either that it is a mere intellectual formulation of theological and moral principles, or they imagine that it is a racially inherited favorite-nation status, or that it is something like a family business, in which God, the father, sent his son as an emissary to set up a franchise on earth. Those who believe such absurdities usually claim exclusive rights to the truth; “Ours is the true religion; all others are false!” they cry. And with their claims, they set up fences, which, while intended to exclude all others, only serve to isolate themselves from the commonwealth of man.

Those who do not understand the nature of enlightenment are those most often heard to exclaim that the Buddha taught something quite different from what Jesus taught. Such people do not understand what either of these men taught. Can the enlightenment of the Buddha be different from the entrance into the kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke? They are not different. How could they be different? Do they think God created several different ultimate Realities just to confuse people?

God’s kingdom is the place where the flimsy ego is dissolved, and the soul awakes to its true nature as unending Bliss. It realizes, “I am no one else but the one Divine Consciousness from which all this universe is projected; I and the Father are one.” That is the kingdom of God. Nothing is seen in that kingdom but God. And that is also the experience of enlightenment. “Buddha” means “the awakened”; it is the eternal Truth, the unchanging Identity, to which he awakened; and it is that direct experience of Truth, which constituted his awakeness, his “Buddhahood.”

As illustration of this, listen to what the Buddha said regarding that eternal Identity beyond birth and death, beyond what is created or what exists as a compound of elements:

There is, monks, an Unborn, an Unevolved, Uncreated, Uncompounded. If, monks, there were not this Unborn, Unevolved, Uncreated, Uncompounded, there would not be any escape here from the born, the evolved, the created, the compounded. But, because there *is* an Unborn, an Unevolved, Uncreated, Uncompounded, therefore, there is an escape from the born, the evolved, the created, the compounded. ¹

The “Unborn,” etc., is that same eternal One whom the sages of the Upanishads called, “Brahman” or “Purusha” or “the supreme Self.” It is this unnamable, unborn One, which the Upanishadic sages experienced, and it is this same One, which the Buddha experienced, in his solitary contemplation. The *experience* of unity, the *experience* of the eternal Consciousness of the universe, is the basis of all that the Buddha taught.

In the attempt to convey something of his own experience to his fellow monks, he said to them:

There is, O monks, a condition where there is neither this world nor any other world, nor is there any Sun or moon. There is neither a coming nor going, nor remaining, nor passing away, nor arising. Without support, without movement, It is the Foundation of everything. It is hard to see That which is selfless; it is not easy to perceive the Truth. Only one who has put an end to craving, who no longer clings to anything [in this world], is able to see [the Truth]. ²

The Buddha had “seen” It; and he knew that others before him had seen It. But the seers of Truth have always been few; and the ignorance of the many always holds sway as the popular view. Siddhartha, the Buddha, had been born into a time when the esoteric understanding of the mystics, the seers, had been almost entirely subverted by the priests of the Brahmin caste, who promulgated an interpretation of the ancient Vedic teachings based on their own ignorance of enlightenment. They had corrupted true religion into a superstition of primitive ritual, in which they, themselves, took the position of intercessors between God and His devotees, pandering to the fears and

worldly desires of the people.

We see the same thing throughout history and today as well. The vast majority of “religious” men and women know nothing of the true meaning of religion. Their highest aspiration is “faith,” not knowledge; and their greatest hope is that they can enjoy prosperity and happiness with their children and grandchildren here in this earthly realm. This is certainly not an ignoble attitude; it is just that it doesn’t go deeply enough toward our true potential. It is superficial and doesn’t really advance us toward the realization of our true and lasting Bliss. Indeed, a strong attachment to such superficial and transient aims can be a great obstacle to the attainment of Truth.

Because the corruption of religion was so prevalent in his time, the Buddha felt that perhaps it was necessary to explain his experience of the Truth in a way that would leave little opportunity for the corruption of his message. He knew that others had spoken before him of the mystical experience of the eternal Truth; the Upanishads were replete with such descriptions and declarations. And yet the people ignored such high things and followed what they could understand: the propitiation of gods through ritualized worship and offerings of sacrifice. The Buddha wished to turn men toward the Eternal within themselves; not to foster more idolatry and dependence upon some “god” without. He knew that it was the revealed knowledge of the Eternal within that constituted man’s ultimate good, his ultimate freedom.

And so, the Buddha didn’t speak of “God”; he didn’t speak of “Shiva,” or of “Brahman,” or even of the “Atman.” He spoke of the *experience* of the Eternal, which he called, *nirvana*—the extinction of the false ego. He didn’t attempt to formulate a systematic metaphysics; he saw that such intellectual learning had failed in the past to lead the people out of superstition and self-delusion. Rather, he taught what he called “the Four Noble Truths”:

- (1) That everything that is born, and dies, must experience suffering;
- (2) That there is a cause for this suffering (i.e., *kama*, desire, which leads to rebirth);
- (3) That there is a release from suffering (i.e., the mystical experience

called, *nirvana*);

(4) That there is a means, or methodology, by which to attain release from suffering; and this means or method he subdivided into what he called, “the eight-fold path.” These are:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right understanding | 5. Right livelihood |
| 2. Right aims | 6. Right efforts |
| 3. Right speech | 7. Right thinking |
| 4. Right behavior | 8. Right concentration |

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he taught what he had come to know to his fellow *sadhus*, or truth-seekers, with whom he had wandered during his own search for Truth. One of the earliest and best-known Sermons, which he gave, was the Sermon at the Deer Park, from atop a hill, as Jesus would do five-hundred years later. This is what he said in that Sermon:

Whatever is born must die; it is vain to worry about the [individual] self. The [sense of an individualized] self is like a mirage, and all the tribulations that touch it will pass away. They will vanish as a nightmare vanishes when a sleeper awakes.³

The Buddha distinguishes between the transient, temporal existence (*samsara*) and the Eternal Truth (*tattva*), which constitutes one’s permanent Identity. The false identification with the transient mind and body is what we regard as our self; but that, says the Buddha, is merely a mirage. Such an independent self does not exist; it is a mere convention, which we have come to regard as real. When one awakes to the Reality, the Truth, the eternal Self, one realizes that the transient life and personality, which seemed so real is like a dream; and that the one who really is is that eternal One who exists as each and every person and creature on earth.

He who has awakened [from this dream] is freed from fear; he has become a Buddha (an “awakened” one). He knows the vanity of all his cares, his ambitions, and his sufferings as well.⁴

A *Buddha* is one who is awakened from the dream of a personal identity and has become freed from the fears accompanying identification with the dream-person and his many adventures. All his posturing, all his proud blustering, all his loves and fears, and long-sufferings are seen as having no more significance than the events occurring in a dream. The fear and anxiety that one experiences throughout life for one's own well-being is comparable to the fear that arises when one sees a rope and thinks it is a snake.

It sometimes happens that a man, when bathing in a river, steps on a wet rope and imagines that it is a snake. Terror will overcome him, and he will shake with fear, anticipating in his mind all the agonies caused by the serpent's venomous bite.

What a relief does this man experience when he sees that the rope is not a snake. The cause of his fear lies in his error, his ignorance, his illusion. If the true nature of the rope is recognized, his tranquility of mind will come back to him; he will feel relieved; he will be joyful and happy. This is the state of mind of one who has recognized that there is no [independent] self, and that the cause of all his troubles, cares, and vanities is a mirage, a shadow, a dream.⁵

The Buddhist doctrine of the illusory nature of the individualized self (the *ego*) is a teaching fundamental to all religion; it is, indeed, the mark of true understanding, based on the realization of the Real. Some, however, who possess only word-knowledge, declare that this doctrine (of *anatta*, or no-self) runs counter to the Vedantic doctrine of the reality of the Self (*Atman*). Not at all. Only a little discrimination will reveal that the *Atman*, or Self, of Vedanta is identical with what the Buddha refers to as "the Unborn," or "the Truth"; and that both the Buddha and the Upanishadic sages declared the illusory nature of the individualized self, or *ego*. There is truly only one Self; we, through our ignorance, imagine that we are many. We identify with a separate viewpoint, a separate set of physical characteristics, and thus we superimpose an imaginary individualized self upon the real undifferentiated awareness—just as one superimposes an imaginary snake on a real rope—and we thereby create a separate self where none in fact

exists.

[An independent] self is a fever; self is a transient illusion, a dream; but [the eternal] Truth is sublime. Truth is everlasting. There is no immortality except in Truth; for It is only the Truth that lives forever.

He who has overcome [the illusion of an individual] self is happy. He who has attained peace is happy. He who has found the Truth is happy. ⁶

What else needs to be said? Whether we call It *Atman*, *Brahman*, *Purusha*, *God*, or *Truth*, it is the realization of *That* which constitutes man's release from suffering, from ignorance, from all illusion. This is the message of the Buddha, of the Upanishads, of Shankara, of Jesus, and of all those who have known the Truth. Let us put to rest all notions that the Buddha taught something other than the one *sanatana dharma* taught throughout history by all the seers of Truth.

There are, of course, many different scriptural texts of the Buddhist tradition, all written long after the Buddha was gone; and each conveys its own perspective of the Buddha's teachings. One of the best, in my estimation, for getting a well-rounded and fairly accurate rendition of the teachings of the Buddha is the little book from the Pali canon, called the *Dhammapada*, "The Path of Truth." Here, as a sampling, are a few passages from it:

The Twin Verses

1. Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it.
2. Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never goes away.

3. “He was angry with me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me!” Those who dwell on such thoughts as these will never be free from hatred.
4. “He was angry with me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me!” Those who do not dwell on such thoughts will surely become free from hatred.
5. For hatred can never put an end to hatred; love alone can. This is an unalterable law.
6. People forget that their lives will end soon. For those who remember, quarrels come to an end.
7. As a strong wind blows down a weak tree, Mara, the tempter (comparable to *Maya*), overwhelms weak people who, eating too much and working too little, are caught in the frantic pursuit of pleasure.
8. As the strongest wind cannot shake a mountain, Mara cannot shake those who are self-disciplined and full of faith.
11. The deluded, imagining trivial things to be vital to life, follow their vain fancies and never attain the highest knowledge. But the wise, knowing what is trivial and what is vital, set their thoughts on the supreme Goal and attain the highest knowledge.
15. Those who are selfish suffer here and hereafter; they suffer in both worlds from the results of their own actions. But those who are selfless rejoice here and rejoice hereafter. They rejoice in both worlds from the results of their own actions.
17. Those who are selfish suffer in this life and the next.

They suffer seeing the results of the evil they have done, and more suffering awaits them in the next life. But those who are selfless rejoice seeing the good that they have done, and more joy awaits them in the next life.

19. Those who recite many scriptures but fail to practice their teachings are like a cowherd who counts another's cows. They do not share in the joys of the spiritual life. But those who know few scriptures yet practice their teachings, overcoming all lust, hatred, and delusion, live with a pure mind in the highest wisdom. They stand without external supports and share in the joys of the spiritual life. ⁷

The Path

1. Of all paths, the eightfold is the best; of truths, the noble four are best. Of mental states, detachment is the best; of human beings the illumined one is best.

2. This is the path: there is no other that leads to the purification of the mind. follow this path and conquer Mara (*Maya*). This path will lead to the end of suffering. This is the path I made known after the arrows of sorrow fell away.

3. All the effort must be made by you; Buddhas only show the way. Follow this path and practice meditation; thus, you will go beyond the power of Mara.

4. All created things are transitory; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure Wisdom.

5. All created beings are involved in sorrow; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure Wisdom.

6. All the various states of the mind occur without the

existence of an individual self; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure Wisdom.

7. Now is the time to wake up, when you are young and strong. Those who wait and waver, with a weak will and a divided mind, will never find the way to pure Wisdom.

8. Guard your thoughts, words, and deeds. The discipline of these three will speed you along the path to pure Wisdom.

9. Meditation brings wisdom; lack of meditation leaves you in ignorance. Know well what leads you forward and what holds you back and choose the path that leads to Wisdom.

10. Cut down the whole forest of selfish desires, not just one tree only. Cut down the whole forest and you will be on your way to liberation.

11. If there is any trace of lust in your mind, you are bound to life, like a suckling calf is bound to its mother. Pull out every selfish desire as you would pull out a weed with your hands. Follow the path to *nirvana* with a guide who knows the way.

12. “I will make this my winter home, have another house for the monsoon season, and dwell in a third during the summer”; those who are lost in such fancies as this forget their final Destination.

13. Death comes and carries off a man absorbed in his family and possessions, just as the monsoon flood sweeps away a sleeping village.

14. Neither children nor parents can rescue one whom death has seized. Remember this and follow without delay the path that leads to *nirvana* [the extinguishing of the illusory ego in the

experience of the unitive Truth].⁸

Meditation

Is there but one path to God? Is there but one line that can be drawn from the circumference of a circle to its center? The answer, of course, is No. An endless number of lines may be drawn from various points on the circumference; they all meet at the center. Likewise, regardless of where they start, all paths that take the eternal Truth as their focus must lead to God.

Some look upward at the night-time stars and pray to the Father who created all things. Some sit in the silent darkness of their rooms, and quiet their wayward minds to know the Self. Some chant the peaceful sounds that drown all thought in waves of bliss. Some worship before an image of their holy master in humble homage or envision his form within their hearts. Some sing with love to the Mother of us all and beg Her for Her blessing. Some raise affirmations of perfection in their thoughts and expand their souls to include all souls. Some call the name of God within and fill their hearts with the sweetness of devotion.

All seek the same embrace; all look to the same unnamable Source who gives them life. The paths are many, the Truth is one. He guides the heart and soul of all, and leads them, one by one, by infinite paths, to Him alone.

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V. Buddhism: A Metaphysical Critique

The man, Siddhartha Gotama, who is said to have been born in northeastern India in 563 B.C.E., sought enlightenment as a young man, and upon attaining it, became known as 'the Buddha', the awakened one. His experience of the Eternal, an experience he called *nirvana*, suggesting the extinguishing of the ego-sense, was undoubtedly genuine. It was identical

with the experience of all who have obtained the vision of the transcendent Reality both before and after him. However, the metaphysics he contrived in order to explain his experience in conceptual terms is uniquely his own and bears little similarity to either the Platonist metaphysics or the metaphysics of Advaita (Nondual) Vedanta.

The Buddha began his spiritual quest in his late twenties, was enlightened in his mid-thirties or early forties, and lived on into his eighties, and so for many years freely gave his teachings to those student-disciples who gathered around him. We may be fairly certain, therefore, that the teachings that have come down to us were for the most part what he taught, even though nearly a century had passed before his teachings were collected, and several centuries passed after his death before those collected teachings were written, published, and became known as the tenets of 'Buddhism'.

No doubt, the three most identifiable doctrines of Buddhism pertaining to our comparison are these: the doctrine of the *skandhas* (or "aggregates"); the doctrine of *pratitya samutpada* (dependent origination); and the doctrine of *anatman* (the non-existence of a self, or soul).

Since there is no Godhead or Its Creative Power in the Buddhist system, there is no cosmological genesis such as is posited in a Theistic system. The Buddha's teachings center, not on a cosmological origin, but rather on the origination of human existence. This is where the *skandhas* come in. These are the aggregations of tendencies that the Buddha says bring about a human birth.

According to the Buddha, a human is composed of five bundles or aggregates (*skandhas*): (1) the aggregate of *matter*, which includes the body made of four elements (solid, fluid, heat, and motion), from which are derived five basic sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin); (2) the aggregate of *feelings*: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, which arise from the contact between a sense organ and a sense object, and which also give rise to a sixth sense organ: the mind, which perceives mental objects; (3) the aggregate of *perceptions*, which arise from the interrelationship between the six sense organs and their objects; (4) the aggregate of *mental formations*, which includes all the possible activities of the mind; and (5) the aggregate of *consciousness*, the various kinds of which arise as awareness of the various objects of perception by the senses and the mind. Notice that

Consciousness, in the Buddha's system, does not exist independently, but arises only as an awareness dependent upon the contact between a sense organ and its object.

According to the Buddha, it is these five aggregates, or bundles, which, coming together, constitute the spontaneous arising of the ego-sense, the sense of 'I'. There is no suggestion in the Buddhist metaphysics of a central originating Power, Consciousness, or eternal Ground to serve as the source of these various 'bundles'; nor is there anywhere in this scheme any mention of either a natural or supernatural origination of the universe. This, some will say, is due to the Buddha's famous unwillingness to formulate a complete metaphysical system. Alas, a metaphysical system was developed nonetheless. Perhaps we must hold lesser luminaries responsible for the results; but the doctrines of Buddhism are steadfastly attributed to the Buddha himself, and so we must charge him with inventing the features of the system attributed to him.

Here, I think it is necessary to insert a cautionary note: Anyone who has read widely, who is familiar with the writings of men living in past centuries as well as contemporaries, knows that accurate knowledge regarding the workings of both physical and psychological nature has increased rather than declined over the centuries, and many an assumption from centuries ago is now regarded as obsolete and inapplicable to our present understanding of things. Indeed, lists of constituent ingredients such as the Buddha enumerates above were common among Indian philosophers of the period, and are now viewed as archaic.

How unfortunate that intelligent men who ponder the things of the Spirit tend to place such unquestioning faith in the authoritarian utterings of those seers who lived in very ancient times, or in a permanent legacy of literature containing the purported utterances of such men! In every lasting religious tradition, there is a faithful reliance on the absolute verity of writings that originated in the minds of men whose experience and learning was excellent in the time that they wrote several millennia ago, but who can no longer be regarded as well-informed by our present standards.

Spiritual understanding is frequently exempted from this kind of critical thinking because, it is argued, spiritual realities, being eternal, are not affected by changing views concerning the psychological or physical world.

Yet we must recognize that so very often the written texts handed down as religious documents contain not only spiritual directions, but also many references to matters that may well be subject to empirical scrutiny—matters which have been shown in modern times to have been sorely misapprehended, or simply erroneously stated.

It would seem to be appropriate therefore for sincere researchers in each of the religious traditions to carefully re-examine even their most revered ancient books, with the understanding and realization that these holy books were written in a time when the world, let alone the distant galaxies, had not been explored, when the notions firmly held regarding creation, cosmology, human history, and the laws of nature were yet simplistic, primitive, and often false. I am not suggesting, as extreme elements among the secular materialists of today do, that we should throw out the good and true along with the bad and false in the various religious texts; I am only suggesting that we think of re-evaluating spiritual teachings in a way that better satisfies our modern intellectual integrity, and better represents our present understandings. Much of our religious past is profoundly valuable; and sadly, much of it is valuable only as an historical record chronicling the many speculative and imaginative accounts left by men of past ages, and which are today considered erroneous.

Real mystical experience can profoundly challenge one's earlier perspective, and in the search for a perspective that makes rational sense of our experience, we may be introduced to various spiritual traditions whose roots date from an obscure past and whose tenets, which may be absurd on their face, are well fortified by the ardor and certainty of accumulated testimonials. The personal appeal of one tradition over another no doubt involves an element of one's previous karma, even though we may prefer to think that our choices are purely rational. And, while we are not merely the products of our previous tendencies and actions, we are nonetheless deeply influenced by these ingrained habits. This is why it is important to carefully analyze and compare competing doctrines that purport to explain spiritual (mystical) experience so as to reach conclusions that fit in all respects with what is actually experienced in the unitive vision.

Let us now move on to a doctrine in the Buddhist lexicon that may seem to be in conflict with the previously described doctrine of the *skandhas*: that of *pratitya samutpada*, the doctrine of 'dependent origination'. It posits a 12-

linked chain of causes likewise meant to explain the generation of a cycle of human birth. The originating cause of existence, says the Buddha, is (1) *avidya*, or ‘ignorance; which gives rise to (2) ‘volitional action’; which in turn gives rise to (3) ‘conditioned consciousness’; which in turn gives rise to (4) ‘name-and-form’; which in turn gives rise to (5) ‘the six bases (i.e., the five senses plus mind)’; which in turn gives rise to (6) ‘sense-impressions’; which in turn gives rise to (7) ‘feelings’; which in turn gives rise to (8) ‘desire’ or ‘craving’; which in turn gives rise to (9) ‘attachment’; which in turn gives rise to (10) ‘becoming’ (the birth or rebirth process); which in turn gives rise to (11) ‘birth’ or ‘rebirth’; which gives rise (eventually) to (12) ‘old age and death’.

This elaborate chain of causes is intended to describe how we arise as existents from the (unnamed, but implied) undifferentiated One; and this brings us to the third and most important doctrine of the Buddha: the doctrine of *anatma*, or, literally, ‘no-self’. As we can see from the above listing of the elements of human existence, there is no permanent identity anywhere to be found; all indeed is *dukkha*, ‘suffering’; *anitya*, ‘impermanence’; and *anatman*, ‘not self’.

This doctrine, of *anatma*, that no individual soul exists, brings up numerous questions, such as the obvious questions regarding rebirth and karma. While the Buddha believed in rebirth, he did not believe in reincarnation because, in his view, there is no soul to reincarnate. If there is no soul to reincarnate, ‘what, then,’ we must ask, ‘is reborn?’ And the Buddha replies, ‘the *skandhas*, which are the aggregates of tendencies and the results of karma.’ But no specific *persona* or soul is reborn, so there is no continuation, no progressive evolution of a particular being (though, paradoxically, it is said that the Buddha remembered *his own* past incarnations). According to the Buddha, when ignorance is destroyed (by enlightenment), there is no longer a causal ‘seed’ prompting further rebirth, and so liberation results. Since there is no soul or permanent identity, what is liberated upon enlightenment is apparently the *skandhas*. To some, this may seem an anticlimactic and unfortunate denouement.

The very designation, *anatman*, is unfortunate as well, since *atman* is not the traditional term for the ego-sense, but is the Sanskrit word used to signify the Eternal Self—the very antithesis of the ego-sense. Had the term *ajiva* been used instead, much misunderstanding could long ago have been

avoided; but as it is, the word *anatman* (*anatta* in the Pali scriptures), which is intended to negate the ego-sense, has the unfortunate connotation of negating the very Reality that supplants the ego-sense in the experience of enlightenment. That there is no permanent personal identity associated with the human body/mind complex is a long-held conviction of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of the Upanishads, and a truth that is self-revealed in the mystical experience referred to in Vedantic literature as *samadhi*, and in Buddhist literature as *nirvana*.

But, does that experience reveal only that there is no personal identity? No. In the Vedantic tradition, as in the Platonist tradition, it is well established that the sense of self arises from an eternal Ground, or substratum of Consciousness; also, the (mystical) experience itself reveals the Eternal Reality that alone is seen to be the *true* identity of all, and the source of the Consciousness one had been experiencing all along. It is not a personal identity, but an eternal Identity, which the Upanishads call the *Atman*, ‘the Self’. It is none else but the One, *Brahman*. Though some later Buddhist writers called that One the *Dharmakaya*, here, in a passage from an ancient text purporting to be his own words, the Buddha speaks of that eternal Reality as “the Unborn”:

Monks, there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned. Were there not the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there would be no escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned. Since there is the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there is escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned.¹

This acknowledgement by the Buddha of an eternal Reality beyond the ‘dependently originated’ *skandhas*, accessible to creatures born into this world, would seem to belie much of what we have absorbed about Buddhism up to this point, and to align his teachings with a ‘theological’ perspective. And so, there remains much ambiguity to overcome. What is clear is that the Buddha, having experienced the One, rightfully taught his disciples the means of approaching that experience through introspection, through meditation on their own true nature. There, as he rightfully indicated, they would find the truth for themselves. But, when it came to formulating a comprehensive and consistent metaphysics, he fell a bit short, and left behind a confusing legacy of contradictions and misconceptions.

One feels it might have been fortunate if he had kept to his stated intention to say nothing about such matters.

Let us now examine and compare the metaphysics of Plotinus: The permeation of the material universe by Soul constitutes the foundation of Plotinus' metaphysical vision. Soul, emanated from the Divine Mind, has no physical parameters; It does not consist of mass or energy; It does not extend as a radiation into space. It is entirely beyond comparison with physical spatio-temporal phenomena. But the fact is that our language is framed in terms of phenomenal temporality, and we have only the tools of our phenomenally based language to use when attempting to convey the operation of the Divine Mind by means of conceptual language.

Can we even form an image in our minds of the emanated extension of the Divine Mind that is referred to as "Soul"? Yet without such an extension of Spirit, how and in what way would we be connected to, and therefore be of the same essence as, the Divine? We are souls, of a Divine nature; or we are some other thing, with no connection or access to a Divine and eternal nature. It is not enough to simply say, 'There is no soul, yet we nonetheless partake of eternal Consciousness.' If we experience in our own being that eternal Consciousness, by what means do we do so? And by what pathway are we connected to it? Surely, we cannot reasonably state that the originating Cause of existence is 'ignorance'.

We reach the heart of this dispute when we see that Plotinus and the Buddha use the one word, "soul," to mean two different things: the Buddha means by it an illusory personal identity applied to a particular body-mind complex; Plotinus means by it an emanation from the Divine Mind, who is the creative aspect of the One. In negating the existence of the ego-soul, the Buddha is correct; however, if Plotinus were to negate the soul, he would place himself among the apostates, the infidels.

Plotinus acknowledges, as do the Upanishads, that the soul is capable of remaining blind to its Divine nature, its innate capacity, attributing an illusory 'I' to its transient embodiment, and thereby living a superficial life concerned only with sensual and emotional pleasures, promoting its own aggrandizement and individual welfare. But eventually it must revise its outlook; for, understand, the soul is nothing else but the Divine—as a ray of sunlight is nothing but sun. Its only real identity is Divine Consciousness.

Its association with body establishes an ego-sense, the illusion of an ‘I’, a *personal* identity, associated with one particular physical entity in a spatio-temporal universe. But there was never an actual personal identity; it was always the Divine Consciousness. The sense of a personal individual identity was simply an illusion, to be sure. But that does not mean that its true identity is not Soul.

Soul, remember, is the one Divine Consciousness; it is not something other than the one Divine Consciousness. When the soul is illumined by the God-given revelation of its true nature, its eternal, illimitable Self is revealed, and the illusion of a separate personal identity vanishes as all erroneous imaginations do. It is still soul—it is still a ray of Divine Consciousness. One must not become beguiled by mere word-confusion. If we could form meaningful language by using just one word, we could say: “God God God God.” But no one would know what we were trying to convey. In order to speak of the different ways that God manifests, we give different names to His differing aspects, and we speak of God as soul, God as matter, God as energy, God as consciousness; and so, we have all these seemingly disparate words. But “soul” is nothing but God; body is nothing but God, the many worlds strung throughout the night sky are nothing but God. How might one speak more clearly?

For those who acknowledge the one Divine existence as the Ground of all reality including themselves, the question of a separate personal self does not arise. If such a question were to arise, they would answer: ‘The One who *is* lives me. And He alone is, manifesting as soul and all else as well.’ For such as these, it is clear that only pitifully empty dreams remain when the blissful Giver of life and joy, the center and life-breath of one’s very being, is discounted and rejected.

You may tell me, “there is no soul.” And I will reply, “With what will you replace it?” If you don’t like my word, please use your own word to describe what your eternal essence is revealed to be. But you cannot negate That which is intended by the word, *soul*; for It is the eternal fabric of your very being, of your thinking and speaking and seeing and acting; It is indeed the famous “Unborn” of the Buddha. It is the only reality that exists in and as whatever phenomena or noumena you may suggest for consideration.

If you are truly confirmed in the belief or knowledge that there is one and only One who is the origin, activator, manifestation and experiencer of all that exists, and in the faith or knowledge that nothing outside of or other than that One exists in all the three worlds, be at peace; we are in perfect agreement. And if you are consistent in this belief or knowledge, you must acknowledge that you, being one of those things that exists, are undoubtedly included in the one Reality, are made of the one Reality, and are connected by indissoluble bonds to It and to all else that has existence, and are safely and inescapably contained in, embraced and empowered by, and ultimately one with, the omnipresent Reality—which you are free and most welcome to call by any name you like.

NOTE:

1. The Buddha, *Udana, Patalgam* 8.3.,

from G.M. Strong, *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of The Buddha*, trans. by Dawsonne Melancthon Strong, 1902; p. 115. Reprinted 2010 by Forgotten Books.

2. Just as the peak and the trough of a wave are complementary, “I” and “Thou” are complementary; that is, they require each other in order to exist. “I” cannot exist without the presumption of “Thou;” in other words, the subjective perspective requires the perception of an object; every perceived object requires a subject, and vice versa. In the unitive vision experienced by the illumined, neither of these exists; there is only the One, the absolute Reality, sometimes referred to as “the Self.”

Buddhists say there is no God, and they don’t like using the phrase “the Self,” as they equate it with the subjective “I,” and they say, that it doesn’t exist either. From the Buddhist’s perspective, what they say is correct: Truly, there is no God, and there is no subject (“I”). There is only the One. The problem is that other philosophies, like Vedanta, call the One by the name, “the Self (*Atman*).” And that is where the confusion arises. It is simply a conflict of Semantics.

If a Buddhist says, “there is no self,” he means that there is in reality no subjective “I.” If a Hindu were to say, “there is no self,” he would be saying, “there is in reality no *jiva*, no soul identity.” However, he would insist that,

“what remains eternally is the one Self (*Atman*),” which is identical to the absolute Reality.

So long as there is an “I” there is a “Thou,” or God. When the individual consciousness is illumined, the “I” disappears, and so does “Thou” or God. But that doesn’t mean that there is Nothing left. We may think of the conscious Reality that remains as “the Godhead,” or “the absolute Consciousness,” or “the One.” Buddhists call It “Tathata,” or “Dharmakaya.” You see, whatever confusion arises regarding God and the Self, does so from the peculiar differences and complexity of language. The illumined among the Buddhists, and the illumined among the Hindus, as well as the Sufis of Islam, are in full agreement as to the truth of the one Reality. It is only the terminology of their languages that disagree.

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34. THE MYSTICAL TRADITIONS OF THE ORIENT

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

The Taoist Sages

The vision of the Eternal was not confined merely to those living in India and the Middle East; we also find a few in ancient China who had experienced an identical realization, and who spoke of the same infinite and eternal Principle underlying the manifested world. However, *That* which the Indian sages called "Brahman" or "Purusha," what some others call "God," the Chinese sages called "Tao" (pronounced *Dow*). We must not imagine, as some ignorant people do, that because the languages of various countries are different that there is a difference also in the absolute Reality connoted by these languages. "Taoism" is simply the Chinese name for the one perennial philosophy of all mystics of all lands.

It is often seen that those who have only a cursory knowledge of mystical philosophy become confused by the many different terms used to connote the Absolute by peoples of differing languages, and fail to penetrate beyond linguistic differences to grasp the common significance of words like "Brahman," "Purusha," "Tao," "Godhead," etc. But, just as, in various languages, the words, *pani, jal, agua, eau, and water*, all signify one common reality, so do the above words of various linguistic origins connote one common invisible Principle. All of the mystics of whatever time or cultural tradition have experienced the same one, indivisible, Reality; yet, because language is infinitely variable, they have called this One by various appellations.

As we shall see, the sages of Taoism experienced and described the same mystical vision, which has been described by all other mystics; and have described the same mystical philosophy, which goes by the name of "Vedanta" in India, and by so many other names in other lands. As the 15th century Islamic saint, Dadu, put it, "All the enlightened have left one message; it is only those in the midst of their journey who hold diverse opinions."

Taoism traces its roots in China to sages living as far back as 3000 B.C.E.; but we know of those ancients only from hearsay recorded much later. It was not until the 6th century B.C.E. that the precepts of Taoism were presented in a written form by that most famous of Taoists, Lao Tze, who is said to have been born in 601 B.C.E. We know of his life only the barest of details. It seems he served for some time as the Curator of the Imperial Library at K'au and was therefore a learned man. In later life, he found the burden of his duties and the decadence of city life incompatible with his spiritual needs, and he decided to withdraw from his duties and the city environs to a more peaceful existence in the countryside.

On his journey from the city, he rested for a short while at the pass of Hsien-ku, where he stayed with the Keeper of the pass, a Yin Hsi, who was himself a student of the spiritual life. Before Lao left to continue his journey, Yin Hsi persuaded him to leave for his instruction some writings on the spiritual path, and so Lao wrote a short book of maxims for him. It is this book, which has come down to us as the *Tao Teh Ching*. That is the last we hear of Lao's life; it is not known what became of him or where he died but legends indicate that he lived to a ripe old age.

Lao's little book, the *Tao Teh Ching*, is one of the major classics of Taoism. The word, *Tao*, in its title, refers to the Eternal aspect of reality—what we have already spoken of as Brahman, or Purusha. *Teh* is Its power of manifestation, identical with Maya or Prakrti. And the word, *Ching*, simply means “book.” So, we may interpret the title of the book as “The Book of The Eternal and Its Power of Manifestation.” Its simple and somewhat cryptic axioms regarding the Spirit, and on the way that a man who has realized It lives his life, has made this book a favorite introduction to the spiritual life for peoples of both East and West. To the beginning student, its apparent vagueness makes it easily digestible, yet as one learns to understand it more thoroughly, its vagueness disappears, and it reveals itself as a profound and explicit metaphysical guide.

Another great Taoist sage is the venerable Chuang Tze, who lived in the 3rd century B.C. E. Very little is known of his life either; we have only the briefest of biographical information in a ‘History’ written in the 2nd century B.C.E. by Sze-ma Khien, which states that Chuang Tze was born in the kingdom of Wei and held some sort of position in the city of Khi-yuan. He grew up in the same part of China as Lao Tze and had thoroughly studied

and understood the writings of his great predecessor. At some time during his life, Chuang attained the realization of the Self, the vision of Truth, and began writing books explaining what he had realized. According to Khien's History, King Wei, having heard of Chuang Tze and perhaps having read some of his books, sent a messenger to Chuang with a quantity of silver and the offer of a position as chief minister at the king's court. Chuang Tze, reportedly, only laughed, and sent back this word:

“A thousand ounces of silver would be a great gain to me, and to be a high nobleman and minister is a most honorable position. But have you not seen the victim-ox for the ceremonial sacrifice? It is carefully fed for several years and robed with rich embroidery that it may be fit to enter the Grand Temple. Then, when the time comes for it to do so, it would prefer to be a little pig, but it cannot get to be so. So, go away, and do not soil me with your presence. I would rather amuse and enjoy myself in the midst of a filthy ditch than to be subject to the rules and restrictions in the court of a king. I have determined never to take such an office but prefer the enjoyment of my own free will.”¹

Chuang Tze, like Lao Tze, had seen the one Existence, and he lived his life in dedication to the freedom and joy of the Eternal. In his writings, he told of his vision, and his spiritual knowledge. What Lao Tze said in a cryptic and terse manner, Chuang Tze explained often in a lengthy, detailed manner, and sometimes in metaphorical and satirical stories. He wrote large volumes in clear, explanatory prose to clarify what had only been hinted at by Lao Tze. Much of what we know today as “Taoism” is derived from the combined writings of these two seers.

The understanding of the one Reality expressed by the authors of the Upanishads and the *Gita* is expressed in a remarkably similar manner by Lao Tze and Chuang Tze. This should not be surprising, however, since everyone who is graced with the transcendent vision experiences the same eternal Unity. What Lao Tze and Chuang Tze saw and wrote about is precisely what Kapila and the Upanishadic seers and all other mystics have seen and wrote about. Their language is different, but their meaning is the same. As Chuang Tze says, “Words are used to express meaning. When you understand the meaning, you can forget about the words.”

Lao Tze explains, in his *Tao Teh Ching*, that the eternal Reality is a Unity, which contains two aspects: The Eternal, which is the unmanifest *Tao*, and *Teh*, Its Power of manifestation. The *Tao* is the Absolute, devoid of all qualities; nothing can be predicated about It, since It is beyond name and form. Says Lao:

“Before heaven and earth existed, there was something unformed, silent, alone, unchanging, constant and eternal; It could be called ‘the Source of the Universe.’ I do not know Its name and simply call It “Tao.”²

“...The *Tao* that can be spoken of is not the absolute *Tao*. That Nameless [*Tao*] is the Father of heaven and earth; that which is named [*Teh*] is the Mother of all things.”³

Here we have the perennial vision of the mystic: the realization of the two-in-One. The unmanifested Source Lao refers to as the Father of all; and Its Power of world-manifestation he calls the Mother of all things. The two are the same One in Its dual aspects of Unmanifest and manifest. They are not really separate; they are inextricably One. But, in order to describe the One in both Its aspects, they must be given separate names:

“These two are the same; they are given different names in order to distinguish between them. Together, they constitute the Supreme Mystery.”⁴ Chuang Tze, from his own experience of Unity, corroborates what Lao Tze had said. In one of his stories, he puts these words in the mouth of Lao Tze, when he is asked, “What is the Tao?”

“If you want to know the *Tao*, said Lao, give a bath to your mind; wash your mind clean. Throw out all your sage wisdom! Tao is invisible, hard to hold, and difficult to describe. However, I will outline It for you: The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Energy [*Teh*] is born from Tao, and all life forms are born of this creative Energy; thus, all creation evolves into various forms.

“...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen. It is fathomless, like the Sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The Tao sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ...That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon—that is the *Tao*.”⁵

If we read for “Tao,” *Brahman* or *Purusha*, and read for “Teh” (the creative Energy), *Prakrti* or *Maya*, we see that the vision of the mystics is ever one. Lao Tze, in his own inimitable style, explained *Tao* and *Teh* in this way: “The *Tao* is an empty cup, yet It is inexhaustible; It is the fathomless Fountainhead of all things.⁶ That which gave birth to the universe may be regarded as the Mother of the universe [*Teh*].⁷ The Womb of creation is called the Mysterious Female; it is the root of heaven and earth.⁸ The myriad objects of the world take form and rise to activity, but I have seen THAT to which they return, like the luxuriant growth of plants that return to the soil from which they spring.”⁹ “That ONE called *Tao* is subtle, beyond vision, yet latent in It are all forms. It is subtle, beyond vision, yet latent in It are all objects. It is dark and obscure, yet latent in It is the creative Power of life [*Teh*].”¹⁰

“From the ancient days till now Its manifestation has never ceased; it is because of this [*Teh*] that we perceive the Father of all. It is the manifestation of forms that reveals to us the Father [*Tao*].¹¹ The *Tao* is never the doer, yet through It everything is done.¹² The *Tao* fathers, and the *Teh* brings everything forth as the world of form, time, and space.”¹³ Lao and Chuang extrapolate from this knowledge of the *Tao* the correct life for one who knows It. Thus, *Tao* is not only the Unmanifest, It is also the guiding Path for the sage to whom It is revealed. The *Tao* is both the Source of the universe and the eternal Soul of man; It is his life and the Way by which he lives. He lives as the *Tao* beyond the world, while living as the *Teh* in the midst of it. He identifies with and rests in the Eternal, even while living and acting in the temporal, ephemeral, world:

“He who holds to the Eternal [*Tao*] while acting in the transient [*Teh*]; he knows the primal Source from which all things manifest.¹⁴ Therefore, the sage may travel all day, yet he never leaves his store of provisions.¹⁵ He who remains aware of the Male [*Tao*], while living as the Female [*Teh*], is a guide to all the people.”¹⁶

“The noble man dwells in the Foundation of the form, and not in the form; he dwells in the fruit, and not in the flowering; thus, he holds to the one, and ignores the other.¹⁷ Therefore, he is not vulnerable to weapons of war; the horns of the buffalo cannot touch him; the claws of the tiger cannot rip him; the sword cannot cut him. Why? Because he is beyond death.”¹⁸

As the Eternal, the *Tao*, gives birth to all things, “yet does not contain them,” the sage, doing likewise, “does nothing, yet all things are accomplished.” Says Lao:

“My teaching is very easy to understand and very easy to practice; yet no one understands it and no one practices it; [it is this:] the sage wears a tattered coat [*Teh*] and carries jade [*Tao*] within his breast.”¹⁹

Since the whole universe appears from the Unmoving, the Unchanging, by imitating or adopting the way of the universe, a man carries on his life in the most perfect manner. By retaining his center of inactivity, his center of changelessness, all his actions take place effortlessly of themselves. And, because he holds to the Unmoving, his energy is not dissipated, his mind is clear, and all that he does is done of a concentrated power and efficiency, and with great clarity of mind. Says Lao:

“Reach far enough toward the Void, hold fast enough to the Unmoving, and of the ten thousand things, none can resist you.”²⁰

And Chuang Tze says:

“I guard my awareness of the One, and rest in harmony with externals. ... My light is the light of the Sun and the moon. My life is the life of heaven and earth. Before me is the Undifferentiated [*Teh*], and behind me is the Unknowable [*Tao*]. Men may all die, but I endure forever.”²¹

“Keep correct your form, concentrate your vision, and the heavenly harmony will come to you. Control your mind, concentrate your attention, and the Spirit will reside in you. *Teh* is your clothing, and *Tao* is your sanctuary.”²²

In the experience of Unity, one learns the nature of Reality, and at the same time, learns the nature of one’s own mind; for, in an inexplicable way, the two are integrally related. The mind, one discovers, creates thoughts and ideas in a way similar to the creation of waves on an ocean; they consist of contrary motions, so that for every wave, there’s a trough; for every motion, an equal and opposite motion. For example, if we love, in that very motion is contained its opposite, hatred. Or if we experience peace, its corollary, mental agitation, is waiting to manifest. Every movement of the mind contains its opposite, just as does the movement of a pendulum; thus, all that we think and experience mentally is but a play of self-produced opposites.

As Lao Tze put it:

“When people recognize beauty,

Ugliness is also recognized.
 When people recognize good,
 Evil is also recognized.”²³

It is only when this alteration, this dual motion of the mind, is stilled, that we can experience that pure Consciousness which is the source of all thought. In the very same way, the physical world is produced by the universal Mind. It is produced by just such a movement of contrary impulses. It is, from this perspective, a mere mirage; for every form that we see is only an image produced by the vibratory motions of the elementary Energy. And when that cosmic Mind becomes stilled, the world-manifestation ceases, and Consciousness rests in Itself. Then, once again, It re-manifests the universe. In a continuous cycle, of world-manifestation and de-manifestation, that one Consciousness lives forever, unmoved, unchanged.

Kapila had described this world-manifestation as a play of the *gunas* of *Prakrti*, which consist of two opposing motions, and a state of neutrality resulting from the balancing of the two. Lao Tze and Chuang Tze also recognize the nature of the creative Energy to be constituted of just such opposing movements; they are called by them *yang*, the positive, and *yin*, the negative. The balance of these two opposites is called the “natural” state. Here is how Chuang Tze describes this manifestory process:

“In the beginning, even nothing did not exist. There was only the Tao. Then something unnamed which did not yet have form came into existence from the Tao. This is *Teh*, from which all the world came into being. Things had not yet received their forms, but the division of the *yang* (positive) and the *yin* (negative) Principles, which are intimately related, had already appeared. This vibratory motion constitutes all creation. When the *yang* and the *yin* become active, all things come into being. It is in this way that *Teh* created all forms.”²⁴

This cosmology is, of course, identical to Kapila’s if we substitute “Purusha” for *Tao*, “Prakrti” for *Teh*, and “rajas” and “tamas” for *yang* and *yin*. For Kapila, the balancing of rajas and tamas begets sattva, the state of repose, wherefrom one could enter into the realization of Purusha, the Eternal. For the two Chinese sages, the balancing of *yang* and *yin* begets the “natural” state of repose, wherefrom one might enter into Tao, the Eternal. The words are different, but the meaning is the same.

“The nature of water,” said Chuang Tze, “is that it becomes clear when left alone, and becomes still when undisturbed.”²⁵ Likewise, the wise man rests in silence, and allows the mind to become pure. In this way the mind reverts to its root, its Source. “To return to the root is repose,” said Lao Tze; “it is called ‘going back to one’s Origin.’ Going back to one’s Origin is to discover the Eternal. And to know the Eternal is to be enlightened.”²⁶

“When water is still,” says Chuang, “it becomes so clear that a man can see every hair of his beard in it. ... If water is clear when it is still, how much more so the human spirit! When the mind of the sage is calm, it becomes the mirror of the universe wherein he can see everything.”²⁷

“Repose brings good fortune. Without inner repose, your mind will be galloping about, even though you are sitting still. Withdraw your senses within and cease all activity of the mind.

Concentrate your will. Let your ears cease to hear; let your mind cease to imagine. Let your spirit be blank, passively receptive. In such receptivity, the *Tao* is revealed.”²⁸

Lao Tze offers similar advice:

“The wise man shuts his senses, closes all doors, dulls his edges, unties all knots, softens his light, calms his turmoil—this is called the attainment of unity with the One.”²⁹

In yet another passage from the *Tao Teh Ching*, Lao repeats this advice, in a slightly different way:

“If you would reveal your original Self, if you would attain union with your true Being, give up your ego, restrain your desires.³⁰ By renouncing of desire, one sees the Secret of all life; without renouncing of desires, one sees the world of manifested forms. Searching within for the ultimate Mystery of this mysterious life, one enters the gateway wherein is found the great Secret of all life.”³¹

In just a few simple words, Lao Tze gives the whole of mystical knowledge, and the path to the experience of it. His message is the message of all who have seen the Truth, the Secret of life: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” For only those who have understood the illusory nature of the world and have erased from their hearts all concern or desire for what

it has to offer, can turn their hearts and minds wholeheartedly to the Source of the world. It is a simple matter of attention; so long as thoughts continue to be focused on the world of name and form, the mind is not free to dwell singly and purely on the Source of all this manifestation.

“He who holds fast to the *Tao* is able to manage very well in the world, for he knows how, from the beginning, all things manifest from the *Tao*.”³²

“Thus, the sage manages things without acting; teaches the Truth without words. The world continues to arise before him, but he does not reject it. He knows he is the Life of all things, but he does not own any of them. Therefore, he continues to act, but he remains unattached to his actions. His work is accomplished, but he lays no claim to it. The work is done, but he does not identify with it. Thus, his strength is never depleted.”³³

How much this sounds like the teaching of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* regarding the path of karma yoga! If we search the words of Lao Tze and Chuang Tze, we realize that they taught all the aspects of yoga: *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion), *jnan* (discriminative knowledge), and *raja* (contemplation). Jnan yoga, the discrimination between the real and the unreal, the Eternal and the Noneternal, is very well represented by Chuang and Lao Tze:

“The pure man sees the One as One and the many as One. So long as he sees the Unity, he is God; when he sees the distinctions, he is man. What marks the pure man is the ability to distinguish between the human and the Divine.”³⁴

“Do not ask whether the *Tao* is in this or in that; It is in all being. It is for this very reason that we apply to It the title of “Supreme,” “the Highest.” All that It has made is limited, but It is, Itself, unlimited, infinite. The *Tao* is the source of the activity of universal manifestation, but It is not this activity. It is the Author of causes and effects, but It is not the causes and effects. It is the Author of universal manifestation and dissolution, but It is not the manifestation or dissolution. Everything proceeds from It and is governed by It; It is in all things, but is not identical with things, for It is neither divided nor limited.”³⁵

“Only he who can see the Formless in the formed arrives at the Truth.”³⁶ He rejoices in THAT which can never be lost, but endures

forever.”³⁷

The precepts of Lao Tze and Chuang Tze and all the later seers of the Tao are in perfect accord with the teachings of all men of spiritual vision. Theirs is but another expression of the perennial wisdom that stems from the mystical vision of Unity. They report what they have seen, and they offer advice on the means to attain that vision, and how to live in this world in accordance with it. They are not mere Quietists, as some would have it, but are illumined sages who had experienced the truth of which they speak and offer their insights as a guide to those who would follow in their footsteps. And their words, for all these centuries, have served to bring solace and understanding to countless generations of seekers after Truth.

NOTES:

1. Legge, James, *The Texts Of Taoism*, N.Y., Dover Books, 1962; pp. 37-38, Intro.
2. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 25
3. *Ibid.*, 1
4. *Ibid.*, 1
5. Chuang Tze, 22
6. Tao Teh ching, 4
7. *Ibid.*, 52
8. *Ibid.*, 6
9. *Ibid.*, 16
10. *Ibid.*, 21
11. *Ibid.*, 21
12. *Ibid.*, 37
13. *Ibid.*, 51
14. *Ibid.*, 14
15. *Ibid.*, 26
16. *Ibid.*, 28
17. *Ibid.*, 38
18. *Ibid.*, 50
19. *Ibid.*, 70
20. *Ibid.*, 16

21. *Chuang Tze*, Ch. 11
22. *Ibid.*, Ch. 22
23. *Tao Teh ching*, 2
24. *Chuang Tze*, Ch. 1
25. *Ibid.*, Ch. 5
26. *Tao Teh Ching*, 16
27. *Chuang Tze*, Ch. 13
28. *Ibid.*, Ch. 4
29. *Tao Teh Ching*, 56
30. *Ibid.*, 19
31. *Ibid.*, 1
32. *Ibid.*, 14
33. *Ibid.*, 2
34. *Chuang Tze*, Ch. 6
35. *Ibid.*, Ch. 8
36. *Ibid.*, Ch. 23
37. *Ibid.*, Ch. 6

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The Ch'an And Zen Buddhists

Buddhism, having originated in India around 500 B.C.E., entered China in the first few centuries of the Current Era, and, for a number of centuries thereafter, vied with Taoism for popular acceptance. Buddhism eventually prevailed, due perhaps to the already decadent condition of Taoism, and the massive proselytizing efforts of the Buddhists. There was really little to choose between the two, however; for, while the Taoist and Buddhist terminologies were different, the realization of Truth which each taught was, of course, the same. In every mystical tradition, the ultimate goal is the attainment of enlightenment, the direct perception of the one Reality. In ancient India, this realization was called *nirvana*, or *samadhi*; when Buddhism was transplanted from India to China, this supramental experience was called, in Chinese, *chien-hsing*, and as Buddhism became

established in Japan in later centuries, this experience was called *kensho* or *satori*. The words and the languages are different, but the experience is the same.

This experience of enlightenment, of the absolute, quiescent, Source of all existence, is described by one Chinese Buddhist in this way:

“In learning to be a Buddha, and in seeking the essence of the teaching of our school, man should purify his mind and allow his spirit to penetrate the depths. Thus, he will be able to wander silently within himself during contemplation, and he will see the Origin of all things, obscured by nothing.

“...His mind becomes boundless and formless, ...all-illuminating and bright, like moonlight pervading the darkness. During that absolute moment, the mind experiences illumination without darkness, clarity without stain. It becomes what it really is, absolutely tranquil, absolutely illuminating. Though this all-pervading Mind is tranquil, the world of cause and effect does not cease; though It illumines the world, the world is but Its reflection. It is pure Light and perfect Quiescence, which continues through endless time. It is motionless, and free from all activity; It is silent, and self-aware. ...That brilliant Light permeates every corner of the world. It is This we should become aware of and know.”¹

Many of the early Buddhist philosophers of India called this absolute, all-pervading Reality, *Dharmakaya*, “the Body of Truth.” Ashvagosa (2nd century C.E.) called it *Sarvasattvachitta*, “the one pure Consciousness in all.” In China, It was called *Hsin*, “Consciousness”; and in Japan, It was *Kokoro*. According to Ashvagosa, there arises, in this one pure Consciousness, a spontaneous movement, from which all the phenomenal world is produced; this aspect of Reality, he calls *ekachittakshan*, “the movement of the one Consciousness.” In Chinese, it is *nien*; in Japanese, it is *nen*. Just see how many words there are for our old friends, Brahman and Maya, Purusha and Prakrti, Shiva and Shakti!

Similarly, in every mystical tradition, the means to the realization of the Divine Reality is the same; it is an in-turning of the mind in search of its root, its source; we call this process “meditation.” In India, the Sanskrit word

for meditation is *dhyana*; in China, it is *ch'an*, and in Japan, it is *zen*. Ch'an, or Zen, then, is nothing but the practice of meditation toward the attainment of enlightenment. Enlightenment is the only goal of Zen; and it is meditation, or contemplation, alone which leads to it. For this reason, all the Ch'an and Zen masters incessantly point all sincere seekers of enlightenment to the meditative life. Here is an example of such pointing, from a Sermon by the Ch'an master, Szu-hsin Wu-hsin (1044-1115):

“O brothers, to be born as a human being is a rare event, and so is the opportunity to hear discourses on the Truth. If you fail to achieve liberation in this life, when do you expect to achieve it? While still alive, be therefore assiduous in practicing meditation. ...As your self-reflection grows deeper and deeper, the moment will surely come upon you when the spiritual flower will suddenly burst into bloom, illuminating the entire universe.

“...This is the moment when you can transform this vast earth into solid gold, and the great rivers into an ocean of milk. What a satisfaction this is then to your daily life! Since this is so, do not waste your time with words or phrases, or by searching for Truth in books; for the Truth is not to be found there. ...They consist of mere words, which will be of no use to you at the moment of your death.”²

This, throughout the centuries, has been the perennial call of the Ch'an and Zen masters. Their message is not different from that of all enlightened seers of the One. The early Ch'an masters of China, having realized the unchanging Absolute, acknowledged the unity of the One and the many, and grappled for some time with the expression of this paradox. Reiterating the old truth of the identity of *nirvana* and *samsara*, they spoke of the Real, the unreal, and the unitive way, which embraces them both in an undivided awareness. But the Chinese had their own way of expressing this duality-in-unity, this unity-in-duality. Here, for example, is a conversation of the Ch'an master, Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi (840-901) and one of his disciples:

Monk: “Where is the Reality in appearance?”

Master: “Wherever there is appearance, there is Reality.”

Monk: “How does It manifest Itself?”

Master: (The master silently lifted his saucer.)

Monk: “But where is the Reality in illusion?”

Master: “The origin of illusion is the Real.”

Monk: “But how can Reality manifest Itself in illusion?”

Master: “Wherever there is illusion, there is the manifestation of Reality.”

Monk: “Do you say, then, Reality can never be separated from illusion?”

Master: “Where can you possibly find the appearance of illusion?”³

At another time, this same Ts’ao-shan Pen-chi was asked by a wandering monk,

“What is your name?”

“My name is Pen-chi,” he answered.

“Say something about ultimate Reality,” demanded the monk.

“I will not say anything,” [replied Pen-chi].

But the monk insisted; and Pen-chi said simply,

“It is not called Pen-chi.”⁴

The difficulty of expressing the paradoxical nature of the absolute Reality, which is other than, but not other than, Its projected world-appearance is oftentimes illustrated in the utterances of the early Ch’an masters.

Tung-shan Liang-chieh (807-896) said:

“I meet Him wherever I go.

He is the same as me,

Yet I am not He.

Only if you understand this,

Will you identify with the *Tathata* (the Truth, the Real).”⁵

Ch’an and Zen Buddhism is replete with the recognition of this paradoxicality, and brings this recognition into the most ordinary experiences of life, and the most ordinary of conversations, relying often, not on words, but on wordless symbols to get across their point:

The Master asked Pai-chang, his disciple, “What will you teach others?”

Pai-chang raised his staff aloft.

The Master remarked, “Is that all? Nothing else?”

Pai-chang threw his staff on the ground. ⁶

Ummon (d. 996), holding up his staff before his disciples, asked, “What is this? If you say it is a staff, you go right to hell; but if it is not a staff, what is it?” And Tokusan (799-865), who was fond of giving blows with a stick to awaken his disciples, also used to ask a similar question of his disciples, and then say, “If you say ‘yes,’ thirty blows; if you say ‘no,’ thirty blows.”

It is easy to see from these examples that, while the goal of enlightenment is the same in all mystical traditions, and the Truth experienced is always the same, the expression of that Truth is infinitely variable. What distinguishes the Ch’an and Zen Buddhist traditions from their Indian counterparts is their unique methods of teaching. They trace this “non-verbal” method of the transmission of knowledge to the Buddha himself, who, according to legend, gave his message to the gathered assemblage on the Mount of the Holy Vulture by simply raising aloft a single kumbhala flower which had been given to him by the god, Brahma. Only one disciple in the throng gave evidence of understanding the import of the Buddha’s gesture: an old man named Mahakasyapa, who simply smiled in appreciation. With this, the Buddha is said to have immediately turned over the succession of Mastership to Mahakasyapa. From this legendary non-verbal transmission, the Ch’an and Zen Buddhists find a precedent for their own tradition.

The perpetuation of this special tradition is said to have been initiated in China by Bodhidharma, who came from India to China in 520 C.E. His influence is described in a 9th century work called “The Complete Explanation of The Source of Ch’an” by Kuei-feng Tsung-mi (780-841):

“When Bodhidharma came to China, he saw that most Chinese students did not grasp the truth of Buddhism. They merely sought it through interpretation of textual terminology and thought of the changing phenomena all around them as real activity. Bodhidharma wished to make these eager students see that the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. The Truth is nothing but one’s own mind. Thus, he maintained that the real teaching must be transmitted directly from one mind to another, without the use of words.” ⁷

Bodhidharma and his followers rejected the necessity of the long-winded

metaphysical formulations of the Indians as a means to enlightenment. They advocated instead a method of evoking an immediate perception of Truth, a sudden recognition of the nature of one's own mind, unfettered by mental formulations or expectations, "a special transmission outside the scriptures; no dependence upon words and letters, a direct pointing to the Soul of man; the seeing into one's own nature and thus the attainment of Buddhahood."

Whenever words are used, whether as tools of analysis, or to construct metaphors and analogies, they must invariably fall short of an adequate representation of the unitive Reality. To many enlightened men, the endless parade of word-pictures and attempted descriptions by the countless millions of seers over the ages appears a futile and self-defeating game. Such a recognition led the early Chinese and Japanese Buddhists to pursue a method of knowledge-awakening which transcended the impossible demands of language, which directly evoked the immediate Reality, and awakened the mind to its true nature. And over the centuries, this method has gradually become the special hallmark of the Ch'an and Zen Buddhist traditions.

Taking the rejection of metaphysical formulations as their starting point, they began to devise methods whereby they might turn, or startle, a disciple toward the direct perception of his own Self, his own Being. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" questioned the Master; and the disciple, deprived of a verbalized answer, had necessarily to peer into the silence of his own being for the comprehension of Nonduality. Thus, instead of hoping to awaken a disciple to enlightenment through such explanations as Shankara and the Vedantists offer, and thereby leading him to delve into his own mind to experience the Truth, the enlightened seers of China and Japan practiced a non-analytical method of awakening the disciple; a method which causes the disciple to grab directly and immediately, by wordless insight, at the living truth of his own existence.

When Ummon is asked, "What is Zen?" he stares the disciple fiercely in the face, and exclaims, "That's it! That's it!" This method of the famous Ch'an and Zen masters is a method of shock, a startling of the mind in order to suddenly knock away the clouds of verbalized concepts in the mind of the seeker and awaken him to the immediate reality of consciousness in the here and now. But who can say whether this method is more effective than another? Who can say whether more men and women have been induced to

know the Truth for themselves by Shankara's reasonings, or by Jesus' exhortations, or by the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, or by Ummon's "That's it!" We can only observe that, in China and Japan, the intellectual method was rejected, and the "direct pointing to the Soul of man" was embraced as a method of instruction.

Teaching methods may vary; but the Truth remains one. And no one has ever realized It without an intense and arduous searching for It within themselves. In the last analysis, it is the determination and fitness of the disciple, which determines whether he will attain to the clear vision of Truth, and *that*, after all, is in the hands of God. Perhaps the most a teacher may do is to exhort and encourage a student to apply himself with all his might to the search for Truth within himself. With this purpose in mind, the famous Zen master, Hakuin (1683-1768), sang:

"Not knowing how near the Truth is,
People seek It far away— what a pity!
They are like one who, in the midst of water,
Cries imploringly for a drink of water,
Or like the son of a rich man
Who wanders away among the poor.

"...Those who testify to the truth of the nature of the Self,
Have found it by reflecting within themselves,
And have gone beyond the realm of mere ideas.
For them opens the gate of the oneness of cause and effect,
And straight runs the path of Nonduality ...
Abiding with the Undivided amidst the divided,
Whether going or returning, they remain forever unmoved.

"Holding fast to, and remembering *That* which is beyond thought,
In their every act, they hear the voice of the Truth.
How limitless the sky of unbounded freedom!
How pure the perfect moonlight of Wisdom!
At that moment, what do they lack?
As the eternally quiescent Truth reveals Itself to them,
This very earth is the lotus-land of Purity,

And this body is the body of the Buddha.”⁸

The experience of *samadhi*, or *satori*, is self-revealing, self-illuminating; it effortlessly reveals the unitive Truth, and dispels all doubts. There is no difficulty of understanding involved in it whatsoever. What *is* difficult, however, is the subsequent adjustment to living the rest of one’s life with the knowledge thus acquired. It takes a good deal of reflection and getting-used-to in order to recognize only the One in all phenomenal manifestations as well. Such an acquired habitual perspective no longer distinguishes between the Absolute and the relative but focuses singly on the awareness of Unity. Such a mind takes no interest in pursuing gratification in appearances but remains unswayed from Unity-awareness by either pleasant or unpleasant circumstances.

It is this adjustment, or resolution, to life on the relative plane which, therefore, claims much of the attention of the enlightened, and which constitutes much of the written material by the Self-realized sages of every mystical tradition. The writings of the early Ch’an Buddhists are particularly replete with declarations concerning this resolution, this final state of Unity-awareness. Though the language and teaching methods of the Ch’an and Zen Buddhists are unique to themselves, the goal of enlightenment and the attainment of a perfect and lasting Unity-awareness is the same for all. In many of the poems and utterances of the memorable saints of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist tradition, we can hear something of that pure and simple state; we can hear the voice of the unfettered Self, released from all doubt and conflict.

In one of the earliest Buddhist treatises to come out of China, called *Hsin-hsin ming*, “Inscription on The Self of The Self,” written by an obscure monk named Seng-ts’an (d. 606), we find an especially illuminating expression of this ultimate awareness. While it represents a movement toward the early China-izing, or simplifying, of Buddhist ideology, it is scarcely distinguishable from the Taoism which preceded it. Its author was, undoubtedly, an enlightened man, and a Buddhist; but he was also a Chinaman with a long heritage of Taoist phraseology. In this perfect gem of wisdom, we can actually see the transformation of Indian Buddhism into something distinctly Chinese, as Buddhism blends into Taoism, and the one perennial philosophy of Unity resurfaces once more; this time, under the

name of Ch'an:

“The perfect Tao knows no difficulties.
It only refuses to make preferences.
When freed from hate and love,
It reveals Itself fully and without disguise.

“A tenth of an inch’s difference,
And heaven and earth are set apart.
If you want to see It manifest,
Take no thought either for or against It.

“To set up what you like against what you dislike:
This is the disease of the mind.
When the profound Truth is not understood,
Peace of mind is disturbed, and nothing is gained.

“[The Truth is] perfect like the vastness of space,
With nothing wanting, nothing superfluous.
It is indeed due to making choices
That the One Reality is lost sight of.

“Pursue not the outer entanglements,
Dwell not in the inner Void.
When the mind rests serene in the oneness of things,
Dualism vanishes by itself.

“When oneness is not thoroughly understood,
In two ways loss may be sustained:
The denial of the world may lead to its absolute negation,
While the denying of the Void may result in the denying of your [true] Self.
Wordiness and intellection—The more with them the further astray we go;
“Away, therefore, with wordiness and intellection,
And there is no place where we cannot pass freely.

“When we return to the root, we gain the meaning.
 When we pursue the external objects, we lose the purpose.
 The moment we are enlightened within,
 We go beyond the voidness of a world confronting us.

“Transformations going on in an empty world which confronts us
 Appear real all because of ignorance.
 Try not to seek after the Real.
 Only cease to cherish opinions.

“Tarry not with dualism,
 Carefully avoid pursuing it.
 As soon as you have right and wrong,
 Confusion ensues, and the mind is lost.

“The two exist because of the One,
 But hold not even to this One.
 When the one Consciousness is not disturbed,
 The ten thousand things offer no offence.

“When no offence is offered by them, they are as if non-existent.
 When the mind is not disturbed, it is as if there is no mind.
 The subject is quieted as the object ceases.
 The object ceases as the subject is quieted.

“The object is an object for the subject.
 The subject is a subject for an object.
 Know that the relativity of the two
 Rests ultimately on the oneness of the Void.

“In the oneness of the Void, the two are one,
 And each of the two contains in itself all the ten thousand things.
 When no discrimination is made between this and that,
 How can a one-sided and prejudiced view arise?

“... In the higher realm of true Being,

There is neither “other” nor “self”.
 When a direct identification is required,
 We can only say, “not two.”

“In being not two, all is the same.
 All that *is* is comprehended in it.
 The wise in all the ten quarters
 Enter into this same absolute Awareness.

“This absolute Awareness is beyond movement and rest.
 One instant is ten thousand years.
 No matter how things are regarded, whether as being or non-being,
 It is manifest everywhere before you.

“...One in all,
 All in One—
 If only this is realized,
 No more worry about not being perfect!”⁹

About one hundred years later, another Ch’an master, by the name of Yungchia Ta-shih (d. 713), wrote his *Cheng-tao Ke*, “Song Of Enlightenment,” which reiterates, in equally inspiring tones, this same knowledge, this same enlightened state of awareness:

“Do you know that leisurely sage who has gone beyond learning
 and who does not exert himself in anything?
 He neither endeavors to avoid idle thoughts nor seeks after the Truth.
 [For he knows that] ignorance is also the Reality,
 [And that] this empty, illusory, body is nothing but the absolute Reality
 (*Dharmakaya*).
 When one knows the Absolute, there are no longer any [independent]
 objects.

“The Source of all things is the absolute Self of all the enlightened.
 The five elements are like a cloud floating aimlessly here and there.
 And the three passions are like the foam which appears and disappears on

the surface of the ocean.

“When the absolute Reality is known, it is seen to be without any individual selves, and devoid of any objective forms.

All past [mental and physical] actions which lead to hell are instantly wiped away.

“... After the Awakening, there is only vast Emptiness.

this vast universe of forms ceases to exist.

Here, one sees neither sin nor bliss, neither loss nor gain.

In the midst of the eternal Serenity, no questions arise.

The dust of ignorance which has accumulated on the unpolished mirror for ages,

Is now, and forever, cleared away in the vision of Truth.

“...The people do not know where to find this precious jewel

Which lies deep within the creative Power (*Tathagata-garba*);

The activity miraculously performed by the creative Power

is an illusion and yet it is not an illusion,

[Just as] the rays of light emanating from the one perfect Sun

belong to it and yet do not belong to it.

“Let us be thoroughgoing, not only in inner experience,

but in its interpretation,

And our lives will be perfect in meditation and in wisdom as well,

not adhering one-sidedly to Emptiness (*Sunyata*) alone.

It is not we alone who have come to this conclusion.

All the enlightened, numerous as the sands of India, are of the same mind.

“I crossed seas and rivers, climbed mountains, and forded streams, In order to interview the Masters, to enquire after Truth, to delve into the secrets of Ch’an;

But since I learned the true path from my Master [Hui-neng: 638-713],

I know that birth-and-death is not what I need to be concerned with.

For walking is Ch’an, sitting is Ch’an;

Whether talking or remaining silent, whether moving or

standing still, the Essence Itself is always at rest.
 Even when confronted by swords and spears, It never loses
 Its way of stillness.
 Not even poisonous drugs can perturb Its serenity.

“Ever since the realization—which came to me suddenly—
 that I have never been born,
 All vicissitudes of fate, good and bad, have lost their power over me.
 Far off, in the mountains, I live in a modest hut.
 The mountains are high, the shade-trees are broad, and under an old pine tree
 I sit quietly and contentedly in my monkish home.
 Here, perfect tranquility and rustic simplicity reign.
 [The sage] neither seeks the Truth, nor avoids the defilements.
 He clearly perceives that all dualities are empty and have no reality.
 And, since they have no reality, he is not one-sided,
 neither empty, nor not empty.

“This is the genuine state of sagehood.
 The one Mind, like a mirror, reflects everything brightly,
 and knows no limitations.
 It pervades the entire universe in even its minutest crevices.
 This world and all its contents, multitudinous in form, are
 reflected in the one Mind,
 Which, shining like a perfect gem, has no “outer” or “inner.”

“If we hold exclusively to Emptiness, we deny the entire causal world.
 All is then attributed to chance, with no ruling principle,
 inviting evil to prevail.
 The same error occurs when one holds exclusively to the
 manifested, denying the Emptiness.
 That would be like throwing oneself into the flames in order
 to avoid being drowned in the water.

“...The Real need not be adhered to.
 As for the non-real, there has never been any such thing.
 When both Real and non-Real are put aside,

“non-real” becomes meaningless.

[Even] when the various means to [the attainment of]
Emptiness are abandoned,
The eternal Oneness of the sage remains as It has always
been. “¹⁰

In the ongoing tradition of Ch’an and Zen Buddhism, many such declarations have been uttered; oftentimes they are but brief and simple declarations of isolation and profound contentment. And oftentimes, when we read the poems of the early Ch’an and Zen masters, such as this, by P’ang-yun (d. 811):

“How wondrously supernatural,
And how miraculous this!
I carry water, and I carry fuel.” ¹¹

Or this, by Pao-tzu Wen-ch’i (10th century):

“Drinking tea, eating rice,
I pass my time as it comes.
Looking down at the stream,
Looking up at the mountain,
How serene and relaxed I feel indeed!” ¹²

Or this, by Hsue-tou (950-1052):

“What life can compare to this?
Sitting quietly by the window,
I watch the leaves fall and the flowers bloom,
As the seasons come and go.” ¹³

...we may fail to recognize the connection of these Oriental Buddhists to their parent tradition, and lose sight of the long, arduous progression of understanding which led to the apparent simplicity of the enlightened Ch’an and Zen masters. Their simple poems may seem far removed from the reasonings of the early Buddhist Fathers on the complementarity of *nirvana* and *samsara*, but they represent the ultimate synthesis of centuries of

metaphysics, and the final freedom of those who have realized that synthesis in their ordinary lives. How simple seem these Buddhist sages, yet their very simplicity is the simplicity of the blessed; it stands on the heads of the Buddhas of the past and reveals a consummation of the struggles of a thousand lifetimes.

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35. THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITION

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

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The Mystical Tradition of Christianity

Judaism, while proudly monotheistic, never advanced to a Nondual perspective. The patriarchal figures, Abraham and Moses, were said to have spoken with God, but neither is said to have experienced *oneness with God*; that is, they never experienced the Divine identity as their own. And since orthodox Judaism refuses to abrogate the authority of the patriarchs, a strict doctrinal separation between God and His creation is maintained, and the possibility of the “union” of man and God is disavowed; though, in recent times, scattered mystics of the esoteric Hasidic and Kabbalistic schools within the Judaic tradition have taught the possibility of ‘the mystical union’ with God.

When Christianity came into existence, Judaism was rightly viewed as its foundational background, since Jesus, the founder and object of Christian worship, was born and raised in the Jewish religious tradition. We have every reason to assume, therefore, that Jesus assented to the Biblical account of Creation in the book of Genesis. However, when Jesus experienced God directly, leading him to proclaim his essential unity with God, he presented a threat to the Judaic theological doctrine of the separation of man from God, and thereby aroused the ire of the Jewish orthodoxy. It wasn't long before these religious legalists hounded and arrested Jesus and put him to death in a public manner usually reserved for enemies of the state under Roman law. Jesus had been merely an obscure Jewish mystic, but the story of his brief life and tragic death spread far and wide, and eventually inspired and raised the spiritual aspirations of generations of people all over the world.

All great religious teachers have taught according to their own intimate experience of God, their “mystical vision”—whether it is called “*samadhi*,” “*nirvana*,” “*fana*,” or “union with God.” Since there is but one ultimate Reality, which all share, each one who has experienced the Truth within has experienced that same ultimate Reality. Naturally, therefore, their teachings about it are bound to be identical. ¹ However, the languages and cultures of the various teachers who have lived throughout history are, no doubt, different from one another. Their personalities and lifestyles are different. But their vision is one, and the path they teach to it is universal. In the mystical experience, which transcends all religious traditions and cultures and languages, the Christian, the Buddhist, the Muslim, and the Vedantist alike come to the same realization: They realize the oneness of their own soul and God, the Soul of the universe. It is this very experience, which prompted Jesus, the originator of Christianity, to explain at various times to his disciples that he had known the great Unity in which he and the Father of the universe are one:

“If you knew who I am,” he said, “you would also know the Father. Knowing me, you know Him; seeing me, you see Him. Do you not understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? It is the Father who dwells in me doing His own work. Understand me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” ²

This was not a personal vanity on the part of Jesus; this was a universally realizable and applicable theological perspective. This is the truth that Vedanta speaks of as “Nondualism.” The term, “Unity,” is, of course, the same in meaning; but it seems that the declaration, “not-two” is more powerfully emphatic than a mere assertion of oneness. Indeed, the word, “Unity” is often used by religionists who apply it to God, but who have not even considered the thought that they themselves are logically included in an *absolute* Unity. Nondualism, the philosophy of absolute Unity, is the central teaching, not only of Vedanta, but of all genuine seers of Truth. This position is embodied in the Vedantic assertion, *tat twam asi*, “That thou art.”

Once we begin to look at the teachings of Jesus in the light of his “mystical” experience of Unity, we begin to have a much clearer perspective on all the aspects of his teachings. His teachings, like those of the various Vedantic sages who’ve taught throughout the ages, is that the soul of man is none other than the one Divinity, none other than God; and that this Divine Identity can be experienced and known through the revelation that occurs

inwardly, by the grace of God, to those who prepare and purify their minds and hearts to receive it. The words of Jesus are so well known to us from our childhood that, perhaps, they have lost their meaning through our over familiarity with them. He attempted to explain to us, with the words, “I and the Father are one,” that the “I,” our own inner awareness of self, is none other than the one Self, the one Awareness, the Lord and Father of us all.

Why, then, are we so unable to see it? Why should it be so hard for us to attain to that purity of heart, which Jesus declared so essential to Its vision? Probably because we have not really tried—not the way Jesus did, going off into the wilderness, jeopardizing everything else in his life for this one aim, focusing completely and entirely on attaining the vision of God. Not the way the Buddha did. Not the way all those who have experienced God, the one Self, have done. Perhaps we’re not ready for such a concentrated effort just yet. Perhaps we have other desires yet to dispense with before we will be free enough to seek so high a goal. For us, perhaps, there is yet much to be done to soften the heart, so that we are pure enough to hear the call of Divine Grace. It is to such as us, for whom much yet needs to be accomplished toward the attainment of a “pure heart,” that Jesus spoke.

All of what Jesus taught to his disciples was by way of explaining to them that his real nature, and that of all men, is Divine; and that the reality of this could be realized directly. Let us look to his own words to corroborate this: In the Gospel book of John, he laments to God, “O righteous Father, the world has not known Thee. But I have known Thee.”³ And, as he sat among the orthodox religionists in the Jewish temple, he said, “You say that He is your God, yet you have not known Him. But I have known Him.”⁴ Jesus had “known” God directly at the time of his initiation by John the Baptist, and probably more deeply during his time in the wilderness; and that experience had separated him and effectively isolated him from his brothers, because he alone among his contemporaries seemed to possess this rare certain knowledge of the truth of all existence.

This is the difficult plight of all those who have been graced with “the vision of God.” It is the greatest of gifts, it is the greatest of all possible visions; and yet, because the knowledge so received is completely contrary to what all men believe regarding God and the soul, it is a terribly alienating knowledge, which brings upon its possessor the scorn and derision of all mankind. History is replete with examples of others who, having attained this saving knowledge, found the world unwilling to accept it, and ready to defend its ignorance aggressively. This circumstance is little changed today.

Because the “vision” of God was so difficult to convey to those who had not experienced it, Jesus spoke often by way of analogy or metaphor in order to make his meaning clear. He spoke of the experience of “seeing” God as entering into a realm beyond this world, a realm where only God is. In his own Aramaic language, he called this realm *malkutha*. In the Greek translation, it is *basileia*. In English, it is usually rendered as “the kingdom of God.”

“His disciples asked him, “When will the kingdom come?” Jesus said, “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘Here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ Rather, the kingdom of the Father is [already] spread out upon the earth, and [yet] men do not see it.”⁵

“... Indeed, what you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it.”⁶

“The Pharisees asked him, ‘When will the kingdom of God come?’ He said, ‘You cannot tell by signs [I.e., by observations] when the kingdom of God will come. There will be no saying, “Look, here it is!” or “There it is!” For, in fact, the kingdom of God is [experienced] within you.’”⁷

“Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, “See, the kingdom is in the sky,” then the birds of the sky will have preceded you. If they say to you, “It is in the sea,” then the fish will precede you. Rather the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you [as well]. When you come to know your Self, then you [I.e., your true nature] will be known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know your Self, you live in poverty [I.e., you live in the illusion that you are a pitiful creature far from God].”

⁸

Another of Jesus’ metaphors utilized the terms, “Light” and “darkness” to represent the Divinity and the inherent delusion of man, respectively:

“Jesus said, ‘The world’s images are manifest to man, but the Light in them remains concealed; within the image is the Light of the Father. He becomes manifest as the images, but, as the Light, He is concealed’.”⁹

“He said to them, ‘There is a Light within a man of Light, and It lights up the whole world. If it does not shine [within that man], he is in darkness.’”¹⁰

Light and *darkness* are terms which have been used since time immemorial to represent the Divine Consciousness in man and the hazy ignorance, which obscures It. In the very first paragraph of the Gospel of John, we find an excellent explanation of these two principles, and their Greek synonyms, *Theos* and *Logos*;

“In the beginning was the Logos [the creative Power of God], and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He [or It] was with God in the beginning. All things were made by Him; without Him nothing was made. Within Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of man. And the Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended It not.”¹¹

A word of explanation is necessary: These two terms, “Light and “darkness,” are also indicative of the cosmic aspects of Reality; in other words, they are not only the Divine Consciousness in man and the darkness of unknowing, but they are, at a higher level, the very Godhead and Its Power of manifestation. They are those same two principles we have so often run into, called “Brahman and Maya,” “Purusha and Prakrti,” “Shiva and Shakti.” It is the Godhead in us, which provides the Light in us; it is the manifestory principle, which, in the process of creating an individual soul-mind-body, provides us with all the obscuration necessary to keep us in the dark as to our infinite and eternal Identity.

“Jesus said, ‘If they ask you, “Where did you come from?” say to them, ‘We came from the Light, the place where the Light came into being of Its own accord and established Itself and became manifest through our image.’”

“If they ask you, ‘Are you It?’ say, ‘We are Its children, and we are the elect of the living Father.’ If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your Father in you?’ say to them, ‘It is movement and repose.’”¹²

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest. Everything came forth from me, and everything returns to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.’”¹³

Here, Jesus identifies with the Eternal Light; but it is clear that he never intended to imply that he was uniquely and exclusively identical with It; his intention was always to convey the truth that *all* men are, in essence, the transcendent Consciousness, the very Light of God, manifest in form:

“Ye *are* the Light of the world. Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”¹⁴

Frequently he declared to his followers that they too would come to the same realization that he had experienced:

“I tell you this,” he said to them; “there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God already come in full power.”¹⁵

“The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the living ONE will not see death. Have I not said: ‘whoever finds his Self is superior to the world?’”¹⁶

“Take heed of the living ONE while you are alive, lest you die and seek to see Him and be unable to do so.”¹⁷

“That which you have will save you if you bring It forth from yourselves. That which you do not have within you will destroy you.”¹⁸

“That which you have” is, of course, the Truth, the Light, the Divinity who manifests as you. “That which you do not have” refers to the ego, the false identity of separate individuality, which is simply a lie. It is the wrong understanding of who you are that limits you, and which prevents you from experiencing your eternal Self.

The teaching, common to all true “mystics” who have realized the Highest, is “You *are* the Light of the world! You *are* That! Identify with the Light, the Truth, for That is who you really are!” And yet Jesus did not wish that this should remain a mere matter of faith with his disciples; he wished them to realize this truth for themselves. And he taught them the method by which he had come to know God. Like all great seers, he knew both the means and the end, he knew both the One and the many. Thus, we hear in the message of Jesus an apparent ambiguity, which is necessitated by the paradoxical nature of the Reality.

In the One, the two—soul and God—play their love-game of devotion. At one moment, the soul speaks of God, its “Father”; at another moment, it is identified with God, and speaks of “I.” Likewise, in the words of Jesus to his disciples, we see this same complementarity: At one moment, he speaks of dualistic devotion in the form of prayer (“Our Father, who art in heaven”); and at another moment he asserts his oneness, his identity, with God (“Lift the stone and I am there ...”). But he cautioned his disciples against offending others with this attitude (“If they ask you, ‘Are you It?’ say, ‘We are Its children ...’”).

At times, identifying with the One, he asserts that he has the power to grant the experience of Unity (“I shall give you what no eye has seen and what no ear has heard and what no hand has touched and what has never occurred to the human mind”).¹⁹ And at other times, identifying with the human soul, he gives all credit to God, the Father (“Why do you call me good? There is no one good but the ONE, that is God.”).²⁰

There is an interesting story that appears in both Matthew and Luke which illustrates the knowledge, from the standpoint of the individual soul, that the realization of God comes, not by any deed of one’s own, but solely by the grace of God: Jesus had just commented upon how difficult it would be for a young man, otherwise spiritually inclined, who was attached to his worldly wealth and occupations, to realize God (“It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle”); and his disciples, who were gathered around, were somewhat disturbed by this, and asked, “Then, who *can* attain salvation?” And Jesus answered, “For man it is impossible; but for God it is possible.”

And Peter, understanding that Jesus is denying that any man, by his own efforts, can bring about that experience, but only God, by His grace, gives this enlightenment, objected: “But we here have left our belongings to become your followers!” And Jesus, wishing to assure them that any effort toward God-realization will bear its fruits in this life and in lives to come, said to them: “I tell you this; there is no one who has given up home, or wife, brothers, parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not be repaid many times over in this time, and in the time to come [will] know eternal Life.”²¹ He could guarantee to no one that knowledge of God; that was in the hands of God. But Jesus knew that whatever efforts one makes toward God must bear their fruits in this life, and in the lives to come.

And so, throughout the teachings of Jesus, one finds these two, apparently contradictory, attitudes intermingled: the attitude of the knower, or *jnani*: (“I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest”); and the attitude of the devoted soul, or *bhakta*: (“Father, father, why hast Thou forsaken me?”). They are the two voices of the illumined man, for he is both, the transcendent Unity and the imaged soul; he has “seen” this unity in the “mystical experience” of oneness.

Jesus had experienced the ultimate Truth; he had clearly seen and known It beyond any doubt; and he knew that the consciousness that lived as him was the one Consciousness of all. He knew that he was the living Awareness from which this entire universe is born. This was the certain, indubitable, truth; and yet Jesus found but few who could even comprehend it. For the most part, those to whom he spoke were well-meaning religionists who were incapable of accepting the profound meaning of his words. The religious orthodoxy of his time, like all such orthodoxies, fostered a self-serving lip-service to spiritual ideals, and observed all sorts of symbolic rituals, but was entirely ignorant of the fact that the ultimate reality could be directly known by a pure and devout soul, and that this was the real purpose of all religious practice.

Jesus realized, of course, that despite the overwhelming influence of the orthodox religionists, still, in his own Judaic tradition, there had been other seers of God, who had known and taught this truth. “I come,” said Jesus, “not to destroy the law [of the Prophets], but to fulfill it.”²² He knew also that any person who announced the fact that he had seen and known God would be persecuted and belittled and regarded as an infidel and a liar. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus is reported to have said, “He who knows the Father (the transcendent Absolute) and the Mother (the creative Principle) will be called a son-of-a-bitch!”²³ It seems he was making a pun on the fact that one who does *not* know his father and mother is usually referred to in this fashion; but, in his case, he had known the Father of the universe, and knew the Power (of Mother Nature) behind the entire creation, and still he was called this derisive name.

It is the common experience of all the great seers, from Lao Tze to Socrates and Heraclitus, from Plotinus and al-Hallaj to Meister Eckhart and St. John of the Cross. All were cruelly tortured and persecuted for their goodness and wisdom stemming from the ‘vision’ graciously granted by God. Jesus too found the world of men wanting in understanding; he said:

“I took my place in the midst of the world, and I went among the people. I found all of them intoxicated [with pride and ignorance]; I found none of them thirsty [for Truth]. And my soul became sorrowful for the sons of men, because they are blind in their hearts and do not have vision. Empty they came into the world, and empty they wish to leave the world. But, for the moment, they are intoxicated; when they shake off their wine, then they will repent.”

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Jesus had taught the mystical path to his disciples; but few of his followers, either during his lifetime or after, could follow him into those rare heights. After he was persecuted and executed for expounding his unitive vision, his followers began to gather together for inspiration, and the small gatherings soon developed into a sizable church organization. And, when the few became many, diverse interests inevitably came into play: some were attracted to contemplation; some to charitable or teaching activities; and some preferred to deify their master, Jesus, as an object of ritual worship.

Jesus never formulated a detailed metaphysics to guide his followers. A metaphysics developed around him, nonetheless, fueled not only by his Judaic background, but by the persuasive Greek influence of the times. In particular, the Greek philosophical concept of the *Logos* played an important part in the metaphysics of the early Christian theologians.

The common Greek word, *logos*, was originally understood in several different ways; one of which was as “intention, hypothesis, or thought”. Heraclitus, in the 4th century B.C.E., the first to use the word in a metaphysical sense, intended by it the Divine Intelligence by which all the world is pervaded. Much later, a contemporary of Jesus, Philo Judaeus, who was an influential Alexandrian Jew with strong ties to the Greek, and specifically the Platonic, philosophical tradition, used the word to denote the Thought in the Mind of God, from whence the Idea of the world took form. Here is how he expressed it:

“God who, having determined to found a mighty state, first of all conceived its form in his mind, according to which form he made a world perceptible only by the intellect, and then completed one visible to the external senses, using the first one as a model. ...It is manifest also, that the archetypal seal, which we call that world, which is perceptible only to the

intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the *Logos* of God.”²⁵

“...The incorporeal [spiritual] world then was already completed, having its seat in the Divine *Logos*; and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it.”²⁶

For Philo, the *Logos* was not only the Idea in the mind of God but was that very Ideational Power of God that Plotinus would later call *Nous*, or “The Divine Mind”. Philo, acknowledging that the *Logos* was the creative Power of the One, referred to it as “the first-born of God,” because ‘It was conceived in God’s mind before all things, and is that which manifests as all things.’²⁷

One of the four Gospel authors, living in the 1st or 2nd century C.E., and known to us only as ‘John’, was apparently familiar with the writings of Philo, and taking his theological cue from him, began his Gospel with these words:

“In the beginning was the Logos, the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. ...All things were made by the Logos; without him, nothing was made. It was by him that all things came into existence.”²⁸

This was, of course, quite in keeping with the Philonian concept; but then John added these words:

“And the Logos became flesh and lived among us...as the only-begotten son of his father.”²⁹

In the words that followed, John made clear he was referring to Jesus of Nazareth whom John the Baptist had declared was the Messiah at the time he baptized Jesus in the river Jordan.

Some of the most influential Christian theologians and apologists, such as Justin Martyr (100-165 C.E.), Irenaeus (130-200 C.E.), Tertullian (150-225 C.E.), and others, jumped on this bandwagon, campaigning strongly for the recognition of Jesus as synonymous with the *Logos*, or Creative Power, of God; though there were others, called *alogi*, who were against this idea. And so, there was much argument and discussion among these early Christians. It was a time when theological and metaphysical ideas were very much ‘in the air’; and it is clear that many of the learned Christian theologians and Apologists of the time were influenced not only by the Judaic tradition, but

by the Platonist vision, as well as by the writings of Philo Judaeus, and possibly the Gnostics, Hermetics and Stoics as well. Borrowing the terminology of Philo, as echoed by the Gospel writer, John, they regarded the *Logos* much the way Plotinus regarded *Nous*, the Divine Mind: as the active Creative power of the transcendent Godhead, or “the One”. For the Christians, the Godhead was referred to as “the Spirit” or “the Father”, and His Creative power was referred to as “the Logos” or “the Son”. According to Tertullian (150-225):

“The Spirit is the substance of the Logos, and the Logos is the activity of the Spirit; the two are a unity (*unum*).”³⁰

The Christian Apologist, Athenagoras (133-190) wrote:

“If you ask what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that he is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal Mind has the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos); but inasmuch as the Logos came forth to be the Idea and energizing power of all material things.”³¹

Later, Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria (293-372), using the very analogy of the Sun’s radiation often used later by Plotinus, says:

“Was God, who IS, ever without the Logos? Was He, who is light, ever without radiance? ...God is, eternally; then, since the Father always is, His radiance also exists eternally; and that is His Logos.³² ...The Logos of God *is* creator and maker; he *is* the Father’s will.”³³

From these many theological interchanges a consensus arose; and the historical Jesus became permanently associated with the *Logos* and was thereafter regarded by Christians as an incarnation of God; or, in popular circles, ‘the Son of God’. Then, to the duality of the Father and Son was added the “Spirit” or “Holy Ghost”—thus constituting a holy Trinity, comparable to Plotinus’ trinity of The One, the Divine Mind, and Soul. This doctrine of the ‘Holy Trinity’ became firmly established as a metaphysical tenet of the Church with the formulation of the Nicene Creed following the first ecumenical council assembled by emperor Constantine in 325 C.E., and the Athanasian Creed, penned around the same time—though in later years Christendom would become bitterly divided in its acceptance of this tenet.

All the great teachers of Spirituality have offered a description of and commentary on the nature of Reality as directly experienced in “the mystical vision.” Only those who have actually experienced the Truth directly are able to speak authoritatively about it. And, the fact is, there have been many wise and pure-hearted men and women of every nationality and every religious affiliation who have experienced the Truth. There are Christians who have experienced It, and Jews, and Muslims, and Hindus, and Buddhists, and so on. And so, we must include as part of our Spiritual heritage the teachings and writings of all those of various traditions who have directly realized the Truth and spoken of It.

Let us consider, for example, some of those Christians who taught Spiritual Truth under the name of Christianity. They are the seers, the mystics of the Church, who taught the path to God-realization, and who proclaimed the identity of the soul and God, and the indivisibility of the one absolute Reality. First among these, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth, called “the anointed one,” or *Christos*, in the language of the Greeks. It is of his own mystical experience that Jesus spoke, a mystical experience that transcends all doctrines and all traditions, and that is identical for Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Vedantists alike. It is an experience of absolute Unity—a Unity in which the individual consciousness of the soul merges into its Divine Source, and knows, “I and the Father are one.”

Ironically, however, this knowledge is unacceptable in all conventional religious traditions; and so, those, like Jesus, al Hallaj, Meister Eckhart, Spinoza, and many others who have experienced the Truth, are inevitably rejected by the religious traditions to which they belong. The religious tradition, which arose around the teachings of Jesus, commonly rejects and persecutes its mystics as well. Nonetheless, down through the centuries, a few of the followers of Jesus also experienced the spiritual unity, by the grace of God, and spoke of It for posterity. Here, for example, is what the famous Christian mystic of the 13th century, Meister Eckhart, had to say about his own experience:

“As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one. “... Some simple people think

that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one. ³⁴

“... I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one Being with Himself—not (simply) a similar being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction!” ³⁵

Or this, by the 15th century Christian Bishop, Nicholas of Cusa:

“Thou dost ravish me above myself that I may foresee the glorious place whereunto Thou callest me. Thou grantest me to behold the treasure of riches, of life, of joy, of beauty. Thou keepest nothing secret. ³⁶

“I behold Thee, O Lord my God, in a kind of mental trance, ³⁷ ... and when I behold Thee, nothing is seen other than Thyself; for Thou art Thyself the object of Thyself, for Thou seest, and art That which is seen, and art the sight as well. ³⁸

“Hence, in Thee, who are love, the lover is not one thing and the beloved another, and the bond between them a third, but they are one and the same: Thou, Thyself, my God. For there is nothing in Thee that is not Thy very essence. ³⁹ Nothing exists outside Thee, and all things in Thee are not other than Thee.” ⁴⁰

Or listen to this, by the 16th century Christian monk, St. John of the Cross:

“What God communicates to the soul in this intimate union is totally beyond words. In this transformation, the two become one. ⁴¹

“... The soul thereby becomes Divine, becomes God, through participation, insofar as is possible in this life.

“... The union wrought between the two natures, and the communication of the Divine to the human in this state is such that even though neither changes their being, both appear to be God. ⁴²

“... Having been made one with God, the soul is somehow God through participation.” ⁴³

This is the truth revealed in “the mystical vision,” the truth that Vedanta speaks of as “Nonduality.” While some Christians interpret St. John’s words to indicate that “the mystical experience” of Unity is an aberration, a gracious unification of the soul with God, rather than a revelation of the eternal unity of the soul and God, Vedantists take the position that the soul is always identical with God but is concealed from the awareness of this unity by the (veil of) ignorance inherent in phenomenal manifestation. The central teaching of Vedanta, and of all genuine religious teachers, is that the inner Self (*Atman*) and God (*Brahman*) are one. This is expressed in the Upanishadic dictum: *tat twam asi*, “That thou art.” It is this very knowledge, experienced in a moment of clarity in contemplation or prayer, which prompted Jesus of Nazareth to explain to his disciples who he was, and who they were, eternally:

“If you knew who *I* am, you would also know the Father.
Knowing me, you know Him; seeing me, you see Him. ...

“Do you not understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? ... It is the Father who dwells in me doing His own work. Understand me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”⁴⁴

There are many other nondual mystical teachings, which one can find in the utterances of Jesus, and his followers. For example, it follows from the teaching of Nonduality—that is to say, the teaching that all beings are manifestations of the one Divinity—that we should therefore treat all beings as our own Self, as they most truly are. We find this teaching very prominent among the teachings of Jesus. In his Sermon on The Mount, he says:

“Ye have heard that it has been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies [also]; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”⁴⁵

This is the message of equality-consciousness, of seeing God (one’s eternal Self) in all beings, and of thinking and acting for the benefit of all. It is this

kind of reformation of our minds and hearts that is called for if we are to assume our true identity and experience the perfection of our eternal Self. It is, of course, our own minds, which must be transformed so that we are capable of ridding ourselves of the false notion of a separate and distinct identity apart from the one eternal Identity. It is the mind, which must be made single, one-pointed, and eventually identified with the eternal Self.

To this end, Jesus spoke to his disciples of the necessity of releasing their minds from concerns for the welfare of their separate personalities and worldly holdings in order to lift them up to God through meditation and prayer. “How,” he asked them, “can you have your mind on God and at the same time have it occupied with the things of this world?” He pointed out to them that their hearts would be with that which they valued most. One’s attention could not be focused on God and on one’s worldly concerns at the same time, for, as he said, a city divided against itself must fall. He advised them frequently to let God be the sole focus of their attention, and to let God be the sole master whom they served. “No man can serve two masters,” he said,

“for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve both God and Mammon [the flesh]. Therefore, I say unto you: take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”⁴⁶

Naturally, this is a hard saying to those who harbor many hopes and dreams of individual worldly wealth and attainments. You’ll recall what Jesus said to the sincerely spiritual man who, nonetheless, was yet attached to his worldly wealth; “It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,” he said, “than for such a man to experience the kingdom of God.” The necessity for renouncing the preoccupation of the mind with worldly things if one is to occupy the mind with thoughts of God, is a teaching that is found, not only in Vedanta and Christianity, but in all true religion. It is certainly a consistently recognized fact within the long tradition of Christian mysticism. Listen, in this regard, to the words of the 5th century Christian mystic who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite:

“While God possesses all the positive attributes of the universe, yet, in a more strict sense, he does not possess them, since He transcends them all. 47 ... The all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all, (and) is free from every limitation and beyond them all.⁴⁸

“Therefore, do thou, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and non-being, that thou mayest arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things, thou mayest be born on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential radiance of the Divine.”⁴⁹

We are accustomed, perhaps, to associating the word, “renunciation” with the Vedantic tradition of India, and most especially as it is used in the *Bhagavad Gita*; but renunciation of the false individual self is a prerequisite to God-consciousness, regardless of one’s nationality or religious affiliation. It is a word, which occurs frequently among the writings of the great Christian mystics of the past. Listen, for example, to the 16th century Spanish monk, St. John of the Cross:

“The road and ascent to God necessarily demands a habitual effort to renounce and mortify the appetites; and the sooner this mortification is achieved, the sooner the soul reaches the summit. But until the appetites are eliminated, a person will not arrive, no matter how much virtue he practices. For he will fail to acquire perfect virtue, which lies in keeping the soul empty, naked, and purified of every appetite.⁵⁰

“Until slumber comes to the appetites through the mortification of sensuality, and until this very sensuality is stilled in such a way that the appetites do not war against the Spirit, the soul will not walk out to genuine freedom, to the enjoyment of union with its Beloved.”⁵¹

Now, I would like for you to hear one more Christian seer on this same theme: Thomas á Kempis was a German monk of the 15th century who, above all other mystics, Christian or Vedantic, had a great influence upon me and many others for the beauty of his expression and the pure sincerity of his longing for God. Here is just a little of what he had to say:

“You may in no manner be satisfied with temporal goods, for you are not created to rest yourself in them. For if you alone might have all the goods that ever were created and made, you might not therefore be happy and blessed; but your blessedness and your full felicity stands only in God who has made all things. And that is not such felicity as is commended by the foolish lovers of the world, but such as good men and women hope to have in the bliss of God, and as some spiritual persons, clean and pure in heart, sometimes do taste here in this present life, whose conversation is in heaven. All worldly solace and all man’s comfort is vain and short, but that comfort is blessed and reliable that is perceived by the soul inwardly in the heart. Await, my soul, await the promise of God, and you shall have abundance of all goodness in Him. If you inordinately covet goods present, you shall lose the Goodness eternal. Have therefore goods present in use and Goodness eternal in desire.”⁵²

Here, again, from the same author:

“Many desire to have the gift of contemplation, but they will not use such things as are required for contemplation. And one great hindrance of contemplation is that we stand so long in outward signs and in material things and take no heed of the perfect mortifying of our body to the Spirit. I know not how it is, nor with what spirit we are led, nor what we pretend, we who are called spiritual persons, that we take greater labor and study for transitory things than we do to know the inward state of our own soul. But, alas for sorrow, as soon as we have made a little recollection to God, we run forth to outward things and do not search our own conscience with due examination, as we should, nor heed where our affection rests, nor sorrow that our deeds are so evil and so unclean as they are.”⁵³

“... You shall much profit in grace if you keep yourself free from all temporal cares, and it shall hinder you greatly if you set value on any temporal thing. Therefore, let nothing be in your sight high, nothing great, nothing pleasing nor acceptable to you, unless it be purely God, or of God. Think all comforts vain that come to you by any creature. He who loves God, and his own soul for God, despises all other love; for he sees well that God alone, who is eternal and incomprehensible, and fulfills all things with His goodness, is the whole solace and comfort of the soul; and that He is the very true gladness of heart, and none other but only He.”⁵⁴

“This grace is a light from heaven and a spiritual gift of God. It is the proper mark and token of elect people and a guarantee of the everlasting life. It lifts a man from love of earthly things to the love of heavenly things and makes a carnal man to be a man of God. And the more that nature is oppressed and overcome, the more grace is given, and the soul through new gracious visitations is daily shaped anew and formed more and more to the image of God.”⁵⁵

Thus, as we have seen, the true religion, the true understanding, is always the same. The teachings of the saints who have known their true nature as Divine have always declared the same path of one-pointed devotion as the means to experience and become united with the Divine Self. And so, we find, in the words of the mystics of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and of the mystics of every true religious tradition, the authentic Spiritual teachings.

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4. *Ibid.*, 8:54.
5. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 114; Robinson (trans. by Thomas O. Lambdin), 1977, p. 138.

6. *Ibid.*, 51, p. 132.
7. Luke, Gospel Of, 17:20.
8. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 3; Robinson, 1977, p. 126.
9. *Ibid.*, 83, p. 135.
10. *Ibid.*, 24, p. 129.
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The Early Christians

During the first few centuries following the death of Jesus, the entire Mediterranean world, from Rome to Tunis, from Athens to Alexandria, experienced a widespread outbreak of popular religious sects; Christians, Gnostics, Manichaens, Hermetics, Stoics and a host of other religious sects competed with one another for the ear of the populace. And since this period of religious fervor derived so much of its fundamental ideology from the Greek heritage of mysticism, it is worthwhile to trace, briefly, the influence of mystical thought during these formative years on the theology of two of these religious sects: the Christians and the Gnostics.

What we know today as the religion of Christianity began with a handful of Apostles, some of whom had actually been disciples of Jesus, and some who, like Paul of Tarsus (d. ca. 60 C.E.), had learned about Jesus and his teachings only after his martyrdom. During that first century after Jesus' death, the Apostles traveled far and wide, extolling Jesus as the greatest of teachers, a Savior who had taught the message of the soul's salvation through devotion to God. The growing legend of Jesus' rising from his burial place after death did much to increase the widening influence of the fledgling religious organization. Despite prolonged persecutions and martyrdoms, the little band of Christians grew, thanks in great measure to the zealous leadership of Paul, a convert from orthodox Judaism, who was convinced that Jesus was, literally, the Son of God.

By the second century of the Christian era, hundreds of Christian communities were flourishing throughout the Mediterranean world, and the talents of the learned among them were put to the task of formulating a coherent religious philosophy, an authoritative Christian theology, which would convincingly establish the divine origin of Jesus, the Christ (*Christos*, the anointed one). It was necessarily a time for the building up of a bulwark of dogma by which the theological position of Christianity would be clearly enunciated, so as both to unite all elements within the Christian community and to weed out those opinions deemed inconsistent with, and therefore heretical to, the "official" interpretation of the life and teachings of Jesus.

The Christian community had, among its more vocal proponents, a number of learned philosophers and theologians during this time, including Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165 C.E.), Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215 C.E.), and Origen (182-251 C.E.), all genuinely devout and earnest men. They seem not to have been mystics, however; they had not experienced God directly for themselves, but were interested primarily in rationalizing the Christian tenet of the divine authority of Jesus. Being well learned also in the philosophical tradition of the Greeks, they were at pains as well to explain their theology in terms recognizable to the "pagan" world. As a means of accomplishing this, they adopted the Greek concept of the Logos, and asserted that Jesus was none other than the divine Logos of God.

Let us look for a moment at the progression of ideas and events, which led to the wholehearted adoption of this conception by the Christian Church. The idea first appears in the opening paragraph of the Fourth Gospel written about sixty years after the death of Jesus by the evangelist known only as John. John undoubtedly had some familiarity with the concept of the Logos, probably from Philo, and perhaps from Stoic sources as well. He began his Gospel with these words:

In the beginning was the Logos; the Logos was with God, and the Logos *was* God. ...All things were made by the Logos; without him nothing was made. It was by him that all things came into existence.

... What came about in him [the Logos] was life, and the life was the light [of God] in man. The life shines in the darkness [of world-manifestation], but the darkness did not understand it. ¹

All this is in keeping with the mystical perception of duality-in-Unity enunciated by mystics of every time and place. John then goes on to assert that the Logos became Jesus of Nazareth:

“And the Logos became flesh and lived among us
...as the only begotten son of his father.” ²

This statement, that the Logos became flesh in the person of Jesus, is also inarguable, as it is the Logos, the creative Intelligence of God, which has become flesh in the person of every creature on earth; and the phrase, “only begotten son” is a designation for the Logos which goes back to Philo. But John seems to imply that Jesus was more than simply another manifestation of the Logos, that he was, indeed, the creative Intelligence itself. It was this very suggestion, which gave immediate rise to a widespread movement among 2nd century Christians to regard Jesus as a special and unique manifestation of God, through whom the very Godhead lived and acted upon earth for the upliftment of humanity. But let us take a moment to recall the meaning of the term “Logos,” as it had been traditionally used up to that time.

The *Logos*, as we have stated before, is the Absolute in Its immanent aspect, the Divine Intelligence or Consciousness that pervades the material world of form. These two, the transcendent One and Its immanent presence are one and inseparable, just as a mind and its thoughts are one and inseparable. Thus, Nature is formed and ruled by God's Thought, or Logos, and is replete with Divinity, is nothing but Divinity; and is as much one and synonymous with God as the radiance of the Sun is with the Sun itself. The term, "Logos," had long been understood in this way, and it was in this way that it was understood and explained by Christians as well, such as Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria (293-372 C.E.):

Was God, who IS, ever without the Logos? Was He, who is light, ever without radiance? ...God is, eternally; then, since the Father always is, His radiance also exists eternally; and that is His Logos.³

... For, as the light [of the Sun] illumines all things within its radiance, and without that radiance nothing would illumined, so the Father wrought all things through the Logos, as by a hand. And He did not speak in order that some subordinate might hear, understand what the speaker wanted, and [then] go perform the task. This is what happens in human affairs. But the Logos of God *is* creator and maker; he *is* the Father's will.⁴

Athenagorus (2nd century C.E.), who wrote an Apology of Christianity to the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, also asserted the eternal coexistence and oneness of God, the Father, and His Power of world- emanation (the Logos), which he calls "the Son":

If ... you ask what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that he is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal Mind has the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos); but inasmuch as the Logos came forth to be the Idea and energizing power of all material things.⁵

Tertullian (150-225 C.E.), another of the early Church Fathers, expressed the same idea in more simplified terms:

The Spirit is the substance of the Logos, and the Logos is the activity of the Spirit; the two are a Unity (*unum*).⁶

These remarks by the early Church Fathers are identical with the declarations of all the mystics who have, over the centuries, described their experience of the two complementary aspects of Reality. But they went on from this conventional observation, to formulate a rather startling tenet of faith: that the Logos, the very stream of God's Intelligence pervading the universe, took on a personality of its own, and lived on planet earth as the man known as Jesus of Nazareth. Here is how this idea was expressed by one of the most influential of the early Church Fathers, Ireneus, the bishop of Lyons (ca. 130-200 C.E.):

The Logos existed in the beginning with God, and through him all things were made. He was always present with the human race, and in the last times, according to the time appointed by the Father, he has been united with his own handiwork and become man, capable of suffering. ... He was incarnate and made man; and then he summed up in himself the long line of the human race, procuring for us a comprehensive salvation, that we might recover in him what in Adam we had lost, the state of being in the image and likeness of God.⁷

At a later date, Athenasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria, added some clarifying remarks to that, in order to explain how the Logos could be working entirely through the person of Jesus while at the same time manifesting the entire universe:

The Logos was not confined solely within [Jesus'] body; nor was he there and nowhere else; he did not activate that body and leave the universe emptied of his activity and guidance. Here is the supreme marvel. He was the Logos. and nothing contained him; rather he himself contained all things. He is the whole creation, yet in his essential being he is distinct from it all, while

he is in all things in the activities of his power, ordering all things, extending over all things his universal providence, quickening each and everything at once, containing the universe and not contained by it, but in his Father alone existing wholly and entirely.

So also, when he was in the human body, he gave that body life; and at the same time, he was of course giving life to the whole universe, and was present in all things; and yet distinct from and outside the universe. And while being recognized from his body, he was also manifest in his working in the universe. ⁸ ...Though he was God, he had a body for his own, and using it as an instrument, he became man for our sakes. ⁹

Not everyone among the Christian priests and intellectuals agreed with this idea, however; some found all this a bit fanciful and illogical, and resisted the movement to declare that Jesus was God incarnate. A hot debate ensued among the clergy, and eventually the Emperor, Constantine, himself a zealous Christian partisan of the ‘incarnation’ theory, called a universal Council of the Church, which took place in 325 C.E. in the town of Nicaea. It was attended by 318 bishops, who, after all the arguments were presented, decided overwhelmingly (with Constantine’s happy approval) to regard Jesus as identical with the Logos, and to adopt the following Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible or invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten ... not made, being of one essence (*homoousion*) with the Father ...who, for us men and our salvation, came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, and comes to judge the quick and the dead. ¹⁰

Thus, a formalized Christian theology was born, declaring Jesus to be identical with the Logos, the creative Intelligence of God. Nor was this the first time, or the last, that a great mystic and teacher was deified by his followers. Many times throughout history, others besides Jesus have been declared by their followers to have been similarly divine “incarnations” of the Godhead; among them, Krishna, Zoroaster, Mahavira Jina, Gautama

Buddha, Mani, Jnaneshvar, Meher Baba, and Ramakrishna. Each of these great religious teachers hoped with all their hearts to convince mankind that the realization of God, which they had experienced, was possible to all men, and that such realization would open to them a new life of freedom and joy.

Whether we believe or disbelieve in the special status of these illustrious teachers, whether we do or do not attribute divine authority to their utterances, the truth they taught remains eternally valid and relevant to all mankind. For the message of Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, and all other seers of God is the same: ‘Strive to realize God in yourself! Then you will know the joyful truth that you and the Source of the universe are one.

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10. The Nicene Creed.

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The Wisdom of Jesus

A group of Pharisees gathered around Jesus, and a lawyer among them, who wanted to test Jesus, asked him:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

Jesus [quoting Moses] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment (*Deuteronomy*. 6:5). “And the second is like it: [and Jesus quoted from the words of Moses again] ‘You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.” (*Leviticus*. 19:18) “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (*Matthew*.22: 36-40; *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, New York, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006; p. 1140).

These two directives which Jesus gave the lawyer are universal and are not just for the followers of Judaism or of Jesus, but for all people: The first directive is paramount, and is theocentric— that is, one’s love is to be focused on God within; the second is derivative of the first and is anthropocentric— stating that one’s love is to be freely shared with others. They are opposing directives, insofar as the direction of the first is interior and the direction of the second is exterior; yet they are complementary. The interior focus and the outer focus are of equal importance to a man’s soul, as is the subtle and delicate balance between the two.

In the early (Catholic) tradition of Christianity, there was a tendency to emphasize the theocentric directive, which gave rise to the Desert fathers, and the founding of the contemplative Orders; whereas the later Reformers of the 16th century, who became known as Protestants, preferred to emphasize the anthropocentric focus. Therefore, the early emphasis on the contemplative life of prayer and meditation on God gave way to a greater emphasis on the concern for benefiting mankind through good works. The balance, once heavily favoring the inward pursuit of God-knowledge, swung to the active outer pursuit of social justice and human charity. It is this anthropocentric focus that remains the predominant focus of Christianity today.

But, as Jesus pointed out, it is the theocentric focus that is primary and fundamental; the anthropocentric directive is secondary and follows from the wisdom and love acquired in the primary focus on God. And yet, today, despite the directive from Jesus and the many reminders from Eastern yogis and sages regarding the need for a contemplative life, we in the West have almost completely forgotten the necessity of the interior focus on God. In many segments of Western society, God has become an unnecessary hypothesis in the current formulation of reality. We have so filled our heads with purely material values and our world with so many glittering technological marvels that we as a people are blinded to the larger existential picture, and have clearly lost appreciation for our divine roots, and for the One in whom we continue to live and move and have our being.

It's true that we have greatly advanced as a society in our ability to carry out the second of Jesus' directives, but if we forget the first of Jesus' directives, and lose sight of our own divine Self—the God who lives in our hearts, who is the sole source of our wisdom, our power, and our joy—with what shall we benefit others? If we can no longer soar into the rare atmosphere of His infinite wisdom, if we can no longer drink from the deep wellspring of His all-embracing love, what wisdom and what love shall we have to share with others? And, without our inner focus on God, the Source of all bliss, what will be the quality of our own inner lives?

* * *

The Gnostics

Contemporary with the growth of the Christian movement, during the first few centuries of the Current Era, there existed throughout the Mediterranean world a number of religious sects referred to as *Gnostics*. Up until recent times, the bulk of our knowledge about the Gnostics was derived from the anti-Gnostic writings of the early Church Fathers, especially Ireneus and Hippolytus (d. ca. 235). But since the find of fifty-two Gnostic books at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, and their belated publication thirty years later, we possess numerous first-hand accounts of the Gnostic views during the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The Gnostics claimed to represent the esoteric tradition of mystical knowledge (*gnosis*), and while many of them embraced and infiltrated the Christian community, they stood opposed to the authority of the orthodox (Catholic) Church, regarding themselves as representative of the “true” interpretation of Jesus and his teachings. It must be understood that, during those first few centuries of the Christian Era, Christianity was not yet a coherent body, but rather consisted of a wide variety of disparate groups, each dedicated to their own opinions regarding Jesus, the Christ. Their opinions were embodied in the works they wrote in order to promote their own particular view.

Many of these works, written and distributed by various authors shortly after the death of Jesus, took the form of “Gospels” (*good news*), purporting to be the authentic reminiscences of the life and teachings of Jesus. The ones that were eventually adopted by the Church authorities as Christian scripture in 367 C.E. are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, known thereafter as “the canonical Gospels.” There were other books of this type, however, that circulated during those first few centuries; one of them, *The Gospel According to Thomas*, was purported to be the work of Didymos Judas Thomas, i.e., Thomas, “the twin brother of Jesus” [which may be either a literal or a figurative designation]. It told nothing of the activities of Jesus and mentioned nothing of Jesus’ status as ‘Son of God’, or his resurrection, but restricted itself to a collection of 114 mystical sayings attributed to him. It began, “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke, and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.”

One group of Christians, the so-called “Thomas Christians”, who adopted *The Gospel of Thomas* as representative of their views, believed that “salvation” lay not merely in accepting that Jesus had direct knowledge of God, but, by following his directions, in obtaining that direct knowledge of God for themselves. Others, who adopted the “canonical” Gospels, and who later became known as the “orthodox” (*straight-thinking*) Church, believed that such knowledge was beyond the reach of mere mortals; they believed in the Divinity of Jesus as a unique and special manifestation of God, and held that it was this very faith in his unique Divinity that by itself constituted “salvation”.

In the first century after Jesus’ death, *The Gospel According To Thomas* was widely circulated in its original Greek edition among some groups of early Christians; then it was translated into Sahidic Coptic (ancient Egyptian) in the third or fourth century C.E. A copy of this Coptic version found its way to the Christian monastery of St. Pachomius in Upper Egypt at the foot of Jabal al Tarif mountain near a village called Nag Hammadi. When, in the late fourth century, the order went out from the Christian authorities to burn all non-canonical books that might be suspect in doctrine, some monks from the monastery loaded a number of such books, including *The Gospel of Thomas*, into a large earthen jar and hid them away in a nearby cave for safekeeping.

For some reason, the books stored in that cave remained undiscovered for fifteen hundred years, when in 1945, a Bedouin peasant, searching for fertilizer, uncovered the jar and discovered its contents. Prior to his dawning awareness of the value of his find, a portion of the books were burned as fuel, leaving intact only thirteen of the long-lost leather-bound manuscripts, containing fifty-two tractates of early Gnostic writings, among them *The Gospel of Thomas*. It would be another eleven years before this document was translated and published in English. Due to the bickering of the scholars in charge of the lost Gnostic books, many of them would wait even longer to see the light of day. When, in 1956, *The Gospel According To Thomas* made its appearance upon the world stage once more, it was hailed as one of the most important scholarly finds to appear in centuries, one that would greatly influence the study of the teachings of Jesus for all time.

Many of the mystical sayings contained in *The Gospel Of Thomas* may appear to us to be merely rewordings of the sayings in the canonical Gospels, but scholars agree that this text is at least as old as those more familiar Gospels; some even assert that it is a precursor or source of the sayings found in the canonical Gospels. The sayings in *Thomas*, however, are declared “secret”, and appear to be addressed exclusively to Jesus’ sincere disciples rather than to an uninitiated public.

Jesus said, “It is to those [who are worthy of my] mysteries that I tell my mysteries.¹”

His “mysteries” consisted of the knowledge obtained during his “vision” of God. Jesus had experienced the ultimate Truth; he had known the Eternal in himself, had clearly seen and known It beyond any doubt; he knew that the Self of all beings was one, that the one Consciousness that lived as him was the one undying Consciousness of all. For the most part, however, those to whom he spoke were well-meaning religionists who were incapable of accepting the profound meaning of his words. The religious orthodoxy of his time, like all such orthodoxies, fostered a self-serving lip-service to spiritual ideals, and observed all sorts of symbolic rituals, but was entirely ignorant of the fact that the ultimate

Reality could be directly known by a pure and devout soul, and that this was the real purpose of all religious practice.

There were many other Gnostic documents in the collection found at Nag Hamadi, but while they are all of great historical interest, none possesses the intrinsic value of *the Gospel of Thomas*. Some of these Gnostic documents originated, apparently, among dissident Jews, and were grounded in Jewish mythology. Others seem to have been drawn from a number of widely diverse mystical traditions, including Indian, Persian, Greek and Egyptian. And, while some of their peculiar ideas were vehemently attacked and declared heretical by representatives of the established Christian Church, the Gnostics served nonetheless to stimulate the early Church Fathers to a formulation and clarification of early Christian theology.

It is impossible to briefly and categorically assess Gnosticism as a whole, for in the period between the 1st and 4th centuries, such a wide variety of beliefs and creeds were subsumed under the name, "Gnostic," that they cannot all be treated collectively or summarily. Suffice it to say that among the Gnostics, as among any religious group, there were perhaps some genuine mystics, or *knowers*, and undoubtedly a great many unenlightened who superimposed upon the declarations of the true mystics their own fantasies and misconceptions. We find, therefore, in the literature of Gnosticism, as in nearly all bodies of religious literature, an occasional instance of true mystical knowledge, and a preponderant body of pretentious and uninspired mythology.

That it was not only possible but incumbent upon men to attain direct knowledge of God was a basic tenet of all who professed Gnosticism, as their name implies; however, the literature produced by the Gnostics reveals, not surprisingly, that there were many more who sought this knowledge than had actually attained it. If one is to comprehend the vast literature of the Gnostics, therefore, one must be prepared to find but a few gems of genuine mysticism here and there amidst the inevitable and overwhelming excrudescence of superimposed speculations by those who were mere theologians and mythologizers.

Among the Gnostic hymns, prayers, and expository declarations by the anonymous mystics who claim to have attained the vision of God, is this, from the Mandaean tradition (ca. 2nd century):

From the place of light have I gone forth; from thee, bright habitation ...; an *Uthra* (angel or spiritual guide) from the House of light accompanied me ... and he turned upward the eyes in my head so that I beheld my Father and knew Him. ²

From the day when we beheld Thee, from the day when we heard Thy word, our hearts were filled with peace. We believed in Thee, Good One; we beheld Thy light and shall not forget Thee. ³

And this Hermetic prayer (2nd century C.E.):

Saved by Thy light, we rejoice that Thou hast shown Thyself to us whole; we rejoice that Thou hast made us gods while still in our bodies through the vision of Thee.

Man's only thank-offering to Thee is to know Thy greatness. We came to know Thee, O Light of human life; we came to know Thee, O Womb impregnated by the seed of the Father ... In adoration of Thy grace, we ask no other grace but that Thou shouldst preserve us in Thy knowledge (*gnosis*) and that we shall not stumble from the life so gained. ⁴

It was common, at that time, to speak of the experience of the absolute Godhead as "the Light," and to refer to the state of normal awareness within the manifested world as "darkness." We see this same terminology used by the Gospel author, John, as well. Here, as illustration, is a prayer from the Gnostic book, *Pistis Sophia* (3rd century C.E.), by one who had "seen" the Light of God, and now once again finds himself returned to the "lower" world of obscurity and darkness:

O Light of lights, in which I have had faith from the beginning, hearken now to my repentance. Deliver me, O

Light, for evil thoughts have entered into me. ... I went, and found myself in the darkness, which is in the chaos beneath, and I was powerless to hasten away and to return to my place, for I was afflicted. ... And I cried for help, but my voice did not carry out of the darkness; and I looked upwards so that the Light in which I had faith might come to my rescue. ... And I was mourning and seeking the Light that I had seen on high.

... Now, O Light of lights, I am afflicted in the darkness of chaos... Deliver me out of the matter of this darkness, so that I shall not be submerged in it. My strength looked up from the midst of the chaos and from the midst of the darkness, and I waited for my Spouse, that He might come and fight for me, and He came not. ⁵

Such a sense of alienation, upon descending from the vision of God, is certainly understandable. The mystic feels that he has fallen from his true home, his eternal identity, and now must dwell in exile in a world ignorant of its true Source. Compared to the state of awareness in which he knew himself to be the eternal Light of pure Being, the state of existence in the manifested world is a place of exile, a place dimmed by the darkness of ignorance; and he longs to return to that absolute state of Godhood which he has known to be his true Self. Yet never does he imagine that he is, even for a moment, actually separated from that eternal Selfhood; for he has seen, with a clarity and certainty far surpassing all worldly clarity or certainty, that all this world is God's, and that there is no other but He.

Unfortunately, however, the words of the mystics are often misinterpreted by the ignorant, who imagine that the "Light" and the "darkness" are two separate and irreconcilable realms, each governed by its own deity, one good, one evil. It is just this foolish sort of Dualist view, which the unilluminated theorists among the Gnostic community created, and which pervades much of the later Gnostic literature, consisting of endless cosmological mythologies and quasi-Biblical allegories.

These have, for the most part, only tended to confirm the harsh judgments made against them during those centuries by the Church Fathers and

others, including the (pagan) mystic, Plotinus. It is now clear that the greater portion of that discovered Gnostic literature represents a tradition counter to the true “gnosis,” or revelatory knowledge, and is a corruption of the authentic teachings of the mystics, as perennial perhaps as the mystical view itself.

How this corruption, or degeneration, took place can be illustrated by taking as a starting point an example of the clear expression of authentic mystical philosophy, such as this, attributed to Simon Magus (1st century C.E.), and preserved by Hippolytus:

The Great Exposition

There are two aspects of the One. The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought (*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists.

The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

Since He, Himself, brought forward Himself, by means of Himself, manifesting to Himself His own Thought, it is not correct to attribute creation to the Thought alone. For She (the Thought) conceals the Father within Herself; the Divine Mind and the Thought are intertwined. Thus, though [they appear] to be a pair, one opposite the other, the Divine Mind is in no way different from the Thought, inasmuch as they are one.

Though there appears to be a Higher, the Mind, and a lower, the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [the world] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two.

[Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [conceptually] divided as Higher and lower; generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence. ⁶

This brief explanation of the mystically perceived duality-in-Unity is, without doubt, the clearest and most comprehensible such explanation ever written; yet crystal clear as it is, there are few, it seems, who are capable of grasping its meaning. It is important to an understanding of this, and other such characterizations of the Absolute and Its Creative Power as Male and Female, to realize that such descriptions are merely poetic representations of what is *experientially perceived* in the mystical vision. Such descriptions are admittedly inadequate to the experience itself, for which no language or metaphor is truly apt; but these remarks of Simon Magus, a true mystic and contemporary of the apostle, Peter, represent the best that language can approximate to that ineffable knowledge revealed in the transcendent vision.

In the vision of God, the mystic experiences, through himself, the absolute Godhead. It is not separate from himself but *is* who he is; he experiences and knows *as* the Godhead. He is the eternal, motionless, Consciousness; utterly alone, without a second. Yet, *from* him, he is aware of the outflow of power, a radiance, which may be likened to that of the Sun's rays, or to that of a heart's love, which is projected as the multitudinous universe of animate and inanimate forms. From the vantage point of eternity, he experiences also the withdrawal of this radiation, much as a breath is indrawn following its expiration. From his absolute vantage point, he watches the cyclic manifestation and de-manifestation of the universe. How is it possible to describe to others such an experience?

He knows that the Godhead and Its Creative Power are one, yet he must differentiate between them; for the one is single, formless, and eternally constant, while the other appears as a multiplicity of form and is transitory. The Godhead he calls the “Father”; Its emanating manifestory Energy he calls the “Mother”—yet he knows, with a certainty that is possessed by no other, that they are one Being, one God, one and only one Reality.

When his mind descends from this “vision,” he is cut off, as it were, from that pure Awareness; he is returned once more to his worldly existence in time and space; but the knowledge of Oneness, the knowledge of his identity with the Godhead is retained. And the conviction is firmly established in his heart that he can never be separated from That from which nothing can ever be separated. His worldly form and all forms that can be perceived he recognizes as the projection of God. He lives in a world that is imaged forth from God; and he walks in that world as God, the eternal Self of all, and views all creation as his own dream-world, his own play, knowing that he is ever secure, ever alone, ever still, the ever-conscious Fountainhead of his own drama.

It is this state of *gnosis* which the Upanishads refer to as “Liberation” (*moksha*) and which the Gnostics called “Release” or “Salvation” (*apolytrosis*). The Gnostic sect of the Valentinians declared: “The cognition of the ineffable Greatness is itself the perfect salvation... To us suffices the knowledge of universal Being; this is the true salvation.”⁷ It is a liberation and release from the ignorance of one’s true nature, a release from the slavery of fear, passion and error, which those ignorant of their true, eternal Identity must unwittingly endure.

Another marvelous example of the expression of mystical vision among the Gnostics, which Hippolytus has preserved, is this, attributed to Valentinus (ca. 160 C.E.):

The Father existed alone, unbegotten, without place, without time, without counselor, and without any conceivable qualities..., solitary and reposing alone in Himself. But as He possessed a generative Power [the Mother, Logos, Prakrti, etc.], it pleased Him to generate and produce the most beautiful and perfect that He had in Himself, for He did not

love solitude. He was all love, but love is not love if there is no object of love. So, the Father, alone as He was, projected and generated [the world].⁸

We find, however, that the Valentinians, like many of the other followers of Gnosticism, soon distorted the concept of duality-in-unity and transformed it into an absolute Duality. Following in the tradition of Persian Zoroasterism (from the 6th century B.C.E.), the Gnostic scriptural authors translated the two complementary aspects of Reality into two independent and irreconcilable principles. Some, like the followers of Marcion (ca. 140 C.E.) or Mani (216-276 C.E.), declared that the two were eternally independent and antagonistic principles, one the power of Good and Light, the other the power of Evil and Darkness; and that the world was solely the product of the Evil and Dark force. Others, like the followers of Simon Magus and Valentinus, rightly viewed the Power of world-manifestation as an “emanation” of the Absolute, but hypostacized that creative Principle, and attributed to it a “will” independent of and rebellious to its original Source. The result is that Gnosticism, in many of its forms, came to assert a philosophy of Dualism, viewing the world, not as an expression or manifestation of God, but as wholly separate from God, and diametrically opposed to Him.

It would seem that, for all their talk of “gnosis,” many of the authors of the Gnostic Gospels were frauds who had not actually experienced the revelation of Truth of which they so glowingly spoke; for it is impossible to behold that vision without apprehending the singularity of Existence, the fundamental unity of God and His Creative Power. Indeed, the Gnosticism of the 2nd and 3rd centuries provides us with a clear example of how the mystical philosophy expounded by the authentic seers is invariably corrupted and distorted by deluded pretenders to mystical knowledge. It is the perennial hallmark of ignorance to see division, conflict, alienation, just as it is the hallmark of the true mystic to have attained the realization of unity, harmony, and integration.

The true mystic could never, even for a moment, declare this world to be separate and divorced from God. If he has truly known God, he knows that this entire universe is the manifestation of God’s will and is replete with Divinity. He could never assert the contrary, though

his head were battered and bleeding; and never, ever, could he assert, as do the pseudo- Gnostics, that this world is the creation of a second, and evil, Creator, whose will is antagonistic to its Origin and Source. The true mystic and sage, Plotinus, writing in the 3rd century of these pretenders to gnosis, stated the matter most clearly:

The one Divine Mind, in Its mentation, thinks Itself; the object of Its thought is nothing external; Thinker and Thought are one, unchangeably the same. ⁹

How could anyone say that [this world] is not a clear image, beautifully formed, of the Divine? ... Such a one could neither have fathomed this world nor have had any vision of that other [the Divine Mind]. ¹⁰

NOTES:

1. The Gospel of Thomas, 62
2. Jonas, Hans, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958; pp. 89-90
3. *Ibid.*
4. Pseudo-Apuleius, *Asclepius*, 41; *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268.
5. *Pistis Sophia*, ch. 32; *Ibid.*, p. 68
6. Simon Magus, *Apophysis Megale* ("The Great Exposition")
Quoted by Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutatio Omnium Heresium*, VI.8;
Adapted from Roberts & Donaldson, 1892, Vol. VI, pp. 208-210.
7. Creed of the Valentinians, according to Ireneus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.4.
8. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Heresium* VI.29.5ff.; Roberts & Donaldson, *op. cit.* 18.
9. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.1-2, Turnbull, 1934, p. 63.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

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36. THE MYSTICAL TRADITION OF ISLAM

A Compilation of Articles from the Mystic's Vision

by Swami Abhayananda

Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-26-2020

The Mystical Tradition of Islam

The religion of Islam was founded in Arabia by Muhammed (d. 632), whose book, the *Quran* or *Koran*, constitutes the final authority and credo for all who claim Islam as their religion. Though Muhammed claimed that the book was inspired by God, whom he calls *Allah*, it contains much that is derived from ancient Jewish and Christian sources. Muhammed set forth in the *Quran*, by the use of many anecdotes and commentaries, a number of moral precepts and social laws, which did much in the 7th century to transform a diversified group of lawless nomadic tribes into a united God-fearing nation. And while the *Quran* is essentially a book of moral principle and faith, it contains many statements by Muhammed which may be interpreted as mystical in nature.

Following upon the death of Muhammed, a number of devout mystics belonging to the Islamic faith appeared throughout the Middle East, spreading from Arabia to Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Turkey, and Afghanistan. They came to be known as *Sufis*, from the word for “wool”—apparently because of the woolen garments worn by these gnostics to set them apart as “knowers” of God. While the mainstream faithful of Islam were busily engaged in the spread of their religion through territorial conquest during the 8th and 9th centuries, the Sufis were teaching the pure love of God, and living an ascetic life aimed at realizing Him in the depths of their souls.

Among the best known and revered of these early Sufis were Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), Rabi'a Adawiyya, the slave-girl of Basra (d. 801), Dhu'n-Nun, the Egyptian (d. 859), Beyizid Bistami, the Persian (d. 874), and Abu'l-Husayn an-Nuri, the Iraqi (d. 907). All were great lovers of God, and each of them greatly influenced the mystical mood of their time. Their love of God took the form of a one-pointed yearning for union with Him, for the “vision of His Face”; and their writings often resembled the arduous outpourings of a

lover to his beloved.

For the Sufis, the path of love is the Way by which the soul makes the involute journey to the awareness of her own true identity. And the prayerful songs of love sung by the Sufis are the expressions of the soul's yearning to return in awareness to her eternal Source and Ground. She searches inwardly for her pristine state, her Beloved, her Lord; and subdues herself, dissolving herself, as it were, by reducing her own being to her pristine simplicity and ultimate non-being. She renounces all regard for herself, divests herself of all fascination with manifested phenomena, both inner and outer; and, drawn by a one-pointed love and desire for God, is brought at last to silence. Then the illusory duality of soul and God is no more; the awareness of the one Self dawns with supreme clarity, knowing who It has always been, knowing Its eternal freedom and joy.

Such a description of the soul's inner "pilgrimage" makes it appear a simple and clear-cut process, but it is the most difficult accomplishment that can be performed, for the ego-soul does not die without a fight. It wages a tireless and bitter warfare against its own attraction to God, and fights with all the fury and panic of a drowning man struggling to sustain his existence; it incessantly asserts its love of the manifested world and life, and restlessly strives to create a diversion from its path toward God. Torn in two directions, the soul suffers, on the one hand, the agonies of annihilation, and on the other, the painful prolonging of its failure to reach its avowed Goal. Only when it comes at last, by the grace of God, to that point where it surrenders all other objectives for God alone does it become capable of reaching its cherished Goal; divinely inspired by the desire for God alone, it makes that leap into the consciousness of universal Being.

In the writings of the early Sufis, and in particular, those of Dhu'n-Nun, this path of divine love for God, culminating in vision, or *gnosis*, is charted as a path (*tariq*) marked by several distinct advances, or stations. The entering upon the path originates with a call from God and the assent of the individual will to embark on the journey. This "call" is an awakening of the heart, which is affected solely by God's grace, serving to draw the wandering soul back to its true home and divine source. This awakening might be precipitated by the meeting with a *Shaikh* (spiritual Master), or through a reading of the words of one of the mystics who had traveled the path of divine love and reached its goal.

The actual journey along the spiritual path begins with the station of Repentance (*tauba*). “Repentance,” said Jalaluddin Rumi, “is a strange mount; it jumps toward heaven in a single moment from the lowest place.” A man may have led an utterly despicable life prior to the awakening of the soul, but once that awakening takes place, he immediately wipes clean the entire slate of the past, and utterly transforms his own mind and will by the intense remorse he feels for all the little acts of wicked selfishness performed theretofore. He is filled with shame and regret for every instance of hurt given to another, because his heart is now filled with pity and love for all humanity struggling to find the joy and understanding he has now found through God’s grace. Such remembrance of one’s own stupidity in the previous state of ignorance is also a great humbler of what pride one might otherwise be tempted to feel in the possession of that grace.

The next station is that of Faith or Surrender To God (*tawakkul*). The mental agitation resulting from fear for one’s own welfare, which may afflict the novice when he chooses to give all his thought to God, is dispelled by the calm remembrance that it is He who has called the soul to Him, and that He will nourish and provide for the body as well. Surrendering all thoughts of his own bodily welfare, he gives everything into the hands of God, and says, “Lead me wheresoever Thou wilt.” This attitude was expressed by Jesus to his disciples when he told them to take no thought for the morrow: “Do not worry and say, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. Seek first His kingdom and all these things shall be given to you.” This may lead to Poverty (*faqr*), and often does; but if this poverty is necessary to the freedom to contemplate God, so be it. To those who have been thus led to it, this poverty is the true and greatest wealth.

The next station is that of Patient Endurance (*sabr*), a great necessity for the soul called to the contemplation of God. Calm acceptance of the rigors of such a life is necessary to the stability of the soul, which must pass through many ordeals, and many temptations that arise in the mind. Next, and allied with Patient Endurance, is Joy In Affliction (*rida*). When the soul is free to focus its attention on God, it enjoys an inner bliss, which cannot be dislodged by any outward occurrence, no matter how unpleasant. Its joy is derived from a source entirely untouched by worldly pains or pleasures, and

therefore the soul remains unaffected by them, reveling solely in the proximity of the Beloved. The soul, burdened by afflictions, has only to remember God to rise above all earthly pain, and know the healing caress of imperturbable bliss.

However, following that sweet time, comes another, often referred to as “The Dark Night Of The Soul”; the Sufis call it *gabd*. This is a state of dryness and emptiness, when the soul, struggling to become completely selfless, egoless, has not yet reached the ultimate degree of extinction, and suffers the heavy sense of death, with no light of superconscious life yet visible. It is a dry, awful, sense of one’s own nothingness, one’s own emptiness, which may be likened to the darkness experienced while going through a dark tunnel when the light at the other end cannot yet be seen. The ego-self is withered, dried-up, and all but gone; but the greater Selfhood has not yet revealed Itself. The suffering soul feels great agony in the lack of both worldly and spiritual consolation; and worse, it imagines that it has been damned and relegated forever to its present hell, and thus suffers all the more.

Then comes the revelation of Love and Spiritual Knowledge (*mahabba* and *ma’rifa*). The soul awakens to an incredibly clear awareness that embraces both divine Love and Knowledge. It is an inner realization by the soul that the God it sought is all-inclusive Love, and the soul experiences that Love within itself. It knows that This is the sustaining Power and guide of all its life. And it vows to surrender all else for the sake of being filled throughout life with this perfect Love. With great joy, the soul is refreshed, and sings: “Thou art my God, the sole Father of my being, the sweet breath of Love that lives in my heart; and I shall follow Thee, and live with Thee, and lean on Thee till the end of my days.”

This experience of divine Love may be likened to the corona of the Sun; it is fully Light, yet it has a still deeper Source. And this Love, while fully complete, yet yearns for its own source, its own center of radiance; and so, while this Love is the fulfilling Light itself, it is drawn by longing to Itself. Says Rumi: “The hearts of the wise are the nests of love, and the hearts of the lovers are the nests of longing, and the hearts of the longing are the nests of intimacy.” The longing of the lover for God is often compared to that of a worldly lover for her beloved. The soul so blessed, or afflicted, with divine

Love has no other thought or desire but to reach her Beloved. She weeps sweet tears of love nightly and calls in her heart for death at her Beloved's feet. Like a moth drawn to a flame, she longs to be annihilated in her Beloved's embrace, and so to enjoy the ultimate intimacy of union with her beloved God.

It is this love-longing which leads to the station of Annihilation (*fana*). This is the profoundly transformative experience referred to in other traditions as *nirvana*, *samadhi*, or "the vision of God." For, at the moment the ego is extinguished, the eternal and all-pervasive "I" is realized. It is an experience that overturns all previous conceptions of God and the soul. Previously, there was a relationship: of the soul to God, the lover to the Beloved; but now, the ego-soul is no more. The false sense of selfhood, which is part of the illusion of phenomenal existence, has been erased, and only the Real, the One, exists. What shall we call It? The *Dharmakaya* of the Buddhists? The *Atman* of the Vedantists? The "One" of Plotinus? The Sufis call It *Haqq*, "the Real."

Scholars may imagine that a Buddhist experiences one thing, a Vedantist another, and so forth; but one who has experienced It, whether a Sufi, Christian or Hindu, knows that It is the final Truth, the only One. There are not different Unitys, one for each sect or denomination; there is only one One, and it is That which is experienced by Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Sufis alike. It should be obvious that, if there is such a thing as Unity, and if It can be experienced, then the experience must be the same for all; since Unity, by its very definition, by its very nature, is one. So what, if that One is called by different names in different lands! In every place and in every generation, new terms are ever being invented in the hope of elucidating the knowledge of Unity.

All phenomenal existence comes into being by the power of that One. This makes an apparent two; but it is really only one. The appearance of two is just the result of the "imaginary" juxtaposition of subject and object. But, of course, the subject and the object are the same One. It is this Unity that is realized when the soul reaches the station of *fana*. When the ego-mind is dissolved, having been drawn to its extinction by its own Source, there is no longer a subject-object relationship. There is only the Unnamable, beyond all subject-object predications. It is what has been called by the Sufis, *jam*,

or “Unity.”

The Upanishadic seers of this Unity declared that, “When one realizes Brahman, he becomes Brahman.” “When I died to myself,” says the Sufi, “I became the Beloved.” “I have ceased to exist, and have passed out of self,” said Rabi’a; “I am one with Him and entirely His.” It is from the standpoint of this experience of Unity that al-Hallaj declared, *ana’l Haqq*, “I am He”; and Bistami exclaimed, “Glory be to Me! There is nothing under my garment but He.” For, after such a revelation, if one is to speak the truth, he can no longer make a distinction between “me” and “Thee.” He knows full well that there is no other in all the universe but that one “I.” If he makes the slightest separation between “I” and “Thou,” he has forfeited the Truth, and re-established Duality. How strange and baffling, that only moments before, he was a soul on fire with love; and now he is enjoined by the Truth revealed to him to forget about souls and desire for union.

One might imagine this experience of *fana* to be the final station on the Sufi path, but, in Sufism, as in nearly every mystical tradition, there is recognized to be a further, final, station on the journey to perfection. This ultimate summit of spiritual attainment is called Retention of Identity (*baqa*). This is the state of one living continuously in the enlightened awareness of Unity. It is the state of the *jivanmukta* of Vedanta; the state of Buddhahood of the Buddhists; the Beatitude of the Christians; the Sagehood of the Taoists. *Baqa*, the final and ultimate station, is nothing less than the continuous retention of the awareness of Unity throughout one’s life; in every moment and breath, to live in the awareness of one’s true, all pervasive, Identity. This is the perfect life of freedom, contentment, and utter surrender of the soul to the will of God within.

We find this state of perfection described by the Taoist, Lao Tze, by the *Bhagavad Gita*, by the Avadhut, by the Christians, Zen Buddhists, and all the enlightened saints of all time; yet all have declared as well that this state is beyond description. “The Way that can be told is not the true Way,” said Lao Tze; it would make no sense at all to those unprepared for it by inner experience, and besides, no words can tell just what the life of such a man is like. It must be lived to know it. Such a man may teach, or he may not teach; he may beg for his food or he may labor for it; he may be fat or he may be thin; he may write books or he may appear a simpleton; but the joy

is the same. He may be a Sufi or a Jew; he may be a Buddhist or an Avadhut, a Christian or a Sikh, a farmer or a monk; but the joy is the same.

Naturally, it is very difficult for people at a lower station of knowledge to recognize or appreciate the view of one at the highest station, and it is because of this that the unilluminated so often deride and persecute the saints. On the other hand, one who has reached the final state cannot malign the preliminary stations as incorrect; for it was by the ascension of the path, by way of these very stations, that he arrived at his Goal. Once there, he sees that all the people of the world are at the station on the path to which they have individually arrived by God's Grace. How can he fault their ignorance? If anyone at all can understand him or even hear his voice, it is those at the stations most near to him. The great majority of men are far below him and must imagine him to be a madman. As Lao Tze has said, "If it were not the highest Truth, it would not be laughed at by the majority of people."

Within Islam, as within all religious traditions, there are individuals of varying degrees of spiritual experience and understanding, with the mystic standing at the highest degree, opposed at the other end of the scale by those pious and pretentious people whose understanding of spiritual experience is dim. These two contrary elements within any religious tradition tend naturally to conflict mightily with one another; and, in Islam, as elsewhere, this conflict has often resulted in the extreme persecution and martyrdom of the mystics.

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A Few Representative Islamic Mystics:

- I. Al-Hallaj
- II. Ibn Arabi
- III. Iraqi
- IV. Rumi

I. Al-Hallaj

One of the most persecuted martyrs of the Islamic faith was a man known as al-Hallaj. Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) was an Arab, born in the province of Fars, and spent most of his life in the city of Baghdad. He became a disciple of ‘Amr al-Makki and also of the famous Sufi teacher, al-Junayd of Persia (d. 910). At some time during his discipleship, al-Hallaj attained the realization of Unity, and realized his identity to be the Identity of the One. But when he spoke of it, he found that both al-Makki and al-Junayd had no inkling of such an experience and refused to acknowledge that what al-Hallaj said was true. It seemed to them quite contrary to the teaching of the Prophet, and therefore a dangerous heresy.

Al-Hallaj, around this time, became married to the daughter of a well-known religious teacher; but the girl’s father also became turned against al-Hallaj when he began speaking of the unity of his own soul with God. In al-Hallaj’s own home, his father-in-law regarded him as “a miserable infidel.” It was then he began writing in poetic verse of what he had realized, in order to make known to his fellow Sufis what he had known to be the Truth. He wrote of his search for God by the path of loving prayer, and his eventual experience of Unity, declaring, “I am the Truth,” “I am the Reality” (*ana’l Haqq*); but very few of his writings have survived, due to their being regarded as blasphemous and heretical in his own time.

In his writings, al-Hallaj attempted to explain that his saying, “*ana’l Haqq*,” was not heretical, by comparing his own saying to the similar declarations of Satan and the Egyptian Pharaoh in certain mythological stories. He argued that, whereas the “I” of the Pharaoh’s saying, “I am your highest Lord,” and Satan’s “I am the Highest,” referred to the personal “I,” the ego; his own “I”

was an “I” devoid of ego, referring not to the personal self, but to the one “I” of all. Said al-Hallaj:

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I; we are two spirits dwelling in one body. If you see me, you see Him; and if you see Him, you see us both. ¹

These words of his were very similar to those of Jesus, who had experienced the same revelation; and they met with a similar response. Both his old friends and teachers, al-Makki and al-Junayd, went to the *ulama*, the guardians of Islamic faith, and accused al-Hallaj of propagating a false and heretical doctrine.

The antagonism mounted against him by the *ulama* became too oppressive, and al-Hallaj was forced to leave Baghdad. He travelled for five years, meeting with other Sufis in Khurasan, and in Mecca. It is said that when he made pilgrimage to Mecca, four hundred disciples accompanied him. In the year 905, at the age of forty-seven, he took a boat to northern India, where the Muslim empire had already begun to establish itself. He traveled through Gujerat, Sind and the lower Indus Valley, presumably meeting with and teaching the Sufis living there. It is not known how long he stayed in India, nor if he had any intellectual intercourse with the Vedantic teachings, but he seems to have traveled extensively; and to have gone from there north to Khurasan, Turkestan, and Turfan, traveling with trade caravans, and eventually back to Baghdad.

Upon his return to Baghdad, al-Hallaj resumed his teaching and preaching to the people on the life of prayer and intense love of God. He led an ascetic and holy life and was revered by many. But again, opposition rose up from the orthodox legalists of the city, and al-Hallaj left for two years to remain in Mecca. On his return, the religionists—in particular, one Muhammed ibn Da’ud—brought action against al-Hallaj’s “heretical” doctrines. Both the Shiites and the Sunnis rallied against him, and, in the year 912, he was arrested and imprisoned. Nearly ten years were to pass before the high judge of Arabia (now Iraq) could be prevailed upon to sign the order for his execution.

Mansur passed those years in prison in prayer and contemplation, sometimes

writing of his ecstatic experiences of divine love, and expressing his knowledge of the oneness of God and the universe. Of his last days, the famous Turkish Sufi, Attar (d. 1220), later wrote:

When al-Hallaj was in prison, he was asked, “What is love?” He answered, “You will see it today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.” And that day they cut off his hands and feet, and the next day they put him on the gallows, and the third day, they gave his ashes to the wind...”²

On the day of his execution, March 26, 922, a great many of the people of Baghdad turned out to see his death; among them many of his old friends, teachers and disciples. It is told that he danced to the gallows, singing praise to God, as though he were going to a wedding festival. Some threw stones at him as he passed, but al-Hallaj had long foreseen and prepared for that day and was like a bridegroom going to meet his beloved. He had written, in his poetry, of the moth that, drawn to the flame, and caring nothing for its light or its heat, desires only to be merged in that flame. “Happiness comes from God,” he said, “but suffering is He Himself!” “Slay me, O my trustworthy friends!” he sang; “For in being slain is my life.” And, as he approached his executioners, he remarked, “It is now time for the lover to make the One single.”

It is reported that his death was long, and deliberately drawn out by his tormentors. First, he was beaten with scourges, and then his hands and feet were cut off; and he was left in that condition to bleed and suffer until the following day when he was hanged. Then, as if to rid themselves of his voice forever, his persecutors severed his head and burned his body, and dumped his ashes in the Tigris. Since that time, however, the name of al-Hallaj has become famous throughout the world, and his perfect love has been extolled in song over the centuries. One admirer, who had also known the experience of *ana'l Haqq*, wrote:

O my friends, you have wreaked your vengeance on al-Hallaj; but it is you who are the losers. What a gentle, perfect soul he was! “*Ana'l Haqq*,” he said. Perhaps if you had listened, you too would have learned to put an end to that ignorance which prevents you from saying *ana'l Haqq*. Far better had you murdered your own sense of pride and selfhood which stands like a cloud between you and your *ana'l Haqq*. But you will live in sorrow and struggle and bitter pain, while al-Hallaj is spread throughout space in blissful

joy, all pervading and sparkling with light. You tried to silence him, but his words are whispered even by the autumn winds. The lips of countless millions of sages praise him still. You cut off his head to wipe the smile from his face, but his bell-like laughter spreads from shore to shore, and his laughing eyes twinkle in the clear blue sky.³

Al-Hallaj's words of truth live still; in a modern-day drama on the life of al-Hallaj by the Egyptian, Abdu's-Sabur, a chorus sings:

We will go scatter in the plough furrows of the peasants what we have stored from his words. ...We will preserve them among the merchant's goods, and we will give them to the wind that wanders o'er the waves; We will hide them in the mouths of singing camel-drivers who traverse the desert; we will note them down on papers, to be kept in the folds of the frock; and we will make them into verses and songs. Tell us—what would have become of his words had he not been martyred?⁴

Thus, al-Hallaj lives on, as has Jesus, in the hearts and minds of all true lovers of God; and his name is a banner of victory for all who would declare the saving truth to men.

NOTES:

1. Nicholson, R.A., *The Mystics Of Islam*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963; p. 151
2. Schimmel, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975; pp. 62-64
3. Anonymous
4. Schimmel, *op. cit.*; p. 77

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II. Ibn Arabi

Islamic Sufism, in the 13th century, produced some of its most prized literature from the hands of some of its most revered saints; among them were: Attar (d. 1220), al-Farid (d. 1235), Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), Rumi

(d.1273), and Iraqi (d. 1289). As we shall later see, it was an equally illustrious period in the Christian and Vedantic traditions; indeed, the 13th century saw one of the most saint-filled and spiritually glorious periods in the history of the world. In the Muslim tradition, with which we are now concerned, it was Ibn 'Arabi who, through his philosophical writings based on his vision of Unity, set the tone for his time, and gave new life and understanding to the mysticism of the Sufis

Muhammed Ali Muhammed Ibn al 'Arabi al-Ta'i al-Hatimi, better known simply as Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), was born into a Muslim family in Murcia, Spain, on August 7, 1165. He was given religious training by his father, and while he was still quite young, his father took him to meet the famed philosopher, Averroes, in Cordoba. It seems the aging Averroes had heard of young Arabi's spiritual proclivities and had asked to meet him. During this youthful period in Spain, Ibn Arabi also came under the spiritual tutelage of two women, both elderly ladies well versed in mystical knowledge, to whom he became quite devoted. It is said that the young man used to spend his free hours in the cemetery, where he practiced his meditation on God.

After his education in Seville, Ibn Arabi became married and obtained a position as secretary to the governor of Seville. He was twenty years of age when he was initiated into the Sufi path. It is not known when he became illumined by God's grace and realized the Unity of which he was later to write; but we know that between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty, he traveled several times to Tunis in North Africa, where he visited a number of Sufi *Shaikhs*, and spent much of his time in studying and writing.

In the year 1200, when he was thirty-five, Ibn Arabi was in Morocco, and had a vision telling him to journey to Fez, and then on to Egypt. He traveled through Alexandria and Cairo and finally made his way to the holy city of Mecca. During the period between 1200 and 1206, much of which was spent at Mecca, he wrote a great deal, including portions of his magnum opus, *Meccan Revelations*. And by the time he went to Cairo in 1206, his reputation as a divine had already preceded him. However, the orthodox *mullas* of Islam living there were highly offended by his teachings and were openly antagonistic to him.

In 1210, he traveled north, and arrived in the city of Konya in Anatolia. There he was welcomed as a great teacher of Sufism, and his influence spread rapidly. He continued to travel about, visiting with celebrated divines, such as Shaikh Suhrawardi (1145-1234) in Baghdad, and eventually settled in Damascus in 1223, where he stayed for the remainder of his life. Having married twice before, he now married a third time in Damascus, and fathered three children; but the children for which he is best remembered are the products of his pen. He wrote *Bezels Of Wisdom* around 1230; and is said to have once remarked that he had written over two hundred and fifty books during his lifetime.

When reading the books of Ibn Arabi, one cannot help wishing that he had presented his thought in a more simple and direct manner, without the many effusive embellishments of Quranic myth and imagery. As in the case of Philo, whose Jewry gets in the way of his expression and makes it all a muddle, so Ibn Arabi's Islamic heritage gets in the way; and one must tramp through a vast swamp of verbiage to find the occasional gems of clear mystical insight. What he had to say was said in so much more precise a manner by Shankara, in so much more direct a manner by Ashvagosa and S'eng-hsin, so much more poetically by a great number of his own fellow Sufis, and with so much less verbiage by so many who have realized the Truth. But, it is because he represents an early attempt within the Islamic tradition to convey a rational formulation of the vision of Unity that he must be accounted one of the most influential thinkers of Sufism in any history of mystical thought.

We have already seen how the various seers of other traditions have described the experience of Unity in complementary terms, naming the Absolute and Its manifestory-Power by such terms as "Brahman- Maya", "Purusha-Prakrti", "Nirvana-Samsara", "Theos-Logos", and so on; the Sufis also had long framed their conception of the Reality in such complementary terms. Prior to Ibn Arabi, the martyred saint, Suhrawardi (1153-1191), who died in prison at the age of thirty-eight (not the Suhrawardi whom Ibn Arabi met in Baghdad), had written of the manifestation of the world from God in terms reminiscent of the Christian Fathers' exposition of the Logos:

The Essence of the First, the absolute Light, God, gives constant illumination, whereby It is manifested and brings all things into existence,

giving life to them by Its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the light of His Essence, and all beauty and perfection are the gifts of His bounty. To attain fully to this illumination is salvation. ¹

Ibn Arabi's contribution to mystical philosophy was his clarification of this concept of complementarity, and his employment of two distinct terms to distinguish the unmanifest Absolute from the manifested world of phenomena; (borrowing from al-Hallaj,) he calls them *Haqq* and *Khalq*. When we experience the Absolute in the transcendent state of consciousness, says Ibn Arabi, we are experiencing *Haqq*; when we experience the world of multiple phenomena through our senses, we are experiencing *Khalq*. "But," says Ibn Arabi, "the *Haqq* of whom transcendence is asserted is the same as the *Khalq* of whom immanence is asserted, although the one is distinguishable from the other." ² Thus, Ibn Arabi's vision and his doctrine, like that of the other great mystics of all religious traditions, was one of the essential unity of God and the universe.

For him, the world (*Khalq*) is simply the appearance of God (*Haqq*). It is simply our limited perspectives as individual perceiving entities that produces the appearance of multiplicity. "Multiplicity," he says, is simply due to the existence of different points of view, not to an actual division in the one Essence."³ And unity simply means that, "two or more things are *actually* identical but *conceptually* distinguishable the one from the other; so that, in one sense the one is the other, while in another sense it is not."⁴ "If you regard Him through Him, then He sees Himself through Himself; but if you regard Him through yourself, then the unity vanishes."⁵ "[Furthermore,] if you assert that only *Haqq* is real, you limit God [to transcendence]. And if you assert that only *Khalq* is real, you deny Him [altogether]. But if you assert that *both* things are real, you follow the right course, and you are a leader and a master in gnosis."⁶

Elsewhere, he says, in much the same vein:

Do not distinguish *Haqq*, lest you regard Him as separate from *Khalq*. Do not distinguish *Khalq*, lest you invest it with non-Reality. Know Him as both particularized and

unparticularized, and be established in Truth. Be in a state of unity if you wish, or be in a state of separation if you wish; if the Totality reveals Itself to you, you will attain the crown of victory.⁷

In the following passage, Ibn Arabi describes how, when the mystical vision of unity dawns, it is seen that the One alone exists—and that *It is* the many:

When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than God. ... Then you will see all your actions to be His actions and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence.

...Thus, instead of [your own] essence, there is the essence of God and in place of [your own] attributes, there are the attributes of God. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence but does not experience that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same.⁸

...There is no existence save His existence. ...This means that the existence of the beggar is His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence. Now, when this is admitted, it is acknowledged that all existence is His existence; and that the existence of all created things, both accidents and substances, is His existence; and when the secret of one particle of the atoms is clear, the secret of all created things, both outward and inward, is clear; and you do not see in this world or the next, anything except God.⁹

This vision is universal among the seers. It must be admitted that Ibn Arabi, by the 13th century, had access to the writings of the seers of ancient Greece, the Neoplatonists, the Christian Fathers, perhaps even of the Vedantists and Buddhists, and certainly of his Sufi predecessors. However, we mustn't imagine on that account that he was merely recounting a learned philosophical position. He had "seen" It, and spoke from his own direct experience, framing his words in the idiom of his own time and traditional affiliations. "Such knowledge," he said,

can only be had by actual experience, nor can the reason of man define it, or arrive at any cognizance of it by deduction, just as one cannot, without experience, know the taste of honey, the bitterness of patience, the bliss of sexual union, love, passion, or desire. ¹⁰

In his writings, Ibn Arabi strove above all to explain the identity of God and the Self for the benefit of all who sought to comprehend the Truth. Here are a few of his most penetrating remarks on this theme:

Know that whenever something permeates another, it is assumed into the other. That which permeates, the agent, is disguised by that which is permeated, the object. In this case, the object is the manifest [universe], and the agent is the Unmanifest, the Hidden. ¹¹

On Him alone we depend for everything; our dependence on other things is in reality dependence on Him, for they are nothing but His appearances. ¹²

The eye perceives nothing but Him; only He is to be known. We are His; by Him we exist, and by Him we are governed; and we are, at all times and in all states, in His presence. ¹³

Nothing but the Reality is; there is no separate being, no arriving and no being far away. This is seen in true vision; when I experienced it, I saw nothing but Him.

When my Beloved appears, with what eye do I see Him? With His eye, not with mine; for no one sees Him except Himself. ¹⁴

It is none other than He who progresses or journeys as you. There is nothing to be known but He; and since He is Being itself, He is therefore also the journeyer. There is no knower but He; so, who are you? Know your true Reality. ... He is the essential Self of all. But He conceals it by [the appearance of] otherness, which is "you." ¹⁵

If you hold to multiplicity, you are with the world; and if you hold to the Unity, you are with the Truth. ...Our names are but names for God; at the same time our individual selves are His shadow. He is at once our identity and not our identity... Consider! ¹⁶

In one sense the Reality is creatures; in another sense, It is not.
 ...Whether you assert that It is undivided or divided, the Self is alone. The manifold [universe] exists and yet it does not exist.¹⁷

Therefore, know your Self, who you are, what is your identity.
 ...Consider well in what way you are *Haqq*, and in what way *Khalq*, as being separate, other.¹⁸ He who knows himself knows his Lord; ...indeed, He is his very identity and reality.¹⁹

As for the theorists and thinkers, and the scholastic theologians, with their talk about the soul and its properties, none of them have grasped the Reality; such speculation can never grasp it. He who seeks to know the Reality through theoretical speculation is flogging a dead horse; ... for he who seeks to know It by any means other than the one proper to It, will never grasp It.²⁰

If men knew themselves, they would know God; and if they really knew God, they would be satisfied with Him and would think of Him alone.²¹

NOTES:

1. Schimmel, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions Of Islam*, Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975; p. 261
2. Affifi, A.E., *The Mystical Philosophy Of Muhyic Din-ibnul 'Arabi*, Cambridge, AMS Press, 1939; p. 21
3. *Ibid.*; p. 11
4. *Ibid.*; p. 11
5. *Ibid.*; pp. 10-11
6. *Ibid.*; p. 21
7. Austin, R.W.J. (trans.), *Ibn Al-Arabi: The Bezels Of Wisdom*, N.Y., Paulist Press, 1980/1980; p.125
8. Landau, Rom, *The Philosophy Of Ibn Arabi*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959; pp. 83-84
9. *Ibid.*; p. 83
10. Ibn Arabi, *Meccan Revelations*, I
11. Austin, *op. cit.*; p. 92
12. *Ibid.*; p. 98
13. *Ibid.*; p. 137

14. *Ibid.*; p. 108
15. *Ibid.*; p. 136
16. *Ibid.*; pp. 126-127
17. *Ibid.*; p. 88
18. *Ibid.*; p. 126
19. *Ibid.*; p. 153
20. *Ibid.*; p. 153
21. Landau, *op. cit.*; p. 79

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III. Iraqi

A younger contemporary of Ibn ‘Arabi, the celebrated Sufi poet, Fakhruddin Iraqi (1213-1289), was born in the village of Kamajan, in Persia (present day Iran). According to legend, he was famous in his region for his religious devotion by the time he was eight years old; and by the age of seventeen he was giving lectures on the scriptures to his schoolmates. As the story goes, he was drawn to the Sufi path when a group of wandering dervishes passed through the town, and he happened to hear their plaintive songs of divine love. Iraqi immediately left his studies behind, and went off with the Sufi band, wandering throughout Persia and into India.

In the city of Multan, in India, he met the Shaikh, Baha’ud-din, of the Suhrawardiyya Order, and became his disciple. Not long thereafter, he married the Shaikh’s daughter, by whom he had a son, Kabiruddin. For twenty-five years Iraqi lived in Multan under the munificent protection and guidance of his master, Baha’uddin. Iraqi was, by nature, a poet; and during his years at Multan he wrote a number of devotional songs; but his great masterpiece of poetry, the *Lama’at*, or “Glimpses,” which has brought him everlasting fame, was written some years later, in Anatolia (Turkey).

In 1268, when Iraqi was fifty-five, his old master, Baha’ud-din, died, and passed the succession of the Order to him. However, there was much

discontent and turmoil over this change of leadership, not only within the Order, but among the political factions of the area as well; and Iraqi decided it would be best to leave Multan. So, along with a few loyal friends, he journeyed by sea to Oman, on the coast of Arabia. There, he was received as a celebrity, and was soon made the chief Shaikh of the district. But Iraqi was not content to remain in Oman; instead, he set out for Mecca, and from there to Damascus, and onward north to Anatolia, to the city of Konya.

Konya was the city in which Ibn Arabi had spent some years of his life, and where Sadruddin Qunawi (d. 1274), Ibn Arabi's chief disciple, now lived. It was also the home of the famous Sufi, Jalal-uddin Rumi, about whom we shall hear more later. Iraqi quickly became the intimate friend of both of these revered Sufis, but most especially of Qunawi, who had a great influence on him intellectually. Qunawi, as mentioned, was the principal disciple of Ibn Arabi in this area; and he was also very actively engaged in the dissemination of Ibn Arabi's teachings, attempting to popularize the philosophy of unity taught him by his master. It was this philosophy, which was to become the foundation and rationale of Iraqi's most exquisite poetry, the loom upon which he would weave a tapestry of unparalleled beauty.

Ibn Arabi had been not only the teacher of Qunawi but had also become his step-father by marrying Qunawi's widowed mother; in addition, Ibn Arabi had bestowed on Qunawi the successorship of his lineage, and Qunawi was now the chief Shaikh of the city of Konya. He gave frequent lectures and wrote books explaining the mystical and metaphysical precepts of Ibn Arabi, and had a number of gifted, and later distinguished, disciples himself. His lectures on Ibn Arabi's *Bezels Of Wisdom* and *Meccan Revelations* were attended by Iraqi, who became thoroughly fascinated and inspired by the study of these works. Each day, after the lectures of Qunawi, he would, in a state of inspired joy, set down a few verses of his own, illustrating Ibn Arabi's teachings, and at last collected them in a book, which he called *Lama'at*, which may be translated as "Flashes," or "Glimpses" of insight.

When he showed his little book to Qunawi, the great Shaikh, after reading it, pressed it reverently to his eyes, and exclaimed, "Iraqi, you have captured the secret essence of Ibn Arabi's thought; your *Lama'at* is the very heart of his words!" Ibn Arabi, though a true mystic, had been of a metaphysical

turn of mind; he labored at great length to thoroughly explain the mystery of things. Iraqi, however, was a poet; he was able to express the thought of Ibn Arabi in exquisitely succinct gems of precision. He used the simple language of love to capture the essential truth of the complementarity of *Haqq* and *Khalq*, which Ibn Arabi had so elaborately articulated; and turned the intellectual abstractions of Ibn Arabi into immediately perceived fruits-in-the-hand. Where Ibn Arabi had hovered like a bee over the blossom of Truth, examining its fragrance, Iraqi settled in the flower's heart, and drank its nectar.

Destiny, it seems, had brought Iraqi to Konya, where he was to catch his "Glimpses" of the one Reality; but he was not to remain there for long. He had found favor with one of the local rulers, the Amir, Parwanah, who built for him a retreat in the town of Tokat, and so Iraqi lived and taught there for some years. But when Parwanah was suspected by the Mongol Emperor, Abaka, of consorting with his enemies, the Amir was executed, and Iraqi fled Tokat in fear for his life.

Arriving in Cairo, Iraqi met with the Sultan there, who became very favorably impressed with him and made him the chief Shaikh of Cairo, conferring on him exceptional honors. And when, after some time, he traveled to Damascus, he was treated in a similarly reverential manner there. But he was now old, and after about a year in Damascus, he became quite ill, and sent for his son, Kabir-uddin, who had remained in Multan. With his son at his side, he died at the age of seventy-eight, in the year 1289.

Here are a few selected verses and passages from his celebrated *Lama'at*:

Beloved, I sought You here and there,
 Asked for news of You from all I met.
 Then I saw You through myself,
 And found we were identical.
 Now I blush to think I ever searched
 For signs of You. ¹

By day I praised You, but never knew it;
 By night I slept with You without realizing it,
 Fancying myself to be myself;

But no, I was You and never knew it. ²

“O You who are so unbearably beautiful,
Whose beloved are You?” I asked.

“My own,” He replied;

“For I am one and one alone—
Love, lover, beloved, mirror, beauty, eye!” ³

I sought solitude with my loved one,
Yet find there is no one here but myself.
And if there were a “someone else,”
then, truly, I should not have attained her. ⁴

When I clutched at His skirt,
I found His hand in my sleeve. ⁵

I am the one I love; He whom I love is I.
Two, yet residing in a single body. ⁶

If I have become the Beloved,
Who is the lover?
Beloved, Love and lover—three in one.
There is no place for union here,
So, what is this talk of “separation?” ⁷

What He takes,
He takes with His own hand from Himself; What He gives,
He gives from Himself to Himself. ⁸

Hunter, prey, bait, and trap;
Candle, candlestick, flame, and moth;
Beloved, lover, soul, and soul’s desire;
Inebriation, drinker, wine, and cup—
All is He! ⁹

Is it You or I—this reality in the eye?
Beware, beware of the word, “two.” ¹⁰

“I” and “You” have made of man a duality.
Without these words,
You are I and I am You. ¹¹

He speaks; He listens.
 “You” and “I” are but a pretense. ¹²

When shall You and I divorce ourselves
 So that “You” and “I” are gone,
 And only God remains? ¹³

If You are everything,
 Then, who are all these people?
 And if I am nothing,
 What’s all this noise about?
 You are the Totality; Everything is You. Agreed!
 Then, all that is “other-than-You”—
 What is it?
 Oh, indeed I know, nothing exists but You!
 But, tell me, whence all this confusion? ¹⁴

He Himself speaks of Truth.
 He Himself listens.
 He Himself shows Himself.
 He Himself sees. ¹⁵

The world but seems to be,
 Yet it is only a blending of light and shade.
 Discern the meaning of this dream.
 Discriminate between time and Eternity.
 All is nothing, nothing.
 All is He. All is He. ¹⁶

Listen, riffraff: Do you want to be ALL?
 Then go, go and become nothing. ¹⁷

You are nothing when you wed the One.
 But, when you truly become nothing,
 You are everything. ¹⁸

Regard yourself as a cloud drifting before your Sun;.
 Detach yourself from the senses,
 And behold your intimacy with the Sun. ¹⁹
 If you lose yourself on this path,
 Then, you will know for sure:

He is you, and you are He. ²⁰

NOTES:

1. Chittock, W.C. & Wilson, Peter L. (trans.), *Fakhruddin Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, N.Y., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 120.
2. *Ibid.*; p. 124
3. *Ibid.*; p. 111
4. *Ibid.*; p. 95
5. *Ibid.*; p. 117
6. *Ibid.*; p. 125
7. *Ibid.*; p. 76
8. *Ibid.*; p. 96
9. *Ibid.*; p. 110
10. *Ibid.*; p. 77
11. *Ibid.*; p. 103
12. *Ibid.*; p. 80
13. *Ibid.*; p. 127
14. *Ibid.*; p. 99
15. *Ibid.*; p. 80
16. *Ibid.*; p. 119
17. *Ibid.*; p. 10
18. *Ibid.*; p. 112
19. *Ibid.*; p. 123
20. *Ibid.*; p. 120

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IV. Rumi

Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) was born in the city of Balkh, in Persia. His father took his family and fled Balkh in 1219, when the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan threatened the city. Jalaluddin's father, Baha'uddin, was a theologian and mystic, and it was he who molded the sensibilities of the young Rumi. It is said that, while the family was yet wandering through Persia, Baha'uddin took his son to meet the famous poet, Attar (d. 1230), who gave his blessings to Jalaluddin.

After long journeying, the family reached Anatolia, then under the rule of the Seljukid Turks, where they were relatively free of the Mongol threat. For a while, the family lived in Laranda (modern Karaman), where Jalaluddin was married and had a son at the age of nineteen. The father was called to a post in Konya in 1228, and took Jalaluddin along, his mother having passed away a few years earlier. Baha'uddin died a few years after they had settled in Konya, and Jalaluddin assumed his father's position as religious teacher to a small community of devotees there.

Jalaluddin studied the mystical writings of the earlier Sufi poets, like Sana'i (d. ca. 1131) and Attar, to whom he was later to acknowledge his debt, saying "Sana'i was the spirit, and Attar his two eyes; we have come after Sana'i and Attar." He was also taught and influenced by a friend and disciple of his father, Burhanuddin Mahaqqiq. But Rumi's unique soul, vision, and talent were his own. His latent mysticism and poetic exuberance were watered into full bloom by his meeting with a love-intoxicated dervish by the name of Shamsuddin [of] Tabriz.

In 1244, Jalaluddin met Shams Tabriz in the streets of Konya, and was drawn by him to the fervent life of mystical love. His relation to Tabriz was like that of a loving disciple to his Guru or Pir. Jalaluddin transferred all his ardent devotion to Shams, as only a spiritual lover can do, seeing him as the Divine manifest in his life for the sake of providing him with companionship with God. However, Rumi's sons and other family members were so jealous and outraged by the hold that Shams had on Jalaluddin's affections that they murdered Shams and threw his body in a well. At least, so the story goes. Rumi filled the void in his life by

writing a book of poems of love and longing, called *Divani-Sham s Tabriz*, sometimes addressing them to Shams, and sometimes identifying with him.

His verses are full of the imagery of love, but it is the love of the soul for God. Rumi is the epitome of the mystical lover; but he also knew the “union” with his Beloved and speaks with rare beauty of this mysterious “marriage” of the soul and God. In his great masterpiece, the *Mathnawi*, which consists of twenty-six thousand verses in the Persian language; he garbs his painful love longing in colorful tales whose characters range from animals to legendary folk-heroes. In a rhapsody of ecstatic poetry, he tells the secrets of the mystic’s heart in a thousand imaginative ways. Rumi was a natural poet; his thoughts poured out in a most amazingly varied and exuberant flood of imagery and poetic melody. For sheer effusiveness and breathtaking profundity, there has never been another like him.

The city of Konya was a gathering place for mystics, artists and intellectuals from all over the Muslim world; and Rumi lived there, famous in his own day as a spiritual Master and teacher, drawing Sufis from all over, who traveled to Konya just to meet him. After his death in 1273, Rumi quickly became recognized throughout Islam as the *Maulana*, “the Master”; and his *Mathnawi* has since been hailed as “the Persian Quran.” Today the Order of the Whirling Dervishes, who trace their lineage to him, sing and dance to his songs; and the very name of “Rumi” brings tears of love to the eyes of all true lovers of God throughout the world.

Here are just a few selections from his voluminous writings:

When I speak of adepts, He is the Master.

When I peer into my heart, He is the Beloved.

When I look for peace, He is the Pacifier; when I enter the battlefield, He is my Sword.

When I come to the celebration, He is the wine and the sweet meats.

When I enter the rose-garden, He is the Beauty.

When I descend into the mine, He is the Diamond and the Ruby.

When I dive into the ocean, He is the Pearl.

When I wander in the desert, He is the Flower growing there.

When I ascend into the heavens, He is the Star.

When I climb the mountain, He is the Summit.

When I burn in sorrow, He is the Flame.

When I ready myself for warfare, He is my Commander and my General.

When I rejoice at feast-time, He is the cup Bearer, the Musician, and the Cup.

When I write to my Beloved,
He is the Ink, the ink Well and the Paper.

When I awaken, He is my awakesness;

When I sleep, He is my Dream.

When I search for words to my songs,
He gives rhymes to my memory.

Whatever image you may paint in the mind,
He is the Painter, and He is the Brush.

If you seek a "greater," He is Greater than greater.

Leave off language and books; let Him be your Book.

Be silent, for on every side is His Light.

And even though you pass beyond all boundaries,
He, the Judge, is there. ¹

Whatever I say in exposition and explanation of love,
When I come to love I am ashamed of that explanation.

The speech of the tongue may elucidate,
But speechless love is yet more clear.

The pen hastily writes, but when it comes to love, it shatters in two.

When the intellect tries to explain love, it becomes helplessly stuck, like an ass in the mud.

It is love alone that can give proper expression to love:

The proof of the Sun is the Sun itself; if you seek proof, then do not avert your face from Him.

Those loves which are for appearance only are not love -- they are a disgrace!

Such shows of love must be abandoned.

In its place, real love must grow.

All that is other than the true "I" must be slain. ²

I complain of the Soul of the soul, but in truth I am not complaining; I am only relating.

My heart is saying, "I am tormented by Him," and I am all the while
laughing at its poor pretense.

Be just with me, O Glory of righteousness.

O Thou who art the Throne and I the threshold of Thy door!

Where, in truth, are the threshold and the Throne?

In that place where the Beloved is, where are "we" and "I"?

O Thou Soul who art free of "we" and "I,"

O Thou who art the subtle Essence of the souls of men and women,

When a man or woman unites with Thee, Thou art that One.

when their individuality is obliterated, Thou alone art.

Thou didst contrive this "I" and this "we" only so that Thou mightest play
the game of worship with Thyself,

So that all "I's" and "Thou's" should become one Soul, immersed at last in
the one Beloved. ³

It happened that we made a journey without "we."

There our heart blossomed without "we."

That Full-Moon which was hiding from us Put Its Face to our face without
"we."

Without dying in grief for the Beloved,

We were reborn in His grief, without "we."

We are always intoxicated without wine.

We are always happy without "we."

Don't remember us as "we."

We are our own remembrance, without "we."

We are happy together, proclaiming

"Oh, we shall always be without "we."

All doors were closed to us.

And then the path of Truth

Opened without "we."

...We have passed beyond right and wrong,

Beyond both prayer and the sins of existence, without "we." ⁴

...The universe was not there; only I was.

Adam wasn't there; only I was.

That light of unity was "I."

I am the Everlasting, and I am the prophet Elias.

The universe gets its light from me.

Adam took his form from me.

I am the All-Wise, the Knower, the Judge of all judges. ⁵

Here, listen to my boast: every moment

I say that I am the water, and not the jar [containing it].

I am not the ocean [of phenomenal existence], neither am I
not the ocean.

I am the leaf of every breeze-filled tree.

I am the wetness of the water in the stream.

Don't laugh like children!

You do not understand my state.

Read a chapter from me, unfold a secret from her
[the Creative Force],

I am drunk of that wine forbidden by the lawgivers.

I am drunk of the wine of oneness; I am free of color and smell.

I am oblivious to this place; my mind is elsewhere.

I don't know vinegar from sugar; I don't know a vat from a jar [i.e., he sees
only God everywhere]. ⁶

If there is any lover in the world, O Muslim, it is I.

If there is any believer, infidel, or Christian hermit, it is I. The wine, the cup
bearer, the musician, the instrument and the music,

The beloved, the candle, the liquor and the inebriation, it is I. The seventy-
two religious sects in the world

Do not really exist; I swear by God every religious sect—it is I.

Earth, air, water and fire: do you know what they are? Earth, air, water and
fire—and the soul as well; it is I.

Truth and falsehood, good and evil, pleasure and suffering, beginning and
end,

Knowledge, learning, asceticism, devotion and faith—it is I.

Be assured that the fire of hell and its flames,

Paradise, Eden and the angels of heaven—it is I.

Heaven and earth and all they hold: angels, demons, and men— it is I. ⁷

NOTES:

1. Nicholson, R.A., *Divan-i-Shams Tabriz: Selected Poems of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Cambridge, 1998.
2. Winfield, E.H., *The Masnavi*, London, 1898.
3. *Ibid.*

4. Nicholson, *Divan-i-Shams; op. cit.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Mathnawi; op. cit.*

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End of Volume Three-