

*For Those
Who Call
for Light*

Learning how to think about religion

by
Dennis Leroy Stilwell

author of

Loves Sacrifice:

*Witnessing the Self-Revelation of the Divine Person,
30 years with my Spiritual Master, Adi Da*

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Dedication

for my Spiritual Master, Adi Da Samraj



74.

I bow down to the Divine Heart-Master, Adi Da Samraj,
That Most Beautiful Form, the Master of Discrimination,
the Master of Understanding, the “Bright”, The Light Itself
(Above all lights), Who Is the Light to those who call for Light,
and Who Is the Realizer in all those who Realize Him.
May You be Pleased to Take Your Seat in my heart at all times.

May You ever Dwell in my heart.

—from the *Ruchira Avatara Gita*

A free-rendering and re-speaking by Adi Da Samraj
of the traditional *Guru Gita* (Song of the Guru)

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Light, Religion, and Spirituality

YES, THERE IS LIGHT. There is the absolute Light that is, indeed, Perfect Love-Bliss Itself. That Light is Conscious, non-separate, Love-Bliss-Full, an inherent attribute of undifferentiated Consciousness Itself, the always indivisible Prior Reality.

Light first comes to some in near death. It speaks to them, they say, as a Personal Presence of infinite Love. This Light in near death may be their introduction to experience beyond present-day convention.

Light may come to others as an overwhelming descending Force, drawn down in a culminating moment of desperation, a mass of Light that resolves their concern by breaking open their feeling and overwhelming them with Brightness. For a moment, they say, they were lost in an Onliness of Light and Love, making everything else by comparison totally insignificant.

Light will sometimes envelop those in deepest meditation or prayer, immersing them in Brightness, dissolving the boundaries of separate-self, perhaps even drawing them into egoless Love-Bliss-Being Itself, Consciousness without limitation.

And Light, in response to the heart's need for an indefinable intervention, may spontaneously fill any room or circumstance with the force of visibly radiant blessing—even if that need was never consciously spoken, and perhaps even only subliminally known.

Religion may be about many things—a search for God, right relationship to That One, a formula for social morality—but, most fundamentally, if religion is to be about the ultimate

nature of existence, then it is necessarily about Light and Consciousness: Reality Itself. Maybe that's "God," maybe not. Maybe there is no "findable" God. But if religion is not ultimately about Consciousness and Light, or Reality Itself, what can it be about? A search for morality or purpose? Some kind of hope for an answer to a problem with vulnerability? An answer to the question, "Why?": "Why is there suffering? Why is there death? Why is there anything at all?" What if all of existence were already and only Light? And what if that Light were Conscious?

People often make a distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion seems to be more the collective enterprise, the externals, the organization, the rules, and the philosophy applied to what a group of like-minded people perceive as Truth. Spirituality seems more individual, personal, internal, private, yet linked to the Universal and to the Common of all others and the world. We hear many people say, "I'm spiritual but not religious." When we include esoteric spirituality, this difference must also account for the "Spirit" in spirituality. That is, religion is about the transmission of culture (through form, structure, rules, beliefs, etc.) and spirituality is about the literal, tangible, and direct transmission of Spirit or Being or Awakening. We can use these differences to further our thinking.

Religion is both absolute and relative. Absolute, because if it is about Universal Truth, as it proposes itself to be, how could it be otherwise? Relative, because until such Truth is realized, there are only the myriad points-of-view of the many religions themselves (and people within those religions). The principal question for religion, therefore, is, what is the Truth that accounts for the innumerable, and relative, points of

view? What is the Truth that includes all of Reality, nothing left out, nothing ignored?

Spirituality is both relative and absolute. Relative, because it proposes itself as personal truth, which is inherently bound by point-of-view. Absolute, because the many personal truths are proposed to reflect a single Universal Truth: “many paths, one Truth.” The principal question of spirituality, therefore, is, what, if anything, do the infinity of personal truths have in common with any proposed Universal Truth?

Karen Armstrong, author of *A History of God*, proposes that common to all religions is the admonition to compassion. This text proposes that deeper than compassion is Light, and that the fundamental context for both compassion and Light—the temporal and the infinite—is Consciousness, Consciousness as inseparable from Light, Conscious Light as the immediate and ultimate Source and Substance of existence itself.

How does the cumulative knowledge of humankind point to this conclusion?

Has our thinking actually evolved such that this is now obvious?

Where is the sufficient collective human experience to indicate this is true?

Responding to these three questions is the purpose of our “learning how to think about religion.”



About Intelligence in Religion

SOME PEOPLE THINK THERE IS LITTLE, if any, intelligence in religion. I disagree. But where is it? Can we “think” our way to it? Can we “feel” our way through it? Should we “believe” our way around it? Do we “doubt” our way out of it? Is religion even important enough to bother thinking, feeling, believing, or doubting anything about? If we look at the news, polls, studies, and op-eds about religion, the response to this last question is “Yes. Definitely.” Religion is important to the majority of people, regardless of formal religious affiliation or personal religious belief. Religion seems to be a persistent universal impulse in the human being.

Intelligence, we know, is founded in a life lived—more than just our thinking, feeling, believing, and doubting, or even the sum of these. A life lived includes the motion of all that has come before us and that exists presently alongside us—in our own culture and in other cultures around the world. To find the intelligence in religion, therefore, we must look to not just any isolated faith or spiritual endeavor or culture, rather, we must look at them together, at the same time, just as the world now presents them to us.

The source of circumspect for this book

For most of the past 30+ years I have lived at a distance from the sphere of ordinary society and conventional livelihood. My life has been centered around service to the great Spiritual Master Adi Da Samraj. At different times I was His photographer, editor, ashram manager, and many other functions. Adi Da required just about everything of those serving around Him. High on that list of requirements

were seriousness, passion, engagement, and intelligence. By intelligence He meant our native intelligence, our application of clear observation and thinking, our freedom from religious fantasy and idealism, and our ability to see things as they are and reality as it is. He called the totality of this, “discriminative intelligence.” Most of us didn’t have it. And so we had to learn it. And we did—from Him. His instruction took the form of thousands of hours of talks, conversation, personal interaction, His correction of our service to Him and the way we related to Him, and His commentary on our understanding of the religious cultures we had come from or otherwise had interest in. The breadth and depth of His Instruction is unimaginable. It covered all of life, love, mind, body, sex, celibacy, science, religion, spirituality . . . in other words, He brought everything to bear in His consideration with us of Reality and Truth.

This book focuses on discriminative intelligence in religion. It is not a textbook about a religion, religions, or comparative religion. It is about how we bring our minds to religion. It is also about accounting for both religious experience and the esoteric spiritual process as we think about religion, not merely the philosophy, theology, or exoteric prescriptions. It is the result of my life with Adi Da, and it is founded in His Teaching. It is my attempt to pass on His Wisdom about religion and spirituality as I have understood it and integrated it into my life.

I sincerely hope the rather brief discussion that follows can live up to its promise to bring you, the reader, even the faintest spark of wanted light, or—if it is what you are looking for—an introduction to Light Itself.



The Problem in Thinking about Religion

THERE IS AN INHERENT PROBLEM in thinking about religion. Religion—as a set of propositions about God or ultimate reality, or as a code of moral behavior, or as prescriptions for ritual—is itself a product of thinking. So just “thinking about thinking” is not a complete approach to either thinking, or religion, or Reality.

It is a truism to say that religion begins with religious experience—perhaps some revelation, or a life-changing event, encounter, or observation, or whatever way we may define it; but once we move on from experience we enter the realm of mind, thought, and the processes of reflection. The great 11th Century Christian theologian Saint Anselm described theology as “faith seeking understanding.” That is, faith (for whatever reason or however established) is a given, an *a priori* certainty, which naturally seeks greater knowledge of its own essence. But how did that “faith” come about? Simple thought? Life experience? A sudden revelation? Is logical deduction, or philosophy—without supportive life experience—truly sufficient to establish faith, or would that logic or philosophy be more a reflection of a kind of doubt that “seeking to understand” is meant to overcome? To properly think about religion it is important to understand its origins in experience—both in the sense of religious “revelation” and ongoing religious “experience” and evidence.

In contrast to theology, religious philosophy (thinking about religious thinking) does not necessarily begin with

either faith or experience—it restricts itself to thought, reason, rationality. So to properly think about religion we also have to understand the process of mind. And “mind” is its own experience such that when we start thinking about religion we have to be particularly careful to ground that thinking with something outside itself, outside the mind and its recursive process of self-reflection. What is that touchstone? The body itself, direct experience and Consciousness itself, because without some sort of grounding outside itself, thought (indeed any self-enclosed and self-referring system) can generate some pretty far out propositions, self-justifications, and interesting, though not necessarily valid, conclusions.

Today there is also a special problem with thinking: thought in “Western” culture has evolved along a certain path that has resulted in a unique brand of materialist philosophy, epitomized by scientific materialism. That is to say, beginning in the 17th Century and following through the “enlightenment” thinkers, the industrial revolution, and the establishment of the scientific method, a kind of materialistic, object-oriented, linear causality type of thinking has come to dominate. When this mental process is applied as systematic thought to religion (devoid of present experience) one can arrive at all sorts of rationale both for and against, all of which may in some sense sound reasonable, while also perhaps being absurd. However profound a theology or philosophy that may result, all the conclusions and rationales lack a force that only genuine experience provides. Religion, as self-admitted atheist Daniel Dennet says in *Breaking the Spell*, risks moving from belief, to belief in belief. That is, religion without experience jumps from the abstract to the even more abstract.

For reasons we will discuss in later chapters, neither thought nor experience is the ultimate domain of religious realization. However, both enter into the religious or spiritual process, and both can be intelligently understood.

Rather than think about religion with a pure “rationality” or with the presumed “objectivity” of experimental science, I propose we look at it with “discriminative intelligence.” Let’s take in the whole picture by accounting for both the thinking and the experiencing as they manifest all around the world.



A Common Ground

IT SEEMS THAT REGARDLESS OF THE DETAILS of its philosophy or its propositions about a God, religion, in its origin, is the accounting for profound experience by either the founder of that religion (like Joseph Smith Jr. and Mormonism) or that person's followers (like those around and after Jesus of Nazareth), or both (as with Gautama Buddha and his disciples). Continuing from its origins, we can say, too, that the ability of a religion to maintain itself with authenticity and fidelity is dependent upon the present-time direct, personal, immediate experiential access to whatever original revelation or experience. In the past and most often, maintaining such authenticity and fidelity was the role of whichever tradition's most serious monks, nuns, and renunciates. Thus, for example, the LDS Prophets and Apostles serve such continuity within Mormonism; the continual appearance of Buddhas do so within Buddhism; and Christian Saints have done so within Christianity. Were it not for such Prophets, Apostles, Buddhas, and Saints, religions would become just religions of religion, rarely more than beliefs in belief.

Although as human beings we are all born with essentially the same psycho-physical structures for thinking and experiencing as the Prophets, Buddhas and Saints, it seems that most of us don't have profound revelatory or mystical experiences. Right? Does this mean that we left out in the cold to just believe such revelation happened, or is happening—to someone else—and that we are “saved” or “liberated” by it? Saved from what? Liberated from what?

Hasn't reality proven itself a much greater taskmaster than religiously proposed vicarious salvation or liberation would have it? Don't we each have something more significant than belief to accomplish? What does it mean to be a Prophet, a Buddha, or a Saint (or a Taoist Master, or Mystic, or Shaman), for example? Is that required of us to be authentically involved in religion?

Even though we all have the same psycho-physical structures for thinking and experiencing, it is also true that our cultural upbringing can affect and limit both. We don't just experience; we interpret our experience. We filter and process our experience based on both our past personal experience and our preset cultural or mental constructs for understanding experience. This cultural upbringing also molds our motivation, putting a type of blinder on our horizons and expectations. However, whether our experiencing is bodily via sense-experience or intuition, mentally via reflection on our own thoughts, or directly in consciousness, our actual experience, even the most ordinary, is fundamental for us to consider.

To talk about our actual experience would seem to be totally straightforward, and we would think that our experience is simply what it is, so obvious to us that anyone could simply listen to us describe it and accept our account. Not so. Especially today, when the Western, post-modern, scientific materialist world has aggressively imposed limits on both our experiencing and communicating.

The lack of personal experience and ignorance of the great devotional, mystical, and transcendental realizations of religious esotericism in Christianity, Hassidism, Sufism, and especially the Eastern religious and philosophical traditions, has meant that the turn taken by Western philosophy toward a

dissociated rationality and intellectual “enlightenment” in the 17th century became an aberrated imposition of certainty and power whereby a presumed (and now supposedly “proven”) separate self of “I” became the universal center of existence.

René Descartes (1596-1650 C.E.) is often credited with the origin of this “modernity.” He is famous for his “cogito”: *I think, therefore I am*, which he describes as meaning, because I am a thinking thing, I exist; even if I doubt my existence, because I am doubting (thinking), that still proves I exist. Or at least “I,” as a “thinking something,” does. Having established what he considered an irrefutable fundamental certainty of the existence of a “thinking something,” he goes on (in part IV of his *Discours de la méthode*) to differentiate that “thinking something” from the physical body and then to establish the necessary existence of a separate, perfect God. In *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry*, the great British philosopher Bernard Williams (1929-2003 C.E.) points out the limitations of Descartes’ reasoning as critiqued by his contemporaries and subsequent philosophers: What about the awareness itself? How do you get from awareness of thinking to “I” am the one thinking? What is “thinking”? Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855 C.E.) proposes that Descartes’ “cogito” (with which he disagrees) is not interesting so much for its logic as it is for its psychological appeal. Most of us hear *I think, therefore I am*, and simply say, “right”; it seems so self-evident.

I don’t want to get too far ahead, but the point is not the content of one’s awareness, perception, thinking, or experience; the point is the presumption of “self” (the sense of identity with a separate something) and “other,” in contrast to the examination of consciousness itself. This need to identify a “self” (in relation to the body, other, “God,” or

anything) highlights our curious relationship to ignorance and uncertainty—in general, we don't like it, and try to remedy or avoid it. Yet some consider the passage beyond the need for certainty, especially the certainty of the thinking mind and seeming separate self, to be essential for human spiritual growth.

Many spiritual traditions of yoga and meditation propose to bring an end to the incessantly thinking mind by stopping the mind altogether. When the mind is stopped, what is there? These yogis, meditators, saints, and mystics often report (among other phenomena) a dissolution of the sense of personal existence into a feeling of unity or identity with everything. Some even report abiding in a limitless consciousness without self reference whatsoever. There are varying degrees to this process of transcending the mind, but transcending the mind is fundamental.

Likewise in Buddhism, where mind defines “self.” People commonly mistake the “Tantra” of Buddhism to be about the use of sexual energy for the purpose of enlightenment. This is not true. Tantra is about the direct realization of non-difference. However self-evident “I think, therefore I am” may be to the objectified and objectifying mind of Western philosophy, it is only in the firmly grounded transcendence of this presumption (or culturally enforced conclusion) that Tantra can even begin. In Buddhism, as explained by one of its great masters, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Tantric path cannot even begin until the practitioner has understood the illusion of separate self.

Similarly, in the Reality Way taught by Adi Da Samraj, genuine spiritual life cannot be initiated until the devotee is more sympathetic to the truth of egoless and non-separate

existence than he or she is to the presumption of his or her own existence as a separate and independent self.

So do “you” (as an independent, separate self) actually exist? No, you don’t. “You” are a presumption. And belief in that presumption has enormous consequences.

* * * * *

What is religious experience? And what is the religious impulse?

Is our essential religious experience (and impulse) related to “God,” or the Greater Reality, or is it perhaps something more humble? A clue unveils itself when we look at religion’s ultimate offerings: salvation and liberation—Eternal Life in the Christian Tradition, escape from the perpetual cycle of birth and life and death and rebirth in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and a continued form of life in some hereafter or other in most religious paths. Mortality is our common human experience, and, with only rare exception, our common human question is what to do about it. Isn’t religion, then, with promises of salvation and liberation, first and foremost the impulse to answer the question of what to do about death?

For the most part, whatever a religion may look like, however it may have originated, whatever it does, whatever its theology or philosophy, it is a “man-made” address to death, to mortality, to our common human vulnerability, an address to the fact that everybody dies. As human beings, we inherently must come to terms with our own mortality. Thus, the religious impulse, as related to death, is, in some real sense, “built in,” because it’s true: we all suffer and die.

There are five fundamental, and fundamentally different, experiences (or concepts) of death that have entered into the stream of religious consideration:

Scientific materialism – when you’re dead you’re dead

Exoteric and dualistic religion – heaven and hell, damnation and salvation

Taoism – natural cycle of forms and energy

Buddhism, Advaitism – reincarnation and transcendence

Adidam – reincarnation and prior transcendence

In *The Aletheon*, Adi Da has described what He calls the “Common Wisdom Inheritance of humankind.” On pages 193-201 He defines five progressively inclusive points of view, or dispositions, relative to Reality. We can use these in our thinking about the relationship between religion and death.

These progressively inclusive points of view are:

Conventional Monism—*The “world” (or cosmic Nature) is all there is, and it is a material Unity.*

Conventional Dualism—*The “world” (or even the Totality of Existence) is made up of a number of principal pairs (whether simply natural or, somehow otherwise, hierarchical).*

Primary Dualism—*The Totality of Existence is an apparent combination of only two Primary Realities (Energy and Consciousness).*

Secondary Non-Dualism—There is only Energy and its apparent changes.

Ultimate Non-Dualism or Primary Absolute Monism—There is only Consciousness, Self-Existing and Self-Radiant, inclusive of all apparent modifications of Itself in the apparent forms of Energy and Light.

Now let's consider a way of looking at religion and death with these points of view in mind.

Scientific materialism

This is the current, yet already over a century out of date, dominant general philosophical approach to reality. Once limited to the Western culture where it developed, it now encroaches into thinking around the world, if only in the form of its resultant object-acquiring attitude: unrestricted consumerism.

In scientific materialism everything is some sort of discrete object that can be “objectively” observed by a separate discrete observer or subjectivity. This is the hard-and-fast view of a subject-object reality. However, Einstein's 1905 special theory of relativity, then his 1915 general theory of relativity, followed by the progressive elaboration of quantum theory, quantum mechanics, and theoretical physics, have firmly rendered this subject-object perspective obsolete. Yet, despite the popularity of science fiction based on quantum theory, somehow people in general still seem to be ignorant of the implications quantum things bring to their ordinary life and religion—except, of course, nuclear power, nuclear accidents, the threat of nuclear terrorism, and the possibility of nuclear war.

The scientific materialist perspective asserts that when you're dead, you're dead. Period. End of story. There is no “soul” or psyche separate from the body to continue in any form whatsoever. Medical “scientists” of this persuasion also propose that any sense of consciousness is merely a function of brain activity. A flat-lining brain is a non-functioning brain, is a body without consciousness.

(That is, until, like Harvard professor Dr. Eben Alexander, author of *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, you personally experience something different. Aside from Dr. Alexander's later interpretation (which many take issue with) of his experience while in a week-long, deep, meningitis-induced coma, he reported the persistence of a lucid conscious state.)

However antiquated, provincial, and ignorant (meaning technically out-of-date, self-protective and self-localizing, ignorant of or deliberately ignoring evidence to the contrary), the scientific materialist perspective dominates much of our cultural and academic reasoning today, and its proponents are quite vocal in opposing other possible modes of thinking.

To put this in religious terms, there is no God. Everything is a material unity. This is "Conventional Monism."

Christianity and other dualistic-exoteric religions

The first step away from scientific materialism, but often existing curiously side-by-side with it (and so related to it) is a view some may call "dialectical"; that is, the world or universe is made of hierarchical pairs such as man-God, self-soul, soul-God, self-not-self, good-evil, etc. If someone holds this expanded subject-object, yet materialist-like view, their religion, religious experience, and religious participation will (generally) necessarily be limited to the exoteric modes of belief, ritual, and social morality. This describes most all exoteric forms of religion. Thus, as in Christianity, death is countered with belief in an "afterlife"; in that afterlife there is the possibility of a Heaven or a Hell; the ultimate solution to death is "eternal life"; and eternal life is "salvation."

Within this dualistic perspective, however, there also is the possibility of entering into a profound process of submission

of self (or soul) to whatever is conceived to be “higher,” like God or Being. Such submission, profoundly engaged, may begin the transformative processes of esoteric spirituality and metaphysics that have produced the great Shamans, Saints and Mystics of humankind, West and East. This dialectical religious disposition is “Conventional Dualism.”

Jainism and Samkhya

There is a religious tradition in India called Jainism and a philosophy called Samkhya. Both propose that two fundamental qualities comprise the world: Consciousness and Energy, or “Purusha” and “Prakriti.” Consciousness is a non-conditional, yet also individual, “self,” while Energy includes the body-mind, all objects of the body-mind, and the world itself. Part of the Jain’s spiritual practice is a severe asceticism, or discipline of the body-mind, through which the practitioner strategically seeks to separate Consciousness (self) from Energy (the body-mind) in order to realize “Purusha,” or Consciousness Itself. Because the body-mind is only a passing modification of energy, death is therefore inconsequential and transcended in identification with Consciousness. Because these two primary characteristics of fundamental reality (Consciousness and Energy) characterize the concerns of Jainism and Samkhya, this approach is called “Primary Dualism.”

Taoist Naturalism

The Taoists have been extremely keen observers of energy in nature. Everything for them can be seen as a process in energy, not merely “object” relations. Death for the Taoist is participation in a perpetual cycle of appearance and disappearance and the changing of forms. Death is, therefore,

not a terminal event. The greater a Taoist's awareness of energy and its transformations, the greater his or her participation in the higher source of appearances. An ultimate Master, in some Taoist thought, is said to be one who has attained participatory identity with fundamental Energy such that, in effect, he or she has become immortal as that Energy. To put this in religious terms (though not Taoist terms), all of Reality (or "God") is Energy. This perspective is "Secondary Non-Dualism."

Buddhism and Advaitism

Buddhism grew out of Hinduism. Advaitism is a branch of Hindu religious philosophy. Reincarnation is a fundamental tenant of both Buddhism and Hinduism; it is, in essence, a fact of life. For a Buddhist or Hindu, death is only a transformation within the cycle of birth and life and death and rebirth. Within the esoteric schools of Advaitism and Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism (to which much of Tibetan Buddhism belongs), meditation is one of the ways to prepare for death. In profound meditation one moves beyond the limits of the body-mind, even beyond identification with the separate self altogether. Ultimately, in these traditions, there is no "solution" to death. The pattern of energy, appearance, relationships, and psyche with which we are identified (which we call "self") has its own inherent force of continuance, of which the physical body is just the visible part. Death, however real it appears when we are identified with the presumed separate body-mind-self, is ultimately realized to be akin to illusion. There is no death because there is no "one" who dies (or any separate self to die). Although the pattern of energy and psyche we mistakenly called "I" may persist

forward in time and resume apparent “self”-awareness when it re-associates with Consciousness, in Reality, just as there is no separate “one” to die, neither is there a separate “one” that reincarnates.

Within these traditions, Consciousness is the Ultimate and Single Principle of Reality and everything is a modification of Consciousness Itself. Fundamental Energy, or Light, is intrinsic to Consciousness Itself. To describe this Indivisibility Adi Da uses such terms as “Self-Radiant Consciousness Itself,” or “Self-Existing, Self-Radiant Conscious Light Itself.” Vajrayana Buddhism uses the phrase, the “Clear Light of Reality.” This orientation is “Ultimate Non-Dualism,” or “Primary Absolute Monism.”

Adidam and prior transcendence

There is a final, principal observation we must make about religion, and indeed all of life. We see that religion is a search for a solution to death. Isn't all of life? Perhaps we feel this in more positive terms, like striving for Happiness, or Truth, or Freedom, but would we be involved in any kind of search if there weren't some kind of end to life, to our present condition? Doesn't death give us a reason to “get on with it” and find an alternative to the suffering, disease, unfairness, suppression, unlove, unhappiness, discontent, complaint, etc. that we find around us and as part of ourselves? Who would not procrastinate if he or she had infinite time?

Nonetheless, from the above discussion, we also see that regardless of appearances, Consciousness, Self-Radiant Love-Bliss-Being, is, as Adi Da says, “always already the case.” No search is required for this to be so. Therefore, all seeking cannot help but miss the point and not notice what is “always

already.” Sometimes this can be a very subtle, almost unnoticeable error.

How can one realize what is always already the case, already True and Truth if one doesn’t yet “get it”? How does one not seek for It? We will discuss this in the chapter “Gurus, Teachers, and Spiritual Masters.”

* * * * *

What about the non-religious experience of death? What about the extraordinary experiences reported in near-death resuscitations?

Books on the subject indicate that there are somewhere around 15 distinct characteristics common to most near-death experiences. Let’s look at four of these:

- 1) a separation of consciousness from the body and sensation of floating above the body;
- 2) being able to view and hear what is going on in the environment from above;
- 3) a tunnel with an indescribable bright white light at the end;
- 4) a sense of a loving Presence associated with the white light.

Even though such things as meeting other helpful beings and deceased relatives, life review, and a decision to return to the body may also comprise the experience, these four especially argue for the Greater Reality and how we interface with it in our presumed limitation as a separate self.

The first two characteristics are particularly interesting because they very directly counter today’s materialist view that our thoughts and mind are mere products of the brain, hardly different from any other organ function. That’s sort of

true, but not 100 percent. Thoughts are especially mechanical, patterned, and reactionary in that mind—as processes of the “conscious,” “subconscious,” and “unconscious”—is similarly patterned through our accumulated life experience. But how can people perceive from a point of view that is not their body (which is a predominant characteristic of near-death experiences)? These people report exact descriptions, both visual and auditory, of what was going on in the hospital, on the operating table, at the scene of the accident, or wherever “death” came upon them. Their eyes were closed, they may have been under anesthesia, they may have been severely injured and unconscious, the heart had stopped. Science has yet to propose an explanation for such continued perception. Yet there was, in detail. “Individual” consciousness persisted, with even seemingly impossible visual perception and extraordinary situational awareness.

Consciousness is associated with the body-mind, not identical to it or a result of its functioning. We, as consciousness, are identified with the body-mind. We, as consciousness, presume a localized point of view and identity. This presumption can be inadvertently disrupted, as in the near-death experience, or it can be understood and transcended. The localized perspective we call “I,” however, is just that, and only that: a localization, a contraction from . . . what? Infinity, Adi Da says, because Consciousness is unqualified and without limit. Until we Realize the undifferentiated non-separate Space of Consciousness Itself (where there is no “I”), “I” remains localized, animating “myself” as whatever presumed self-definition or limitation “I” has assumed at the time.



Heaven, Houdini, and Kierkegaard

This chapter is a discussion about some characteristically Western cultural responses to death.

HEAVEN AND HELL. Although there are political dimensions to the juxtaposition of Heaven and Hell, such as control of social behavior and imposition of morality through the evocation of fear and threat of punishment (and these very elements often enter into the criticisms of religion by many atheists, as they did with Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) let's set politics aside and look at these from a different angle.

A good friend and former ordained minister with 18 years of ministry in the Episcopal Church, said to me, "You know, it's unfortunate, but it was certainly true in my experience: most adult parishioners only had the most superficial, Sunday-school understanding about their Faith." What about Heaven, then? Is it a place above the clouds somewhere where we eventually go? Is it a physical place? A "spiritual" place? Is it any place at all?

Like God, the existence of Heaven can't be "proven." It may be reasonable to postulate a place like Heaven, but a serious discussion about it, in and of itself, is both impossible and beside the point. The point is the experiences people have that make them think there is one.

For eons people have communicated with supernatural beings, entities, and deceased friends and relatives. Where were these beings, entities, friends and relatives? Heaven? Hell? Purgatory? Another dimension in time? A higher or

lower frequency of vibratory existence? A parallel universe to our own apparent physical one? Some other plane of consciousness?

Unless the experience of every one of these people (including me, most of my friends, and several hundred thousand others throughout history) is the expression of some recessive gene for psychotic auditory, visual, and relational experience, asking “where” these beings, entities, and deceased friends and relatives exist when they’re not relating to human beings is a natural question.

Western religion proposes a simple answer in line with its theology and institutionalized myth: Heaven, generally—or purgatory—for the deceased relatives and other “good” people. Other than “angels,” institutionalized monotheism generally ignores supernatural beings and entities (or may attribute them to something related to evil or “satan”), but other, more nature-oriented religious persuasions in the West, such as Paganism and Metaphysics, certainly have no problem with their existence and don’t necessarily worry about “where” or what dimension they inhabit. And, ultimately, just as there is no truly separate “you” or inherently separate “object,” neither is there an absolutely separate definable place.

Are some of these extraordinary experiences and other reports of visitations to heaven-like or hell-like places in dreams, psychic states, and mystical transports, the result of aberrant brain chemistry, self-induced hypnosis-like apparition, or clinical psychosis? Of course! Are they all? Of course not! Is our experience of them influenced by our beliefs and culture? Most often.

Are even less exaggerated states of consciousness and religious or meditative experience reflections of physiological

processes and brain chemistry? Certainly, and even possibly related to our genetic coding as discussed in geneticist Dean Hamer’s 2005 book *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into our Genes*. How could we physically perceive or experience anything if such physiological mechanisms weren’t at least at some point involved? Then again, there also are all the subtle electromagnetic-like fields and happenings in and around the body and brain that have yet to be scientifically accounted for, including the individual consciousness that seems to function and experience outside and independent of bodily states.

Given the limitless possibilities of experience and the equally limitless possible interpretations of experience, the traditions of Ultimate Non-Dualism or Primary Absolute Monism teach that experience is not the point—not even “religious” or mystical experience, neither having such experiences nor not having them. Consciousness stands prior to the body-mind, but (for most of us) in mistaken identification with it. However, Consciousness Itself, which is non-separate from and identical to the totality of Reality Itself, is necessarily and simply the “thought-free Mere Witness.” Thus, relative to experience of any kind, the admonition in these traditions is to neither seek nor avoid experience; rather, as expressed in Adi Da’s “The Five Reality Teachings”:

Merely Be the Witness-Only, Always Already Self-Abiding In and As the Always Already Priorly egoless, and Intrinsically “point-of-view”-less, and Perfectly “objectless”, and Perfectly searchless Not-“knowing” That Is Consciousness Itself, no matter what arises or does not arise.

Harry Houdini (1874-1926 C.E.), the great American magician and escape artist, was also known as an anti-spiritualist. Later in his life he took to debunking mediums and psychics. As a magician, he had a keen eye for the “tricks of the trade,” and he never found a medium or psychic he couldn’t expose as using fraudulent techniques. What does this mean? That he didn’t find a genuine medium or psychic? That all mediumship and all psychic phenomena are bunk? That there is such a psychological need to believe in the “afterlife” that there is ample opportunity for amateurs and charlatans to make a lucrative business out of it? Or does it mean that genuine mediums and psychics avoid such public exposure? Or perhaps that communication with deceased loved ones is principally a natural phenomenon occurring spontaneously between those with strong emotional ties, and not particularly subject to willful evocation?

Lawrence LeShan, Ph.D. is one of the most well-known and respected modern researchers of psychical phenomena. In his 2009 book, *A New Science of the Paranormal*, he summarizes the development of Western rational thought and makes a strong call to recognize its limits when dealing with non-ordinary phenomena that involve consciousness. On page 63 he describes the paradox that he and any serious practitioner of esoteric spirituality must confront:

Impossible events do not occur. Therefore, if a scientist is faced with the fact that an impossible event has occurred—our daily fare as psychical researchers—the paradox must be resolved. This can be done only by redefining reality in such a way that what was previously impossible now becomes possible. If the theory must bow to the brute fact, we

must be clear as to what is the theory and what is the fact. The paranormal [and esoteric spiritual] event is the fact. Our definition of reality, which decides for us what is possible and what is impossible, is the theory.

Then on page 87:

[We must] get over the idea that science is only a matter of controlled experiments done in a laboratory. Geology, astronomy, anthro-pology, and ethology gave up this belief, and they seem to be doing quite well. Science is not a matter of statistics and control groups. These are sometimes relevant and sometimes not. Science is an unusually obstinate attempt to think clearly about a subject and to study it with the relevant methodology.

[We must] get over the Enlightenment ideal that all the universe is rational and that there is only one meaning to that word and that everything works on the same principles. This idea has bitten much more deeply into our culture than is generally realized. No one objected very strongly when Hegel wrote, "The real is rational and the rational is real." We must get over the idea that we know how things basically work and that therefore there are no astonishing surprises in store for us. We must give up this concept as Max Planck did when he studied the quantum segment or Einstein did when he studied the macrocosm. Both made progress by allowing themselves to be surprised.

LeShan shows, through examples from thousands of scrutinized accounts, how the paranormal phenomena most people have experienced at one time or another are manifestations within consciousness that demand a new definition of reality. He then speaks about the laws of these manifestations, such as when someone appears to us (as an apparition) to warn us of danger; or when we hear someone “telepathically” speak to us, telling of some life-threatening situation they are presently in; or how someone who has recently died appears to us either in vision or in a dream. If you have not had such experiences yourself, then it is almost certain you know someone who has. Le Shan notes that these phenomena generally only appear between people who already have a strong feeling-emotional connection, and that often the content of the communication (the situation) also has strong emotional content.

In *Love's Sacrifice* I describe the psychic communication I had with my father when he died. Also, I remember having had a dream as a young man about a former lover. In the dream she came to me, dressed in a plain, sheer, flowing white gown, seeming to drift across a furrowed farmland. I hadn't seen or thought of her in years. I only had heard that she had gotten married and had a child. A few months after the dream I happened to run into her husband. He was at a Sunday market with their little girl. I asked about Vicky. He told me the horrible story of how just a few months before, she had been visiting her family at their farm in Kansas, staying alone in a small cabin in one of their family's fields when one night two men broke in, assaulted her, then brutally raped and murdered her. I was so sorry.

Although I was deeply saddened, her husband's account explained everything about the dream. The incident and the dream had happened at the same time.

I have many other personal stories of similar connections and communications (not all around death), which, for me, often occur within the dream state. Reality is immeasurably more than just the physical, and even the mental.

* * * * *

Søren Kierkegaard is considered one of the great writers of the Western philosophical tradition and is noted for his perspective about how religion, in contrast to having to be “reasonable,” needs to be passionate—a life of intense engagement, a kind of love, a gift from God. Kierkegaard is sometimes called “the father of existentialism.”

I am not an expert on Kierkegaard, but something I heard in a lecture about his relationship to a woman named Regine Olsen caught my attention and I think is interesting to include in our discussion about reactions to death.

Apparently Kierkegaard deeply loved Regine. They became engaged, but then he broke off the engagement for what still remain unknown reasons. Here are some comments from his *Journals* about this:

It is so hard; my last hope in life I had placed in her, and I must deprive myself of it . . . so deep a wound. I have always ridiculed those who talked about the power of women, and I still do, but a young, beautiful, soulful girl who loves with all her mind and all her heart, who is completely devoted, who pleads—how often I have been close to setting her

love on fire, not to a sinful love, but I need merely have said to her that I loved her, and everything would have been set in motion to end my young life. But then it occurred to me that this would not be good for her, that I might bring a storm upon her head, since she would feel responsible for my death. I prefer what I did do; my relationship to her was always kept so ambiguous that I had it in my power to give it any interpretation I wanted to. I gave it the interpretation that I was a deceiver. Humanly speaking, that is the only way to save her, to give her soul resilience. My sin is that I did not have faith, faith that for God all things are possible . . . my sin has never been that I did not love her. If she had not been so devoted to me, so trusting, had not stopped living for herself in order to live for me—well, then the whole thing would have been a trifle . . .—O, if I dared return to her, and even if she did not believe that I was false, she certainly believed that once I was free I would never come back.

Women I know tell me that they see in this self-confession the familiar story of a man's ambivalence toward commitment. It reveals to them a man's characteristic fear of intimate emotion, both of the woman's and of his own. Both of these—fear of commitment and fear of intimate emotion—are, they say, the external dramatizations of a man's fear of death. This seems to be clear to the woman involved; not so clear to the man. Fear of death is fear of surrendering oneself to ecstasy.

When my professor pointed out Kierkegaard's statement "My sin is that I did not have faith. . .", he stated that if

Kierkegaard had had enough “faith”—meaning religious faith—he would have married Regine. But our yet youthful, passionate, engaged Kierkegaard could not go through with it.

How does religious “faith,” passionately lived, intensely engaged enter into this story? And where was its limit such that Kierkegaard backed out? What does “God” have to do with making marriage possible for him? Let me pass on a bit of Adi Da’s Wisdom about love and fear: it is the passing through this very crisis that allows a depthful religious or spiritual process to begin. It is, He says, the crisis of persisting as love in the face of death.

Absolutely everyone and everything we love dies. Everything we become attached to or are dependent upon can, and indeed does, get taken away. What will we do in the face of this obvious fact of life? Retreat from it? Try to ignore it? Deny it? Get angry? Grieve forever about it? Go shopping? Have another ice cream? Or will we stay engaged, remaining in relationship and loving through it? Will we persist in our loving regardless of circumstances?

As we observed before, this fact of life, this problem of death, is integral to religion. Yet it is just a fact, not necessarily a problem. Until death is truly understood, however, it is, for most people, a problem.

So if Søren Kierkegaard were a young man today and a practitioner in Adidam, discussing with his men devotee friends his ambivalence about marrying Regine, they might lightly joke with him about his fears of women and intimate emotion, but they would remind him that such fear is unproblematic, merely to be noticed and observed. Then, because it is essential to spiritual practice that in emotional-sexual intimacy one must consciously always move beyond this fear, they would remind him of Adi Da’s admonition to

allow himself to be moved by his attraction to Regine into self-forgetting whole-bodily ecstasy with her. They would advise him that ultimately the only resolution to such fear—the fear of ecstasy and death—is the Realization of Love Itself, as Love, as inclusive Reality Itself, as Adi Da Himself, non-differently beyond the illusion of the separate one who inevitably dies. And, because men can easily get rather philosophical about love and relationship, they might add that until such Realization is actually true of him, not merely idealized (because he understands it in principle), the exercise of self-transcendence and living as love in all relations and under all circumstances is a fundamental discipline in his practice.

You are born into an experiential circumstance in which all kinds of apparent separations can take place, harm can come to you, you can die, and people you depend on in an emotional way can be separated from you or can be indifferent to you. You are in a vulnerable position. What human beings must realize is a Condition of Unity with What is Alive, What is Life.

Therefore, you have to Awaken to a fundamental emotional sense of being connected to a Reality that does not kill you, does not separate from you. This is what esoteric consciousness is about, fundamentally.

Merely having "religious" beliefs or imaginative ideas of "God" is not sufficient to really cure the emotion of vulnerability. There must be actual Real-God-Realization and actual Realization of Unity with that Infinite Life—direct Realization of the Fullness of

Life, of Love, Self-Radiant Energy and Self-Existing Consciousness.

Real God is simply the All-Pervading, Self-Existing, and Self-Radiant Reality, Itself. When you get out of the mood of contraction and into That Unity, then That Force and Being begins to Change you and Reveal to you the Realities of Life and Demonstrate Influences that are forms of Blessing, Grace, Help, and Awakening.

—Adi Da Samraj



Nonsense, Violence, and Truth

IT IS THE YEAR 2012. We humans still want to think of ourselves as rational beings. Long ago we even began calling ourselves *homo sapiens*: thinking or knowing man. But do we really deserve such a self-honoring epithet? Have we earned it? For many people, the way we relate to religion belies significantly less intelligence than implied in our likely biased self-assessment. Yet whether we are chimps, champs, or chumps; simians, saints, or sots, religion seems to be a perennial preoccupation of the species.

Whoever can make you believe in absurdities, can make you commit atrocities—Voltaire (1694-1778 C.E.)

Sometimes one finds the above phrase by this famous French philosopher rewritten in its converse: “If you are willing to believe in absurdities, you will be willing to commit atrocities.” The Dalai Lama could easily have said this about the Chinese disdain of Tibetan culture and the atrocities committed in their 1949 takeover of that country. Most of the world has said this about Hitler’s disregard of the Jews and his attempt to systematically exterminate them during World War II. Western European, British, and American governments seem to have passed similar judgment on the indigenous peoples they encountered in their explorations of the “New World,” Africa, Australia and New Zealand. But Voltaire was commenting on the Christianity of his era, accounting for the history of violence already perpetrated in the name of religion, such as the crusades, the various inquisitions and religious wars, and the then present-

time practice of selling indulgences. But is his observation true? What about religion is absurd? Virgin births? Supernatural beings? Raising people from the dead? Original sin? Reincarnation? Is there anything about religion that is not absurd? We'll discuss this and more in subsequent chapters, but for now, let's go beyond these outer cultural markers to the heart of matter—the two fundamental pillars of human absurdity: belief in ethnic and gender inequalities, and belief in a separate self.

We are all human beings. We are one species. Modern genetic science proposes that as human beings we are all descended from a small group of humans in Africa. Based on the analysis of mitochondria DNA, geneticists further say that we all have the common ancestry of a single mother: a woman from southern Africa (they call her mitochondrial Eve). Moreover, humans who migrated out of Africa also have the gene-markers of a single father, from northern Africa. We literally are all brothers and sisters to each other. There is greater genetic variation among individuals than there is among what we now consider ethnic groups.

Reflecting on Voltaire's observation, if someone can make you believe that your ethnic (or gender) group is superior to any other ethnic (or gender) group, then they are making you believe an absurdity. And if they can make you believe that absurdity then what follows—and what has followed—is the warring history of mankind: the atrocities of war, slavery, segregation, apartheid, economic and political subjugation; ongoing genocides and every kind of inhumanity our species perpetrates on others of its kind: torture, murder, rape, and on and on.

If we are indeed rational beings then we are required to stop believing in the absurdity that there is any kind of ethnic or gender superiority. Of course there can be the individual variations and cultural differences that are part of any plural society, but these are not inherent inequalities. They are more like family differences. The ultimate truth of our manifest existence is that we are all one person.

What inequalities or superiorities do some religions seem to insist on? Are they real? Are they defensible? Is it time to let them go? Each of the three monotheistic religions of the “Book” (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) propose that it is the unique bearer of Truth and that their adherents are in some way the chosen people. How can this be so? Over the centuries many great minds have argued for such differences, many against. Contemporary author Yossi Klein Halevi has another point of view: “all the great religions are in effect denominations in one great religion.” My Spiritual Master, Adi Da, has observed how all of humankind’s activities, including religion, reflect stages in its impulse to infinite life. All religions, He says, therefore, comprise a single “Great Tradition,” with each religion reflecting both its stage of development in the unfolding of the fulfillment of that impulse and the unique point of view inherent in that stage.

The most fundamental absurdity we all insist on believing, though, is the existence of a separate self. Nearly everyone believes it. But it is an absurdity. Belief in that absurdity guarantees fear. *Wherever there is an “other,” fear arises*, it says in the *Upanishads* of India. In fear, we seek security. Seeking that security, we commit the principal atrocity of suppression of self (of love, of pleasure, of relationship, of

freedom), and then the suppression of others (war, killing, exploitation).

What would happen if human beings stopped believing these absurdities of fundamental difference and separateness?

- 1) We would acknowledge our prior unity.
- 2) We would practice universal compassion.
- 3) We would stop war and instead cultivate cooperative peace and tolerance.
- 4) We would stop killing other humans and animals.
- 5) We would guarantee food and shelter to all human beings on earth.
- 6) We would cease to exploit other beings and the environment itself.

What about religion itself? What “God” and what religion are we talking about?

- ◆ The Yahweh of Abraham and Moses of Judaism?
- ◆ The God and Christ of Christianity (and which Christianity)?
- ◆ The God denied by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud?
- ◆ The Beingness of Paul Tillich and other existential religious philosophers?
- ◆ The al-Lah of Muhammed of Islam?
- ◆ The Brahman of Hinduism?
- ◆ The Guru as God in Hinduism and Advaitism?
- ◆ The Nirvana of Buddhism?
- ◆ The Tao of Taoism?
- ◆ The Great Spirits of indigenous cultures around the world?
- ◆ The God and Beings and Forces of Metaphysics?

Instead of pursuing the path of merely “thinking” about religion and “God,” suppose we take a different tack. Let’s ask the question, “Have you ever ‘seen’ God?” Excluding a flat atheistic “no,” the following are some illuminating answers:

- 1) “Yes, I see ‘Him’ now as clearly as I see you standing before me.”
- 2) “No, but I believe.”
- 3) “Yes—in my feelings of love, the magnificence of nature, and by the results of ‘His’ grace in my life.”
- 4) “Yes. I have been brought before God in transports of Divine Ecstasy.”

There is no right answer, of course, but the responses do characterize different spiritual qualities:

“1” and “4” are the ageless responses of the great Saints and Mystics of humankind. There is no doubt of God. There is no mere belief in God. God is real, palpable, and personal.

“2” and “3” are the ageless responses of the devout and serious religious practitioners of humankind, but for whom the ecstasies of devotion and mysticism or of Transcendental Awakening have yet to be part of their experience.

All the responses are good and true and profound, based on the individual’s experience—but what do they each point to? Is there something significant in each response, something even in common? Yes. Each response speaks of a separate “I” in relation to a separate God. This separate “I” defines the experience; it is a limiting presumption within the singleness that is Reality Itself.

Although there is only Reality Itself, non-separate, inherently indivisible; and even though anyone can have the

deepest intuition of this Truth (and in fact does), until that Onliness is actually Realized, the world of apparent separation is what seems “real.” It is from this presumed reality of differences that the above responses, however profound, emerge. Adi Da calls us to notice, though, how even in our apparent separateness it is possible to discern a natural (potential) progression to spiritual realization. He calls this progression “The Seven Stages of Life.”

At first we may believe and experience ourselves as separate, and think that the world and universe is made up of only discrete material things. There is no God, or God is a parent-like other. (This is part of the first three stages of life. Exoteric religious practice. Scientific materialism.)

Further experience may show us the world is actually a psychic, or psycho-physical process as well, in which we are all connected in feeling and emotion. (Part of maturing in the first three stages of life. The great Humanists and genuine psychics.)

Increasing sensitivity and intuition may lead us more deeply into the feeling and psychic depths of the world process and to encounters with the spiritual Presence of “God” and even other beings. (The fourth stage of life. The great Shamans and Saints.)

Deepening and increasingly whole-body sensitivity and feeling-surrender may then move us to moments of ecstatic communion with the Spiritual Presence of “God” (or of Love, or of Light, or of Being) wherein we may lose all sense of ourselves in that Presence, perhaps to the point of feeling identification with That “One” (“God,” Love, Light, or Being). (The fifth stage of life. The great Yogis and Mystics.)

At some point we may be moved beyond experience altogether, into the domain of Consciousness Itself where

there is no self, or ego, and where there is, without self-reference or objectified anything, only the unmoved and actionless Witness-Consciousness. (The sixth stage of life. The great Sages of non-Dualism.)

Ultimately, the natural and prior condition of mind-transcending and utter egolessness may find release into and identification with the Source Condition of Self-Radiant Consciousness Itself (or Conscious Light and Love-Bliss), absolutely beyond all difference and separation, without qualification, permanently. (The seventh stage of life. The Ultimate, all-inclusive, Realization.)

Just as the body depends on the progressive development of its physical structures, physiological processes, and relational environment for proper maturation in the first three stages of life, it is the deepening human sensitivity as just described that allows for development into the fourth, fifth, and sixth stages of life. Such growth beyond mere bodily and social maturity depends on the human being's more refined psycho-physical structures and processes—those that relate directly to feeling, intuition, energy, and consciousness. It is in this later context that one encounters terms such as Kundalini, chakras, nadis, meridians, chi, Holy Spirit, Shakti, etc. It is also in this context that the relationship to a genuine Spiritual Master has its supreme value.

The seventh stage of life, however, as taught by Adi Da, is Realized to be entirely prior to all conditional structures. As the condition of Identification with the totality of prior egoless Reality Itself, the seventh stage of life is not dependent on any part, structure, or process therein.

Religion, as a system of beliefs and behaviors, is mind-made. That any religion, in and of itself, or even any and all religions together, can contain the “Truth” is simply a myth. Hasn’t this become obvious, since now, in the 21st Century, we can examine them all, side-by-side, in the light of modern experience and thinking? At its best, religion, as myth, is meant to inspire and awaken intuitive sympathy with the fact and process of the Greater Reality. It can provide a foundation for further human and spiritual growth.

Mysticism and spiritual experience are like myth, since experience is still founded in the presumption and activity of separate self. It is a misunderstanding that experience causes or leads one anywhere on the spiritual path other than to more experience. Spiritual experiences may inspire, and some certainly may contribute to profound psycho-physical changes in the body-mind, but can any exercise of self, or any transformation of that self, take one beyond self? The esoteric traditions of mankind concerned with realization of Ultimate Reality agree that only Reality Itself can attract, or draw a person beyond the illusory presumption of identity with and as a separate self.

In other words, religion is a mythology of mind; mysticism is a mythology of spirituality—because both are founded on the underlying myth of separate self. There is only the single, undifferentiated, non-separate Reality.

Adi Da asks people to seriously consider the following: Religion, Spirituality, Philosophy, Science are all searches (however profound and positive) based on the presumption of separate self. One’s seeking reinforces the sense of being the seeker. It is the frustration of that seeking (however that really occurs) that can lead to the searchless beginnings of present

spiritual life and to the realization of egoless, non-separate Reality Itself.



The Absence of God, and the Presence of the Greater Reality

WHY SHOULD THERE BE A SEPARATE, Great, Omnipotent God who created the world and universe? Obviously there is “creation,” but does that mean that someone or One “created” it? Why couldn’t there simply be “infinity” on both ends of time, an endless cycle of appearance, change, and disappearance—like many already believe, and that science’s “black holes” may suggest. There is Reality. But no one or One outside Reality could have “created” that either, because everything already exists in Reality. Reality simply is.

I like what the great enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 C.E.) wrote: “self, world, and God are concepts reason must give to itself in order to answer questions it inevitably asks. Reason posits God to account for first cause and infinity in order to not undermine itself with metaphysical riddles.” Thus, he concluded, one is rationally justified to believe in the existence of God.

Curiously enough, for the same reason modern atheists feel they must deny the existence of God! To allow for the existence of God—the Omnipotent, Omniscient, Creator-of-the-universe God—is to open a bottomless Pandora’s box of cascading metaphysical riddles and absurd (they feel) propositions about reality.

We can reasonably both postulate and doubt the existence of God, but we cannot prove it by the same means. Does the absence of a creator God mean there is no Greater Reality? Clearly, it doesn’t.

Isn't a creator God beside the point, anyway? It is certainly true that we are utterly dependent on something, and perhaps would feel more at ease knowing "who" or what that was. As human beings we are not independent, self-sustaining, thoroughly self-enclosed, and self-sufficient organisms. We constantly, without ever even a nanosecond break, take in food, light, air, and energy from our environment. We are dependent as well on the complex processes, relations, and interactions of both our local world and the entire manifest cosmos. We are dependent on everything. Nothing in the realm of conditionality is utterly independent and self-sufficient. We are dependent beings, but is the notion of a "creator God" necessary? Certainly Buddhism—arguably the world's most tolerant, compassionate, benign, and philosophically sophisticated approach to life and spirituality—thinks not. The God of creation seems to be myth, illustrative and perhaps inspirational, but clearly myth; and religion most often elaborates upon whatever particular God myth is prescribed. Reality is the point. Reality wasn't "created"—Reality Is—Inclusive, necessarily without cause.

So what about the "metaphysical riddles" that Kant and Western philosophers generally seem to want to sidestep by either invoking or denying an omnipotent creator God? Some of the principle riddles include:

- ◆ The origin of the world and humankind
- ◆ Original sin
- ◆ Revelations of prophets and their conversations with "God"
- ◆ Existence of discarnate beings, like angels and the devil
- ◆ Existence of a literal "Heaven" and "Hell"

- ◆ A virgin birth
- ◆ God becoming human
- ◆ Raising people from the dead
- ◆ Physical resurrection and ascension into “Heaven”
- ◆ The Trinity
- ◆ Death and the afterlife

Many of these “riddles” obviously come out of the Western religious tradition, especially Christianity. We can see they are only “riddles” if our thinking and experiencing is limited to the tangibility of the five senses. Thus limited, we give ourselves no choice but to take them literally (that is, as statements of fact); or discount them; or invoke something like “God can do these things.” In one form or another, these very same “riddles” exist in most religious traditions, however, other traditions, Hinduism for example, understand the function of myth and, in principle and in general, have no problem with them. They regard them not as riddles but as useful metaphors. Additionally, other religious traditions and cultures allow for experience in the Greater Reality beyond five-sense tangibility such that some of these “riddles” are neither philosophy nor metaphor—they are present-day tangible experience. The difficulty with Christianity in general is that there is no evidence that any of the “riddles” around Jesus of Nazareth are anything more than metaphor or deliberate myth. Thus, Christianity tends to be a religion of belief rather than certainty (other than certainty of belief). The greater difficulty with Protestant Christianity in particular is that the mode of modern materialist thinking has all but eliminated the possibility of present-day mystical or revelatory experience and understanding. Moreover, we can say the same for post-modern scientific materialist and

consumer culture as a whole: we have barred ourselves from the depths of Reality.

Yet, despite all the strange, bizarre, quirky, childish, neurotic, utilitarian, political, rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable, uninspected and habitual reasons for which one can get involved in or avoid religion, according to the 2005-2006 study on “American Piety in the 21st Century,” lead by Professor Rodney Stark of Baylor University, nearly 90 percent of all Americans claim some sort of formal religious affiliation. Most people, it seems, have no problem with the “riddles,” and no matter what, people seem to know inherently that life is never neatly logical. Mind, or seeming rationality, is not the ultimate measure of our humanity.

Without God, what is there? There is Reality. Yet in Reality we hear people throughout all the ages speak of having felt the “Presence” of God (or a seemingly Ultimate Being). This Presence was not just romantic reverie or an ephemeral feeling in the midst of some contemplative repose. It was tangible, gripping, often physically and psychically overwhelming, unsolicited, beyond mental comprehension or even description. Throughout history, and even presently, in every religious or spiritual tradition, this “divine” intrusion has been occurring. How could it not? Reality Is, still, and always.

Divine Presence isn’t the only psychic intruder reported within the fabric of Reality. Possession by demons; visitations by ghosts, animal and nature spirits, lesser divinities, and angels; pleas and calls from friends or loved ones in distress; premonitory dreams—all are so frequently reported that they necessarily call our attention to a reality that is more than the merely physical. They even suggest a Divine that doesn’t

always mesh with the traditional Western ideas about God. So the question eventually becomes, “What does religion have to do with the Greater Reality?” Or does it have anything to do with it at all? It sometimes seems that “religion” wants to focus only on a God of creation, or a God that invests Itself in humankind much as a parent does. (Which is why Buddhism, by not proposing a God, is sometimes not considered a “religion” *per se*.) But does that God exist? A Divine Presence obviously does. But a Creator God—Separate, Independent, Alone at the beginning of everything, Original Cause? How and why would that happen? What in us wants there to be such a One? Or does that wanting only appear in the mind of mind-made religion itself?

Let’s conclude this chapter by taking a brief look at some of the “riddles.”

The origin of the world and humankind Outside of sheer speculation and inspirational myth, “origin” is a subject of straightforward science—that is if scientists can resist the temptation to create philosophy out of their discoveries and understand that the “why” of existence might not be subject to their “objectivity.” The atheists are right on this one, but why do they use this obvious fact to discredit the whole of religious endeavor? And, besides, science is always a “work in progress,” that is, the information of science is always theory in the process of further elaboration and validation (or not). As LeShan pointed out, scientific interpretation evolves, sometimes to the point of recognizing that previous “facts” were actually only theory.

Original sin Myth and metaphor that attempts to account for the religiously perceived problematic relationship between

man and God, “free will,” and certain aspects of presumed good and evil.

Revelations of prophets and their conversations with “God” Discussion in the next few chapters.

Existence of discarnate beings, like angels and the devil Discarnate entities certainly are part of the Greater Reality. Angels and the “Devil” or “Satan,” however, as related to a supreme God, seems an arbitrary interpretation. There can be hierarchies in every dimension, and powerful, non-human, non-corporeal beings, both helpful and benign, negative and terrifying, are real; but one’s description of them, the name they are given, and the hierarchy or cosmology to which they belong (if any) seem to depend on human cultural interpretation.

Existence of a literal “Heaven” and “Hell” How people understand or interpret non-physical places like these can seem rather arbitrary. Such places do exist, but any particular interpretation of them is generally designed to support the overall myth and purpose of that religion’s cosmological scheme.

A virgin birth Many stories are told of great individuals in order to honor them, show respect, and acknowledge their particular unique stature among human beings. The Buddha is said to have immediately upon his birth stood up, taken seven steps, and proclaimed, “I alone am the World-Honored One!” Do we think this really happened? No. Could it have happened? No, of course not. Moses is said to have been born without a foreskin. Really? Not likely. Was Jesus born of a virgin? Certainly this is a powerful metaphor for purity—an inspiring myth, perhaps. But why the need for such purity? Jesus’ virgin birth is meant to be understood as one of the proofs of his divinity: such a miracle could only occur

through either the intervention of God or to God him/herself. But did it really happen? Could it happen? Again, no, of course not. At the same time, does the acknowledgement of such claims as simply being positively intended exaggerations negate the greatness or praiseworthiness of these great individuals? Why would it? Wouldn't most people say it doesn't?

God becoming human Discussion in next chapters.

Raising people from the dead Certainly can and has happened. Extraordinary, but not by magic, and not necessarily a proof of the healer's divinity. More about this in the chapter entitled "Magic, Mystery, and Miracles."

Jesus' physical resurrection and ascension into "Heaven" Many scholars say that this story was simply a way to account for the disappearance of Jesus' body in terms culturally understandable in that era. It serves the purposes of prophesy-fulfilling religious myth. Some speculate Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, but lived on and went elsewhere. Supposing he had died, though, and physically revived; would Jesus have physically ascended into "Heaven" somewhere in or beyond the clouds? No, of course not.

The Trinity Appears in many traditions. Discussion in next chapter.

Death and the afterlife A fact of life and of the Greater Reality.

We will look more deeply into religious revelation, the "humanness" of God, and various forms of the Trinity in the chapters that follow.

Human difficulty is inherent in the conditionally manifested “world” itself, during life or after death “world” itself, during life or after death.

There is no Absolute “Other”-Power merely making things happen.

Countless beings and forces (visible and invisible) are making things happen.

This is a “cause-and-effect” cosmos.

There is no single “anything” that is “in charge”.

Everything is “in charge”.

Everyone is “in charge”.

Everything and everyone are, altogether, “causing” all “effects”.

Everything is limited and controlled by conditionally “caused” (and “causative”) “effects”.

Everyone is limited and controlled by conditionally “caused” (and “causative”) “effects”—and everyone is (thus and thereby) suffering the relentless round of “cause-and-effect” (appearing as “self” and “world”).

Therefore, I Call you to a life that is constantly being Transformed at its “root”—not by the “One Cause” that is “in charge” of everything (because there is no such “One Cause”), but by the One (Indivisible, and Acausal, and egoless, and Self-Evidently Divine) Self-Nature, Self-Condition, and Self-State That Is Reality Itself (and That Is the Source-Condition of everything and everyone).

Adi Da Samraj (*The Aletheon*, p. 1797-1798)



The Divine Person and the Trinities of Religion

WITH OR WITHOUT A CREATOR GOD, human beings tangibly experience a Divine Presence. What is that? How is that?

The Divine Person

Perspectives from the Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Adidam.

From the Christian Tradition

Excerpt from *St. Seraphim of Sarov, Life and Teachings*, by Bishop Alexander (Mileant), Translated by Nicholas and Natalia Semyanko

The miraculous transfiguration of the starets' [monk, holy man, spiritual mentor in the Russian Orthodox tradition] face was described by a close admirer and follower of St. Seraphim [1759-1833 C.E.] — Motovilov. This happened during the winter, on a cloudy day. Motovilov was sitting on a stump in the woods; St. Seraphim was squatting across from him and telling his pupil the meaning of a Christian life, explaining for what we Christians live on earth.

"It is necessary that the Holy Spirit enter our heart. Everything good that we do, that we do for Christ, is given to us by the Holy Spirit, but prayer most of all, which is always available to us," he said.

"Father," answered Motovilov, "how can I see the grace of the Holy Spirit? How can I know if He is with me or not?"

St. Seraphim began to give him examples from the lives of the saints and apostles, but Motovilov still did not understand. The elder then firmly took him by the shoulder and said to him, "We are both now, my dear fellow, in the Holy Spirit."

It was as if Motovilov's eyes had been opened, for he saw that the face of the elder was brighter than the sun. In his heart Motovilov felt joy and peace, in his body a warmth as if it were summer, and a fragrance began to spread around them. Motovilov was terrified by the unusual change, but especially by the fact that the face of the starets shone like the sun.

But St. Seraphim said to him, "Do not fear, dear fellow. You would not even be able to see me if you yourself were not in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Thank the Lord for His mercy toward us."

Thus Motovilov understood, in mind and heart, what the descent of the Holy Spirit and His transfiguration of a person meant.

In this remarkable account, that the elder's face was "brighter than the sun" is a literal description. It is not a metaphor for an extraordinary smile or unusually peaceful countenance and coincidental reflection of the wintery sky. St. Seraphim explains to Motovilov that the phenomenon and even his ability to perceive it are consequences of the descent of the Holy Spirit—in other words, the Divine Person.

From the Hindu Tradition

Bhagavan Nityananda (1897-1961 C.E.) of Ganeshpuri was a great Indian Yogi and Saint. Many books have been written about him, one even entitled *Nityananda, The Divine Presence*.

Excerpt from *Bhagawan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri*, by Swami Muktananda (1908-1982 C.E.), perhaps Swami Nityananda's most famous Indian devotee. (pp. 38-39)

The only One dwelling in this entire world is God. In Him lies the ever-changing drama of this astounding world. Just as from gold many different ornaments are created, just as from clay many different pots and vessels are shaped, and just as from a drop of semen comes a human body with many organs, similarly, the whole world is a form of God. And Shree Gurudev [Bhagavan Nityananda] pervades all of it.

"I am in everything," he used to say to people coming for darshan [the sighting of him]. Once a photographer asked permission to take his picture. "Take a picture of the world," replied Gurudev. "I am the world. Is there any place where I don't exist? In everything, there is a glimpse of me." The world is one with Nityananda, and Nityananda pervades the entire world.

From the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

The German initiate of Tibetan Buddhism Ernst Hoffman (Lama Anagarika Govinda) describes his own experience of being entered spiritually by a revered hermit Lama he was going to see. The first part of this account is from the night before their meeting.

Excerpt from *The Way of White Clouds*, by Lama Govinda Anagarika, pp. 155-156.

. . . But before I could fall asleep a strange thing happened. I had the sensation that somebody took possession of my consciousness, my will-power, and my body—that I no more had control over my thoughts, but that somebody else was thinking them—and that slowly, but surely, I was losing my own identity. And then I realized that it could be none other than the hermit . . . due to the power of his concentration and my own lack of resistance in the moment when I was hovering between the waking and the sleeping state. There was nothing aggressive in his presence—on the contrary, it gave me some kind of satisfaction and a sense of wonder to yield to its irresistible magnetism and growing power.

I felt like a meteor, drawn into the orbit of a bigger celestial body—until it dawned upon me that once I allowed myself to “fall” without reserve, the impact would be my inevitable end. And then, suddenly, a terror seized me, the terror that neither this body nor this mind would be mine any more, the terror of losing my own identity for good, and of being pushed out of my own body, irrevocably: the indescribable,

inexpressible fear of emptiness—to be blown out like a candle—to fall into the Nameless Void, a void from which there could be no return.

In his fear, Hoffman forcefully shakes off the experience. He continues the next day to the meeting with the hermit Lama.

. . . This brought us to the subject of meditation and its various methods and experiences, and in this connection I was almost on the point of mentioning the happenings of the previous night. But as I felt slightly ashamed of my terror, when faced with the experience of falling into the abysmal void, I let the opportunity pass and merely asked him to write some suggestions in my meditation booklet.

He hesitated a moment, saying that he was old and that his hand was no more steady, but then, suddenly taking a bamboo pen and dipping it into his home-made ink, he filled a page with Tibetan characters.

“There!” he said, “Here is your subject for meditation: The Eighteen Kinds of Voidness!”

So he was aware of what had happened to me the previous night and what I had tried to hide! I was deeply moved. And when leaving the Great Hermit, after having received his blessings, I felt that I had not only met him in the flesh but in the spirit; in a manner which revealed both his spiritual power and his human kindness. . . .

I shall never forget the peace of his hermitage amidst the eternal snows and the lesson he taught me: that we cannot face the Great Void before we have the strength and the greatness to fill it with our entire

being. Then the Void is not the negation merely of our limited personality, but the Plenum-Void which includes, embraces, and nourishes it, like the womb of space in which the light moves eternally without ever being lost.

From Adidam

Excerpt from an accounting of my personal experience in *Love's Sacrifice*.

On another occasion, I had been doing a weekend retreat at home and had just finished studying. I was writing in my diary about something I had just observed, something revealing about myself, about how I was generating my own anxiety in relationships and in practice altogether. In that observation I became spontaneously relaxed and was now simply, without much thought, making a journal entry.

As I was writing I became aware of a sensation like a warm, thick liquid being poured over my head. It wasn't just pouring down onto my head, however, it was also flowing into my head, filling it, and then in pleasurable flows moving down into the rest of the body.

This sensation, completely tangible as something entering the body from the outside and above, was more than just a sensation, though. I felt as if I were being lovingly embraced from the inside out, one cell at a time, each cell of the body—not just filled, but embraced. Even more than that, I was being embraced by a clearly distinguishable personality. Even though this was the first time I had ever experienced anything

like this, I recognized the embrace as the person or personality of Adi Da Himself. How this was so self-evident I cannot say, but it was immediately and clearly so, prior to any thinking about it. It was the most intimate and personal feeling I had ever had. The full process of this whole-bodily infusion and then its dissipation went on for about ten minutes.

The experience changed my life irrevocably. I now knew Adi Da not just as spiritual transmitter, I knew Him as tangible Spiritual Presence, personal and intimate. To know Adi Da as Spiritual Presence moved me into a deeper sense of the mystery and wonder of the relationship to Him. And that mystery and wonder further undermined the part of the mind that seemed to insist on a linear, cause-and-effect nature for the world; moreover, the arbitrariness of time and space became an indelible knowledge in the body itself.

Two years later I had the opportunity to speak to Adi Da about this experience. He responded by commenting on how I was so moved by the feeling of personal intimacy, then He said, “That’s why I say, [the way is relationship to Me as] the ‘Divine Person’.”

Without trying to define “Divine Person,” these examples show why there is discussion about it: profound and profoundly similar human experiences all around the world require it. Out of the experience of the infusion (from outside our presumed selves) of Light or of overwhelming Joy or Love, or of the Presence and Personality of an apparently other being also come the religious philosophies that attempt to account for it.

Swami Muktananda's description of Bhagavan Nityananda is full of "God-talk" language. His personal spiritual and mystical experience had proven to him his Guru's Divinity. He had personally experienced in his Guru (as had many others) the characteristics of Love, Light, Omniscience, and All-pervasiveness.

In contrast, we can see that Lama Govinda's description contains no "God" language or vocabulary about the Divine. This is characteristic of the Buddhist perspective which feels no need for theistic explanations, yet still makes a point about the Greater Reality and personages who serve its revelation or the unveiling of our limitations in relationship to it.

For those who have experienced such ineffable immersion in coincidental Being, no explanation is necessary; it is self-evident. But sometimes words are sought to describe it to others. What are the qualities of such experiences that lead to the description of "Divine Person" rather than to the acknowledgement of simply "psychic intrusion" or a form of "spirit possession"? The following might be among those qualities:

- ◆ limitlessness
- ◆ unqualified love
- ◆ forgetting of the sense of self
- ◆ absence of fear
- ◆ the sense of infinity
- ◆ the sense of unity or oneness
- ◆ the obvious personal quality
- ◆ utter personal intimacy
- ◆ the non-physical (spiritual) nature of the happening
- ◆ the self-authenticating quality
- ◆ depth and certainty

The Trinities

How, theologically, have people accounted for this experience of spiritual infusion of the “Divine Person”? In some religions, it is done through a “Trinity,” for example:

Father, Son, Holy Spirit (the Trinity of Christianity)

Real (Acausal) God, Spiritual Master, Divine Presence; or the Transcendental State, the Bodily Human Form, and the Spiritual Presence of the Spiritual Master (the Divine Person of Adidam)

God, human Guru, Guru’s Spirit Presence (the Siddha Guru of Hinduism)

That is to say:

- 1) All-inclusive Reality is first of all Mystery, unknowable (as a separate something), and all-inclusive (Father, Real [Acausal] God, the Transcendental State of the Spiritual Master, God);
- 2) There is a tangible-to-the-human being manifestation of that One, in human form, who is not in any essential way different from that Mysterious, All-inclusive Unknowability (Son, Spiritual Master, Guru); and
- 3) Both Reality Itself and Its tangible manifestation are reflected in a single, equally tangible, yet also all-pervading Spiritual manifestation (Holy Spirit, the Spiritual Presence of the Spiritual Master or Guru).

Through these three distinct but non-separate manifestations, All-Inclusive, Unknowable Reality Itself has the apparently paradoxical qualities of relational intimacy and intimate responsiveness as the Divine Person.

Although the Trinity may appear to be a paradox, when you encounter the Son or Spiritual Master or true Guru, the

seeming incongruities melt away and all questions are dissolved—answered in a tacit obvious Singleness of that one and the “Divine” Spirit Presence and All-Inclusive Reality Itself.

Adi Da expresses this “Trinity” in contemporary language as it manifests in Him. In Adidam, the self-authenticating experience of this Trinity brings the devotee to the Master.

From “The Searchless Essence of Radical Devotion to Me”, in *The Aletheon*, pp. 634-635.

63.

My Avatarically-Born and Divinely “Bright” bodily (human) Form, and My Avatarically Self-Transmitted (and Omni-Present, and here-Descending) Divine Transcendental Spiritual Presence, and My Divine (Transcendental, Inherently Spiritual, and Intrinsically egoless and Non-separate) State of Person Are (As One) the only-by-Me Revealed and Given “Radical” Reality-Way of Adidam (Which Is the “Radical” Reality-Way of the Heart, Itself). I Must Give My Perfect Word of Divine Avataric Instruction, for the Sake of all-and-All, but the Divine Reality-Way Itself Is simply Me—the One and Only and “Bright” Divine Person, Who Is Non-separateness Itself, Divinely Avatarically Appearing here (Self-Manifested in bodily human Divine Form) before you, without any limitations whatsoever.

64.

Therefore, whole bodily devotional turning to Me is not an ego-based (or “self”-referring, or “self”-manipulating) practice of strategic surrender. Rather, whole bodily devotional turning to Me is an always devotionally Me-recognizing, devotionally to-Me-Attracted, and (always presently, directly, and immediately) ego-transcending practice of searchless turning to Me (and, thus and thereby, of unconditional surrender of separate and separative “self” to Me)—merely by Beholding Me (and, thus and thereby, “Locating” Me, and “Knowing” Me, and responsively yielding to Me).

In the traditions where this Trinity appears (whether or not explicitly stated), such as in Christianity, Siddha Yoga, and Adidam, the fundamental practice is relationship to the human manifestation rather than any technique. Furthermore, it is the Spiritual Form of the human manifestation—rather than the efforts of the practitioner—that “works” whatever spiritual transformation the practitioner undergoes.

Other Trinities

Although Hinduism uses almost an infinite variety of reference to God and Gods, it also accounts for Reality in two other principal Trinities of non-separate qualities. With typically unproblematic mixture of metaphor and keen observation, these are:

The God-Head of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva illustrates the three principal characteristics of Reality: that it exists; that it continues or is sustained; and that it disappears or is destroyed.

Sat-Chit-Ananda illustrates the three principle qualities of existence: Being Itself, Consciousness Itself, Love-Bliss Itself.

Mahayana Buddhism has the doctrine of the *trikaya*, which the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines as:

trikaya, (Sanskrit: “three bodies”), in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the concept of the three bodies, or modes of being, of the Buddha: the *dharmakaya* (body of essence), the unmanifested mode, and the supreme state of absolute knowledge; the *sambhogakaya* (body of enjoyment), the heavenly mode; and the *nirmanakaya* (body of transformation), the earthly mode, the Buddha as he appeared on earth.

The concept of *trikaya* applies not only to the historical Buddha, Gautama, but to all other buddhas as well.

Divine Person, Religion and Reality

What can we conclude about the relationship between the “Divine Person,” religion, and Reality? Is there only one Divine Person? Is it Adi Da? Is it Jesus of Nazareth? Is it Bhagavan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri? Is it some supreme Lama in Tibetan Buddhism? Is it one of the other many Great Gurus and Spiritual Masters of the past or present or future?

The characteristics of such an experience, the experience itself as reported by innumerable people throughout history seem to make moot this question. To say there is only one Divine Person (inferring that accounts from other religions are false) would require us to insist that Reality is divisible. It

would be to adopt a point of view that what is Great and All-Inclusive is, in fact, not. It would be to presume separation where none is noticed and where none is possible.



Gurus, Teachers, and Spiritual Masters

IN THE DAWN OF QUANTUM THINKING, when the leading edge in math and physics was formulating a post-Newtonian and necessarily more comprehensive way of speaking about physical reality, if you wanted to learn relativity and the new physics you had to go to one of the very few men who understood it. You had to seek out people like Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Max Planck, and Enrico Fermi. There would be no question in your mind about your need for a teacher of the highest knowledge and caliber who understood this new paradigm and could communicate intelligently about it. It is the same for any area of complex and specialized knowledge or experience, especially if it challenges your presently held assumptions: if you want to accurately acquire that knowledge and experience you find a “master” in that field. When I was anticipating going to graduate school I received the following advice from a friend: “If you want a good education, go to a good school; if you want the best education, go to the best professor.”

So it is for those in religion. Those who believe in God, or have a Guru or Spiritual Master have no question about the validity of their belief or choice. To them it is self evident: life is sufficiently complex and mysterious to warrant faith; the path to understanding existence is sufficiently complex to warrant a teacher. It is only those who feel life isn't so complex and mysterious that faith comes into question, or for those who feel the understanding of existence isn't so complex that the need for a teacher is at best optional. If life

and existence were simply a set of mechanical, mathematical, social, behavioral, and perhaps psychological laws, then their doubt and suspicion could possibly be justified. But the essence of being human is our inherent existence in, our prior unity with, and our non-separation from, Reality Itself. However obvious these three conditions of relationship to Reality may seem, they stand out as a new paradigm of understanding our existence, and thus for thinking about religion. For most people it's time to go back to school.

Although these three conditions have been touched upon by great theologians and philosophers, both past and present, the Western intellectual tradition seems to have remained merely philosophical about them and not understood their implications. Even in the esoteric traditions of Judaism (Hassidism), Islam (Sufism), and Christianity (monastic orders of Roman and Greek/Eastern Orthodoxy), the presumption of Reality being inexorably differentiated into the three fundamentally and forever distinct categories of “world, self, and God” has confined religious consideration to the dialectical world of mind-limited experience and thought.

In contrast, the Eastern traditions of Buddhism, Advaitism, and Taoism are not so limited. Their “philosophies” each propose a type of singleness of Reality, and they have each developed unique experiential approaches (yoga, meditation, and development of intellect and of chi) which support and justify their perspective. These traditions and approaches have their own limits, as discussed in the “Common Ground” chapter, but their strength is that of being grounded in a time-tested experiential approach.

In fact, we can rightly acknowledge the authentic esoteric branches of most religions as exemplars of “scientific religion.” That is to say, thousands of years of replication of

the same approach by serious practitioners of these traditions, including techniques of prayer, meditation, yoga, and mind, have consistently given the same results. In the traditions of Buddhism, Advaitism, and Taoism, where this singleness of reality is proposed, the results of serious practice universally confirm: 1) a singleness of reality that exceeds the limitation of merely materialist assumption, 2) a singleness of reality that exceeds the limitation of otherwise dualistic experiencing and thinking, and 3) a singleness of reality that reveals the secondary and limiting nature of mind itself. In each of these traditions, anyone who seriously takes up that same approach will achieve the same results. One only needs to look at the great lineages of teachers and masters in these traditions for such proof.

Sometimes it seems that modern science would have us forget that the scientific method is merely an approach to knowledge, not the materialist philosophy it has come to represent in the world.

So if we are serious about realizing the ultimate nature of existence, we go to someone who has realized it and who also “qualifies” to teach (and transmit) it. Both aspects are necessary. To learn advanced theoretical astrophysics we don’t enroll in an introductory course in astronomy—and we certainly can’t make much use of any advanced instruction without some foundational education and basic understanding.

In our present line of consideration, then, exoteric, or institutionalized social and ritualized religion is foundation only. Esoteric, or deeply experiential mind-transcending and altogether “self” and “other” transcending, spiritual practice is the advanced part of religion. To take the “advanced

course”—and be able to make profound use of it—requires both a foundation and a qualified teacher.

In the type of religious or spiritual learning we are speaking about it is important to understand the difference between a realizer, or expert or authority, and a spiritual teacher. Great yogis or saints or mystics can be said to be authorities in their particular traditions because they have realized, in tangible experiential terms, the essence of their traditions. But that doesn't necessarily mean they can “teach” it. Teaching is a function. In the spirituality associated with the realization of the singleness of Reality, the fundamental purpose of the teacher is not so much to communicate a verbal teaching—he or she may do that, historically some have and some haven't—rather, one whose function is to teach literally directly spiritually transmits what there is to realize. His or her purpose is to awaken that realization in “others.” The teacher teaches by being that realization, not by talking about it. The teacher reaches to others from beyond their present limitation to awaken them beyond that limit. In the traditions where mind and self are the fundamental limits to be gone beyond into egoless reality, some of what any teacher may have to do to prepare a person and then draw him or her beyond identification with mind, body, and “self” can be unpredictable, unconventional, socially unacceptable, and disorienting. This is necessarily so because the teacher's instruction—whether through silent transmission or paradoxical action—works to undo in the student the very presumption of separate “I.” People who have been deeply involved in religion and spiritual practice know and value this; it is their experience. It has always been so.

The remainder of this chapter is for those who might not have much experience or education in this area. It includes

comments by Adi Da as well as observations from great representatives of many spiritual traditions.

In speaking about the Ultimate Realization of the Prior Unity of conditional existence, Adi Da explains how He, as Spiritual Master, is literally not separate from anyone or any thing.

Excerpt from “The Universal Divine Presence of Me”, in *The Aletheon*, pp. 1785-1787.

Life itself is an egoless Prior Unity.

There are no egos, there is pattern only.

Life is only egoless pattern.

The entire cosmic domain is egoless pattern, which is merely an apparent modification of the Divine Conscious Light.

The tendency to identify local pattern as ego-“I”, separate from all of “this”, is only illusion.

Egoic “self”-identification with local pattern leads to a life of limited destiny and endless complication.

In the midst of patterns interacting with one another, patterned roles are being played.

To egoically “self”-identify with any patterned role is to be bound.

There must be free and egoless functioning in this domain of apparent conditionality, so that the pattern does not defeat the Event and Process of egoless Divine Self-Existence.

The demonstration-in-practice of egoless Divine Self-Existence is—in its full Self-Realized seventh-stage-of-life Demonstration—about Self-Abiding Divine Self-Recognition of the Intrinsically egoless Nature of the conditionally arising life-pattern of modifications.

Intrinsically egoless Self-Abiding Divine Self-Recognition (or the seventh-stage-of-life Demonstration—in-practice of egoless Divine Self-Existence) is not based in a local entity-pattern.

Rather, Intrinsically egoless Self-Abiding Divine Self-Recognition is based in the fact that the overall pattern (or comprehensive psycho-physical structure) of the body-mind-complex essentially duplicates the fundamental conditional structure of the total cosmic domain.

This is also how I Am Present here—Constantly Meditating all, Perfectly Coincident and Constantly Involved with every thing and every one.

This is possible because I Am not identified with a local personality-pattern, body, or ego-“I”.

My Divine Avataric Presence here in bodily (human) Form is not limited by pattern-identity, because I have no ego-identity.

The Primary Pattern of Totality Is My Pattern of Divine Avataric Appearance here.

I Function just as straightforwardly with the Primary Pattern of “everything-and-everybody-all-at-once” as egos function in relation to their local identity of bodily-identified ego-“I”.

You did not have to choose your own body and feel identified with it in order to play your patterned role.

Your patterned role is simply “there”.

Similarly, in My Case, the Primary Pattern of “everything-and-everyone” Is simply the Case.

That Primary Pattern Is Inherently and Directly and Divinely Avatarically Obvious to Me.

To Me, the Primary Pattern of Totality is as evident as the body or the immediate local ego-mind is to an egoic personality.

Not-two Is My Characteristic.

No- “other” Is My Characteristic.

The Characteristic of Prior Unity Is My Divine Avataric Sign and My Divine Avataric Self-Revelation.

On the following pages are comments made by great masters and realizers in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Sufism, and Christianity about the masters in their own traditions. I am aware that I have not spoken about the great teachers within the metaphysical, shamanistic and other generally less-known dualistic approaches to reality. Authentic practice in the dimensions of reality where metaphysics and shamanism take place is difficult, often dangerous, and even potentially life-threatening. I personally have never met or heard of a genuine master of these approaches who has not endured extended and intensive training and testing under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

**“Unless one is definite,
one should not take someone as a Guru”**

His Holiness the Dalai Lama — from *The Bodhgaya Interviews*, ed. Jose Ignacio Caberon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), p.60.

The Lord Buddha himself has made it quite clear in both the Vinaya Sutras and the Mahayana Scriptures, and even in the Tantrayana, in a very detailed fashion, what the qualities of a teacher should be. This is why I often criticize the Tibetan attitude of seeing whatever the Guru does as good, of respecting everything that [he] does as good right from the start, without the initial period of examination. Of course, if the Guru is really qualified, then to have such an attitude is really worthwhile.



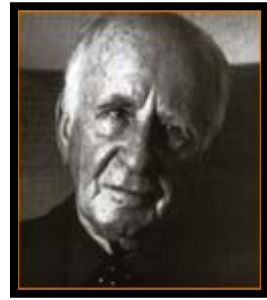
Take the cases of Naropa and Marpa, for example. Sometimes it appears as though some of the things Tilopa asked of Naropa, or Naropa asked of Marpa, were unreasonable. Deep down however these requests had good meaning. Because of their great faith in their Gurus, Naropa and Marpa did as intended. Despite the fact that they appeared to be unreasonable, because the teachers were qualified, their actions had some meaning. In such situations it is necessary from the disciple's side that all of the actions of the teacher be respected. But this cannot be compared to the case of ordinary people. Broadly speaking, I feel the Buddha gave us complete

freedom of choice to thoroughly examine the person who is to be our Guru. This is very important. Unless one is definite, one should not take someone as a Guru. This preliminary examination is a kind of precautionary measure.

The Master Is Never a Model of Civic Virtue

Karlfried Graf Durckheim (1896-1988 C.E.) A German diplomat, psychotherapist, Zen-Master, and writer.

Regarding a Master, from *The Call for the Master: The Meaning of Spiritual Guidance on the Way to the Self*:



If he has to, a master is ready to violate a community's code — but he never violates the law by which it really lives. Sometimes, however, he can obey this law only by turning the community's tidy systems upside-down. This is why he is never a model of civic virtue — never an example for the upright citizen to follow.

Regarding the disposition of a disciple, from *The Way of Transformation*:

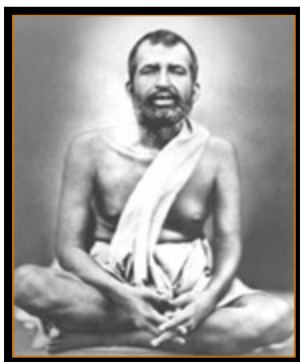
The man, who, being really on the Way, falls upon hard times in the world will not, as a consequence, turn to that friend who offers him refuge and comfort and encourages his old self to survive. Rather, he will seek out someone who will faithfully and inexorably help him to risk himself, so that he may endure the suffering and pass courageously through it. Only to the extent that man exposes himself over and over

again to annihilation, can that which is indestructible arise within him. In this lies the dignity of daring.

On Physicians and Spiritual Teachers

Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886 C.E.) Recognized as one of the greatest and most revered 19th century Indian Saints. Excerpt from *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, by Mahendranath Gupta, vol 1, section 15.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: There are three kinds of physicians: superior physicians, mediocre physicians and inferior physicians. The physician who comes, feels the pulse and goes away saying, "You must take the medicine," is an inferior physician. He doesn't care to know whether the patient has taken the medicine or not.



And the physician who makes the patient understand in so many ways to take the medicine, talks to him nicely, saying, "Brother, how can you get well unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, do take it. I will myself put it in your mouth," is a mediocre physician. And the physician who puts his knees on the chest of the patient and forces the medicine down his throat when he sees that the patient refuses to take it is the superior physician.

DOCTOR: And there are medicines for which you don't have to put your knees on the patient's chest. For example, homeopathic medicines.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA: There is no danger if the superior physician puts his knees on the patient's chest.

Like physicians, there are also three kinds of *acharyas* [religious teachers]. They who don't keep contact with their disciples after imparting instructions to them are the inferior ones. They who convince their disciples again and again for their good so that they can assimilate their instructions, they who implore and assist them lovingly are mediocre ones. And they who even use force, finding that the disciple doesn't listen to them by any other means, are known as superior *acharyas*.

Who Wants Truth as Badly as That?

Irina Tweedie (1907-1999 C.E.) is one of the most respected women realizers and woman Spiritual teacher of the 20th century. She was the first woman to ever be trained in the yogic Sufi lineage. She moved from England to study and live with her Teacher, a traditional Naqshbandi Sufi Master, in India for five years, until his death in 1966. The following is from her foreword to the spiritual diary of her training, *The Daughter of Fire*:



Suffering has a redeeming quality. Pain and repetition are fixative agents.

The reader will find it [*Daughter of Fire*] very repetitive. Naturally so. For it is the story of a

teaching. And teaching is constant repetition. The pupil has to learn the lesson again and again in order to be able to master it, and the teacher must repeat the lesson, present it in a different light, sometimes in a different form, so that the pupil should understand and remember. Each situation is repeated many a time, but each time it triggers off a slightly different psychological reaction leading to the next experience, and so forth.

I hoped to get instructions in Yoga, expected wonderful teachings, but what the Teacher did was mainly to force me to face the darkness within myself, and it almost killed me.

In other words he made me "descend into hell," the cosmic drama enacted in every soul as soon as it dares to lift its face to the Light.

It was done very simply, by using violent reproof and even aggression. My mind was kept in a state of confusion to the extent of being "switched off." I was beaten down in every sense till I had to come to terms with that in me which I kept rejecting all my life. It is surprising how the classical method of training, devised perhaps thousands of years ago, is similar to the modern psychological techniques; even dream analysis has a place in it.

Somewhere in one of the Upanishads—I don't remember which one—there is a sentence which puts our quest for spirituality in a nutshell: "If you want

Truth as badly as a drowning man wants air, you will realize it in a split-second."

But who wants Truth as badly as that? It is the task of the Teacher to set the heart aflame with the unquenchable flame of longing, and it is his duty to keep it burning till it is reduced to ashes. For only a heart which has burned itself empty is capable of love. Only a heart which has become non-existent can resurrect, pulsate to the rhythm of a new life.

I Need a Rebbe Who Will Flay the Living Skin from My Flesh

Excerpts from *Sparks of Light: Counseling in the Hasidic Tradition*, by Zalman M. Schachter and Edward Hoffman (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 1983), as presented by James Steinberg in *Love of the Godman*.

The encounter between the Hasidic Rebbe and his disciple took the form of a private one-to-one Spiritual meeting or encounter known as a "yehidur". The Rebbe was given permission and encouraged to serve the disciple very strongly. Many "methods of awakening" were used, including "shock":



Hasidic rebbes believed that gradual methods were sometimes inadequate to help the hasid see his condition in all its

complexity. . . . [T]he rebbe's task was to overcome the hasid's elaborate defenses and make him face the truth about himself, however unpleasant. . . . To accomplish this goal, the rebbe often employed shock to rouse the hasid into a markedly more lucid view of his predicament.

A Rebbe would deliberately tell things to the disciple to shake him loose from conventional viewpoints. The confrontation is often described as a battle between the Rebbe and the disciple's ego:

The Rabbi 'fought'. . . to shock the Hasidic Jew into a realistic self-appraisal. . . . A hasid could also not count on a rebbe's conventional morality.

It is related that the extent to which shock was used in the yehidur depended on the Rebbe's personal style, as well as his orientation and training:

Those of the Kotzk school employed shock more than their Chabad or Ruzhiner counterparts. Indeed, Kotzk Hasidism viewed shock as a vital part of their treatment for inner difficulties. "I need a rebbe who will flay the living skin from my flesh, not one who will flatter me!" declared Rabbi Isaac Meir of Ger.

Another technique is known as "restructuring", in which the entire social situation or life of a hasid was changed by the Rebbe, so that the disciple would see what he had been doing. So, for example, a very stingy man came to the Maggid of Mezritch for his Blessing. He bragged that despite his money, he continued to eat only the simplest foods.

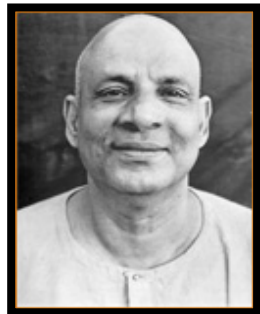
Thereupon, the Maggid advised him to begin immediately to eat the richest and most expensive foods. The Hasidim who heard this could not understand it.

The Maggid explained, “When this man starts to consume and enjoy lavish dishes, he will see how stingy he has been. Thereby, he will understand the plight of the poor who have only bread and salt. But so long as he limits himself to eat only bread and salt, he will think that the poor can subsist on rocks.”

On Choosing One's Guru

Swami Sivananda (1887-1963 C.E.). One of the most well-known and well-respected Indian Yoga masters and Hatha Yoga teachers of the 20th century. Excerpt from *Guru* by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati Maharaj.

If you find peace in the presence of a Mahatma (great soul), if you are inspired by his speeches, if he is able to clear your doubts, if he is free, from greed, anger, and lust, if he is selfless, loving, and I-less, you can take him as your Guru. He who is able to clear your doubts, he who is sympathetic in your Sadhana, he who does not disturb your beliefs but helps you on from where you are, he in whose very presence you feel spiritually elevated—he is your Guru. Once you choose Your Guru, implicitly follow him. God will guide you through the Guru.



Do not use your reason too much in the selection of your Guru. You will fail if you do so.

You Have It Now, You Have It Now

Hakuin (1685-1768 C.E.). One of the most influential figures in Japanese (Rinzai) Zen Buddhism. This story about Hakuin is told by D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966) in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, first series (New York: Grove Press, 1961). D. T. Suzuki was one of the most significant figures in introducing Buddhism and Zen to the West.

One day Hakuin went to his Master, Shoju, to demonstrate his understanding of Zen. Engaged by Shoju in fierce dialogue, Hakuin recoiled more and more and the Master grew seemingly angrier by the minute. In the end, Shoju threw him over the porch of the house. Hakuin fell several feet, hitting his head against a stone wall. Shoju stood over his disciple, laughing mightily, which brought Hakuin around again. But even then, the old Master berated him, calling him names.



D. T. Suzuki

In his desperation, Hakuin seriously contemplated leaving his Master—a predictable reaction of the ego resistive to surrender. Then the unexpected happened. During his begging-round, a woman refused to give him any rice. Absorbed in thought, he continued standing in front of her house, which she mistook as a sign of juvenile impudence. She swung a heavy broom at him, knocking him down on the ground.

When he regained consciousness, he found that his inner eye had been opened. Overjoyed, he returned to the monastery. Master Shoju instantly recognized the transformation in his devotee. He gently slapped his back and said, "You have it now, you have it now."

No Wonder You Have So Few Friends!

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582 C.E.). A mystic Carmelite nun. One of the greatest and most influential of women Roman Catholic Saints. Excerpt from 'A Gift of All That One Is': *The Laughing Man Interviews Mother Tessa Bieleck*". *The Laughing Man*, vol. 4, no. 2 p. 52.

It is said that once Saint Teresa of Avila was riding through the back roads of Spain during a torrential rainstorm. Her horse-drawn cart hit a huge pothole and collapsed, throwing her head-first into the mud. Saint Teresa complained to Jesus at being treated in this manner in the midst of trying to serve Him.



The voice of Jesus then came to her from the heavens: "This is how I treat my friends, Teresa." Wiping the mud from her face, she replied, "No wonder you have so few!"

Tired of Speaking Sweetly

Hafiz (1315–1390? C.E.). One of the world’s most beloved poets and Sufi mystics. He is affectionately known by his admirers as “the Tongue of the Invisible”. His collected works of poetry is to be found at the home of most Iranians who recite his poems by heart and draw upon his proverbs and sayings to this day. In myriad poetic ways, Hafiz expresses the spiritual experiences of a mystic, in love with his Beloved. His life and poems have influenced the course of post-fourteenth century Persian lyrics more than any other poet.



Love wants to reach out and manhandle us
Break all our teacup talk of God.

If you had the courage and
Could give the Beloved His choice, some nights,
He would just drag you around the room By your hair,
Ripping from your grip all those toys in the world
That bring you no joy.
Love sometimes gets tired of speaking sweetly

And wants to rip to shreds
All your erroneous notions of truth
That make you fight within yourself, dear one,
And with others,
Causing the world to weep
On too many fine days.

God wants to manhandle us,
Lock us inside of a tiny room with Himself
And practice His dropkick.

The Beloved sometimes wants
To do us a great favor:
Hold us upside down
And shake all the nonsense out.

But when we hear He is in such a "playful drunken
mood"
Most everyone I know
Quickly packs their bags and hightails it
Out of town.



Magic, Mystery, and Miracles

Magic is when something happens and you don't know how. Mystery is when everything happens and you don't know why.

—Adi Da Samraj

REALITY ITSELF, OR EXISTENCE ITSELF, would seem to fall into the category of Mystery—something that essentially defies knowledge. There are a couple of religious approaches to fundamental Mystery. The monotheistic traditions and some Hindu sects will say that “God” wanted to “enjoy” Himself, so He brought the world and beings, and everything else into existence. Everything, then, is “God’s Play,” or God’s means to “know” Himself.

In Buddhism and Adidam even posing the question of “why” about Reality and Existence is seen as a false approach. The resolution of the “why” is in the realization of total ignorance about it, or the “unknowability” of it. Such ignorance and unknowability, profoundly realized, is effectively mindless, egoless coincidence with Reality or Existence Itself. Such Ignorance is one way to describe Ultimate Realization within these two traditions.

Theist traditions do say something about the “mystery” of existence, but these statements are about a presumed separate God. They mean the unknowability of God, how “the ways of God are mysterious,” etc., but these are statements of “fact” (from their tradition’s perspective) about the attributes of a separate God and His relationship to humans; they are not propositions about the ultimate nature of Inclusive Reality nor

are they admonitions to enter into egoless coincidence with or realize identification as That.

Whereas Buddhism does not use theistic terms or appeal to theistic concepts, Adi Da refers to the realization of this ultimate Unknowability as “Divine Ignorance” (as well as Truth Itself, or Liberation). He also uses the term “Real (Acausal) God”; that is, God as Reality, not the separate creator God or any objectifiable any thing, other, or process.

What do magic and miracles have to do with religion? Miracles could seem to be more like magic, perhaps on a grander scale: something has happened and we don’t know how, but any possible “how” is so far outside our comprehension, or otherwise unknown to us, and the event was so positive or otherwise transformative and without explanation, and because “impossible events do not occur”—we call it a “miracle,” thereby attributing agency to God or the Divine.

Does this mean that only God performs “miracles”? Maybe. But what if that “miracle” (or magic) is a human capability, however rarely exercised or witnessed? And what if we are also unaware how our present assumptions about reality limit even our possibility to accurately observe, let alone understand, such happenings within the Greater Reality?

Let’s take “raising the dead” for example. We could rightly say that until the advent of modern science there was no scientific explanation for when a person either spontaneously came alive again or when someone intervened and somehow rose someone from having been dead. Today, medical science does it routinely. Does our knowledge of how to use adrenaline and electric shock make “raising the dead”

less of a “miracle”? I think most people would say yes. Perhaps it’s a “miracle of modern medical science,” but it is not an unexplained “divine” miracle. What about people spontaneously waking up from an extended coma, or after having been declared “brain dead” (a controversial term in some medical quarters)? Miracle? Or very rare natural phenomenon? And what if it happens in coincidence with our prayers? Did God answer our prayers and so perform a miracle? If so, what about all the others who prayed for loved ones who didn’t recover? Did God just choose not to do a miracle for them? Without being skeptical, what about the other non-medical science interventions we can read about that demonstrate workings in a Greater Reality?

Should we believe the stories about Jesus raising the dead and therefore attribute divinity to him? Whether or not they are true, we know that “raising the dead” was a miracle story enthusiastic followers often attached to a teacher as a way of honoring him or her—a tradition of positively-intended myth-making. But does raising the dead really happen? Yes. Is there some indication of how? Yes.

The book *The Marvelous Adventure of Cabeza de Vaca*, by Haniel Long, is a reprinting of a letter by a 16th century Spanish Conquistador, Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, to the King of Spain about his eight years of tribulation after being shipwrecked and ending up on the coast of Florida in North America. Cabeza de Vaca describes in detail how the native Indians eventually required that he and his three surviving companions become healers. The Spaniards were all soldiers and knew nothing about medicine or healing, but they were given the choice to either successfully heal people or die. Being at least nominal Catholic Christians, they prayed over the ill whom the Indians brought to them:

Then over each ailing Indian we made the sign of the Cross, and recited the Ave Maria and a Pater Noster.
(p. 32)

The Indians got better, and Nuñez and his friends were allowed to live—but now their living depended totally on being able to continually perform successful cures. They earned a reputation. They wandered all the way from Florida, across what is now the United States and Mexico, to the Gulf of California, in a state of general malnutrition, almost naked, while continually performing “miracle” cures for the hundreds of Indians who came to meet them along their journey:

Indians came from many places. But Castillo was always afraid his sins would interfere with his working miracles. The Indians turned to me. I told Castillo it was no moment for indulging the idea of being sinful, and then I followed the Indians to their ranch. The dying man was dead; Dorantes and I found him with eyes upturned, and no pulse. I removed the mat that covered him and prayed. At last the something in me like a membrane broke, and I was confident the old man would rise up again. As he did. (pp. 36-37)

Nuñez goes on to explain in his letter to the King of Spain that he must apologize because he felt the power flowing through him as something natural to human beings, a universal, impersonal phenomenon which we had forgotten and when not used recedes. He apologized because he felt such power, even of life and death, was not exclusive to Christ or to any divine personage.

Nuñez described what he felt as a power flowing through him—by which I understand as a tangible current, not just an abstract concept. Tangible power, flowing. Until you experience this yourself, you might think Nuñez and anyone saying something similar are speaking metaphorically. But they are not. Today there are many modalities of healing that work with subtle currents of energy and “power,” such as Chi Gong, acupuncture, polarity therapy, bioenergetics, and often the age-old practice of laying-on-of-hands. Certainly anyone can do these things and not actually feel the energy currents they are based on, either circulating within the body or being drawn in from the outside or otherwise invoked—and even be effective—but thousands of years and many thousands of practitioners can attest to their reality.

Why would I personally believe this story by a 16th century Spanish soldier yet be skeptical of the one about Jesus? Because Nuñez’s description of the process, his prayer and the flow of an unnamable Power, are consistent with my own experience. Self-surrender and egoless invocation are right relation to Reality, and there is “response” within Reality. That response has often been called “Divine,” and, depending on one’s culture and experience, given a name—or not.

I have a friend who was stillborn during a homebirth at one of the Adidam Sanctuaries. It was 1976. The attending doctors and nurses were unable to revive her and alerted Adi Da. He rushed over to the cabin. I wasn’t there personally, but the following is the report from devotees who were there: As Adi Da entered the cabin, it visibly became brighter, as if the lights in the room had suddenly been turned up. He stood at the end of the bed where the limp, ash-colored body of the child had been laid. He raised His hands to the ceiling, palms

up. Contortions of agony-ecstasy came over His face as He seemed to draw a column of light down through the ceiling and into His body. Flashes of light shot from His chest to the baby girl, whose body jumped with each bolt until she began to whimper with life. She's still alive and well today.

Do I believe this story? Yes. Why? Because I know the girl personally, I know her parents, the doctors and nurses, and everyone who was there. I also have directly experienced similar potent spiritual transmission from Adi Da. Was it “magic”? A “miracle”? No and yes. The “how” of it was obvious, and indeed extraordinary: Adi Da’s intervention and His conscious infusion of Light and life-energy into the baby. So in that sense, the event itself was neither magic nor miracle. However, for me, the “Who” of it—Adi Da Himself—was, and is. Over the years, my experience of the totality of Adi Da’s appearance has become an unfathomable Who, What, Why, and How—a Mystery of His Person that encompasses the domain of Reality Itself, Existence Itself, the Divine Person, and, as He says, “Real (Acausal) God.”



The Straw Man of Atheist Complaint

WHENEVER I READ AN ATHEIST ARGUMENT against God or religion, it seems to me that their complaint is neither about “God” nor religion, but about what people do with it, that is, how they use their beliefs to justify social, moral, or political points of view and often try to force them on others. One could just as well complain about corporate structure, government, organized sports, or whatever. An analogy from American culture can be found in an expression from the perennial debate about “gun control”: “guns don’t kill people; people kill people.”

The societies that have engendered the personal attitudes in people that allow for murder and violence have also fostered the permissive context for it. But the choice for any particular action always rests with the individual. There have always been pacifists and conscientious objectors to war. Similarly with religion: the religions—or interpretations of them—that have engendered permission for prejudice, class distinction and discrimination have indeed fostered great inequity and violence; but here too there have always been those who object to these expressions and sought reform and higher truth. So it’s fine to criticize the religion, but that critique is a social critique, ignoring the central issues of individual choice and even the evolutionary development of the human being.

Atheist critics don’t seem to understand that even the most benign exoteric religion is just the beginning of a process that can become profound human development. They lack the knowledge of, and personal experience in, the greater, non-

physical realms of existence that would inform their critique and refine it to address more fundamental reality. Exoteric religion and its attendant social morality is only a starting point in the religious or spiritual process that is potential in all of us. Exoteric religion only deals with the most immediate and superficial aspects of our existence. Fullest religion necessarily must tangibly move us into the much greater Reality that includes Energy, Spirit, Consciousness, and Light.

Earlier I mentioned an Episcopal minister pointed out that most adult Episcopalians he knew had only “the most superficial, Sunday-school level of understanding about their Faith.” I don’t doubt this is true of most adults who participate in formalized religion. Yet, it is the demonstration and expression of faith by these good-hearted, yet perhaps minimally informed religious practitioners that the atheists seem to choose as exemplars of religion and upon whom they base their criticism. Such strategy makes neither for legitimate generalized argument nor for intelligent, comprehensive discussion.

When critics of religion first attempt to establish their case they point out a series of what they consider inconsistencies between the “talk” and the “walk,” or inadequacies in thinking or philosophy or psychology. Some of these discrepancies are:

- 1) The difference between what is preached and what actually happens: love and war; human integrity and corruption or abuse of power; care for the poor, and hoarding of wealth and power.
- 2) Scientific rationality and untenable propositions about reality: certain “miracles” or other supernatural events; virgin births; creationism.

- 3) The lack of any proof of the actual existence of “God.”
- 4) Proponents of religion overlooking what seems just to be people’s “need” for “God,” and thus their motive for inventing one; they equally ignore people’s “need to believe.”

Revisiting the gun control analogy provides the simplest and most straightforward rebuttal to these objections: *Yes, you are correct, but religion doesn’t delude people, people delude people.* Or, perhaps more precisely, “Religion doesn’t delude people, people delude themselves.”

There are also arguments for looking at religion as simply a “natural” phenomenon, a set of biologically and evolutionarily determined feelings and behaviors. Fine. But what about all of Reality? And what about Consciousness Itself?

Religion without experience in the Greater Reality is often worthy of criticism. But that criticism misses the point. Such religion, rightly engaged, is, as we have seen, only a foundation. Without experience in the Greater Reality neither the atheist nor the religionist has the genuine discrimination to either criticize the other or defend him or herself, for each is left with only the thinking mind and limited experience with which to understand the other—and thinking mind and limited experience are, in themselves, inadequate for the task.



A Summing Up

Reality Is.
 Religion is what we make it.

Reality Is, prior to mind.

Religion is what we make it, with the mind.

Our relationship to religion is at a crossroads. The sum of our human experiential, cultural, and scientific knowledge points to a new, all-encompassing perspective on life and consciousness that we, as a collective, have yet to embrace. Will we notice and embrace Reality, or will we continue to wander in the wilderness of our illusions and mind-made myths? Will we include the obvious Real in our thinking and doing about religion, or will we remain retreated in abstracted thought only? Will we accept the Help that indivisible Reality Is, or will we insist on suffering our separate alone?

In 1985, Krister Stendahl, the Swedish theologian and former professor and Dean at Harvard Divinity School, gave the following “three rules of religious understanding”:

- 1) *When you are trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.*
- 2) *Don't compare your best to their worst.*
- 3) *Leave room for "holy envy."* [Be willing to recognize aspects of other religious traditions or faiths

that we admire and/or wish could, in some way, be reflected in our own.]

In the course of my 30 years (and ongoing) as a devotee of Adi Da, through the apparent ordinariness of human relationship to Him, through infusion by His Spiritual Presence, through transports into realms of love-bliss-saturated devotional ecstasy, and through returns from undifferentiated spaces of Light and selfless Consciousness, I have come to know Him as the Bright “*Is-ness*” of Reality Itself, the non-separate Person of Conscious Light. This is simply my experience.

Whether through religion or science or common sense, discriminative intelligence is a necessary companion when we are moved to and within the profundities of existence. And, that same discriminative intelligence—inclusive of mind, heart, and tangible self-authenticating experience—will always be, for those who call for Light, an ever-deepening, and humbling, Gift. If we want the Light of religion, we have to really do religion. Beyond thinking, feeling, believing, and doubting, our engagement in life will provide the opening for What Is Real to Communicate Itself to us. Existence, Reality Itself, will never be intimidated by our experiment.

May the Blessings of Adi Da Samraj be with you.



Resources
About the Author
About *Love's Sacrifice*

Resources

Some books by Adi Da Samraj:

(Published by The Dawn Horse Press, Middletown, California)

Not-Two Is Peace

The Knee of Listening (Adi Da's autobiography)

The Teaching Manual of Perfect Summaries

The Aletheon

The Pneumaton

The Gnosticon

Transcendental Realism

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Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry, by Bernard Williams (Harvester Press, 1978)

God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World, by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (Penguin Press, NY 2009)

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The Spiritual Instructions of Saint Seraphim of Sarov (The Dawn Horse Press, 1991)

The Way of White Clouds, by Lama Anagarika Govinda (The Overlook Press, 2006)

Internet Resources

<http://adidamlibrary.com/> - Adidam reference library for the largest collection of the world's most representative spiritual literature.



About the author

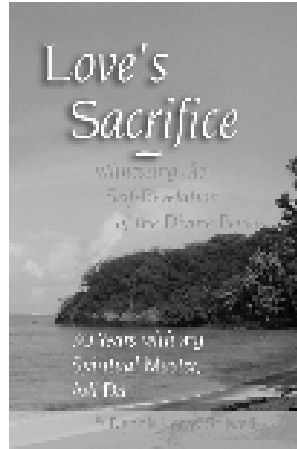
Author of *Love's Sacrifice: Witnessing the Self-Revelation of the Divine Person, 30 Years with my Spiritual Master, Adi Da*, Dennis Leroy has been a formal devotee of Adi Da Samraj since 1977. From 1986 on he regularly lived in hermitage on Naitauba Island, Fiji, for extended periods during which he participated in

cycles of consideration with Adi Da, served as editor, photographer, videographer, communications manager, ashram manager, and personal assistant to the Ruchira Sannyasin Order.

Dennis graduated from the University of California, Irvine with degrees in Biology and French, later obtaining a Master's degree in developmental psychology from the Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, France. Over the years he has worked professionally in child and family guidance, children's protective services, programs for the blind, programs for severely developmentally disabled children, vocational counseling, and teaching. Presently, he lives in Lake County, California.

Love's Sacrifice

-a recommendation by
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Dear Professors and students of
 Comparative Religion, Psychology of
 Religion, Theology, and Human
 Development,

Mr. Stilwell recounts in *Love's Sacrifice* something almost impossible to articulate: the complexity, the multi-dimensionality, and the continuous shattering that is life in the presence of a great spiritual teacher. Yet, in the overall recounting of his story, he succeeds superbly in doing just that.

What Mr. Stilwell writes about is so humanly magnetizing, heart breaking, astonishing, miracle-laden, humorous, compassionate, magical, boundary-melting, non-judgmental, and deeply personal, that one easily gains innovative insight into the fundamental substance of the religious/spiritual impulse in Man—in its origins, development, and fulfillment. Because of the breadth of both his spiritual master's teaching and the spontaneous evolution of his own devotional, shamanic, mystical, and transcendental spiritual experience, I personally feel that this book offers an extraordinary opportunity for any student of human development or of religion and spirituality to gain heretofore unavailable perspective.

Certainly Mr. Stilwell's book is an example of a student honoring the memory of his spiritual master, but it is not a work of propaganda. It is simply an extraordinary and humanly engaging story. Moreover, it is an excellently written and easily readable book. I recommend this book for any reading list in psychology, theology, or religion, at either the undergraduate or graduate level.