

# **SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE**

**A Compilation of Articles from *The Mystic's Vision*  
by Swami Abhayananda  
Arranged and published in the Public Domain, 7-14-2018  
(last revised 8-20-21)**

## **Personal Spiritual Experience**

Mysticism is a metaphysical perspective based on personal spiritual experience. That perspective may be informed by the knowledge of the experience of previous mystics but is not dependent upon that knowledge. It is dependent upon the direct personal revelation of God in the soul. Strangely enough, however, personal spiritual experience is quite alien to the normal modern Western religious sensibility. Once, several years ago, when I asked a group of students associated with a Protestant Christian organization to speak individually of their personal spiritual experience, each of them, without exception, offered a list of the various churches to which they had belonged over the years. They had no concept of what a 'spiritual experience' was.<sup>1</sup>

It's not necessary to accept the doctrines of any established religion in order to have a personal spiritual experience. It is only necessary to be openly receptive to God in your soul. He is the Ground of everyone's existence, and the sole Savior of all His children. Pray to Him in your heart of hearts, and He will hear. In every age, however, it seems that there are very few who seek Him wholeheartedly. This was the case at the time that Jesus lived as well. Young men studied the Torah and memorized the verses which they were instructed to memorize. But few actually sought to have personal knowledge of God in their own lives. Jesus was one of those very exceptional persons who opened his heart to God with a pure love, and God graced him by revealing His eternal presence. The life of Jesus was thereafter filled with much personal spiritual experience: the divine light enveloped him and revealed to him the knowledge of his innate divinity.

In ancient India, it was the enlightening personal spiritual experience of the *rishis* that inspired them to write the Upanishads. The Buddha too became enlightened through personal spiritual experience. He meditated deeply upon the mystery of his own nature until at last the truth of his divine nature was revealed to him. Muhammad also knew personal spiritual experience; it was through that

experience that he became filled with love for God and was inspired by Him to write his inner realizations for the benefit of his people.

Do you think you are less than these men? God lives in you as well, and only awaits the turning of your gaze to Him in order to fill you with the wonder of His glorious presence in your life. Exceptional people are not content with mere beliefs based on hearsay but seek to know God directly through their own personal spiritual experience. Know that you are His own. Give your heart and your life to Him, and He will surely illumine you with His merciful Grace, invigorating your life with the blissful knowledge of your divine and all-pervading Self. This is the blessing He bestowed on me, and this is the blessing I wish for you.

#### **NOTE:**

1. Personal spiritual experience was once a cornerstone of the Christian Church, but after the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was a trend away from a theocentric focus in the Church to a more anthropocentric focus, and this resulted in fewer instances of personal spiritual experience within the Christian tradition. This, in turn, resulted in a sort of cultural agnosticism within a more secular society in the West. Today, therefore, *Mysticism* is much more associated with the Eastern religious traditions that have retained much of their theocentric focus.

#### **How Do We Know?**

One of the recurring problems of philosophy involves the question ‘What is knowledge—and how do we define it?’ The various answers to this question constitute the branch of philosophy known as *epistemology*, a subject that has been much discussed and argued throughout history. It was a question frequently discussed among the early Greek philosophers, such as Plato and his teacher, Socrates, who held that the highest and most worthy kind of knowledge was the knowledge of the Divine Mind, the *Nous*. However, over time, the idea that such a knowledge was at all possible of attainment fell out of favor. Also, the subjective and undemonstrable nature of such knowledge made it suspiciously untrustworthy to some minds, and it became popular to regard only that knowledge whose evidence was sensory as valid, because it was experientially apparent and demonstrable. Sensory knowledge, i.e., the confirmation of sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc., came to be regarded, therefore, as the only acceptable

criteria of “knowledge”. Knowledge obtained in this way was considered to be *empirical* knowledge. Webster’s New World Dictionary defines “empiricism” as “(1) relying or based solely on experiment and observation [the empirical method] rather than theory; (2) relying or based on practical experience without reference to scientific principles.” In these sentences the *sensory* nature of “experiment,” “observation”, and “practical experience” is implied and understood.

But such a limited definition of “knowledge” leaves little room for a subjective, non-sensory knowing, such as the self-evident knowledge *I am*, i.e., the knowledge of being conscious. It also does not account for the knowledge of the thoughts and images existing only in the psyche; nor does it account for what we call “spiritual” knowledge. After all, we use the words “I know” to represent an inner certainty based on the various kinds of evidence to which we have access.; and this may pertain not only to sensory phenomena perceived as objects, but also to mentally perceived phenomena as well as spiritually perceived noumena. “Knowing”, we must admit, is ultimately a subjective and intangible thing, difficult to put one’s finger on. All forms of knowledge—even that we refer to as “empirical knowledge”—exist only as ephemeral conditions within the subjective field of awareness of each individual. And all these kinds of knowledge—empirical, mental, and spiritual—are informed by the kinds of evidence appropriate to each.

Evidence, in the scientific, empirical sense, consists of sense data. This refers, usually, to that data which reaches us through the faculty of vision via the *physical eye*. Even when there is mathematical proof of a scientific theory, empirical proof demands the confirmation of visual measurement, whether performed by the physical eye or by technological instrumentation. But there are other kinds of *knowledge*, and other faculties of vision which provide the evidence for those other kinds of knowledge. There is not only the physical vision, but also psychic vision and spiritual vision, corresponding to the physical (phenomenal) field of experience, the mental (psychological) field of experience, and the spiritual (noumenal) field of experience; and the instruments of these various kinds of vision are the physical eye, the psychic eye, and the eye of spirit.

The contemporary author and mystic, Ken Wilber, has written extensively about these different faculties and instruments of vision in his book, *The Eye of Spirit* <sup>1</sup>, where he points out that without acknowledging these different ways of seeing and *knowing*, we are limited to a very incomplete and woefully deficient theory of knowledge; with them, we are able to account for the entire spectrum of knowable experience—physical, mental, *and* spiritual.

Now, while the criterion of *empirical* proof is objective evidence limited to sensory experience, the criterion for the ‘proof’ of dreams, imaginations, and other subjective mental phenomena is, not physical vision, but *psychic vision*. This ‘vision’ does not occur through a faculty of sense, but through a faculty of the mind, or psyche, inherent in all, and is subjectively accessible by everyone: this faculty is frequently referred to as ‘the mind’s eye’, a term we use to represent that psychic instrument of vision whereby we “see” the images which we willfully or unwillingly project upon our inner ‘screen’ as “imaginations”. It is by this inner projection that we are able, in an instant, to create whatever images we desire to enjoy within our own private screenings. In dreams, also, we see subconsciously produced images that our dreaming selves believe to be real while they are being presented to us. Some also claim to experience images in the waking state that are clairvoyant or prescient, or projected from other human sources, living or dead. All these kinds of visual experience are ‘seen’ in the mind’s eye. (*Conceptual thought* seems to be audial, however, rather than visual; bringing up the likelihood of the existence of a physical, mental, and spiritual “ear” as well.)

*Spiritual vision* is not obtained by means of the physical eyes, or any of the other senses, nor through the imaginative or psychic faculty referred to as “the mind’s eye”; but rather through a yet subtler faculty arising only in the higher reaches of contemplative concentration, which is usually referred to as “the spiritual eye” or “the eye of contemplation”. The spiritual eye “sees”, but without the physical sense of eyesight or the deliberate projection of mindsight. The individual’s interior awareness is lifted beyond his/her mental field of awareness, as well as beyond the awareness of worldly perceptions, as that awareness is transformed into a timeless awareness of identity with the limitless and eternal Consciousness from which the universe emanates. In a uniting of the separative individual consciousness with the absolute and eternal Consciousness, one’s awareness transcends, not only the senses and the imaginative faculty, but the sense of self, the egocentric identity, as well, relieving the individual of the sense of a separate identity, as he becomes aware of the all-inclusive One. The individual knows this eternal Consciousness as his own, since there is no longer a separate individual identity by which he can perceive this Consciousness as other.

It is this unitive mystical experience that we must consider the only valid knowledge, proof and confirmation of the existence of God or Spirit. No other kind of vision is appropriate to this kind of knowledge. It has long been accepted as axiomatic that reason, in the form of philosophy or metaphysics, is powerless to provide a credible proof (empirical knowledge) of the existence of God, since it is limited to mental conceptions only; but God has been “seen” repeatedly in the

unitive vision by the eye of Spirit. It should therefore be widely understood and accepted that the only self-evident knowledge and indubitable proof of God, the eternal Self, is the direct unitive vision. For those who fail of that, there is faith, a trust in the validity of the experience of others.

The unitive 'vision' bears with it a unique kind of clarity, possessing an unmistakable and indelible stamp of truth that does not accompany the mere physical or psychic kinds of vision. If it fails of the established standard for "knowing", then it must itself replace that standard, for it is the very essence of *knowing*. However, insofar as I know, it is a knowledge that is non-transmittable, and therefore undemonstrable. It may (with difficulty) be verbally described, but that scarcely constitutes the actual 'knowledge' itself. The direct knowledge is obtainable only via the eye of Spirit. It should immediately be added that the unitive vision must never be regarded by its recipient as a matter of pride, for it is not a deed to which the individual may lay claim. Such experience is brought about entirely by the One in whom the individual exists. The individual is not meritorious in experiencing the unitive vision; rather, he is illumined despite himself. He is drawn as if by a magnet to the experience by the power of the greater Self, and, as a dream-character in a dream is dissolved in the waking consciousness of the dreamer, his sense of a separate selfhood (ego) is likewise dissolved in the eternally wakeful Consciousness of the One in whom he lives and moves and has his being. The One alone has absolute being, and alone has the power of self-revelation. It is that One who is seen, and it is that One who sees Himself in that unitive vision. Ultimately, no other may truly be said to exist but that One who exists absolutely and forever.

Many have experienced the unitive vision who have never sought it. It comes, at times, when least expected, during moments of introspective reflection, or when viewing a restful scene, or while feeling especially content or joyful. If the individual so illumined is fortunate, that unitive vision will take up perhaps twenty minutes of his life. But, for the rest of his life, his mind will hover about that vision, as a moth about a flame, in search of a continual clarification of the illuminative understanding obtained in that fleeting vision. It is in this way that he revisits the unitive vision, basking in the contemplation of the One who illumined his heart. There he finds the adoration, the bliss, and the sweet wisdom which that Self revealed to him, ever living and ever new. It is not just a memory, but it is a lasting presence in his life, benefiting him every moment, and also shedding some benefit to others whom he touches with his words. That vision is a lifelong treasure, filling his mind with a never-failing fountain of love and happiness and the brightest consolations of wisdom. Though to the world he appears empty and

alone, he possesses within himself the fullness of the universe, and his solitude is the blissful aloneness of the only One.

**NOTE:**

1. Ken Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit*, Boulder, Colorado, Shambhala, 2001.

**Who Sees God? (Part One)**

It is only God (the Divine Mind) who sees God—but He does so through the souls of men. One’s soul is able to search within itself and ascend in consciousness all the way to God. If it were not an expression of the Divine, it could not do that. When a soul rises to the vision of God, it is no longer soul, but is merged in and made one with God, so that it is not the soul that sees, but God Himself who is seeing Himself. Looking within itself, it sees its own original Self, an infinite, eternal, and all-pervasive Self. No longer two, soul and God are one Spirit, seeing Itself. Nonetheless, the vision is retained by the soul, even after the soul is no longer united in vision with God. And so, the soul is able to speak of the experience. And the story told is identical with that of all other souls who have seen God. There have been, over the centuries, many well-known and unknown souls who have seen Him, this soul among them. And it may be useful to look to some of the best-known seers who have described this experience, in order to piece together a consolidated description of what has been seen:

From **the Upanishads** [10<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.]:

He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be realized by the senses, or by austerity or the performance of rituals. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen in the silence of contemplation.<sup>2</sup>

When a wise man has withdrawn his mind from all things without, and when his spirit has peacefully left all inner sensations, let him rest in peace, free from the movement of will and desire. ... For it has been said: There is something beyond our mind, which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one’s mind and subtle spirit rest upon that and nothing else.

... When the mind is silent, beyond weakness and distraction, then it can enter into a world, which is far beyond the mind: the supreme Destination. ... Then one knows the joy of Eternity. ... Words cannot

describe the joy of the soul whose impurities are washed away in the depths of contemplation, who is one with the Atman, his own Self. Only those who experience this joy know what it is. ... As water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the infinite Mind and thus attains Freedom. <sup>3</sup>

When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where man possesses all—for he is one with the ONE. <sup>4</sup>

From **the Bhagavad Gita** [5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.]:

When the mind of the yogi is in peace, focused on the Self within, and beyond all restless desires, then he experiences Unity. His mind becomes still, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the winds. When the mind rests in the prayerful stillness of yoga, by the grace of the One, he knows the One, and attains fulfillment. Then he knows the joy of Eternity; he sees beyond the intellect and the senses. He becomes the Unmoving, the Eternal. <sup>5</sup>

... In this experience of Unity, the yogi is liberated, delivered from all suffering forever. ... The yogi whose heart is still, whose passions are dissolved, and who is pure of sin, experiences this supreme bliss and knows his oneness with Brahman. <sup>6</sup>

**Maximus of Tyre** [2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.]:

The eye cannot see God, words cannot name Him, flesh and blood cannot touch Him, the ear cannot hear Him; but within the soul That which is most fair, most pure, most intelligible, most ethereal, most honorable, can contemplate Him because it is like Him, can hear Him because of their kinship.

... The soul holds herself erect and strong, she gazes at the pure light [of the Godhead]; she wavers not, nor turns her glance to earth, but closes her ears and directs her eyes and all other senses within. She forgets the troubles and sorrows of earth, its joys and honors, its glory and its shame; and submits to the guidance of pure reason and strong love. For reason points out the road that must be followed, and love drives the soul forward, making the rough places smooth by its charm and constancy. And as we approach heaven and leave earth

behind, the goal becomes clear and luminous—that is a foretaste of God’s very self. On the road we learn His nature better; but when we reach the end, we see Him. <sup>7</sup>

How, we must ask, do we attain such vision? And all who have experienced that inner revelation of the Divine Self declare that they have done so only through the grace of God. One cannot therefore speak of the ‘attainment’ of that vision; it is given. It cannot be produced according to one’s own will. Those who are truthful acknowledge this and give thanks to the One who so generously blessed them; and they shower Him with a constant love, knowing that this love too is His own. Here, Plotinus acknowledges this truth.

**Plotinus** [3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.]:

When there enters into it a glow from the Divine, the soul gathers strength, spreads true wings, and however distracted by its proximate environment, speeds its buoyant way to something greater; ... its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the Giver of that love. ... Surely, we need not wonder that It possesses the power to draw the soul to Itself, calling it back from every wandering to rest before It. From It came everything; nothing is mightier. <sup>8</sup>

... In advancing stages of contemplation, rising from contemplation of Nature to that in the soul, and thence again to that in the Divine Mind, the object contemplated becomes progressively a more and more intimate possession of the contemplating being, more and more one with them. ... In the divine Mind itself, there is complete identity of knower and known, no distinction existing between being and knowing, contemplation and its object, [but] constituting a living thing, a one Life, two inextricably one. <sup>9</sup>

In this state of absorbed contemplation, there is no longer any question of holding an object in view; the vision is such that seeing and seen are one; object and act of vision have become identical. <sup>10</sup>

... There, our Self-seeing is a communion with the Self restored to purity. No doubt we should not speak of “seeing,” but, instead of [speaking of] “seen” and “seer,” speak boldly of a simple unity. For in this seeing, we neither see, nor distinguish, nor are there, two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor belonging to himself; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It; it is only in

separation that duality exists. This is why the vision baffles telling; for how could a man bring back tidings of the Supreme as something separate from himself when he has seen It as one with himself? <sup>11</sup>

**Meister Eckhart** [(1260-1328 C.E.):

As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one. <sup>12</sup>

...Some people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one. <sup>13</sup> ...I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one Being with Himself—not a *similar* being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction! <sup>14</sup> ...The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving. <sup>15</sup>

The soul awakens to know itself as the Divine Mind, but the One, its prior, is experienced only from a distance, as it were. The One is the transcendent Source of all, and beyond all predication or qualification; It is indescribable, as It is prior to all discernible qualities. The soul is keenly aware of the blissful imperturbability, unlimited power, omniscience, and eternal existence of its ultimate Source; but It is not distinctly 'seen', nor does the soul 'merge' with It. Nonetheless, the soul in union with the Divine Mind keenly recognizes that One as the beginningless Source of its own identity and of all that follows upon It—as the Sun hidden in the cover of the clouds is recognized to be the source of the omnipresent light.

That One was even before the first movement of Creation:

**Rig Veda** [15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.):

Then, neither the non-Real (*asat*) nor the Real (*sat*) existed. There was no sky then, nor the heavens beyond it. What was contained by what, and where, and who sheltered it? What unfathomed depths, what cosmic ocean, existed then?

Then, neither death nor deathlessness existed; between day and night there was as yet no distinction. That ONE (*tad ekam*), by Its own power (*svadha*) breathlessly breathed. <sup>16</sup>

**Lao Tze** [6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.]:

Before heaven and earth existed, there was something unformed, silent, alone, unchanging, constant and eternal; It could be called ‘the Source of the Universe.’ I do not know Its name and simply call It “Tao.”<sup>17</sup>

**Plotinus:**

The All-Transcendent, utterly void of multiplicity, is Unity’s Self, independent of all else... It is the great Beginning, wholly and truly One. All life belongs to It.<sup>18</sup> ...The One is, in truth, beyond all statement; whatever you say would limit It; the All Transcendent has no name.<sup>19</sup> ... [It] is That which is the truly Existent. ... It is the Source from which all that appears to exist derives that appearance.<sup>20</sup>

... Everywhere one and whole, It is at rest throughout. But ... in Its very non-action It magnificently operates and in Its very self-being It produces everything by Its Power.<sup>21</sup> ... This Absolute is none of the things of which It is the Source; Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It—not existence, not essence, not life—It transcends all these. But possess yourself of It by the very elimination of [individual] being, and you hold a marvel! Thrusting forward to This, attaining, and resting in Its content, seek to grasp It more and more, understanding It by that intuitive thrust alone, but knowing Its greatness by the beings that follow upon It and exist by Its power.<sup>22</sup>

Here, **Meister Eckhart** distinguishes between the One and the Divine Mind, using the terms “Godhead” and “God”:

God and the Godhead are as different from each other as heaven and earth... Creatures speak of God—but why do they not mention the Godhead? Because there is only unity in the Godhead and there is nothing to talk about. God acts. The Godhead does not. ...The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and non-action. ...The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in Him; the Godhead is as void as though it were not.<sup>23</sup>

Eckhart's "God" is the manifestory Power of the One, which has been referred to as *Prakrti*, *Maya*, *Nous*, *Shakti*, *Logos*, and many other names; we are calling It 'the Divine Mind'. The Divine Mind is not a thing apart from or distinct from the One; It is the causal aspect or agency of the One. It is the 'Creator' aspect of Divinity, from which Soul is radiated as an extension of Itself. It is the Divine Mind with which the soul is reunited, and by It, through It, knows the One as its eternal Self.

But how can it be that this immoveable, unchangeable, contentless One produces from Itself a Power so great containing all this universe? Is it, as the *Rig Veda* suggests, the arising of 'Desire' within the One that gives rise to that Power; or is it, as Plotinus suggests, a 'Circumradiation'; or is it simply a wish to be many, instead of alone, as suggested by the author of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* or the Gnostic, Valentinus? Here is the *Rig Veda*'s theory of Desire as the originating impetus to Creation:

### **Rig Veda:**

In the beginning, darkness lay wrapped in darkness; all was one undifferentiated (*apraketa*) sea (*salila*). Then, within that one undifferentiated Existence, [something] arose by the heat of concentrated energy (*tapas*). What arose in That in the beginning was Desire (*kama*), [which is] the primal seed of mind (*manas*)...<sup>24</sup>

And here is Plotinus' suggestion that the Creative Power of God is a spontaneous "circumradiation" of the One:

### **Plotinus:**

Given this immobility in the Supreme, It can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary. What happened, then? What are we to conceive as rising in the innards of that immobility? It must be a circumradiation—produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unaltering—and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance. ...There [in the One] is the Unity which is the potentiality of all existence. ...The perfection entails the offspring; [for] a power so vast could not remain unfruitful.<sup>25</sup>

And here is the suggestion in the *Upanishads* that the Creation was born of the desire of the One to be many:

**Taittiriya Upanishad:**

He [the One] desired: ‘May I be many, may I procreate. He performed *tapas* (created heat); and, having performed *tapas*, He created all this—whatever there is. Having created all this, He entered into it. Having entered into it, He became both the manifest and the unmanifest, both the defined and the undefined, both the supported and the unsupported, both the intelligent and the non-intelligent, both the real and the unreal.<sup>26</sup>

And here is a similar theory from the Gnostic, Valentinus, in the second century C.E.:

**Valentinus:**

The Father existed alone, unbegotten, without place, without time, without counselor, and without any conceivable qualities ..., solitary and reposing alone in Himself. But as He possessed a generative Power, it pleased Him to generate and produce the most beautiful and perfect that He had in Himself, for He did not love solitude. He was all love, but love is not love if there is no object of love. So, the Father, alone as He was, projected and generated [the world].<sup>27</sup>

Each of these speculations provides a plausible scenario; but do we really think that we can determine, by any amount of speculation, just how and why the one Divine Father, the absolute Consciousness, managed to possess a creative Power by which the Spiritual and material universe is produced? Really! If, as the Gnostic, Valentinus, and others have suggested, He abandoned His Oneness and entered into all this apparent multiplicity and tumult out of a desire to escape Aloneness, to be many, it may be that He is happily enjoying being all these worlds and creatures; or it may be that, underneath it all, He is still quite aware that it’s all only Himself, and still feels Alone. What do *you* think?

**NOTES:**

1. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c-e; trans. by Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, London, Oxford University Press, 1871.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, III.1; Mascaró, Juan, *The Upanishads*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1965.

3. Svetasvatara Upanishad, VI.19-23.
4. *Ibid.*, II.1.
5. *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:18-21; Mascaró, Juan, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1962.
6. *Ibid.*, 6:23-27.
7. Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.*, XI.9-10
8. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 38:6:22-23; MacKenna, Stephen (trans.), *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London, Faber & Faber, 1956; p. 199.
9. *Ibid.*, 30:3:8; pp. 113-114.
10. *Ibid.*, 38:6:35; p. 204.
11. *Ibid.*, 9:6:10; p. 221.
12. Meister Eckhart, Treatise A.2, Colledge E. & McGinn, B. (trans.), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 222. *Ibid.*, *Sermon 6*; p. 188.
13. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 18, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; p. 181.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 23, *Ibid.*, p. 206.
16. *Rig Veda*, x.129.1
17. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 25.
18. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 44:5:15-16; MacKenna, Stephen (trans.), *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London, Faber & Faber, 1956, pp. 162-163.
19. *Ibid.*, 49:5:13; p. 162
20. *Ibid.*, 26:3:4; p. 101
21. *Ibid.*, 47:1; p. 76
22. *Ibid.*, 30:3:10; p. 116
23. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 27, Blackney, Raymond B., *Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, N.Y., Harper Torchbooks, 1941; pp. 225-226.
24. *Rig Veda*, x.129.2-5
25. *Enneads*, V.1.4-8: The Three Initial Hypostases
26. Taittiriya Upanishad, II.6.1, Swami Nikhilananda, *The Principal Upanishads*, N.Y., Dover Publications, 1963, 2003; p. 269.
27. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Heresium* VI.29.5ff. Roberts, Rev. A. & Donaldson, J. (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; Vol. VI.

## Who Sees God? (Part Two)

In many religious traditions, the One, the absolute Ground, is regarded as the masculine component, and Its Creative Power (the Divine Mind) is regarded as the feminine aspect. This genderization of God and His Power is certainly not to be taken literally, but it is merely a metaphorical device to emphasize their apparent duality within a subsuming Unity. It is a metaphor that is most evident in the Hindu and Buddhist Tantric traditions, as well as in the ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite religious traditions; but it exists also in many other unrelated traditions, such as in the Taoist tradition, where *Tao* is the One, the Father; and *Teh*, Its feminine aspect, is Its Creative, or manifestory, Power:

### Lao Tze:

... The Tao that can be spoken of is not the absolute Tao. That Nameless [*Tao*] is the Father of heaven and earth; That which is named [*Teh*] is the Mother of all things.<sup>28</sup>

These two are the same; they are given different names in order to distinguish between them. Together, they constitute the Supreme Mystery.<sup>29</sup>

The *Tao* is an empty cup, yet It is inexhaustible; It is the fathomless Fountainhead of all things.<sup>30</sup> That which gave birth to the universe [*Teh*] may be regarded as the Mother of the universe.<sup>31</sup> The Womb of creation is called the Mysterious Female; it is the root of heaven and earth.<sup>32</sup>

The myriad objects of the world take form and rise to activity, but I have seen THAT to which they return, like the luxuriant growth of plants that return to the soil from which they spring.<sup>33</sup>

That ONE called *Tao* is subtle, beyond vision, yet latent in It are all forms. It is subtle, beyond vision, yet latent in It are all objects. It is dark and obscure, yet latent in It is the creative Power of life [*Teh*].<sup>34</sup>

From the ancient days till now Its manifestation has never ceased; it is because of this [*Teh*] that we perceive the Father of all. It is the manifestation of forms that reveals to us the Father [*Tao*].<sup>35</sup> The *Tao* is never the doer, yet through It everything is done.<sup>36</sup> The *Tao* fathers, and the *Teh* brings everything forth as the world of form, time, and space.<sup>37</sup>

The later Taoist sage, **Chuang Tze** [3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E.], explains these two: The One and Its manifestory Power, in a straightforward manner, without the symbolism of gender:

In the beginning, even nothing did not exist. There was only the Tao. Then something unnamed which did not yet have form came into existence from the *Tao*. This is *Teh*, from which all the world came into being. ...It is in this way that *Teh* created all forms. <sup>38</sup>

The *Tao* is the source of the activity of universal manifestation, but It is not this activity. It is the Author of causes and effects, but It is not the causes and effects. It is the Author of universal manifestation and dissolution, but It is not the manifestation or dissolution. Everything proceeds from It and is governed by It; It is in all things, but is not identical with things, for It is neither divided nor limited. <sup>39</sup>

*Tao* is invisible, hard to hold, and difficult to describe. However, I will outline It for you: The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Power [*Teh*] is born from *Tao*, and all life forms are born of this creative Power, whereby all creation evolves into various forms.

...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen. It is fathomless, like the Sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The *Tao* sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ... That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon—that is the *Tao*.<sup>40</sup>

And here is how **Plotinus** describes the Eternal and Its Power:

Time was not yet; ... it lay ... merged in the eternally Existent and motionless with It. But an active principle there ... stirred from its rest; ... for the One contained an unquiet faculty, ... and it could not bear to retain within itself all the dense fullness of its possession. [Like] a seed at rest, the nature-principle within, unfolding outwards, makes its way towards what appears a multiple life. It was Unity self-contained, but now, in going forth from Itself, It fritters Its unity away; It advances to a lesser greatness. <sup>41</sup>

**Philo Judaeus** (1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.) refers to these two as ‘God’ and His ‘Logos’:

God is high above place and time ... He is contained by nothing, but He transcends all. *But though transcending what He has made, nonetheless, He filled the universe with Himself.* [My italics] <sup>42</sup> The supremely generic is God, the next is the Logos of God; <sup>43</sup> ... That which comes after God, even if it were the most venerable of all other things, holds second place, and was called feminine in contrast to the Creator of the universe, who is masculine.<sup>44</sup>

Here is another surprisingly perceptive treatment of the One and Its Creative Power represented as masculine and feminine, by the 1<sup>st</sup> century Gnostic, **Simon Magus**, who refers to the One as “the Divine Mind”, and Its Energy-producing Power as ‘the Thought’:

There are two aspects of the One. The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought (*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists. The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the Divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

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

Though there appears to be a Higher, the Mind, and a lower, the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [the world] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two. [Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [conceptually] divided as Higher and lower; generating

Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence.<sup>45</sup>

The Divine Mind possesses Its own light of Consciousness which we name 'Soul'; but Soul, being invisible Spirit, requires a substantial and relatively stable world of forms to inhabit; and so, the Divine Mind periodically sends forth a burst of Energy that transforms into the Matter of which the physical universe is constituted. He sends forth this Energy in cycles, first projecting His Light Energy, which transforms into the universe of matter in its four dimensions; and then, at the end of a cycle, withdrawing that universe of matter, time and space. To us, perceiving this drama from the temporal side, these cycles appear to last for billions and billions of years; but for the soul united in consciousness with the Eternal, the Divine Mind, they are seen to last but the space of a breath.

The Divine Consciousness, or Soul, both contains and inhabits this material universe formed by the Divinely manifested Energy, becoming its indwelling evolutionary force, its living vitality, and its conscious Intelligence. By inhabiting or permeating the distinctly manifested forms, Soul becomes associated with those individually distinct forms, and thus takes on the individual characteristics of each one; It appears as separate and multiple souls, while yet retaining its inseparability and singularity. Soul, by virtue of its inhabiting of body, takes on an individuality, thus becoming distinct souls; and yet, because it is identical with the Divine Mind, it retains its Divine unity as Soul, being in essence the Divine Mind.

### **Philo Judaeus:**

That aspect of Him which transcends His powers cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure Being; but that power of His by which He made and ordered all things [the Logos] ... pervades the whole and passes through all the parts of the universe.<sup>46</sup>

### **Heraclitus (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.):**

Of all the wise philosophers whose discourses I have heard, I have not found any who have realized the one Intelligence, which is distinct from all things<sup>47</sup> and yet pervades all things.<sup>48</sup> That Intelligence is One; to know It is to know the Purpose, which guides all things and is in all things.<sup>49</sup> Nature has no inherent power of intelligence; Intelligence is the Divine.<sup>50</sup> Without It [the one

Intelligence], the fairest universe is but a randomly scattered dust-heap.<sup>51</sup>

### **Plotinus:**

There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete. The differentiated souls issue from the Unity and strike out here and there, but they are united at the Source much as light is a divided thing on earth, shining in this house and that, and yet remains one. One Soul [is] the source of all souls; It is at once divided and undivided.<sup>52</sup>

... Diversity within the ONE depends not upon spatial separation, but sheerly upon differentiation; all Being, despite this plurality, is a Unity still.<sup>53</sup> ... The souls are apart without partition; they are no more hedged off by boundaries than are the multiple items of knowledge in one mind. The one Soul so exists as to include all souls.<sup>54</sup>

Soul, permeating and inhabiting the universe of Matter, lends its Intelligence and Vitality to the material forms, thus bringing life and an evolutionary force to the material universe. As Heraclitus rightly states, the universe of Matter, without the Intelligence of Soul, would be nothing but 'a randomly scattered dust-heap'. As for the material universe, which dwells within, and is permeated by, the *anima mundi*, or world soul, we have shown that it is the product of a periodic burst of (electromagnetic) Energy cast forth by the Divine Mind. This light-energy has the ability to transmute into material forms (wave-particles), which in turn aggregate into the larger forms that make up the universe.<sup>55</sup> Plotinus, of course, knew nothing of this, and so he could never grasp the nature of Matter.

Plotinus was also tripped up in his attempt to understand the nature of Matter by his Platonist concepts. He could only conceive of the world of things as eternal Idea-forms, and so he had to regard Matter as an eternal existent; and yet, in other instances, he saw the material universe as the very outer limits of the radiance of the Divine Mind, where, extending beyond Soul, it fades into utter darkness. Plotinus often equated this darkness, this extremity of the reach of the Divine, with the world of Matter. Brilliant and insightful as he was, he simply did not have all the facts, and so could not piece together all the elements of manifest existence into a comprehensive and consistent whole.

The eighth century Indian Nondualist philosopher, Shankara, declared that the appearance of the universe is an illusion, a product of Maya, the Creative Power of Brahman. And, as contemporary science has shown, the universe does indeed

consist of (a Divinely produced) Energy that transforms into material particles; but these material particles are really nothing more than submicroscopic electromagnetic impulses, mere ‘points of Energy’, interacting in such a way that the appearance of substance is produced—forming, in other words, an illusory world.

How do these “points” of Energy, these wave-particles that began as “photons”, manage to produce the illusion of form and substance? In their original abundance, they collide, transforming into particles such as electrons, and quarks—which combine to form protons and neutrons, which combine to form atoms; and the atoms combine to form molecules, which combine in vast numbers to form perceptible gases, liquids, and solids in a variety of sizes and configurations. And yet the atoms of which these perceivable solids consist are mostly empty space in their interior. In fact, all of what we call *Matter* is 99.999999999999 percent empty space; the other infinitesimal part seems to be nothing more than energy wavelets and intangible forces. Subatomic wave-particles consist of intangible electrically charged impulses held in proximate “orbits” about one another by invisible forces, so as to form the appearance of much grander substantial entities. And these appearances are multiplied in infinite profusion and variety as if by some magician’s hand, to appear before our eyes as a multitudinous world of objects. And so, this material world, this phenomenal reality of ours, is a marvelous magic show of truly immense proportions!

Soul is Spirit, and the Divine Energy that becomes Matter is also Spirit; they are both from the Divine Mind, but the two are distinctly different: Soul is noumenon, and Matter/Energy is phenomenon. Obviously, they require distinctly different means of production. Soul, possessing Intelligence, is inherently Divine, emanating from and partaking of the Divine Intelligence. It is an extension or radiance of the Divine Itself. Whereas Matter, woven of Light Energy, had to have been produced deliberately as an illusion-producing force expressly to produce the appearance of form and substance—it is, as Shankara tells us, *Maya*, or illusion.

Intelligence, or Soul, is a direct extension of the Divine, an emanate of conscious Intelligence identical with its source; and the Energy constituting Matter is of an entirely different kind, transient and lifeless, lacking Intelligence, whose only function is to house the Soul or Spirit. We call this universe-manifesting Energy ‘electromagnetic radiation’ but it may just as rightly be regarded as ‘the power of *Maya*’.

**Shankara** (8<sup>th</sup> century C.E.):

Maya, ...also called the Undifferentiated, is the power (*shakti*) of the Lord. She is without beginning, ...being the Cause of all. One who has a clear intelligence infers Her existence from the effects She produces. It is She who brings forth this entire universe. Maya is neither real nor unreal, nor both together; She is neither identical with Brahman nor different from Him, nor both; She is neither differentiated nor undifferentiated, nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.<sup>56</sup> ...Everything, from the intellect down to the gross physical body, is the effect of Maya. Understand that all these and Maya itself are not the [absolute] Self, and are therefore unreal, like a mirage in the desert.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, the Divine Energy-producing Power, also referred to as *Prakrti*, *Maya*, *Logos*, etc., must be differentiated from the Soul-emanation that is essentially identical with the Consciousness of the Divine Mind (*Purusha*). Soul, being identical with the Divine, is eternal; the world-appearance, produced by an eternal Energy, is temporal, and transient, and therefore, by Shankara's definition, 'unreal'. It is produced by the Divine Mind periodically, in a cyclic manner, similar to the production of a recurrent respiration. This has been repeatedly 'seen', experienced, in the unitive vision, and described by numerous seers. Here is how this cyclic "creation" and "destruction" is described by some others who have seen it:

***Svetasvatara Upanishad*** (4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.):

He [the Lord] spreads his net [of appearance] and then withdraws it again into His *Prakriti* [His creative Power].<sup>58</sup>

And here, from the ***Maitri Upanishad*** (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.):

The supreme Spirit is immeasurable, inapprehensible, beyond conception, never born, beyond reasoning, beyond thought. He is vaster than the infinity of space. At the end of the worlds, all things sleep; and He alone is awake in eternity. Then from his infinite space new worlds arise and awake, a universe which is a vastness of thought. In the consciousness of Brahman, the universe exists, and into Him it returns.<sup>59</sup>

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* has Krishna explaining to Arjuna the process of manifestation-dissolution in the following passages:

They who know that the vast ‘day’ of Brahma (the personified Creative Power), ever lasts a thousand ages; and that his ‘night’ lasts also a thousand ages—they know in truth day and night.

When that day comes, all the visible creation arises from the Eternal; and all creation disappears into the Eternal when the night of darkness comes. Thus, the infinity of beings which live again and again all powerlessly disappear when the night of darkness comes; and they all return again at the rising of the day. But beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is a higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains for ever and ever. <sup>60</sup>

**Krishna**, who is identified with *Purusha*, the Eternal, continues, referring to His Creative Power by the Sankhya term, *Prakrti*:

At the end of the night of time all things return to my [creative Power, called] *Prakrti*; and when the new day of time begins, I bring them into light. Thus, through my *Prakrti* I bring forth all creation, and these worlds revolve in the revolutions of time. But I am not bound by this vast work of creation. I exist alone, watching the drama of this play. I watch and in its work of creation *Prakrti* brings forth all that moves and moves not: and thus, the worlds go on revolving. <sup>61</sup>

What do the mystics of other traditions have to say? **Lao Tze**, of the Taoist tradition of China, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., also spoke of the universal creation/dissolution cycle:

The myriad objects of the world take form and rise to activity, but I have seen THAT to which they return, like the luxuriant growth of plants that return to the soil from which they spring. <sup>62</sup>

And **Chuang Tze**, who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., wrote:

The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The Creative Energy [*Teh*] is born from the Eternal [*Tao*], and all life forms are born of this Creative Energy; thus, all creation evolves into various forms.

...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen. It is fathomless, like the sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The Eternal [*Tao*] sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ... That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon— that is the Eternal [*Tao*].<sup>63</sup>

**Heraclitus** adds his voice to the consensus:

What is within us remains the same eternally; It is the same in life and death, waking and sleeping, youth and old age; for, It has become this world, and the world must return to It.<sup>64</sup> This ordered universe ...always was, is, and shall be, [like] an ever-living Flame that is first kindled and then quenched in turn.<sup>65</sup>

(This last, by the way, led unilluminated commentators to say that Heraclitus believed the universe was made of fire.)

By all accounts, the creative expansion and “eternal return” of the universe to a state of potentiality in the Divine Mind was also recognized by Pythagoras (570-490 B.C.E.), Empedocles (495-435 B.C.E.), and the early Stoics, and was an established major tenet of Stoic metaphysics by the time of Plotinus. Yet both Plato and Plotinus assumed that the material universe was eternal and unchanging. Plotinus emphatically stated this opinion in his *Enneads*. How could he have begun to imagine the countless wonders that would eventually be discovered in the heavens with the aid of the telescope, including the revelation that the universe is expanding, and that it had its beginning around fourteen billion years ago? No doubt, we in this current time are also woefully deficient in both spiritual and material knowledge, the future addition of which will one day more perfectly complete our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our place in it.

#### **NOTES:**

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

29.*Ibid.*, 1

30.*Ibid.*, 4

31.*Ibid.*, 52

32.*Ibid.*, 6

33.*Ibid.*, 16

34. *Ibid.*, 21
35. *Ibid.*, 21
36. *Ibid.*, 37
37. *Ibid.*, 51
38. *Chuang Tze*, Ch. 12
39. *Ibid.*, Ch. 8
40. *Chuang Tze*, 22
41. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 45:3:11; *Op.cit.*, p. 106
42. Philo, *De posteritate Caini*, 14-16; Winston, David (trans.), *Philo Of Alexandria—The Contemplative Life, Giants, And Selections*, Ramsey, N.J., Paulist Press, 1981.
43. Philo, *Legum Allegoriorum*, 2:86; *Ibid.*, p. 93
44. Philo, *De uga et inventione*, 50-52, *Ibid.*, p. 93
45. Simon Magus, *Apophasis Megale* (“The Great Exposition”), quoted by Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutatio Omnium Heresium*, VI.8; adapted from Roberts, Rev. A. & Donaldson, J. (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; Vol. VI, pp. 208-210.
46. Philo, *De confusione linguarum*, 136-137; Winston, 1981; p. 90.
47. Heraclitus, based on Freeman, K., *Ancilla To The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983; pp. 24-34. Fragment nbr. 108.
48. *Ibid.*, 113
49. *Ibid.*, 41
50. *Ibid.*, 78
51. *Ibid.*, 124
52. *Enneads*, 27:4:2-5; *Ibid.*, p. 118.
53. *Enneads*, 22:6:4; *Ibid.*, p. 184.
54. *Enneads*, 22:6:4; *Ibid.*, p. 184.
55. For details regarding the transformation of electromagnetic radiation into material particles, in this book, see the chapter on “Body”.
56. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*; Prabhavananda, Swami (trans.), *The Crest-Jewel Of Discrimination*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; p. 59.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 62
58. Svetasvatara Upanishad, V.3.
59. Maitri Upanishad, 6.17.
60. *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapters VIII.17-20.
61. *Ibid.*, Chapter IX, 7-10.
62. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 16.
63. *Chuang Tze*, Chapter 22.

64. Heraclitus, fragment 88; based on Freeman, K., *Ancilla To The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983.

65. Heraclitus, fragment 30; *Ibid.*

### **Seeing Is Believing**

The metaphysical understanding of the Western philosophical tradition is virtually identical to that of the Eastern philosophical tradition. Only the names used by each tradition are different. The current metaphysics in both East and West holds that the Absolute Ground, the transcendent One, possesses a Creative Power that we call *God*, or *the Creator*. In the beginning, that Creative Power of God manifested the Light of creation; that Light became form, and every form is permeated with the Divine consciousness. For, just as our own consciousness exists as the substratum of every one of our dream-forms or thought-constructs, and permeates them all, so does He, the universal Consciousness, permeate the forms of this world, made of His self-produced light. Over the course of time, His life awakens within these forms;<sup>1</sup> and the forms evolve, culminating in man, in whom God's consciousness exists as individual souls. When He reveals Himself as the soul within us, that conscious soul realizes itself to be no one else but Him.

When we say that the universe is “ensouled”, it means that the one Soul, the Mind of God, permeates and is present in everything. That presence manifests in this universe as an all-pervading Spirit, or *anima mundi*, which enfolds, inheres in and embodies every element of this cosmic appearance. It is a unified Spirit in which all exists, and by which all constituent appearances are permeated and governed—just as, in our own personal experience, all images are contained, permeated and governed by the mind in which they appear. It is in such a conception of the universe and the Soul that we find, for example, the possibility of a correspondence between existing planetary patterns and the incarnation of individual souls, the sum of whose karmic histories are depicted in those patterns. Indeed, such a miraculous correspondence *requires* a universe that is ensouled, one that is pervaded by a universal Spirit, or *anima mundi*. It requires a universe in which all things move together of one accord, in which assent is given throughout to even the most insignificant occurrence.

Soul, as an intelligent organizing principle, is present in every single particle of matter; but the limited sense of an independent self which we identify as ‘our soul’ is perceived as a conscious individual identity that exists distinct from body and material things. It is a conscious ‘I’ that, while *associated* with the body, brain,

and sense perception, is independent of all these. However—wonder of wonders—when our soul ascends to its transcendent Identity by the grace of God, it experiences that Identity as *both* the material manifestations *and* the universal Soul within material manifestations as well. For, in God (the Divine Mind), the two are undivided; they are one unitive Spirit. One all-pervading Consciousness is the substratum of both the material world and the all-pervading Soul. That Divine Mind who manifests as the manifold world and all souls remains one undivided Spirit, guiding all things, and so throughout the cosmos “all things move together of one accord, and assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” What a mysterious and wonderful world Thou hast made, O Lord! Who can fathom it?

When God (the eternal Self) reveals Himself in man, the illusory duality of body and soul vanishes. Like all dualities, this one exists only in the spatio-temporal reality produced by God’s projected Light. When the individual mind (soul) ascends to the Eternal, it then sees from the unitive perspective of the Eternal, wherein body and soul are both contained. Here, all dualities vanish, and only the undivided Mind remains. Here, the division between I and Thou is no more; now and then both vanish in the Timeless; life and death no longer stand apart. Only the One shines eternally.<sup>2</sup> This experience is the revelation from which all religion derives. It is this mystical experience that provides the irrefutable evidence for the Divine identity of the soul. Those who have not experienced that ‘mystical’ union may argue the question of the immortality of the soul, but for those who have been graced with that unitive experience, no question remains. The Divine Mind is an experiential reality that is a thousand times more impressive than mere thought or sense experience. It is an experience more indubitable than the light of day.

God’s creative Light is eternal, though the forms it takes are temporal and transient. Likewise, Soul is eternal; the forms it takes are temporal and transient and are stamped with the pattern of the heavens at the time of their embodiment. As limited souls, we journey through time from body to body in quest of the perfect joy and satisfaction that already exists in its fullness within us. Our souls are limited rays of the one Sun, droplets of the one ocean of Joy; and when we are ripe for seeing, He opens our eyes: He reveals our true nature, showing us that we are His own Beauty, His own unlimited Vastness, His own sweet Joy. He shows us who we have always been.

It is this experience that prompted the authors of the Upanishads to proclaim, “That thou art”; it is this experience that prompted Jesus to declare “I and the

Father are one”, and Mansur al-Hallaj to declare, *an al Haqq*, “I am the transcendent Reality”. It is this experience that provides the self-evident proof of our Divine Ground and ultimate Identity. It is an experience that is accessible, by the Grace of God, through contemplative introspection.

The soul experiences its “union” with God when He reveals His eternal presence in the soul. This vision is the greatest attainment possible to man, and yet it is not an attainment that can be taught. The reason is that it is not something that can be accomplished by man. A man can only make himself receptive to it, but it is accomplished by God Himself. It is a gift. I am not speaking of the mere intellectual recognition of the fact that the one all-pervading Spirit is the only one who exists; the *experience* of union entails the actual upliftment of the soul to its divine Source, so that it is no longer aware of its separate existence on this earth, but knows itself, for as long as that experience lasts, as God—transcendent to the cosmos and yet the life and conscious Spirit pervading the cosmos. It is a going-out of the limited soul-identity and an awakening to the consciousness of an unlimited, eternal and all-inclusive Identity. All questions are answered in this altered awareness—or rather, they are dissolved away in the sweetness of eternity, an eternity that is realized to be one’s own indubitable Self. Truly, there are no words to describe this ‘awakening’; but it is the foundation of all religion and all philosophy, and the bedrock of all certainty and satisfaction.

Those who have experienced that 'awakening' tend to espouse the metaphysical view, the mystical theology, that is commonly referred to in modern times as ‘the Perennial Philosophy’. It is the perennial expression of the revealed knowledge of the one eternal Spirit. Yet such reasoned arguments for the Divine creation of our world and the existence of our Divine soul are oftentimes utterly impotent to convince the determined advocates of a Godless and materialistic worldview. The materialist worldview is based entirely on the material sciences, and does not even give consideration to a metaphysics, insofar as “metaphysics” implies a non-physical reality creating, underlying and controlling the physical reality. The materialist worldview acknowledges the insubstantiality of matter at the quantum level, but it does not recognize a supernatural cause, a noumenal Source and Ruler of the phenomenal world of matter.

The proponents of materialism say that ‘when the body dies, the consciousness associated with it dies as well; there is no second entity such as an enduring soul.’ ‘Life and consciousness’, they say, ‘are merely transient properties of matter, and have no existence apart from individual material bodies.’ And without some inner

experience of God, they remain skeptical of the spiritual view, and rely solely on what they perceive through sense experience.

Also, those who *have* known God have found no objectively rational way of convincing such people of the existence of the Spirit, though throughout history many have tried to do so. The Spirit must be experienced subjectively, and then only by God's self-revelation. It would seem that He has retained control of this knowledge among humans by causing it to be unknowable by the senses or by rational thought, and realizable only through His grace. Once He reveals Himself within our soul, we realize that we are His creations, made of His substance, and that we are utterly dependent upon Him. Then we learn to surrender our own will to His will; and this, in turn, alleviates us of all our errors, and brings about our own highest good and happiness. Without that self-revelation, we remain blind to Him in ourselves and in the world. This, too, is His doing; as He says: "I bring the dust of blindness". But He is also the remover of that blindness. He is not only the Light of the phenomenal world; He is also the inner Light that reveals His presence as our own Soul, our own divine Self.

This being the case, how can we enjoin others to awaken to the knowledge of God when such knowledge is only obtained through the Grace of God? Even the desire to know God arises through the workings of His Grace! What, then, can we do? It has been said that 'The breeze of His grace is always blowing; but it is we who must set our sails to receive that breeze'. I reply that it is only by His Grace that we are inspired to set our sails to receive Him. The truth is that He is doing everything, whether we are aware of it or not. "We" are *His* manifestations, and we live and move within His omnipresent Spirit.

However, as His manifestations, we possess the abilities that He has granted us; and one of those abilities is the power to exercise our individual wills. We are able to choose, and we are responsible for our choices; and it is we, as individual souls, who receive the consequences of those choices. Every moment, He offers us the choice of turning our intention to Him or to the illusory world:

*I have given sweets that decay to those that crave them.  
I have given my wealth unto the poor and lonely.  
My hands are open—nothing is concealed.*<sup>3</sup>

We choose, ultimately, not from reason's arguments or empirical proofs, but from the yearning that arises from the loving kinship of the soul to God. And the rationale for expounding rational arguments that tell of His presence and the

possibility of knowing Him is that such reasonings are on rare occasions capable of prompting a recognition and a yearning in those who are readied for it, leading them to seek His revelation in their own hearts. And that too is His doing, as His presence in our hearts inspires both the expounding and the recognition.

Nonetheless, I fear that the great majority of souls living on earth today have yet to see beyond immediate appearances, have yet to experience God in their lives, have yet to experience the joy of the soul upon being uplifted to union with the Creator. They cannot therefore be expected to give credence to such a mystical worldview. They are bewitched by a fascination with and desire for the things of creation, and fail to recognize their Creator, or even their own souls. I have not the slightest doubt that these people will eventually come to recognize the Divine in themselves and in the world; but for the time being, they are blind, and therefore suffer many miseries. It is certain, however, that the Lord, in His justice and mercy, will bring them, in the course of time, to awaken from their slumbers, and will make Himself known to them, leading them to comfort and joy in His bosom.

#### **NOTES:**

1. Many believe, as the respected Biologist, Michael Behe, believes, that the propensity for 'life' was pre-programmed into the evolution of matter from the beginning:

“I am not saying the origin of life was simply an extremely improbable accident. I am saying the origin of life was deliberately, purposely arranged, just as the fundamental laws and constants and many other anthropic features of nature were deliberately, purposefully arranged. But in what I'll call the “extended fine-tuning” view, the origin of life is merely an additional planned feature, culminating in intelligent life. The origin of life is simply closer to the very same goal that the other, more distant anthropic features (laws, chemical properties, and so forth) were also put in place to bring about.”  
(Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution*, New York, Free Press, 2008; p. 216.)

2. This ‘coincidence of opposites’ in the unitive experience was first noted by Heraclitus. In fact, Heraclitus touched on nearly all of the elements of mystical experience, and yet his valuable insights have never been fully acknowledged or appreciated.

3. From Swami Abhayananda, "The Song of The Self" in *The Supreme Self*, Atma Books, Fallsburg, New York, 1984.

## Mystical Experience And Near-Death Experience

Have you ever noticed the difference between the descriptions of the spiritual world by the so-called ‘mystics’ and the descriptions by people who claim to have had a ‘near-death’ experience? Have you ever wondered how these stark differences can be explained or reconciled? Is it possible that both perspectives are true? The vast majority of those people who claim to have had a ‘near-death’ experience speak of having gone out of their bodies, of having perceived a loving light at the end of a tunnel, and of having moved rapidly through that tunnel toward the light. They experienced themselves as being outside of their body, sometimes hovering over it, and observing the occurrences taking place in the physical world around them. While they were out of their bodies, they sometimes perceived deities or messianic figures, or experienced meetings with relations and loved ones who had ‘passed over’. They sometimes experienced visions of beautiful ethereal landscapes to which they became attracted; and then came the sudden, often non-volitional, return to their body.

The mystic, on the other hand, experiences no such out-of-body excursions, no soul-travels or events relating to an individual ‘me’ at all. Rather, he experiences a sudden shift of consciousness wherein he becomes the all-pervading spiritual identity, in which there is neither subject nor object, neither an ‘I’ nor a ‘Thou’, but rather a blissful awareness of identity with the one eternal Being. The mystic experiences that he *is* that eternal Being (‘I and the Father are one’), and often is able to see clearly into the workings of that eternal Being as well. How can we possibly explain the vast differences between these two descriptions of spiritual experience?

First of all, we must come to recognize that there are at least three distinct levels of subtlety, not only in the world, but in ourselves. These three levels of subtlety are simply progressive elements of the one conscious Being who is the sole reality.<sup>1</sup> Our own human make-up is a reiteration of that triune cosmic reality; in other words, as conscious beings within the divine reality, we have our origin in the eternal Being—the Divine Mind; and secondly, within that Divine context, we exist as an individual soul; and lastly, we have a transient association with a physical body. On the physical level, we see each other solely as physical bodies; but the awareness of one who experiences a ‘near-death’, no longer identifies himself as a body, but sees himself and experiences existence as an individual soul, living and operating on what some call ‘the astral plane’. As a soul, he is free of the body, and yet retains all the memories of the people and past events associated with it.

However, at the highest, or deepest, spiritual level, there are no souls, and no individual perceptions; there is only the divine Self, the Eternal, wherein all the various levels of manifestation—including the material and the astral—are merely potential. This ultimate reality has been called the One, Brahman, the Godhead, the Self, the Void, the Tao, and many other names; and is realized by enlightened sages to be the highest truth, the sole source and origin of all the manifest planes of existence, and everyone's ultimate Identity.

Our experiences are different because the focus of our attention is different. A focus on the state of one's personal well-being will likely result in an experience of the soul, whereas a focus on God and the determination of His will would likely result in an experience of the Divine Mind. People often experience themselves in a near-death situation as souls moving about in the astral realm at a very crucial time regarding their personal well-being; some few, whose focus is on God and His service, are blessed to experience the eternal Being as their true Self. But understand, there is no contradiction implied between these two experiences. The Self may reveal Itself as one's eternal Identity, or it may present Itself as a disincarnate soul on the astral plane or as a soul associated with a body in the manifested plane. Many, including myself, have seen disembodied souls on the astral level; and many, including myself, have experienced the universal Spirit, the divine Self, as the ultimate Identity. The soul and the Absolute Self are not mutually exclusive. He is all, and all is He; He also transcends all. The Godhead, Brahman, the one Spirit, is the ultimate Reality and Source of all that exists and constitutes the ultimate knowledge to be attained. But, at a grosser level of consciousness, each of us is an individual soul, just as we are temporarily—at a yet grosser level—manifested in this phenomenal world as a *material* body.

The Creator and the created, manifesting as our Divine Self and the individual soul, are not two; there is only the One, appearing in many forms, and as the many varied souls. And yet, since most of us do not frequently experience an intensely intimate level of conscious deliberation toward God, we seldom experience ourselves as the Divine Self; instead, we experience ourselves as individual souls with distinctly unique attributes, and we deal with others as individuals with unique attributes—though in fact, there is only the one Divinity living and acting in the world as manifold individual souls. Look more deeply into the truth! Lift the veil! See God in each other! There is no one here but God—appearing as you and as all in this world. This is the highest knowledge and the highest attainment. Identify with the attributeless Self and become free of the limiting soul attributes. Once you've known your divine Identity, those soul-attributes may or may not

continue. No matter. Know that you are free. Know that you are the one Divine Reality.

Realization of the eternal Self does not put an end to one's soul or one's body, just as, in other cases, knowing or recognizing the whole does not negate or destroy the constituents within that whole. We, as souls, live within Him, even while being aware of our oneness with Him; and we partake of that vision by His loving Grace. So, let us put away our arguments, acknowledging that we are both the divine Self and a uniquely individual soul, and that we may rightly experience ourselves as either the one or the other. These two, Self and soul, are complementary aspects of our own conscious identity; they are, in fact, complementary aspects of the one all-inclusive Divinity in which we live and breathe and have our being.

#### **NOTES:**

1. The three levels of subtlety were described by Plato, and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman Neoplatonist mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, as consisting of *the One*, followed by Its Creative Power, *the Divine Mind*, and thirdly, the *Soul*. According to Plotinus, our material bodies consist of an illusory substance produced by *the Divine Mind* by which the *Soul* is ensnared and with which the *Soul* then becomes identified. Our modern understanding of the nature of *Matter*, by which we recognize that the phenomenal world is comprised of electromagnetic impulses masquerading as substance, would seem to reinforce Plotinus' notion of *Matter* as an illusory substance.

#### **About Spiritual Knowledge**

You probably know that there is a real and definite division between the spiritually informed and the spiritually uninformed, not only in this country, but in the entire world. And you probably agree that the former group is a very small minority, and the latter group is a very large majority. But before you jump with both feet onto this particular bandwagon, be advised that you're probably not on the side of this divide that you think you are.

The fact is that almost no one has any real spiritual knowledge—no one except those of us who have been blessed by a direct revelation, a vision, of God. Such a

divine revelation is usually referred to as a ‘mystical’ experience. True mystical experiences are rare, and few have even heard of such an experience.

One of the reasons that mystical experience is so unfamiliar to the majority of people is the infrequency of its occurrence. Also, among those who *do* experience divine revelation, there are only a few throughout history who have garnered widespread public attention. There are the authors of the Upanishads, the Buddha, Lao Tze, Jesus, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, and one or two Sufis, such as Rumi or Ibn Arabi—hardly enough to hold the world’s attention for very long. And then, here am I, a contemporary mystic, with the ability to give a good description of the experience. Will it make a difference in the times to come? Who can say?

For many years now, I have undertaken to inform the public about my own mystical experience, and have discovered that, in these current times, almost no one is aware of the fact that ‘enlightenment,’ the ‘vision of God,’ is even something that is possible of experiencing. And so, I am up against the opinion held by nearly the entire population that I am either insane or deluded or both. It seems that it is also futile for me to bring up the similar experience of Jesus of Nazareth, since his experience is not believed to have occurred either, or if it did occur, is believed to have been a unique experience exclusive to him. To speak of the other mystics who’ve existed throughout history and who have also written of their experience of God is also a pointless exercise, since no one seems to be aware of their existence either.

After many years of attempting to inform the public about the validity of mystical experience, it is clear that the larger populace regards my testament of mystical experience as a fraudulent representation and considers me to be a liar, a deceiver, a con artist. I don’t think that this universal judgement is due to any fault or inability of my own, but rather because it’s just so difficult to know and trust what a person has to say when that person says that they have come to know God directly and intimately. It sounds to many so much like the preaching of ordinary religious zealots whose only basis for their knowledge is what they learned from a “holy” book. This public judgement cannot affect or harm me, but on the other hand, this judgement greatly hinders my ability to have a beneficial effect on others through my writing, and I have failed to understand what I must do to counter this unwarranted public judgement. Perhaps it is simply God’s will that only those to whom He has revealed Himself are intended to know the truth.

Who is to say what God’s intentions are? Jesus, assuming that others would listen and follow his teachings, was flummoxed when, instead, they hung him on a

cross. “Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?” he cried. Jesus had believed that God had his back, but no one truly knows what God’s intentions are or where His story is heading. Perhaps my words will be heard by others after I’m gone. Perhaps not. Perhaps my words will vanish like smoke in the wind. Who can say? It’s best to have no expectations. As Krishna taught Arjuna, ‘Do not cease to perform your actions, but renounce the *fruits* of your actions.’ Thy will be done, Father. Thy will be done.

\* \* \*