

CLOVERLEAF

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and
All Encompassing
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**JOURNAL OF EDUCATION IN EVOLVEMENT AND ALL
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Dedication

Author: Danny Best

Who We Are

***no matter where we travel
no matter how far
there should never be any question
regarding who we are***

***having known countless other Home planets
nurtured by just as many
an accommodating Host star***

we are here

***ever inherently inspired by spirit
to always and forever remember
just who we really are***

***one need only consider the actual meaning of
Eternal***

as we are

***Sandman the Dreamer
Danny Best***

Publisher's Note

Author:

Dr. Shiv Talwar, President, Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc.

Post-Truth Era in Religion and Its Ramifications

Introduction

It is widely reported (Wang 2016), (Flood 2016) that the editors of the Oxford Dictionary selected “post-truth” as the international word of the year 2016 in recognition of the nearly 2,000 percent increase in its usage in news articles and social media in the United Kingdom and the United States in 2016 over the previous year.

The Publisher’s note for the January 2017 issue of Cloverleaf is a reflection on the modernity of its recognition and the antiquity of its mindset. While the notion of “post-truth” came to light in 2016, its mindset has been playing havoc with the state of our universe for a very long time.

Purpose

The state of the universe is intimately related with what we collectively think the universe ultimately is and what is the nature of this reality. The notion of “post-truth” is related to minimising the relevance of the truth by promoting the attitude of indifference to it with arguments that may sound palatable relative to the perceived abstraction or inherent bitterness, difficulties and hardships in the pursuit of the truth.

Modern science has caught up with ancient wisdom on the nature of this ultimate reality. Our academy however underplays its importance perhaps because of the attitude of indifference promoted by the powerful post-truth influence in our faiths. This indifference is costing humanity untold misery through the loss of the vision of common good. As a result, we are dogged by our misguided “us” vs “them” conflicts

rather than “us together” love and compassion. The resultant fragmentation of humanity, its mistrust, greed, identity violence, and mindless exploitation of nature have many discerning people wondering whether there is any humanity left on the planet.

Scope

The scope of this reflection includes:

1. The notion of “post-truth”, its recent recognition in the political arena, and the causes leading to the creation of a mindset which aims to hide from the truth.
2. Ancient field of inquiry into what the universe ultimately is, nature of this ultimate reality —- traditional wisdom and modern science on the resulting metaphysical (Wikipedia n.d., Metaphysics) truth.
3. Truth-based and post-truth understanding of religion with price paid for the latter.
4. Remediation of problems caused by post-truth religiosity.

Post-Truth

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “post-truth” as an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” It offers two examples of the use of the expression namely ‘in this era of post-truth politics, it is easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever truth you desire’ and ‘some commentators have observed that we are living in a post-truth age’.

Two political events primarily cited for the skyrocketing usage of this expression were the “Brexit” referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States. According to Wikipedia

(Wikipedia n.d., Post-truth politics), "Post-truth politics (also called post-factual politics) is a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. Post-truth differs from traditional contesting and falsifying of truth by rendering it of "secondary" importance."

Wikipedia continues, "While this has been described as a contemporary problem, there is a possibility that it has long been a part of political life, but was less notable before the advent of the Internet."

Why do human beings set truth aside? What makes us forget about facts? How does truth lose its importance? How do facts become irrelevant? There can be two possible answers.

Firstly, we may have a set of beliefs or preconceived ideas to which we are deeply attached emotionally. We may regard them too dearly to let go. We tend to disregard the truth or facts when faced with a threat of losing our system of beliefs and preconceived truths held dearly with emotion.

Secondly our emotions may come in the way of the pursuit of the truth. What is an emotion? An emotion is an urge to act impulsively in an autonomic manner without prior consideration. Action is in response to a perception. An emotion thus is an autonomous unconsidered response to a perception in the external world or the internal world (a memory recall). The response to a stimulus is determined by the feelings of prior experiences or by natural instincts resulting from biologic inheritance.

Emotions can be classified into base emotions which are either survival based or perceived as such on one hand and noble and selfless on the other. Base emotions are related to selfhood while noble emotions are related to others. Feelings of love and compassion underlie noble

emotions while those of fear, likes, dislikes and finitude (self-image of helplessness and weakness) underlie base emotions.

Finitude

Our self-image begins with the perception of our body. Our body is finite and limited. Its limitedness leads to a feeling of helplessness. Our mentality is defined by the feelings about the body. We develop feelings of finitude and helplessness in shaping our lives. We feel incapable of freeing ourselves from the feelings of the limited body-mind and its experiences in the external world. We get trapped in the box of our physical experience, referred to as the individual ego in psychology.

Likes

We feel attracted to things that lead to pleasant experiences. We then want to repeat those experiences. Our tendency to repeat pleasant experiences leads to attachment to those things that generate them.

Our inability to repeat pleasant experiences results in feelings such as sadness, anger and depression. On the other hand, our ability to repeat them strengthens mere likes to become wants, needs, requirements, appetites, compulsions, habits, dependencies, cravings, obsessions and addictions.

It is not only that we want things and experiences we like; we do not want others to have them. The underlying feeling is called jealousy. If we don't have them, we absolutely do not want others to have them either.

The stronger the feelings of our finitude, the stronger are the feelings of our likes and its offspring such as appetites, habits, addictions, jealousy, anger and depression.

Dislikes

We feel repulsed by the things that lead to unpleasant or painful experiences. We do not want to relive those experiences.

Our tendency to avoid unpleasant experiences leads to aversion of those things that generate them. Mere dislikes thus become distastes, aversions, detestations, disgusts, repulsions and hatreds. The stronger the feeling of finitude, the stronger the sense of aversion and hatred born of dislikes.

Our inability to avoid our dislikes results in unhappiness, anger and depression.

Fears

The biggest fear is that of death.

Our likes and dislikes refer to our perception of the quality of life. We do not want things that we do not like. We develop a fear of things that we dislike and on the other hand we do not want to lose things that we like which creates a fear of loss.

We feel dismayed at getting things that we dislike or not getting things that we like. Simple fear leads to phobia, worry, anxiety, depression, or dread so much as to make us contemplate suicide as an escape.

It is important to notice how the sense of our finitude is related to our fears. Our sense of finitude leads to our feeling of weakness. It also underlies our level of self confidence. The weaker we feel, the lesser our confidence in ourselves and the higher our feeling of fear. The feelings derived from it are negative feelings such as mistrust, worry, anxiety, depression etc.

Our self-image, likes, dislikes and fears conspire to distort our perception of the value of truth. How do our emotions and preconceived ideas make us devalue and disregard truth or facts? The answer seems to lie in the way our neural system is structured, see Figure 1.

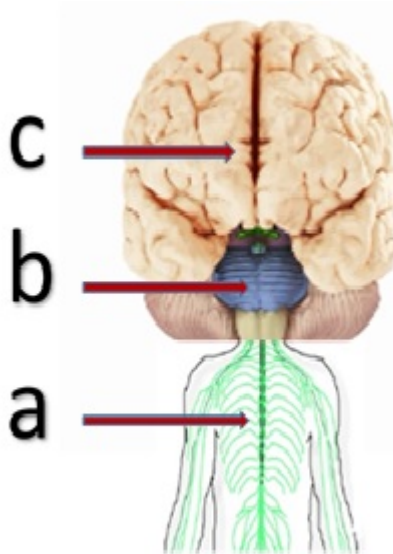


Figure 1 shows the neural structure of a human being with (a) pointing to the network of nervous system spread all over the body, (b) pointing to the limbic brain on top of the spine and (c) pointing to the neocortex located just inside the skull around the limbic brain.

Our neural system comprises of the systems of control which run our bodily functions and our behaviour in the inner and outer world. The brain located in the head, Figure 1 (b) and (c), is the controller. The network of neurons which spreads out in every part of the body and

called the nervous system, transmits the state signals from the body to the brain and control signals from the brain to various parts of the body.

The brain work of controlling life and living is divided primarily between two functional parts: the limbic brain comprising of various neural anatomical structures located at the top of the spine and the surrounding neocortex just underneath the skull and around it.

All creatures have a limbic brain. One of its roles is to sustain life. It runs time sensitive body functions that sustain life in an autonomic manner. We are not at all conscious of this function. In addition, it also runs all time sensitive survival related base emotions. If the nervous system relays to it that it senses danger, it sends control signals to various parts of body for flight or fight. If the nervous system relays to it the sighting of something we really like, we do not wait to grab it unless we lose the opportunity. If the nervous system relays to it the sighting of something we really dislike, we do not wait to run away to escape from it lest we get it. If we have a strong sense of weakness, time sensitivity of these matters is even more critical. There is no time to think, when we are facing time sensitive survival related impulses. Therefore consideration involving thought is not included in its function; in fact it is removed from it.

The neural structure physically helps the limbic brain by connecting it directly with the nervous highways running through the spine while the neocortex is only indirectly connected to them, placing the limbic system in a priority position for receiving state signals and sending control commands.

In allocating a survival related role to the limbic part, nature is indeed very wise; there is no time to be lost in saving life in case of danger to survival.

The role of the neocortex includes thought, awareness, mindfulness, volition, insight, learning ability, strategy, problem solving, love, compassion etc. Seeking and pursuing truth is its role. Its role is not time sensitive and can be slow. Consideration is time consuming.

While the limbic activity is 24/7, that of the neocortex is occasional. The limbic brain may be over-active and the neocortex so slow that at times we are not even aware of having acted until it is too late.

Neocortex is named as such because it developed later in the evolution of life. Primitive creatures do not have a neocortex and only mammals have been blessed with it. It was a later development as an individual brain. Survival is the only issue and the limbic brain suffices. Humans have the most developed neocortex. But, alas it is unused; our limbic brain running our base emotions fixed on mere survival or its perceived style hijacks (Goleman 2006) the neocortex and uses it only to serve its purpose. As a result, we humans are likely to sacrifice on the altar of our base emotions, all noble pursuits including not just truth in itself, but love, compassion, insight, learning, spiritual growth et al and also those values that are implied by it.

Ultimate Reality of Wisdom Traditions and Science

Contesting and falsification of truth or relegating it to secondary importance is certainly neither a contemporary issue nor is limited to political life. On the contrary, it has been surreptitiously practiced for defiling spirituality: the most noble of the sciences informing us of what we ultimately are and how we relate to existence.

Matter lends itself to some degree of sense perception; it is said to possess a degree of concreteness or grossness. Spirit on the other hand is not sense perceptible at all; it is said to be infinitely subtle and totally lacking grossness or concreteness. Metaphysical truth links spirit with

existence as its ground of being and physical truth links energy as the ground of being of matter.

Both energy and spirit are infinitely subtle. Whereas grossness or concreteness lends an object to sense perception, subtlety deprives it of it. Sense perception comprises information leading to knowledge. We can easily know what is gross. On the contrary, we do not know with full certainty what is subtle. We may have to make a special effort using instruments to extend the reach of our senses for gaining certainty about subtle objects. But instrumentation has its limits; no instrument is limitlessly powerful for gaining absolute knowledge of what is infinitely subtle.

How do we then know that an infinitely subtle principle exists? Besides indirect sense perception of it through its effects, the only direct means we have is human wisdom gained with sharp and sustained focus of our minds which cannot see with the certainty of our senses but can definitely reflect and infer to realise it. This realisation can be validated with testimony of reliable sources.

Both energy and spirit being infinitely subtle are unknowable with direct sense perception. What is infinitely subtle is also formless; it does not lend itself to any attribution; it does not lend itself to any action; we cannot compare it with anything else and we cannot directly know anything about it. On account of our language being related to the objects of our senses, we cannot talk about it with definiteness either.

All we can definitely say about an infinitely subtle principle is that it concretises itself to assume gross forms in the universe of sense perception. The infinitely subtle energy of physics concretises itself as inanimate material objects. But the universe does not comprise only of inanimate objects; it consists of inanimate and animate beings. The infinitely subtle spirit of metaphysics concretises itself as animate as well

as inanimate beings. The difference between physics and metaphysics is in their scope; while the scope of physics is the inanimate matter; the scope of metaphysics is more comprehensive, it includes the inanimate as well as animate.

What is the difference between the inanimate and the animate? They both have a material dimension; therefore the energy of physics underlies them both. The animate is more comprehensive; it in addition displays consciousness. The spirit of metaphysics thus includes consciousness in addition to the energy of physics.

What is consciousness? It too is infinitely subtle. Although we cannot perceive it by our senses, we can surely perceive its effects. Our individual consciousness is the effect of this infinitely subtle principle of consciousness. It is what lends us our knowledge and understanding, our individual consciousness.

Both energy and consciousness are infinitely subtle. Energy lends all beings their external macro existence and consciousness animates it through their inner micro existence.

Can two infinitely subtle principles that underlie everything that exists, themselves sustain separate existence? The answer evidently is no; their separate existence is impossible to imagine. Energy and consciousness thus are an indivisible whole (spirit) although we may talk about the two individually for the sake of linguistic expression.

Modern science has now caught up with ancient wisdom traditions in identifying the final truth of all existence:

1. All that exists is ultimately spirit; it is the Self of all beings.
2. Spirit is limitless in space: formless; limitless in time: eternal, immovable and changeless; beyond perception and

unknowable: ineffable, incomprehensible, incomparable and without attribution: beyond activity or action of any kind whatsoever; limitless in inclusion and pervasiveness or permeation.

3. It expresses itself in the being of all forms limited in space and time and in all becoming subject to action, movement, change and attribution.

Real, Essence and Absolute are other terms used to refer to the unseen and limitless spirit of wisdom traditions. Self is another term to denote the real as it relates with an individual. Since an individual is also a part of the universe, ultimate reality of an individual cannot be different from that of the universe. Since our Self is the same, ultimately we are all one.

“That beyond which there is nothing ... the inmost Self of all, free from differentiation ... the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.”

Shankara (Madhavananda 1957, 263)

“Know that whenever something permeates another, the first is necessarily contained in the second. The permeator becomes veiled by the permeated, so that the passive one (i.e. the permeated) is the ‘outward’ and the active one (i.e. the permeator) is the inward which is invisible.”

(Izutsu 1983, 233)

The Real permeates the universe. The Real thus is the all *permeating* while the universe is the *permeated*. The Real is the inner while the universe is the outer. The outer universe is visible while the inner Real is invisible. Similarly, the Real permeates an individual also. The Real Self then is the invisible inner in relation to the individual as the outer visible.

According to physics, energy is the ultimate reality of matter. Thus, it is the invisible inner *permeater* concealing our material body which is the visible outer permeated. Similarly we can say, consciousness is the invisible inner reality of the self-perceptible mind which is like the outer concealing it's inner. Thus, our body is ultimately one and so is our mind.

A question arises here. How does energy permeate matter? Let us examine. Elementary chemistry teaches us that all matter is comprised of elements and compounds. Elements are few in number while diversity of compounds is infinite.

Elements are comprised of the same type of atoms at the micro level (Wikipedia n.d., Atom). Compounds on the other hand are comprised of different types of atoms. Elements on the periodic table (Wikipedia n.d., Periodic table) combine in infinite number of ways to produce an infinite number of compounds. Thus, infinite diversity in material underlies a small and finite number of elements on the periodic table.

Let us now examine atoms underlying elements. An atom is the smallest particle of an element with the properties of the element. Can an atom be subdivided? The answer is yes, but sub-atomic particles have their own identities apart from any of the elements they comprise.

Where do the sub-atomic particles come from? Since all matter is ultimately energy, all sub-atomic particles are ultimately the concretised form of energy.

There are three types of the sub-atomic particles: electrons with very little mass and carrying a unit of negative charge; protons equal in number to that of the electrons and having a significant mass and carrying a unit of positive charge; and neutrons equal in number to that of the electrons and protons with a mass equal to that of protons with no charge at all. Protons and neutrons combine in close proximity to

each other to form the nucleus of the atom. The nucleus is positively charged because of the positive charge of its protons, it is also heavy with almost the whole of the mass of the atom.

We know that positive charges repel each other. Then how can protons be held in close proximity in the nucleus? The answer is energy. There is requisite amount of energy in the nucleus to hold the positively charged protons that repel each other. Without this energy permeating the nucleus, it cannot maintain its integrity.

Electrons comprise a cloud of negatively charged extremely light particles orbiting the nucleus at a fast pace. We also know that opposite charges attract each other. Then why don't the electrons with very little mass and negative charge collapse on the heavy positively charged nucleus which attracts them with a tremendous force? The answer again is energy in the space between the nucleus and the electrons that keeps them apart. Thus atoms cannot maintain their integrity without energy permeating the space between the electrons and the nucleus. Thus sub-atomic particles are energy particularised in their form held together in atomic integrity by energy in itself in some form or the other. Energy thus not only creates the material universe but permeates it through and through. Energy is thus said to be all pervasive. Energy is said to be the Self of all matter.

Let us now pay attention to the domain of the mind. If we inquire about the location of the mind: "Where is the mind in relation to our body?" The answer is that the mind is the invisible inner permeator in relation to the visible outer mind. It exists in every cell of the body. Every cell of our body composed of about many trillion cells has its own mind. What we call our mind is the sum total of the minds of all these cells acting through the brain which becomes the tool through which it works.

If our mind is the sum total of the minds of trillions of living cells in our body, can we talk of mind as separate from body? Wisdom traditions do not regard the mind and body as separate. Unlike the mind body dualism of Descartes (Wikipedia n.d., René Descartes), we have one mind-body complex.

Just as we are living beings with a body comprised of the bodies of trillions of cells, our minds too are comprised of trillions of minds of the individual cells that make up our body. Wisdom traditions regard the universe as alive with a body consisting of trillions of bodies of beings in the universe and a mind consisting of trillions of minds of individuals in the universe. Energy is the ultimate reality of its body and consciousness that of its mind. Just like our body and mind are inseparable, energy and mind also are indivisibly one spirit.

In its core spirituality, religion refers to the Ultimate Reality using divine terminology such as Godhead and God. In popular religion, religion uses divinity or Gods to refer to anthropomorphic beings with human traits.

Let us examine how wisdom traditions express the limitlessness and mystery of spirit:

“Whatever we say God is, He is not; what we do not say of Him, He is more truly than what we say He is”

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. I, 237)

“It is His nature to be without nature. To think of goodness or wisdom or power disassembles the essence and dims it in thought. The mere thought obscures essence.”

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 32)

"For goodness and wisdom and whatever may be attributed to God are all admixtures to God's naked essence: for all admixtures cause alienation from essence."

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 39)

"God is something that necessarily transcends being. ... God is in all creatures insofar as they have being, and yet He is above them. By being in all creatures, He is above them: what is one in many things must need be above those things."

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 149)

"God is nothing: not in the sense of having no being. He is neither this nor that that one can speak of: He is being above all being. He is beingless being."

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 115)

"He who supposes that he has knowledge of the positive attributes of the Self has supposed wrongly. For such an attribute would define Him, but His essence has no definition."

Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989,58)

"He is not declared incomparable in any manner that will remove Him from similarity, nor is He declared similar in any manner that will remove Him from incomparability. So do not declare Him non delimited and thus delimited by being distinguished from delimitation. For if He is distinguished then He is delimited by His non delimitation. And if He is delimited by His non delimitation, then He is not He."

Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989,112)

"It is not correct for the Real and the creation to come together in any mode whatsoever in respect of the Essence, only in respect of the fact that the Essence is described by the Divinity."

Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989, 59)

"[T]he Cosmos is but a fantasy without any real existence. ... [K]now that you are an imagination as is all that you regard as other than yourself an imagination. All existence is an imagination within an imagination, the only Reality being God, as Self and Essence, not in respect of His names."

Ibn Arabi (Austin 1980, 124-125)

"In respect of His Self, God possesses the Unity of the One, but in respect of His Names, He possesses the Unity of the many."

Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989, 337)

"The phenomenal, when it is joined to the Eternal, vanishes and leaves no trace behind. When He is there, thou art not, and if thou art there, He is not."

Junayd (Nicholson 1978, 90)

"... hence the Absolute cannot be designated by any name or form."

Shankara (A. J. Alston 1987, 87)

"The Absolute is ... 'That from which words fall back', and 'That which ignorance only will attempt to define'."

Shankara (Shah-Kazemi 2006, 2)

"... When the word Atman is used ... to denote the Self ... its function is to deny that the body or any other empirically knowable factor is the Self and to designate what is left as real, even though it cannot be expressed in words."

Shankara (A. J. Alston 1987, 144)

"The Absolute is artificially referred to with the help of superimposed name, form and action, and spoken of in exactly the way we refer to objects of perception But if the desire is to know the true nature of the Absolute, void of all external adjuncts and particularities, then it cannot be described by any positive means whatsoever. The possible procedure then is to refer to it through a comprehensive denial of whatever positive characteristics have been attributed to it in previous teachings and to say 'not thus, not thus'."

Shankara (A. J. Alston 1987, 141)

Truth-Based and Post-Truth Understanding of Religion

The oneness of all existence through its infinitely subtle, invisible and mystical metaphysical truth of the Absolute was personally realised by our enlightened sages, prophets, scientists and seers. Thus, this truth forms the foundation of all world religions. The metaphysical reality is infinite. It is the single source for all diverse beings. It is indescribable being itself beyond attribution and yet the source of all attributes. It is formless, but it lends form to the infinite diversity of the universe. It does not act, but it is the mover of all actions. It is infinite and unlimited itself, but leads to all limited and finite beings. It is incomparable itself and yet leads to all comparable existents.

True religion is truth based. It unites all existence. It is the source of universal values. It is inclusive of all that exists in the universe without

any differentiation and bounds. Truth is based upon wisdom, critical reasoning and inquiry, not on emotion or personal beliefs. Our enlightened sages, prophets, scientists and seers realised the truth and started teaching it out of compassion for their fellow beings so that we could all be like them.

This truth-based religion of all humanity is the core spirituality of all religions of the world. Spirit, unlike material, is all inclusive. This understanding of religion is nectar of love, life and justice. It unequivocally declares the essential oneness of all existence.

With oneness realised, we see all existence as one system. The universe comes to life just as an individual person. Just like our mind-body complex is comprised of trillions of cells, the living universe is comprised of trillions and trillions of existents of which it is comprised. Just as all of our cells coexist in peace with each other and work harmoniously as a team for our survival, all existents of the universe must also must do the same failing which the universe is in danger just like we individually are when all our cells cease to sustain our life.

With oneness realised, there is no mistrust or fear. There is no hate and no love either in the sense that I love you today and tomorrow I fall out of it and start hating you which is worldly love. Worldly hate and worldly love are forms of conditional love. Unconditional love dawns when we transcend worldly hate and worldly love.

When there is no worldly hate and no worldly love, there are no worldly appetites or greed. We consume of nature to sustain our lives as we contribute to nature to sustain it. That is coherent living when we all win: humans win, nature wins and none loses.

There is yet another understanding of religion; its other post truth face based upon personal beliefs and human emotion rather than the

spiritual truth. In this understanding, truth is irrelevant; faith and emotion rule. This face of religion is downright divisive. It unites people in particular communities while simultaneously dividing humanity into conflicting tribes of "us" vs "them". It builds tight boundaries around communities leading to tribalism. This is the post-truth religiosity in which the unlimited metaphysical truth of spirit as the underlying reality of the universe is essentially replaced by anthropomorphic Gods with human traits.

We may ask, "Why? What is the need to represent the formless infinite truth with a finite form whether carved in wood, stone or words?" The reason is the ineffability of the Real and human need of getting an initial grasp on it to begin the process of contemplation and examination. Inquiry requires a provisional concept to begin and sustain the process. The concept of yesterday has to be cast away and unlearned and that of today to be provisionally accepted as the truth. Ultimate truth is achieved when the intellect is fully satisfied and further denial is impossible.

The process is somewhat like this. Suppose x is the truth. Let us examine x whether indeed it is the truth. After some contemplation on the various facets of x , we decide y may be the truth. We then drop x and start examining y . After contemplating y , we decide that y is not it, z may be it. Then the process goes on. If the truth is finite and definable, the intellect is satisfied. When the truth is achieved in the process of inquiry and it pauses from looking further. And if the truth is undefinable, one keeps contemplating until all possibilities have been examined and negated. What is then left must be it. Having arrived at the possible truth, you validate it with applicable means of validation including empirical methods, reason or opinions of experts in the discipline of inquiry to be sure whether indeed you did arrive at the truth. If the truth arrived at is not validated, inquiry begins again.

In the case of the truth of what all existents ultimately are, you arrive at something that does not exist in the worldly sense of material existence and neither is it non-existent. It exists transcendentally: it is neither an existent neither a non-existent in the material sense.

Scripture uses attributes, names and forms as symbols to provisionally point to the "symbolized" with the implicit purpose that once people get contemplating on them, they will successively get beyond the symbols to the "symbolized" (Shah-Kazemi 2006, 5):

"First let me put them on the right path, and then I will gradually be able to bring them round to the final truth afterwards."

Shankara (A. J. Alston 1989, 22)

Names, forms, attributes and concepts used as adjuncts to limit the infinite provisionally into finite intelligibility must be clearly distinguishable from the Absolute Reality. Dependence upon the limiting adjuncts must be reduced by subtilising them through successive unlearning and negating, along with a movement towards enlightenment of the truth as the final the goal. It is possible to do only if the seeker or the lover of the truth does not get emotionally entangled or attached to a provisional truth on her/his path to enlightenment.

It must also be understood that the limiting adjunct is not the Absolute you are seeking, it is not only different from the Absolute but it also at the same time colors the Absolute according to its own nature. Shankara warns that a limiting adjunct used as an expedient for a conceptual starting point for the reality of the Absolute may reveal but always simultaneously veil its true nature (Shah-Kazemi 2006, 6).

According to Ibn Arabi, "definition of Reality is impossible" (Austin 1980, 58, 74), therefore doctrine must inescapably be incommensurate with

Reality as it is in itself. Doctrines and beliefs also become obstacles on the way to Reality because they bind it to particular concept promoted by religion which must be unlearned for spiritual growth.

"It is well known that when the Scriptures speak of the Reality, they speak in a way that yields to the generality of men the immediately apparent meaning. The elite on the other hand, understand all the meanings inherent in that utterance, in whatever terms it is expressed"

Ibn Arabi (Austin 1980, 73)

The purpose of the scripture is an immediately apparent concept for the generality people to begin seeking deeper. Left to themselves, people largely stay at this starting concept for life since they have no tools and societies make no provisions to help them go beyond it. Religions make little effort to help people along the long road from the immediately apparent to the infinite mystery of Reality. Humanity has paid highly for this negligence by way of human fragmentation and environmental issues afflicting us today.

The more limiting the adjunct and the more binding the concepts of faith, the more they veil Reality than reveal. Anthropomorphic Gods of religion with human traits meant as provisional starting points to kick start the process of contemplation themselves begin masquerading as the Absolute which in itself is largely banished from human awareness. It is so very easy for us to get emotionally attached to belief in God with human traits that we forget that they are meant to be temporary tools to help us get on the road to personal discovery of the truth. There is no effective system to clearly inform of the true nature of Reality or that of the limiting adjuncts in divine forms meant to help us along the way of spiritual growth.

We have looked at the thought of Shankara and Ibn Arabi, let us now look at what Meister Eckhart says.

"God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. ... God becomes and unbecomes. ... God works, the Godhead does no work: there is nothing for it to do, there is no activity in it. It never peeped at any work."

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 80)

God and the Absolute are as different as heaven and earth. The reference to heaven and earth is from the book of Genesis where heaven is used to signify the inner and earth as the outer such as mind and body. God is the outer and the Absolute Godhead is His inner essence. The essence transcends being and becoming while God becomes and unbecomes. God comes into being at the beginning of existence and goes out of existence at the end of it. As compared with God, Godhead is eternal: it transcends time. God acts: it is finite and endowed with human traits. It needs to act. Godhead on the other hand transcends activity: it has no need because it unlimited in itself.

"God in as much as He is "God," is not the supreme goal of creatures. ... [I]f a fly had reason and could intellectually plumb the eternal abyss of God's being out of which it came, we would have to say that God, with all that makes Him "God" would be unable to fulfil and satisfy that fly."

Meister Eckhart (Walshe 1959, Vol. II, 271)

If there is any intellectual awareness or capacity needed to understand the transcendental Absolute as the source of God just as it is the source of all existence, then God will not be able to fulfil and satisfy even the puny mind of a fly, let alone a human being and yet post-truth religion presumes to be fulfilled and satisfied by Him!

Why do we need to rediscover truth uncovered by ancient wisdom as well as by science? It is not merely rediscovering the wheel. We need the kind of deep conviction that results from incisive contemplation of Reality (on our way to spiritual development and enlightenment) in order to transcend our base emotions and appetites and transform our vision from “me” to “we”, from “us” vs “them” into “us together”. We need the pursuit of truth to transform our heads, hearts and hands to act in harmony to acquire the vision of oneness for a real life of service and love with wisdom.

To ensure that we stay focussed and bound to the form of God in our religion, the post-truth form of it seems to conspire that we do not become aware of the Absolute truth at all. We are told to remain true to the articles of faith. Post-truth religion of faith keeps us away from the truth based religion of humanity lest they lose control over our minds. The institution of post-truth religion wants us to remain under its particular influence lest we grow and transcend into the common religion of inclusive humanity.

In spite of having been given one infinite reality, post-truth religion goes on to confine it in finite forms built in words or otherwise. Describing the indescribable in particular ways, post-truth religion identifies the underlying reality with its respective form. The form becomes the God. Suddenly, somebody's God becomes false or less Godlike, somebody's prophet less prophetic or un-prophetic, and somebody's community less righteous and deserving.

In its drive to distinguish communities and demarcate territories, this post-truth face of religion encourages divisiveness. This face not only sets communities apart but against each other and is toxic, insidious and downright poisonous.

Until modern times, humanity existed in geographically isolated and homogenous communities but thanks to modern transportation, geographical distances are fast shrinking. Travel between communities are speedily decreasing homogeneity. Thanks to the internet and modern telecommunications, geographical isolation is fast decreasing and communication increasing. As a result, the world is fast becoming small and diverse. Homogenous communities of the recent past are rapidly becoming extinct. Divisive post-truth religiosity must now give way to a unifying core spirituality or our scientific and technological developments is likely to become the cause of our extinction and that of the universe.

Remediation of Problems Plaguing Humanity Today

An inability to perceive equality threatens pluralistic societies. The best we can then hope for is an uneasy peace; and history is proof that uneasy peace is easily broken.

We need to enrich and expand our identity. Let us not be so fearful about losing our religious identity that we isolate ourselves and shy away from building bridges to survive in pluralistic societies or a pluralistic global village that the world is fast becoming.

We must wholeheartedly adopt the truth-based unitive face of religion. We must discard the divisive one in our lives and in the education of our children. Otherwise, the sustainability of everything inter-religious or pluralistic, including dialogues, marriages or democracies, would be threatened.

Yes, the pursuit of truth requires us to transcend belief and emotionality that promotes post-truth religiosity. The world needs to tread the path of the truth and be careful about using expediency of narrow adjuncts that are self limiting and which clip the wings of the infinity that truth

actually is. Truth may be abstract and harder to reach for the generality of people because it requires us to think in an educated and informed manner. Education must therefore pursue it because the pursuit of the truth with critical reasoning should be a goal of education.

Let us then educate about the truth-based core spirituality of religion in our schools, colleges and universities to help humanity deal with the problems caused by a lack of the vision of oneness and commonality and the ensuing human fragmentation and environmental exploitation that is plaguing us today. Post-truth era in religion must now end.

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Editor's Note

Author:

Dr. Sami Rafiq

We are here with the second issue of Cloverleaf and as the poem by Danny Best illustrates, have delved a little deeper into our spiritual legacies. The year 2017 has brought a whole lot of changes in the world. The political changes in various countries have come laden with surprises. Unhappily enough the political changes in America and elsewhere have come with violence and a loss of innocent lives.

Things like these make spiritually inclined and peace loving people very depressed and sad. While on one hand bloodshed continues unabated in the name of power and politics, on the other hand there are many enlightened and kind hearted people who are reaching out (to help those who are suffering the loss of lives, livelihoods, homes and dear ones) in an attempt to ameliorate their agony in a variety of ways. Writing for world harmony and a message of love and peace is what Cloverleaf embodies.

Cloverleaf is a hope, to dispel the doubt and darkness that are created by violence and greed, by showing the pathway of enlightenment through different cultures and religions.

As Seyyed Hossain Nasr has rightly said:

A Secular scientific and technological worldview, detached from spiritual and religious roots, has caused the earth to experience crisis and becoming close to its destruction point. Hence, religion needs to play its role to alleviate the crisis and prevent destruction.¹

Looking deeper into oneself and one's religious beliefs which helps one to see the spiritual unity of the universe is the essence of Cloverleaf.

The papers and articles in this issue testify to the hope and belief in the spiritual essence and unity of humanity and the universe.

Fred Lawlor in "The Spirit of SHEN" has aptly summed up the goals and objectives of SHEN as brought out in the September 2016 conference.

Dr. Shiv Talwar in "A Reflection on Genesis" has interpreted the concept of creation in the Bible in an in depth manner which fits in with the concept of God the Creator in other religions.

Dr. Rajendra Narain Dubey in "On Spiritual Education" dwells upon the valuable contributions of Indian seers and thinkers towards spiritual education and evolvment. He has also highlighted the timeless wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads.

Aneela Azeemi in "Role of Spirituality in Nurturing the Positive Mind of a Whole Child" stresses upon the necessity of instilling in children at an early age, the spiritual values of compassion, love, understanding and acceptance specially in the modernised world of today and also to insure a peaceful world.

Barbara Bedford in "Understand that You are the Power" dwells on the miracle of DNA in the human cells as a carrier of Divine energy.

M. Darrol Bryant in "Recovering the Forgotten Contributions of Christian Mystics" brings out the spiritual and humanitarian messages of three Christian women mystics Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). Reading about them is an inspiration towards unity, harmony and peace.

Atif Khalil in "Intimate Strangers? Jewish-Muslim Relations and the Prospects for Dialogue" has attempted to uncover the common religious and cultural values across theological, legal and mystical intersections between Jewish and Muslim communities in order to foster respect, friendship and harmony between them.

Dennis Haskell's poem "Monday Night Outing" which is a very small sample of his poetic oeuvre reflects truth and consciousness from a different cultural perspective.

In my poem "The Unspeakable Mystery" I have attempted to bring out the gendered perception of spirituality.

I sincerely hope that Cloverleaf is a source of hope, comfort, healing, education and enlightenment for all.

1 Nasr, Hossein.1996. Religion and the Order of Nature. New York: Oxford University Press.

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Articles

This section of Cloverleaf contains articles on all-encompassing spirituality ...

The Spirit of SHEN (Spiritual Heritage Education Network)

Author:

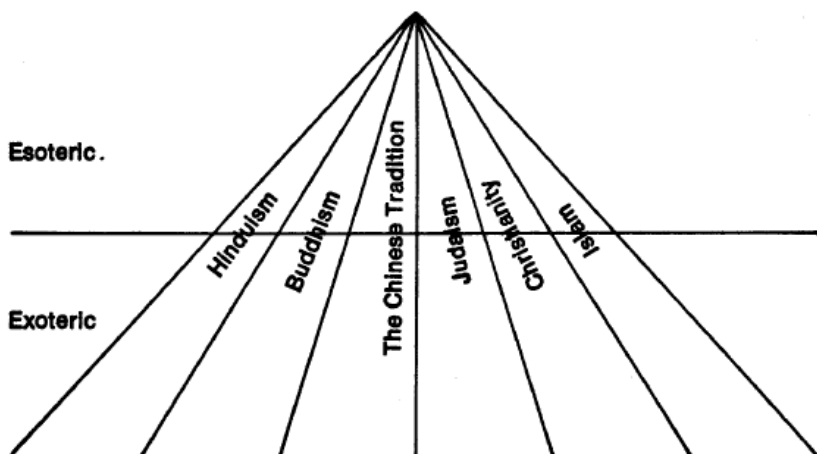
Fred Lawlor

The experience of a SHEN (Spiritual Heritage Education Network) conference is a unique way of self discovery and realisation that we are all one.

SHEN is a conference that brings all religions together to discover the spirituality in each and find the same in one's own beliefs. This year's conference in September 2016 offered spiritual insights shared by the presenters on their faiths which was wonderful. There was a commonality between all and what follows is a sample of those insights.

Dr. Atif Khalil, Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge's Department of Religious Studies

(www.spiritualeducation.org/work/conf2016/atif) presented the following chart in his 2014 presentation: **The Perennial Philosophy**



He described our quest for the divine as climbing a mountain. All of us climb different paths (our beliefs) to reach the divine (the top of the mountain). If we were climbing an actual mountain we would not look over at others climbing and decide to jump over their path. Our path (belief) is not perfect but it is in the understanding of the imperfections we grow spirituality.

Dr. Darrol Bryant, Distinguished Professor Emeritus and currently Director of the Centre for Dialogue & Spirituality in the World Religions at Renison University College/University of Waterloo, presented **Towards an Inclusive Global Family: Recovering the Forgotten Contributions of Christian Mystics** at the 2016 conference (www.spiritualeducation.org/work/conf2016/darrol)

As part of his presentation he quoted St Theresa of Avila which seems to sum up our journey and our fears:

- *“May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.”*
- *“Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.”*

It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves.”

*Teresa of Avila, A Spanish mystic (1515-82),
Carmelite nun*

I believe the biggest fear we all have is examining ourselves through our inner voice. The first step is finding that quiet inner voice within ourselves. Not easy when we are “fearful”.

Shiv Talwar, who is the founder of SHEN and a wonderful Anam Cara (old Celtic Gaelic term for "soul friend.") came to my house a year ago just before Christmas. He told me that he had been meditating on

“Original Sin”. I found it interesting that Shiv, a Hindu, was meditating on a Christian belief. Personally, as a Catholic, I have always had a problem understanding how a baby could possibly have any sin. Shiv said that original sin is “ego” and went on to explain that we all are born into this world with fear and need an ego to survive. Think of young babies or children, they cry when they are hungry or wet. A two year old will throw temper tantrums. Almost everything a child does growing up is self focused (ego driven) to learn and survive. Shiv’s meditation revealed to him that when our ego is driving us it hijacks our intellect (our spirit) from the connection to the divine.

We were blessed this year to have Kevin Nadjiwon who is an Anishinabe, Three Fires-Potawatami, Ojibway, Odawa -Turtle Clan. A Member of Batchewana First Nation Band of Ojibways. Kevin’s presentation "Simply Bringing Back the Old Ways in A New Way" (One mind One Heart) ~ Anishinabek Prophecy ~ took the conference participants through a wonderful explanation of the first nations spirituality and ceremony—past, present and future (www.spiritualeducation.org/work/conf2016/kevin).

Kevin helped start a non - profit organisation called the 8th Generation Infinity Network a traditional and modern working group of professional leaders, dreamers and visionaries consisting of indigenous and non-indigenous youth, adults and elders. The purpose is to inform the world of the prophecies, visions and dreams of their ancestors for the purpose of sharing sacred spiritual ceremonies, knowledge, wisdom, education, dreams, visions and ways of living in unity and harmony with the land, spirits, other worlds, dimensions and all our relations.

He organised a Healing Prayer Journey called the “Walk For Nations” which took a team of 4 youth and 4 young adults for 8 months (Kevin was one of them) and 8000 kms across Canada sharing their stories, performing ceremonies, building traditional and modern networks and unity.

"They will come to a Fork in the Road. One Road will lead to Materialism and Destruction for Almost All Living Creatures. The Other Road Will Lead to a Spiritual Way upon which the Native People will be standing. This Path will lead to the Lighting of the 8th Fire, a Period of Eternal Peace, Harmony and a "New Earth" where the Destruction of the Past Will Be Healed"

Some of Kevin's insights given during his presentation included:

- The longest distance on earth is from the mind to the heart and back again
- We forget to laugh like children
- The past and the future are the present
- Gratitude: live our days in the present
- When you are lost you are found. In the blackness you will find everything. Close your eyes.
- We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors we borrow it from our children.
- When you give yourself into nothing what follows is something and everything. You have to continually give to get to nothing and ultimately to get to everything. Detach from worldly selfishness
- Our voice is Thunder and our tongue is lighting
- Our bodies are spacesuits for our spirits.
- The mind can have a billion thoughts per second but we only grab on to a few and often they are troubles because of our fears. Sickness comes from holding on to things. We find identity in holding on to things and that's called Ego. You cannot fly like an eagle if you do not let go.
- Fuel, Energy and Heat is Fire the "Trinity"
- As we are traversing this world we are overwhelmed by our own duality. Kevin described our being as "the Trinity" (Energy: Positive, Negative and Neutral). When we are pulled by the positive and negative it is the earth (neutral) that grounds us.
- One mind and one heart is the most difficult thing and yet it is simplicity

- If you want to get to know yourself go on retreat and spend quiet time to stop the “mind chatter”. You will be visited by yourself, the divine.
- It is important to have fun as we move through our worlds.

All of the above insights are the basis of all world religions and are example of how our spirituality is the same worldwide.

Many believe that spirituality lacks logic, that spirituality is personal, emotional, etc. and so spirituality is for the non-thinking. Actually Spirituality is the most logical science which was the basis for the Acharya Vivekji presentation on The Logic of Spirituality (<http://www.spiritualeducation.org/work/conf2016/acharya-vivekji>)

Acharya Vivekji is the Resident Acharya (Professor) of Chinmaya Mission Niagara, Visiting Acharya of Chinmaya Mission Pittsburgh and the Deputy Director of Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (Youth Centre) West.

When Vivekji went to the Vedanta Course at Chinmaya Mission’s Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in India he studied and lived under the guidance of Pujya Swami Tejomayananda* for over two years, in an ashram in India. He thought “now I will find oneness, no anger, no selfishness, no jealousy; no envy, no ego, etc. What did I find: anger, selfishness, jealousy, envy, ego, I found humanity” However he also found his true self.

As long as we use our eyes we will live by sight. We will live with differences. But when we start to live with our intellect, where ideals are held, we start to live with vision. Our differences are functional but oneness is fundamental.

Vivekji spoke of three laws to the Logic of Spirituality:

1. Every effect has a cause
2. Multiple effects can have a single cause

3. If the cause is removed so is the effect

He went on to say that every one of us is born from the same cause, the Divine. We are all made up of the very same components of the earth and come from the same cause. Does this not mean we are one?

Where there is change there will be challenges. If we face challenges with a purpose it is called training. But without purpose change is a problem from which we recoil. We need vision to overcome problems.

We have three main fears:

1. Fear of Death
2. Fear of the Unknown
3. Fear of Sorrow

To overcome our fears we have to learn to think. The logic of spirituality is that spirituality is the vision behind all actions.

In order to develop this vision there are 5 steps that need to take place:

1. Introspection

-spend more time by yourself

2. Detection

-when you spend time with yourself study the mind and its reaction and why?

3. Negation

-people do not want to see what is in their mind. All of us have six enemies that steal our Peace (see below)

4. Substitution

-substitute the negativity enemies with their opposite (see below)

5. Emancipation

-If you have no enemies you become free to help others and truly love:

<u>Enemies</u>	<u>Substitution</u>
Desire	Contentment
Anger	Acceptance
Greed	Generosity
Delusion	Knowledge
Arrogance	Acknowledgment
Jealousy	Appreciation

When you develop and practice this skill set “all the poison comes out of you”

What was beautiful to see at the SHEN conference was how the presentations by Vivekji, Kevin Nagawan, Darol Bryants, Dr. Ranjeet S Bharaj, Trish Barbato and Dr. Atif Khalil, mirrored each other in the vision of Spirituality (www.spiritualeducation.org/work/conf2016). Dr. Atif Khalil, Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge's Department of Religious Studies spoke on **The Wings of an Angel on the Tail of a Donkey: Form and Meaning in the Mystical Philosophy of Rumi**. He shared in his presentation some beautiful quotes from Rumi:

“Man is called a ‘rational animal.’ So man is two things: The food of his animality in this world is his sensual passions and desires. But that which is his quintessence – its food is knowledge, wisdom and the vision of God. Man’s animality is fleeing God, while his humanity is fleeing the world. One of you lacks faith while the other possesses it [Quran 64:2]: In your own existence two persons are warring. To whom will fortune belong? Whom will it make a friend?”

“He whose intellect [or spiritual conscience] overcomes his lust is higher than the angels, he whose lust overcomes his intellect is lower than the beasts”

“You may try a hundred things, but love alone will release you from yourself. So never flee love – not even from love in an earthy guise – for it is a preparation for the supreme Truth”

The beauty of SHEN is the platform it gives for us to see that there is nothing that divides us spiritually. It is our Ego (fear) that gets in the way of our truly giving to each to reach true emancipated Love.

SHEN typically meets at the end of September. In 2017 it is scheduled for two days: Sept 23 and 24, 2017. The venue is in Kitchener/Waterloo in Ontario, Canada about an hour by car from Toronto international airport.

Come and join us on **your journey**, you will find much to nourish the spirit.

May God bless you all and keep you close.

With Love

Fred Lawlor

A Reflection On Genesis

Author:

Dr. Shiv Talwar

The inner is foundation of the outer
The still is master of the restless
The Sage travels all day
Yet never leaves his inner treasure.

~~*Lao Tzu*

This article is a reflection on the underlying thought of the Abrahamic traditions with its origins in the Middle East. The original source is the Old Testament.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

(Gen 1:1)

What does this verse mean?

In common usage, God is understood in terms of an anthropomorphic other worldly being creating the universe and having supremacy over it. In reality, it is a reference to That One which has no form, no genre, no attributes, and it neither acts nor enter into relations with another like we do because there is no other (Shah-Kazemi:4). Anthropomorphic references are used only to facilitate human understanding of a reality beyond human intellect. This imposition of a form on the formless is meant to be a provisional expedient. Human nature being what it is, the provisional expedient meant to be discarded with the growth of the intellect, becomes a lasting feature of our discourse.

That One becomes existence with its in-built intuitive power while God creates in His mind and then forms existence. This difference in discourse must be used as a filter to interpret the story of Genesis. We must keep in mind that:

“That which we designate as the Creator of the Universe is the Absolute”

Shankara (Shah-Kazemi: 8)

The Scriptures all over the world is composed to be interpreted metaphorically in many ways each true to the meaning of the particular expression. It is skilfully composed in such a way as to offer something to every reader. There is the most obvious meaning called the literal one and there are deeper symbolic meanings to be discovered by those not satisfied by the most obvious. The allegorical meanings are culture specific as they depend upon the linguistic imagery prevalent in the locale and the period of the composition. The Bible is no exception.

There is a tradition of church fathers such as Origen (Wikipedia n.d., Origen) early as 184/185 – 253/254 AD seeking to discover the deeper meaning implied in the scripture. Later 354 –430 AD, Augustine (Wikipedia n.d., Augustine_of_Hippo) expressed similar views: if a literal interpretation contradicts science and our God-given reason, the Biblical text should be interpreted metaphorically.

Here is Ibn Arabi’s thought on the style of expression in the Scriptures:

“It is well known that when the Scriptures speak of the Reality, they speak in a way that yields to the generality of men the immediately apparent meaning. The elite on the other hand, understand all the meanings inherent in that utterance, in whatever terms it is expressed”

Ibn Arabi (Shah-Kazemi:72)

Note the reference to the so called “elite” in Ibn Arabi’s quote above. Ibn Arabi seems to make it their responsibility to read between the lines to interpret the Scriptures to make sense of its expressions beyond the immediately apparent meaning meant for the others. There seems to be an implication that they would be throwing the baby out with the bath

water if they dismiss the scripture instead of making the effort, of which they are capable of in terms of interpretation.

The most obvious literal meaning in the beginning is temporal in nature as in the beginning of creation in the same way, as the earth is the planet on which we live and heaven, the abode of divine beings, God and his angels. In accordance with this interpretation, the first things God created were the heaven for His abode and that of his angels, and the earth for humans and other terrestrial beings. The word heaven brings to mind a realm of the everlasting blessedness for the righteous (Easton's Bible Dictionary n.d., heaven), where all are holy and happy. On the other hand Earth is just the opposite as a place for the unholy and unrighteous devoid of blessedness.

Scriptures are not written to be read only literally in the most obvious of the ways, although the obvious may also make some sense. Thus, the most obvious meaning presented in the previous paragraph, although apparently sensible, is reducing God to the level of a selfish being just like us.

‘Heaven and earth’ is a phrase used to indicate the whole universe. ‘God created heaven and earth’ may be considered to mean that God created the whole universe, everything and every being that can be said to exist. If you think about it, this interpretation is hugely meaningful. The same God, because there is only one, created all beings including Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and those of other religions. He also created those who do not profess any religion. The same God created all the prophets. Why then would he favour one over the other, and those approaching him through one prophet over those who do so through another? If he created us all, why would he favour those who approach him at all over those who do not? Wouldn't he love us all his creation the same and wish us all well?

Although this interpretation makes a lot of sense, the choice of words indicates there it more to it than meets the eye.

Let us delve into the meaning of the words involved. Let us turn our attention to the heaven that God created in the beginning. Consider the following verses:

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven ...”

(Gen 1:6-8)

It is traditional to think of the transcendent God as a distant being far removed away from us mortals on the ground. The ground being close to us just below our feet, we look up above our heads into distant space when we point to the transcendence of That One. We talk of God being in heaven and us on earth and sky dividing the heaven from the earth. According to Genesis, the sky or the firmament is a God made separation dividing the created world from the uncreated divine world.

The heaven of the first verse of Genesis thus is the created firmament that divides the rest of the created world below it from the uncreated divine world above it, “God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.”

(Gen 1:6-1:9)

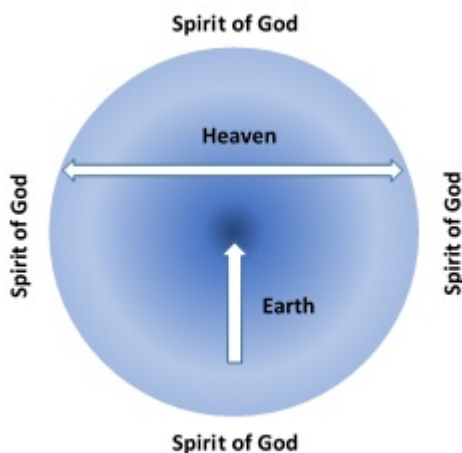


Figure 1 shows the universe of an earthlike planet surrounded by its firmament called heaven separating it from the transcendent spirit of God.

The divine world is totally imperceptible to the human senses. That is the reason why we refer to it as the transcendent, too far away in the distance for us to perceive it at all unlike everything else that we perceive with our senses.

Our world is the world of the gross. The divine world is that of the imperceptible. The world in between the gross and the imperceptible that divides the two is a big wide realm of the subtle that is neither gross nor imperceptible, neither imperceptible nor perceptible or both perceptible and imperceptible. This in-between universe of the subtle is vast and deep like an infinite expanse of ocean with endless depth.

Biblically, earth is used in two senses (Easton's Bible Dictionary n.d., earth): (1) in the sense of *erets*: the whole earth, the planet on which we live and (2) in the sense of *adamah*: dust, soil or ground particularly

meant for cultivation of things. Adamah seems to associate earth with adham, man, Adam. Thus the first verse of Genesis seems to associate Adam, the first human being, with soil meant for cultivation of crops.

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

(Gen 2.7)

This verse makes the role of earth crystal clear. The dust of the ground which we use for cultivation, the soil is the material cause of human existence. How can we formed of it? Soil is what gives rise to food. Food is the stuff that comprises our physical bodies. Although God may be the father, indirectly through food, the earth is our mother because it shapes our bodies. Metaphorically we are all born of it.

In general, all animate beings live by food. Thus, all living beings are born out of the ground through the stuff it grows.

God forms Adam of the produce (“dust”) of the ground. The body of Adam gets formed from the produce and he becomes a living soul only when God breathes into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life.

Genesis is very clear in differentiating between a person and his/her body. The body is just physical; like all matter it is inanimate without any life. It is not conscious, it has no feelings, thought or will and therefore it cannot move, it cannot breathe, it cannot eat, it cannot grow and it cannot reproduce by itself. It is the spirit of God that causes it to live and when that spirit leaves, the body becomes lifeless and begins to decay just like food, of which it is made and decays in time.

Mind is also in the created domain like body and unlike the spirit of God. It touches the body on one side and the spirit of God on the other.

Isn't then not spiritual ignorance that we identify our self with the inanimate body when indeed the spirit of God is the Self that animates us? We may have different bodies but our Self is the same. We are one in our Self that make our bodies tick. Won't the grave global problems that humanity faces today will not vanish if we as human beings realize this truth and start living by it?

"My me is God: nor do I know my selfhood except in God."

(Catherine of Genoa)

Our bodies are made of food, it is the Spirit of God that animates us. How then are we different? It is something to us to contemplate.

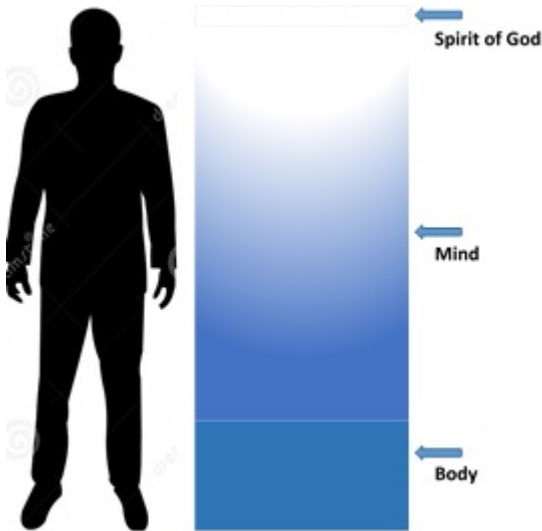


Figure 2 showing Adam and his body made from dust (food) of the earth and the realm of mind (heaven) that separates the body from the spirit of God breathed into his nostrils.

What is sense perceptible is merely the surface of this expanse of endless depth which is subtle with partially perceptibility. When it comes to Adam, his body is made of the earth through its produce, his mind is the firmament which divides the body made with food from the self-existent breath (spirit) of God which when blown into Adam's nostrils makes him a living soul.

The story of Adam is the story of the rest of world as well. There is the outer body of things which can be perceived by our senses, there is the spirit of God at the innermost core of all existence and there is an infinite number of subtle in-between things separating the outermost from the innermost.

Let us now look at the plurality of the heavens and the earth when they were created:

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was* not a man to till the ground.

But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

(Gen 2:4-2.7)

In this verse, one can notice the plurality in relation to the heaven: “generations of the heavens” and singularity in relation to “the earth” while Gen 1:1 uses singular expressions for both the heaven and the

earth. The use of both the singular and the plural for the heaven shows a plurality of realms within one heaven. Heaven is something which is so deep that various reaches of it may have their own particularities. It is significant in this connection to note that in Jewish notion, there are three heavenly realms (Easton's Bible Dictionary n.d., heaven): (1) that of the birds, (2) the starry heaven and (3) heaven of heavens. The realm of the birds is the closest to the earth.

The word 'generations' also applies to the earth. Although the word 'earth' is singular in itself, when we relate it to the word 'generations', it seems to imply different terrestrial bodies like the earth with their own particular realms of heaven surrounding them, Figure 3. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens surrounding it, He created many terrestrial bodies like the earth each one surrounded by their own layers of heaven surrounding them.

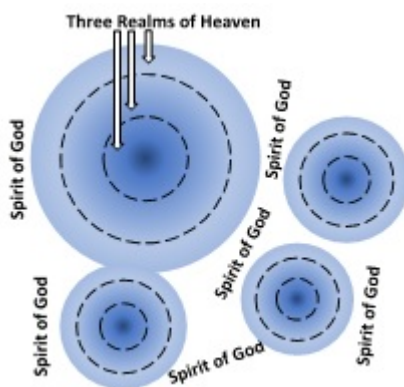


Figure 3 shows a universe of different earthlike bodies with their own particular heavenly. Each of the heavens separate its earth at its center from the transcendent spirit of God around it. Each heaven is shown as divided into three realms identified as the realm of the birds,

starry realm and heaven of heavens with the first one closest to the earth.

Genesis seems to make a difference between creation and formation or making. Creation happens in ideas, in planning, and in intention. Formation or making, on the other hand is the process of implementation of the ideas in causing things to materialise. Before man became a living soul, he was created in the divine mind as an image of the divine. Before every plant of the field was in the ground, they were created in the divine mind. Although rain was intended, it was not caused to hit the ground, because there was no material ground and no man to till the ground.

Having created everything in the divine mind in the six days of creation, God rests for a day and then gets back to work materialising the creation. He forms the earth and causes mist to rise from the earth and which fall back on it as rain watering the ground for food to make Adam's body.

Now let us come to the phrase 'in the beginning'. Its obvious meaning is temporal in the beginning of the world. Meister Eckhart (c.1260-c.1328), a German preacher of Dominican order, mystic and now regarded as an influential spiritual master, points out another meaning very relevant to the context. According to him, 'in the beginning' means in principle.

What is a principle? A principle is an invisible or partially visible likeness or form of far reaching generality that underlies visible existence. By this definition, spirit of God is the first principle. It is all-inclusive. It underlies all that exists.

It is to be noted that the all-inclusive principle is a total mystery. It is infinitely subtle and therefore unseen and un-seeable. What is un-seeable is the most general principle.

As subtlety reduces, a principle begins to lose its generality or inclusiveness. Creation is the expression of the first principle of the Spirit out of two principles: the principle of the heaven and that of the earth. These principles are visible with different degrees of perceptibility and thus are not all-inclusive as their underlying principle.

The principle of heaven is the active principle of inner existence, interiority of things (Colledge: 90-91, 101-107) or the mind in case of the animate. The principle of earth is the principle of exteriority of things, or the body. Exteriority is an expression of the interiority. The subtle interiority is the likeness of non-existence and the gross exteriority is the likeness of existence.

The outermost is the principle of earth with full solidity and visibility. Then there is an immensely deep inner existence with partial perceptibility. Finally there is the totally imperceptible mystery of the Spirit of God sitting at the core of everything without which nothing at all can exist.

We will conclude this chapter by considering the verses of Genesis that paint the picture of what existed at the time of materialisation of creation:

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that *it was* good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”

(Gen 1:2-1:5)

Let us focus on the terms 'God' and 'the Spirit of God' used above. God is totally a spiritual being, not lending itself to perception by any means whatsoever. The term spirit in the phrase 'Spirit of God' underscores the total mystery or the infinite subtlety of the spiritual reality called God in this context.

"Whatever we say God is, He is not; what we do not say of Him, He is more truly than what we say He is"

Meister Eckhart (Shah-Kazemi: 132)

"He who supposes that he has knowledge of the positive attributes of the Self has supposed wrongly. For such an attribute would define Him, but His essence has no definition."

Ibn Arabi (Shah-Kazemi: 73)

Matter and spirit are opposite to each other. While matter is sense perceptible or can be so with the use of scientific instrumentation extending within the reach of the senses of perception, spirit is not and cannot be sense perceptible. Matter is visible or lends itself to a degree of visibility, spirit on the other hand is totally unseen and remains so. Matter is concrete or has a degree of concreteness while the spirit is totally void with no concreteness whatsoever.

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters implies a scenario of the existence of nothing concrete. All was in a state of fluidity or lack of definition, a void. The only non-void existence was that of the void called the Spirit of God. The earth that materialised in a concrete form after its formation was also a formless void.

It is noted that the only reference to divinity before creation is to the Spirit of God, and there is no relational reference to the Father or the

Son. When nothing existed except the Absolute Spirit, there were no relations. The Spirit of God started to manifest as the Father and the Son only after relations appear on the face of the earth. In essence God the Father, God the Son and the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit are different references to the same uncreated principle underlying the whole existence. Here is the thought of Meister Eckhart expressing the unity of the three divine persons:

“For anyone who can grasp distinctions without number and quantity, a hundred could be as one. Even if there were a hundred Persons in the Godhead, a man who could distinguish without number and quantity would perceive them only as one God. ... [He] knows that three Persons are one God.”

Meister Eckhart (Shah-Kazemi:136)

“la ilaha illa'llah”: “There is no divinity except the (one) Divinity”

(Shah-Kazemi:69)

“... I AM THAT I AM ...”

(Exo 3:14)

“In respect of His Self, God possesses the Unity of the One, but in respect of His Names, He possesses the Unity of the many.”

Ibn Arabi (Shah-Kazemi:76)

Darkness is the reference to imperceptibility of the void of the undifferentiated. Light on the other hand is a reference as the perceptibility of the differentiated. Spirit of God is totally unseen and thus a perpetually unknowable dark secret. The differentiated is on the contrary is an open secret, perceptible or light.

Isn't it paradoxical that the perceptible existence is underlain by the imperceptible "non-existence", materiality by immateriality, light by darkness, something by "nothing", multiplicity by oneness or "none-ness" depending upon whether you talk of the spirit as one or "none". One can say that if something is founded on or underlain by "none-ness", that "none-ness" can also be said to exist.

"And the earth was without form": the differentiated was not formed yet and therefore, invisible. All that existed was the totally invisible Spirit of God.

"God divided the light from the darkness": is the description of the process of creation. The process of creation is described as the separation of the light, that which is visible, from darkness, that which is a total secret - the Spirit of God. In other words, creation is the process of the Spirit of God manifesting itself as the perceptible universe and everything it contains without diminishing itself.

"And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" is a reference to the cyclical nature of the process of creation. Day follows night and night follows day; the manifestation of the Spirit of God in the form of the universe follows the dissolution of the universe back into the Spirit of God just as day follows night and vice versa.

Morning and evening are times of twilight implying the appearance of the realms of unclear partial visibility of the subtle in contrast to the night of total invisibility or darkness of the undifferentiated and day or clear visibility of the differentiated.

Genesis shows that that which separates human body from the animating spirit of God breathed into it, is the mind just like the sky separates the earth from the transcendent God above. In that direction, various realms of the principle of heaven that separates the eternal and unchanging Spirit of God from the temporal and the ever changing

principle of earth are in fact various faculties of the mind with their own forms of consciousness. Light is the metaphor used to indicate consciousness, the capacity of knowing which enables differentiation, to help human bodies navigate life:

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.”

(Gen 1:14-15)

Let us look at how Genesis describes the various forms of consciousness of the different realms of mind, “lights in the firmament of the heaven”. Genesis describes the faculties of the mind in two different ways: (1) in terms of the essence of various life forms, and (2) by using the metaphor of the serpent, Eve and Adam.

We learn about the consciousness of the faculties of the human mind by comparing it to the consciousness of the numerous primordial and developed life forms of the water and the earth:

“And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”

(Gen 1:20-25)

Consciousness of the faculty of human mind closest to the body is compared with the consciousness of numerous primordial life forms of the waters and the earth and the consciousness of the first two faculties then with that of the developed life forms.

This faculty of the mind closest to the body is charged with the responsibility of interfacing with the physical body and therefore it shares in the physicality of all life forms with any kind of body. All forms of life must have this interfacing faculty. Humans are no exception to its requirement.

What is the capacity of this interfacing faculty? It is the power of perception through some form of sensing and power of action through some form of active capacity comprising a particular life form. The use of this faculty is to serve the needs of survival of the body. There is no point of sensing if there is no capacity to respond to what is sensed. We refer to this faculty as the sensory faculty although it performs twin functions of sensing and responding with the sole purpose of survival of the body.

What are the aspects of existence about which developed animals are conscious and primordial life forms are not? One such difference is especially worthy of note and it concerns the ability of being conscious

of the other. Primordial life forms are aware of their own bodies only. They are not aware of the other at all, because they do not need the other for any reason whatsoever. They even reproduce by themselves. Developed life forms have feelings of the other as well of awareness of their own bodies. Genesis thus teaches us that the second faculty of human mind is the faculty that enables us to feel the existence of the other.

To learn about the next heavenly realm, the heaven of heavens, as the third faculty of human mind, let us pay attention to the following verses:

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.”

(Gen 1:26-30)

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”. Human beings comprise a special life form because of it.

Just like God has dominion over all he created, He offered humans dominion over all life forms and over the earth itself: “let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”.

God is the creator. He is the sustainer of what he creates. He must renew His creation so that it remains sustainable. Being the supreme, He has supreme dominion over all He creates. Dominion means authority, territory, domain, province, power, control, responsibility and protectorate. As the Governor of his creation, He has authority as well as responsibility for its protection, sustenance and renewal. Having made humans in his image, God offers to share with them His dominion.

A question arises. What did He mean in offering His dominion to humans? Did He mean to offer it in the sense of authority, power and control only when He Himself took responsibility, sustenance and protectorate in His own share? There is no authority without responsibility; even God is not exempt from this law of His. He offers humankind dominion over the entire creation in the full sense of the word including both responsibility and authority. Humankind has the authority to use God’s creation for sustenance while it assumes the responsibility for looking after, protecting and sustaining the creation.

Genesis uses the word ‘earth’ to mean the planet on which we live and also the principle of materiality of which our bodies are comprised. Again in the full sense of the word ‘earth’ He offers humankind dominion over the planet on which we live as well as the body in which we live. If we discharge our responsibility, we have the authority to exercise full control over the planet as well the body.

What then is the third faculty of human mind? It is related to the capacity to share in the divine dominion over the divine creation. It is the divine consciousness that enables us to discharge this responsibility. We may call it intellect, enlightened intellect, wisdom, intuition or by any other name—it is the human capacity to be in the likeness of the Absolute Divinity.

Thus we have a faculty of our minds that makes us behave in a creaturely way, another faculty that make us behave in the fashion of an animal, and yet another one which can make us divine in our behaviour. In other words, we have in our minds a built in capacity of creaturely consciousness, animal consciousness and also of divine consciousness.

We noted that Genesis describes the faculties of the mind in two different ways. We have looked at one description in Genesis of the faculties of the human mind. Let us now look at the other.

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she

took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

(Gen_3:1-6)

In these verses, we see two levels of consciousness: (1) that of the serpent which entices and tempts, and (2) of the woman who yields to temptation and has the power of tempting others. The former is the creaturely sensory faculty with the power to perceive and the latter the developed animal's awareness of the other and the effects of this awareness.

We have seen that every perception demands a response. If the thing perceived is good, it tempts: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise”.

What is the responsibility that goes with the authority in dominion over the earth? It is to stay away from temptation and to be careful with our likes; as they cause temptation. The possibility of not getting what we like causes anxiety and fear. We are also instructed to be careful of our dislikes; dislikes are just the flip sides of the likes. Any possibility of getting what we dislike causes anxiety and fear as well. Do not be afraid of the serpent; understand and control your fears. Remember that being in the image of God, you are not limited, why should there be then any fear or any particular need or any particular dislike? Why should there be any sense of limitation? Being in His image, we are as limitless as God Himself who has created us so with unlimited choices and possibilities in the Garden of Eden.

What is wrong with temptation and its likes? Temptation leads to greed, gluttony, appetites, lack of discernment and irresponsible consumption that destroy rather than support life. They work subconsciously, taking over our lives and robbing us of our intellect, energy and capacity to discern, causing stress which kills us slowly but surely.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

(Gen 2:16-17)

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:”

(Gen 3:4)

When you yield to temptation, it is the social thing to tempt others for company. Then, “she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

“And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

(Gen 3:12-13)

Eating of the forbidden fruit was neither the fault of the woman nor of the husband. It was neither the fault of the serpent who beguiled the woman or of that of God for giving the woman to the man. Along with the conscious awareness of the other, comes the tendency of passing the buck and transferring the responsibility of your actions on the shoulders of the other.

Let us examine who this woman is:

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

(Gen 2:22)

Woman here is not a person but the metaphor for the consciousness of humanity subject to temptation of likes and dislikes. God made humans to take dominion along with responsibility and control and not just control. Control alone, without responsibility leads to exploitation without discernment.

The consciousness to take responsibility with authority is the realm of the mind farthest from the body and closest to the immanent Spirit of God. The sensory faculty, the realm of the mind and closest to the body tempts the next realm of the mind which in turn tempts the one farthest from the body and closest to God.

Genesis thus presents human consciousness as a dysfunctional hierarchy of three levels: (1) one that tempts, (2) one that gets tempted, and (3) the one that should assume its responsibility but yet gets tempted. The Kingdom of God is established in the being of a human being only when (1) is ordered to (2), (2) to (3) and (3) to the spirit of God. Then (3) can discharge its responsibility of dominion over “the fish in the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth

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On Spiritual Education

Author:

Dr. Rajendra Narain Dubey

Introduction

Indian seers and thinkers developed their ideas about life and living over a long period of time. Several regions in India contributed to the ideas. The chronological order of development is perhaps difficult to identify, but it is relatively easy to identify evolutionary layers of development. Since the Vedas are now accepted to be the oldest literature available, a consideration of the Vedic text may help in tracing the order of development in the early period. The order of development of the later period can be traced through the epics and Puranas.

The early phases of development seem to focus on observation. It seems that Indian people even at that time had a good understanding of how to observe things and events.

Observation of external objects and events is made in two stages; the first involves transmission of information to the receiving human organs of knowledge such as the eyes and ears. This phase can be termed 'physical darshan'; it is a stage in which information from external objects/events flows through to the human organs of knowledge. In the second stage, the information received in the first stage is transmitted from the organs of knowledge to the brain where it creates a mental image. An appropriate name for this phase is mental darshan. It entails a reorganisation of mental consciousness in a wave formation in response to the stimuli received first by the organs of knowledge. Indian people were however of the opinion at that time, that neither physical darshan nor mental darshan nor the two together could lead to a complete knowledge of the objects or events under observation. For that to happen, another step is required. That required step can be termed intellectual darshan. It involves a total and comprehensive analysis of an image that neural transmission creates in the mental consciousness. The result of the analysis is often accepted as the knowledge of the object/event under observation. This result along

with the mental image becomes part of memory. It immediately throws light on the fact that mental images could also be created from objects and/or events stored in and retrieved from memory.

Physical Sciences explain how information is transmitted in the first stage from objects/events to human organs. The transmission in the second stage from the organs to the mind belongs to the subject of Neuroscience. The mental images created by memory can easily interfere with those related to the event currently under observation. An analysis too of such mental images created by memory often interferes with the analysis of the image of the object/event under observation. The resulting conclusion regarding the object of observation may be unreliable especially if the two images are unrelated or are incompatible. That perhaps is the reason for the following narration directed at the object of observation and the status of observer. A true image of Sun (or any other object) on a surface of water (in a pot for example) is possible only if the surface is calm. If the pot is disturbed such that it creates waves on the surface, the image (of Sun or of an object) does not produce a constant picture for observation-based conclusion. It produces a distorted image that appears to change and flicker. If the observation of the (mental) image is to be used as the basis for knowledge, observation of an image that flickers is unlikely to lead to a reliable conclusion. Vedic thinkers used the word 'agyan' for a conclusion derived from incomplete, unreliable or questionable information. This word is often used to suggest ignorance. This meaning seems incorrect. If the word 'knowledge' used in English is equivalent to 'gyan' in Sanskrit, the prefix 'a' (implying 'not') attached to gyan can only mean 'no knowledge'. Hence, 'agyan' refers to a conclusion or knowledge based on incomplete, unreliable or unverifiable observation. The proper English word for 'agyan' could be 'pseudo-knowledge'. Ideally speaking, the word 'gyan' is associated with knowledge of truth or reality.

Vedic Period

Experts may differ regarding the time the Vedic period began and ended. It is however fair to assume that the development of Vedic Sanskrit, the language used in the Vedas, occurred during this period. Words in Sanskrit were created and used to express and convey human observations and emotions. A large part of the Vedas uses a combination of words in metrical form. This method of expression must have a the part of this early development. Vedic Seers (or Scientists in present day terminology) knew that the meaning or knowledge a word implies has to be inferred either alone as it is or in the context of where it appears. For this purpose, they developed a discipline called Mimansa to interpret and find the correct meaning of a spoken (or written) text. A speaker (or writer) conveys a message to an audience. The field of Mimansa seems to be a direct outcome of intellectual darshan. The word used in the West for Mimansa is Hermeneutics that has a limited scope.

Vedic seers were deeply interested in finding ways to live a good life. The body of knowledge they generated can hence be classified as the science of life. Like any other science, it consisted of two parts: theory and practice. Further, to make the theory and practice useful and simple in life, it had to be described in words people could relate to easily and be frequently used in everyday life. Vedic words along with understanding of their meaning or Mimansa make it rather simple to decipher the message of the Vedas.

According to Vedic thinkers, knowledge based on the physical, mental and intellectual darshans is inferential in character. It can be identified as relative knowledge, never as absolute. Spiritual darshan was necessary for absolute knowledge and for a meaningful life. It now forms part of the science of life and living.

Each of the four forms of darshan can be identified by the four corresponding states which are the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual. Mental darshan is the observation of the mental image of objects/events. Intellectual darshan aims at the analysis of the mental

image. The inferential knowledge they lead to depends on the state of observer. In order to remove the subjectivity, scholars began to rely on the scholars' collective opinion about objects and events. Objective knowledge is the word they associate with such common inference. The knowledge acquired in this fashion is still relative but accepted as scientific. In fact, modern science developed along this line.

Knowledge contributed by a small number of trusted people to is known as Testimonial. It must be emphasised that in all such cases, knowledge as conclusive evidence was still arrived at by individuals as observers. They are the subject that observes the object. If the people who are relied upon for a conclusion are biased or wrong, knowledge based on their conclusion is more likely to be biased or incorrect. A group of people often accept the Testimonial knowledge as more reliable and in some cases as absolute truth or absolute knowledge. Any knowledge accepted without proof is still an inference. Vedic seers consider spiritual darshan as essential for Absolute knowledge. Subsequently, they explained what Spiritual darshan is and how to make it a part of life. The process to this darshan is gradual and requires some practice. The discipline of Yoga addresses the practical part of the science of life. It explains how to move gradually from physical darshan to spiritual darshan.

Since physical objects/events are available only as mental images the initial attempt of yoga is to shift attention from physical darshan to mental darshan. This is described as Pratyahar in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali. A continuous focus on the mental image is called Dharna. Once the state of dharna is achieved, an intellectual analysis of the image begins. Any conclusive result arrived at from the analysis of the mental image of an object/event is intellectual darshan. It is an inference of an individual. Any theory or doctrine developed as a result is therefore inferential. In the words of Aurobindo Ghosh (Upanishads: 7), such development belongs to the psycho-physical state of a human being. A continuous and deep state of dhyana eventually leads the person to a psycho-spiritual state (Upanishads:7). The state in which Spiritual darshan takes place is called the state of Samadhi in the yoga

philosophy. In it, the difference between mental darshan and intellectual darshan disappears. This is also the state of pure existence in which mental consciousness is free of any image created either by external stimuli or due to memory. The description by the yoga philosophy of how to negotiate the path of search for knowledge is now quite clear. It traverses from the physical (object/event assumed real in the beginning) to the mental (image) to the intellectual (analysis) and finally to Spiritual darshan. This last form of darshan is a direct perception of mental consciousness when it is completely free from residual images of objects/events created either directly from external factors or indirectly from memory. Vedic thinkers view this state to offer a vision of pure consciousness. Only when it is disturbed due to external stimuli or memory, it takes on an adjunct 'mental'. It is then referred to as mental consciousness because it is attached to the created principle known as mind. In the same way, it is possible to think of physical consciousness and intelligence consciousness as adjuncts associated with the physical and intellectual bodies.

A statement of a creative principle is made in the 129th sukta of the tenth mandal of the Rig Veda. It says "there was neither sat nor asat in the beginning. What existed then was 'tad ekam' or 'That One'". Some Scholars use the word existence for 'sat' and non-existence for 'asat'.

The acceptance of this statement would mean acceptance of 'existence within the domain of non-existence'. Is it what Indian seers meant? If not, an alternative explanation has to be found. The meaning of Vedic words provides an alternative. In Vedic Sanskrit, both 'sat' and 'a sat' refer to Truth as Reality. 'Sat' refers to Reality that appears to remain the same, Sat is the Reality that appears to change in time. In the case of Spiritual darshan, the mental consciousness always remain the same provided it is free of any disturbance created due to external stimuli or memory. In this particular case, it presents a vision of pure or absolute consciousness with no trace of disturbance of any kind. Hence, it can be identified with Sat. All other consciousness with adjuncts like the physical, mental or intellectual are therefore examples of Asat.

A distinguishing characteristic of Asat is that it introduces a feeling of multiplicity in life. Ishopanishad deals with the concept in terms of pairs of opposites and attempts to reconcile them. Ken and Mandukya Upanishad consider Asat in three parts. When the three parts are combined with Sat, the result can be interpreted as statement regarding That One in four parts. Mandukya Upanishad states the four parts as 'chatuspaad of self'. 'Chatuspaad of self' is its four fold description or its narration in four parts. Ken Upanishad introduces the four parts in the form of a story and thereby lays foundation for the Puranic concept of narrating life in terms of stories.

It seems that the Vedic ideas evolved over a long period of time. Its ideologies presented in the Upanishads must also have taken a long time to evolve. It is possible that evolving concepts played a primary role in the compilation of Vedic text as it is available now in the present form. The name of Ved Vyas is accepted as the person who compiled the Vedas. They are four in number and each has four parts. In view of the statement in Mandukya and Ken Upanishads, each Veda exhibits a chatuspaad or four fold description consisting of Physical, Mental, Intellectual and Spiritual aspects.

The physical body of a person is used for performances that are repeated again and again. The same characteristics of repeatability are followed in Rituals as well. The purpose of mind is to bring in focus what is being done and to use a framework of how to make a body repeat an action. Intellect is used for analytical development of a theoretical framework for the reason of an action. A person of course stands apart from the physical, mental, and intellectual bodies that he or she is endowed with. The Vedas exhibit the same features: Brahman for physical body, Aranyak for mental body and Upanishads for the intellectual body of the Vedas. Samhita stands apart from these three: it is the Spiritual body of the Vedas.

Epic Period

Another feature of the Vedic period that stands out is its proposal for movement of human beings from their physical moorings to spiritual height. This feature was built on during the epic period in the form of Purusharth or the aim of human life. This too is expressed in four parts; artha, kam, dharma and moksha. Moksh or liberation is the highest form to aim for in life. The journey begins with physical body as the means or arth. The desire or kam comes from the mental body. Dharma is linked to the intellectual body. Freedom, independence or moksha from these three are reached in the spiritual body.

Moksh is the ideal state for people to strive for. Another thought developed perhaps during this period: the attainment of the ideal state can also lead to a living technique that can free the physical body from physical ailments, mental body from mental ills and make the intellectual body free from error in making decisions. Is it possible for a human being to attain such a status in life? This threw in a concept of an ideal person. Scholars made the epic period famous by narrating the story, in puranic mould, of two ideal persons of the era. The story of Ram as an ideal person is narrated in Ramayan. A later version of Ramayan makes the author claim to observe the omnipresence of Ram and Sita in the created world. This is in line with the statement in Ishopanishad according to which this world is permeated by Isha or the Lord. This is perhaps the reason why Ram of Ramayan is given the status of an incarnation of God. Ram is considered an example of how to lead an ideal life. Indeed, the life of Ram shows how to put the theory of Science of Life in practice.

The other epic is known as Mahabharata. It is a story involving war between two sections of people, one good and the other bad. The story describes in some detail the theory and practice of Science of Life introduced first in the Vedas. It was done to present before people a way of life that has been lost with the passage of time. Krishna is an ideal person of the time, elevated to the level of God incarnate. He explains the importance of Sankhya and Yoga, the theoretical and practical parts of the Science of Life. Another important feature of life and living emerges from these explanations.

People in general do not want to die. They want to live or exist. They want to know. They want to be happy. The Spiritual Heritage of Sat-chit-anand (Existence, knowledge and bliss in Sanskrit) took possession of human thought. It was introduced in the Vedas and rediscovered in the Gita, which forms a part of the Mahabharata. According to the Vedas, two spiritual heritages are part of every person. One is Sat and the other is Asat (Rig Veda). The heritage of Sat makes a person sat-chit-anand, potentially at least. Asat provides the power to attain the ideal of sat-chit-anand in life. These powers are named as devas (gods in English) and help people achieve their potential. In the Vedic period, Agni was the power or deva that helped achieve optimum physical health. Vayu is the deva that guides senses and mind to their optimal performance. Indra is the god of intellectual health. This is narrated as a story in Ken Upanishad. It in fact introduces the concept of Yoga, the practical part of the Science of Life. Yoga as it is known now developed over a long period and was eventually put in concise written form by Patanjali. This work is known as Yoga Sutra.

This period also saw the emergence of Shiv as supreme deity of knowledge. With Ram as sat, Shiv as Chit and Krishna as anand, sat-chit-anand became part of Indian heritage.

Modern period

The consequence of Indian thought beginning with the vedic period and continuing upto and past the epic period made India a very rich country. People from other parts of the world got attracted to its wealth. It became the reason for their invasion of India. Early invasions of the country were perhaps not so damaging. The later invasions began to destroy the spiritual, intellectual and material wealth of India. To guard against this loss, Indians began to idolise what they once idealised in their life. The idols of Ram, Krishna, Shiv and other gods were established in temples across India. A tradition of worship and prayer took root in the life of Indians. Yoga as a discipline that leads to unity of existence is now forgotten.

All the phases of development are deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche. It is true that some prefer one over the other. However, there was seldom any animosity of one group against the other because of chosen preferences. This created a sense of tolerance among Indians towards other ways of thinking. However now there has emerged a group of Indians who prefer Western thinking. They are the people who promote intolerance against the heritage from ancient Indian thinking and refer to people who promote this ethos as intolerant. They have perhaps forgotten the ancient Indian thinking which makes it clear that, in absence of spiritual darshan, people can rely only on an inferential result of intellectual analysis of mental images. A system of higher education based on inference alone is a Western concept. A system of higher education based on spiritual darshan is an Indian concept. A blind acceptance of the Western system implies a lack of confidence in the Indian system. What people accept controls their behaviour in life. It is perhaps the reason why Indians have become materialistic and are looking to the West for solution to their problems. It shows a lack of self-confidence. The only way out of this state is to practice Yoga as it was during the Vedic period and as it is explained in the Gita of the Epic period.

It is also nice to revisit some of the statements of the past and how they can be applied for a better life. One statement from the Ishopanishad that is repeated in different form in the Gita ought to be looked at again. 'Observe the Self in all existence and entire existence in the Self' says Ishopanishad. 'One who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me is never lost' says Krishna in the Gita. The two statements 'Me in all' and 'all in Me' is clearly contradictory in nature from the point of view of knowledge emphasised in present day education. They are correct when seen from the point of view of how people learn. Everyone is seen to live within the world around them. Yet, the knowledge of the world without is based on the information obtained from the mental image formed within.

The idea of time and attribute (guna) explained in the Gita also points to inadequacy of present day education in leading a good life. The

present concept is to divide time into three parts; present, past and future. The attributes are also divided into three parts; tamo, rajo and sato. The three fold division can be related to the physical, mental and intellectual parts of a human being. The ancient Indian system of knowledge from the Vedas and Epics, especially the Gita of Mahabharata, adds a fourth, a spiritual dimension to human existence.

It can be appreciated that all human activities take place in the present, not in the past or future. Physical limbs work in the present. Mind thinks in the present. One may think of the past as stored in the memory. But the thinking about the past also takes place at the current instant. One can plan for the future, but the planning is also done at the current time. Too much thinking of the past while forgetting the present sows the basis for stress in life. Unnecessary thinking about the future could also become the reason for stress in life. A desirable stress-free life requires working in harmony with all parts of human life: the physical, the mental, the intellectual and the spiritual man must always live and work together in the present.

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Role of Spirituality in Nurturing the Positive Mind of a Whole Child

Author:

Aneela Azeemi

This paper is an attempt to see how children are naturally spiritual because of their close connection to the pure consciousness and about how to protect their pure mind set in the contemporary world which is technologically advanced, but whose many challenges have a negative impact on a child's psychology. Our global society's emphasis on materialism, productivity and capitalism are shadowed by numerous dangers that have led to corresponding physical, psychological and sociological vices. This has led to a rise in the rates of suicide as well as extremism and other reactionary attitudes. Now the need is to adopt such measures so as to nurture the positive mind set of a child in order for him or her to flourish in a healthy society.

The child of today is the father or mother of tomorrow. Children should be exposed to different kinds of knowledge, not only that which focuses on measurable and tangible objects, but also that which concerns the spiritual dimensions of human life and experience. Spirituality tells us that human beings are not only the combination of bones and flesh but there is the soul or spirit which is giving life to this body. Sufis say that the human soul is configured with a very sophisticated energy formula made up of 70000 layers of energy (noor). The human soul is in continuous journey and the Holy Quran beautifully expresses this soul cycle as "Inna lillahe wa Inna Elehe Rajaun" meaning a circle starting from one point and ending in the same after completion. The soul creates a material medium during this cycle, in the shape of a baby's body with the zero level of conscious mind but blooming with pure consciousness. Therefore, a child is naturally spiritual because of his/her strong connection to the pure consciousness. Slowly and gradually with the personal growth of a child his or her conscious mind grows along with the thickening of one immediate layer of energy or noor which encircles conscious mind and famously known as 'Ego' (Anna or Nafas). This ego carries a tinge of negativity like anger, jealousy, hate,

biases etc.— but with exception to this single layer, the rest of 69999 layers are all positive and contain the powerful potential of a human. This layer due to negativity eventually gets thicker, creates a curtain or barrier between the conscious and pure consciousness. All the revealed scriptures, prophets, sages, saints, mystics and sufi's worked and made efforts on this very part of 'Ego' which is the only barrier and has a deep connection to the mind set or way of thinking of an individual. People's lives revolve around this mind or way of thinking but if one were to cleanse it of negativity, he/she can attain enlightenment or connection to the positive side of the human which is the actual 'Being'.

It is very important to nurture the positive mind set of a child from the very beginning through which we can restore a peaceful world.

However, it is also very pertinent to highlight that there are two types of knowledge: acquired knowledge and primordial or esoteric knowledge. Acquired knowledge is that which we receive from parents, forefathers, society and schools, colleges etc., whereas there is another kind of knowledge which is naturally built in within us, that knowledge is known as Primordial or Esoteric knowledge. This is the hidden side of a human being and it resides within as a pure source behind the curtain of ego (lying in 70000 energy attributes). It is the attributed, gifted part of the human soul from the divinity in the form of an energy chip. This 'Chip' needs to be activated and even people like Albert Einstein activated only 5 to 7 percent of this knowledge. This pure side of human beings can be activated through self-awakening or actualisation.

Spiritual knowledge, by virtue of its emphasis, can impart patterns of cognition that focus on tolerance, introspection, awareness, and other attributes that are needed now more than ever.

Spirituality based education like "Mindfulness Meditation" and silent practices can help us achieve balanced and stress free minds, and spiritual awareness programs can also help children to get connected to their actual or pure self. Incorporating spiritual knowledge base into

childhood education, rather than stifling a young individual's in built ability to successfully participate in the modern world, would inculcate the principle of '*Unity in Diversity*' and instill values that may help control the rise of violent or extremist perspectives. In as much as many positive spiritual orientations are characterised by compassion, love, understanding and acceptance, providing a strong background in these traditions and systems may in turn lay the groundwork for lives that are healthier in mind, body and spirit. Parents, teachers, and society as a whole should take responsibility for providing an integrative and spiritual basis of knowledge, rather than one that may dangerously exclude such a significant and foundational expression of human life and psychology.

sufiawakening.org@gmail.com

Understand that You are the Power!

Author:

Barbara Bedford, BA



The Human Genome Project. Photo credit: "DNA 2012" Sliderbase.com
The Human Genome Project Photo credit: Sliderbase.com

I am humbled by the thought that every single cell in my body contains all the potential for my becoming. That DNA in my body is the template of who I am capable of becoming from conception until death! How stunning is that!

The inside of my body is somewhat easier to comprehend neatly encapsulated as it is within the skin. A constant and harmonic actions and reactions of each grouping of specialising cells within my capsule. Cells which have autonomy, communicate with each other, reproduce and co-operate. They are born out of 2 single cells that come together and then multiply into billions of cells. Each has come with a purpose which is unknown by the Overseer of these countless universes, ie. ME! Moreover, much of the time, I don't particularly care either. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, is a great motto!

The most miraculous part of this entire manifestation of becoming 'ME' is that from the original cells of origin to the final cells at the time of death, each single cell carries the DNA or Life Code from everyone that has ever existed, exists or will exist 'ad infinitum'!

Beyond the apparent solidity of this vessel of human body however, the molecular body, scientists now know, is engaged in a continuous state of flow and interaction of its molecular structure with all that is adjacent to it and into the furthest reach of stellar space of the stars and planets! We are always inter-being with all that is! The Universe within and the Universe without, all contain the essentials of who I am meant to be. And you too. I contain the Universe. The Universe contains me.

In this knowing of my Energy Being not only existing in the vastness of the Universe but also carrying an occult purpose for being present at this time and in this place, I am humbled! I am also greatly empowered. I am somehow vital to the overall health of the entire Universe. Regardless of the role I have taken in this present life, a liver or heart cell or even a toe nail cell, I, at the profound, timeless level of DNA, have undertaken to keep the macro-universe operating at its healthiest by maintaining and nurturing the micro-universe within my body and that material world which supports and sustains my life. I am nothing less than Divine Creative Energy in expression. I express creative energy in every measure of the life I find myself inhabiting. The Universal Power and that which expresses itself as ME, are One. I am the Power.

Towards an Inclusive Global Family: Recovering the Forgotten Contributions of Christian Mystics

Author:

M. Darrol Bryant, Centre for Dialogue & Spirituality in the World's Religion, Renison University College/University of Waterloo

I came late to an engagement with the mystical traditions. If mystics were mentioned in my undergraduate and even graduate studies it was mainly to dismiss them. Mystics were often charged with irrationality and obscurantism as products of an “overheated mind.” They didn’t fit the mode of rationality that characterised so much of Christian thinking over the ages. But I continued to bump up against these figures – Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Bonaventure, Julian of Norwich, and Teresa of Avila – in my courses in the history of Christian thought. What was I to make of them?

Things began to change for me as I recalled two things. First, there was the oft-repeated remark of Krister Stendahl, one of my teachers at Harvard Divinity School. He would often say that Christian thinking is “poetry plus not science minus.” It was a reminder of the variety of ways of articulating Christian thought found among Christian thinkers. And with the mystics you were encountering language that sought to give expression to the inexpressible. It is not language that competes with modern science; rather it is language that seeks to direct our attention to their experience of the ineffable divine. This is the second thing that I realised. The divine always exceeds the capacity of words to capture the truth of the sacred. But words can point us in the right direction.

There is a wonderful Buddhist tale that makes this point. One version goes as follows: “...truth can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon, but the finger is not the moon. It is necessary to look beyond the pointing finger or words to its experiential ground: the ineffable divine.”

Wayne Teasdale makes a related point when he writes:

“The West has never been at home in mysticism. It has had great mystics and its greatest theologians...have been touched by mystical experience...but the structure of its life and thought remain basically rational and logical.... Today we are discovering the disastrous limitations of this mode of thinking... Concrete, intuitive thought has been neglected... If the world is to recover its balance it has to rediscover the feminine mind: ...concrete, symbolic, synthetic, imaginative, and intuitive.”^[1]

Here we will follow this lead and turn to three women Christian Mystics to tease out their contributions to an inclusive global family. But rather than seeing their contributions in conceptual and rational terms, we will seek to understand them in their own intuitive and experiential terms. For we need to come to understand that mysticism is the Way to intimacy with the divine. It is the way of the heart and articulates its experience of the divine in symbolic and intuitive terms.

We begin with Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), then turn to Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) and conclude with Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). Each has contributed to the Christian grammar of the spiritual life. And, like other Christian writers they affirm that life is to be seen as **from** God, **in** God, and **to** God or the Sacred. Unlike other Christian writers, they seek to unfold the inner spiritual meaning and dynamics of the human quest for the divine.

II. Hildegard of Bingen:

Divine Creation and Cosmic Christianity

Let me place the following over our too brief encounter with Hildegard of Bingen in these words: “God hugs you. You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God.”

Hildegard was a remarkable figure. Born in Germany, she entered a monastic community at eight. She became a “renaissance woman” three hundred years before the Renaissance. She became an Abbess, heading her community and challenging bishops and Popes. She was a visionary, an artist, a mystic, an administrator, a writer, a visionary theologian and a composer of songs. She wrote books and corresponded with the leading figures of her time. She traveled little, except for her four preaching tours in Germany.

Hildegard’s writings grew out of her visionary experiences that began when she was a child and continued throughout her life. As an adult she experienced a command to write about her visions, something that she resisted. But she finally began to share something of her experience. Those took the form of paintings – whether by her or another is a matter of dispute – and words that appeared in her *Book of Divine Works*.^[2]



For Hildegard, the divine was in all things. It was the dynamic at the heart of creation. It was at the centre of her cosmology. This is what she wrote:

I, the highest and fiery power, have kindled every spark of life... with wisdom I have rightly put the universe in order. I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I glean in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains everything, I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive... And thus I remain hidden in every kind of reality as a fiery power. For I am life. I am also Reason, which bears within itself the breath of the resounding Word, through which the whole of creation is made. I breathe life into everything... For I am life, whole and entire... I am life that remains ever the same, without beginning and without end. For this life is God. *Divine Works*

She dictated her visions to a scribe and secretary. Here she is not offering a theory of the universe, but giving expression to her experience, to her visions. She also characterised the soul in a unique way: she regarded it as “the green life force of the flesh.” As an Abbess she quarrelled with Bishops and won. She minded the gardens that fed her community and became known as a healer for her knowledge of herbs and natural remedies. From her we receive a vital vision of a cosmos enlivened by the divine. As she wrote, “All creation is a song of praise to God.”



She was unique for her times. Her works were read and approved by Popes. She was a remarkable woman. After her death, her works were neglected, but in the 20th century she enjoyed resurgence, in part due to the then Catholic thinker, Matthew Fox. In 2012 she was made a Doctor of the Church.

III. Julian of Norwich: The Living Trinity & God as Mother

As we turn to Julian of Norwich let me put these words before us: “All shall be well, & all shall be well, & all manner of things shall be well. For there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go.”

Born just four years before the Black Plague (1346-1353) that devastated Europe, we know little about Julian of Norwich. Even her name comes from the Church in Norwich, England where she was an anchoress. An anchoress was someone who “withdrew from the world” and lived in a tiny dwelling – an *anchorhold* or small cell – attached to a Church. They devoted themselves to a life of prayer. They often became known for their wisdom and lay people turned to them for advice and counsel. People often came to Julian.

When Julian was thirty, she became very ill. A priest came to administer “Last Rites.” As he was intoning the Last Rites – to prepare her for dying by absolution from sins, relief from suffering through anointing, and the final Eucharist – he held a crucifix over Julian who then experienced several visions. She recovered and then wrote the short version of her *Showings* or what would later in an expanded version become known as *Revelations of Divine Love*. For much of her remaining life, she reworked and expanded her account of the meaning of these experiences.

It was the first mystical writing in English and centuries later was regarded as “the most profound and difficult of all medieval mystical writings.” I don’t find her so difficult, but I do find her profound. But it takes time to understand what she was trying to do. In the 20th century

Julian gained some notoriety for writing of God as Mother. Julian has a vision of the Living Trinity, one that is intimately connected to our life and experience as human beings. Listen to Julian:

I contemplated the world of all the blessed Trinity...I saw and understood these three properties: the property of fatherhood...of motherhood...and of lordship in one God. In our almighty Father, we have our protection and our bliss...which is ours by our creation...and in the second person, in knowledge and wisdom we have...our restoration and our salvation, for he is our Mother, brother and saviour; and in our great Lord the Holy Spirit we have our reward and gift for our living and our labour...surpassing all that we desire in his marvellous courtesy...his great plentiful grace. For all our life consists of three: in the first we have our being, and in the second we have our increasing, and in the third we have our fulfilment. This first is nature, the second is mercy, and the third is grace....[\[1\]](#)

Or again,

I saw and understood that the high might of the Trinity is our Father,

and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother

and the great love of the Trinity is our Lord...

the second person of the Trinity is our Mother...

working in us in various ways...he reforms and restores us...

and, through the gifts of grace of the holy spirit we are fulfilled...

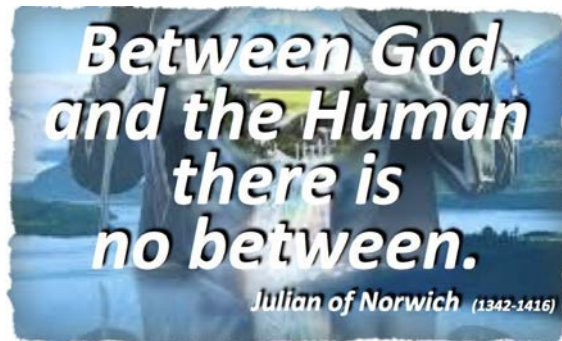
Notice Julian's words here: what "I saw" and "understood." This was her vision and her experience. It was not just a bright idea or an argument but an insight. For Julian, the trinity is our experience of being

made/born, being re-made and redeemed as our life unfolds, and being fulfilled by the spirit.

And also notice that when she speaks of the motherhood of God, she always says HE. Why? Because Julian is here speaking of Jesus. Here what Julian calls “the property of mothering” is de-gendered and turned into nurturing and caring. It gives us a very comforting image of Jesus far different than that of the Christ of the Last Judgment that appears on the wall behind the altar in the Sistine Chapel.

She then sees a correspondence between the human soul and the Trinitarian structure of divine life. But here comes the big surprise! This is what she says: ...as truly as God is our Father...so truly is God our Mother...

This, in Julian’s words is that “...Force of Love moving through the universe that holds us fast and never lets us go.” Julian is recognised as a Saint in the Anglican and Lutheran traditions.



IV. Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle & Union with God

Let me begin our brief journey with Teresa of Avila with these words: “May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be....a child of God.”

Unlike the writings of our two previous mystics, the *Interior Castle* is a model of practical advice. When one opens the *Interior Castle* one is immediately in the presence of a wise woman speaking to other women about the challenges and joys that lie ahead on the journey to God.

Listen to her: Teresa “the practical mystic” is the author of the *Interior Castle* and she writes,

“I was told...that the nuns of Our Lady of Carmel need someone to solve their difficulties concerning prayer, and as...women best understand each other’s language and also in view of their love for me, anything I might say would be particularly useful to them.”

Teresa of Avila was born in Spain. She entered the Cistercian order when she was twenty. But she was dismayed by the laxity that prevailed. She early on sought to reform her order.

From childhood she had visionary experiences, but she later came to doubt their authenticity. Her spiritual advisor assured her of their authenticity – they were from God. She was then encouraged in her efforts of reform. It was also her spiritual advisor who encouraged her to write about her inner experience and her spiritual journey. She became a close friend of the much younger Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591) and together they worked to reform the Order and return it to its focus on contemplative prayer.

The *Interior Castle* is intended to be practical and to aid her sister contemplatives in their own spiritual journeys. The *Interior Castle* is the inner life of the spirit. Insight in spiritual matters does not come easily, and one finds oneself encountering many states and stages on the way to the soul’s “spiritual marriage and union with God.”

That guidance looks like this as she unfolds the Seven Mansions of the Interior Way:

1. **Entry:** an awareness of one's self as a child of God coupled with an awareness of sin or *missing the mark*. A *prayer of humility* marks entry into "*our beautiful & delightful castle*" as it brings "*self-knowledge*" which is essential to this stage and to the whole journey.
2. **Persevering:** is the second mansion and it is the stage of persevering in the ups and down of the life of prayer and meditation. It takes time to cultivate an inner disposition of quiet and peacefulness.
3. **Walking in Fear:** This too is part of the journey within the Interior Castle... Here one finds one's self afraid, alone and full of fear. It too is part of the story,
4. **Understanding in the House of Consolation:** here we begin to gain "understandings that exceed mere concepts." Here understanding is spiritual, intuitive, and contemplative (beyond conceptual). Here "*we cannot express these consolations adequately in rational terms.*" The way of prayer and meditation is not only striving, but letting go and receiving.
5. **Uniting with the Will of God:** here we begin to unite our will with that of God, making God's purposes ours. The image Teresa uses here is marriage: a loving relationship.
6. **Stage of Greatest Favours & Greatest Trails:** here we are closest to the goal yet most fearful that all will be lost. It is that moment that her friend, St. John of the Cross, called the "dark night of the soul."
7. **Spiritual Marriage:** the deepest or innermost room of the soul's journey to God is what Teresa calls "spiritual marriage" or "divine marriage." When it comes, or if it comes, it is not the result of one's striving, but a gift from above. This union of the soul should NOT be confused with "our senses, our faculties, or our passions" having attained to union. Rather, this is something deeper, more spiritual, and beyond our capacity to adequately describe. In Teresa's words:

He has been pleased to unite Himself with His creature

in such a way that they have become like two

who cannot be separated from one another:

even so He will not separate Himself from her.”

Like Hildegard and Julian, Teresa’s writings grow out of her visionary experience. They give voice to what is beyond our reasoned capabilities: the ineffable divine.

Teresa’s efforts led to the creation of the Discalced Carmelites or Barefoot Carmelites. I want to conclude by sharing a story of my one encounter with the Carmelites. It was nearly a decade ago that I was invited to be part of a summer program of the Elijah School of Wisdom in Israel. The program brought together a group of twenty Israeli Jews and Muslims along with four faculty members: one Jewish, one Muslim, one Buddhist and one Christian. During the program we visited various religious communities including the Discalced Carmelites on Mount Carmel in Haifa. The community there had dwindled to six women. They were European, African, & Asian. We met them through a screen. And they were remarkable. Good humoured, articulate, and so alive. I asked them if they still read the *Interior Castle*. “Yes, daily!” they exclaimed. “It was a continuing part of their daily life of contemplative prayer.” And a fascinating conversation unfolded... It was a remarkable moment for me and a witness to the enduring contribution of Teresa.



V. Some Concluding Comments

Here I have sought to share something of what I call the mystic Way. It is a way that is rooted in experience, presence, awareness and/or consciousness rather than doctrine, or abstraction. Mystics seek to explore the inner spiritual depths, the meeting place of the human and the divine. Mysticism is a Way to intimacy with the Ultimate ground of all things; it is the way of the heart. Mystics are found in all traditions both East & West. Their findings comprise the spiritual heart of the human quest, but are expressed in the languages of particular traditions. Mystics always tell us that their words are inadequate to express their experience and simply direct us towards the realities they have experienced or glimpsed. The challenge is how to read/understand the glimpses of insight and inspiration that they offer us. Here we have looked at three Christian mystics, all women. Their writings grew out of their visionary experience. And their words sought to convey something of the light that illumined their Way. ^[1]

I have come late to an appreciation of their ways. We are just in the early stages of recovering this neglected aspect of Christianity and relating it to living as one all-inclusive global family.

^[1]See Wayne Teasdale, **Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought** (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2003). See also

Wayne Teasdale, **The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions** (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001).

^[1] See Mathew Fox, **Hildegard of Bingen, Book of Divine Works** (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1987).

^[1] See Julian of Norwich, **Showings** (the first title given to *Revelations of Divine Love*) (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

^[2] See also M. Darrol Bryant, **Religion in a New Key**, 3rd edition (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2016) and M. Darrol Bryant, ed., **Ways of the Spirit: Celebrating Dialogue, Diversity & Spirituality** (2013), **Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women** (2013), and **Ways of the Spirit: Persons, Communities, Spiritualities** (2015) all available from <http://www.pandorapress.com/>

Intimate Strangers? Jewish-Muslim Relations & the Prospects for Dialogue¹

Author:

Atif Khalil, University of Lethbridge

Introduction

In an article published a decade ago on “Dialogue and Solidarity in a Time of Globalisation” James Fredericks argued that inter religious dialogue should be promoted as a form of civic virtue in modern Western societies, part of the aims of which should be to contribute to ways in which religious communities may learn to live together more harmoniously. Dialogue, he contends, should seek to create and cultivate broader feelings of communal and social solidarity, the need for which is made all the more pressing because of a number of significant consequences of globalisation. Among them he notes the large-scale relocation of religious communities, due in large part to mass immigration, mostly to Europe, North America and Australia. This wide scale “deterritorialisation” has resulted in the creation of neighbourhoods where religious communities now live together with each other in a manner which is historically unprecedented. Indeed, the observation of Diana Eck of the Harvard Pluralism Project, that America may be the most religiously diverse nation in the world (Eck, Diana:1-6) could perhaps also be made of other equally if not more diverse nations, such as Canada and Britain. Another significant consequence is the reemergence of traditional religious identities as new forms of social cohesion, partly as a reaction to the destabilising effects of globalisation.^[1] Instead of dying out as some 19th European thinkers predicted, religion has not only survived the onslaught of modernity, but emerged as major player in identitarian politics. Religious dialogue can, in light of these developments, serve not only to mitigate the potential growth of militant fanaticism, but also help forge broader inter-confessional communal relationships to offset the more inward turning, sometimes parochial tendencies of the major world religions whose adherents now work and live together – as neighbours, colleagues,

teachers, students, and business partners – to a degree and scope that is without historical precedent.

There are few who would contest Fredericks's argument that inter religious dialogue has the potential to contribute to the stability and welfare of our rapidly expanding, increasingly heterogeneous, global village. The challenge, however, lies in bringing together people whose identities are closely bound to religiously charged conflicts. In the current dialogical landscape in North America, perhaps the most difficult obstacles on this front are faced by the Jewish and Muslim communities. While dialogues of the three Abrahamic faiths have been quite common over the last few decades, exclusively Jewish-Muslim dialogues have been rarer. It is as if adherents of these two faiths have often been unable to meet in interfaith venues without the buffering presence of Christians. The reasons are not hard to understand. The emotionally charged Palestinian-Israeli conflict has almost entirely laid siege to Jewish-Muslim relations since the Holocaust and subsequent creation of Israel with the unfortunate result that Jews and Muslims are often unable to meet for irenic inter-faith exchanges without either party demanding of the other some form of politically oriented disclaimer, dissociation, or apology. Indeed, if the extent of mutual distrust among Jews and Muslims living in the west³ reflects, to any degree, the sentiments of Jews and Muslims in Israel and the Islamic World as gathered by a recently released study, then the reasons behind the impasse which Jewish-Muslim dialogue face are clear. The findings of a Pew Poll released just a few years ago found, on the basis of survey of six predominantly Muslim countries – Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan – that less than ten percent of its citizens felt favourably disposed towards Jews. A similar survey conducted in Israel found that these sentiments were echoed among Israeli Jews: less than ten percent of them were also amicably disposed towards Muslims. The Pew Poll also found similar results regarding how violent Jews and Muslims felt each other's religions were. According to the survey, all the citizens of the Arab and majority Muslim countries, who felt that some religions were more violent than others, believed Judaism to be the most violent, with Turkey a notable exception (for Turks it was

Christianity). Similarly, among Israelis who felt that some religions were more violent than others, Islam topped the list, with 91 percent of Israelis expressing such a sentiment (Pew Research Centre). There is little doubt that these perceptions of how prone Judaism and Islam are to violence, among members of the opposite faith, cannot be separated from the ongoing conflict in the Middle-East.

And yet despite the findings of the Pew Poll, there seems to be a need, particularly among a small but growing segment of North American Jews and Muslims, especially among the younger generation, for constructive communal exchanges. Indeed, the creation of the *Centre for Muslim-Jewish Engagement*, a joint initiative of the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Foundation and Hebrew Union College, reflects these very feelings.^[2] This sentiment was also expressed by Rabbi Marc Schneier of the *Foundation for Ethnic Understanding*, quoted in Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper as stating, "Now we must move beyond the myopic focus on Jewish-Christian relations and face the real challenge of the 21st century: Jewish-Muslim Dialogue." But he went on to acknowledge, as perhaps any realist would, that the "battle will be uphill, the struggle difficult, the discomfort inevitable" (March 7th, 2009).^[3]

The inevitability of the discomfort he was referring to has much to do, no doubt, with the current political climate of the Middle-East and the increasing deterioration of Arab-Israeli relations – relations which the recent election of Trump may only serve to aggravate. If, however, the political issues could to be bracketed out, at least for the purposes of dialogue, then Jews and Muslims might be able to pause and appreciate just how much they have in common. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that as far beliefs and practices are concerned, Judaism and Islam are closer to each than any other world religion. It was these very commonalities that allowed for a Judeo-Islamic tradition to develop in the pre-modern Islamic world which was, in the words of Norman Stillman, "parallel to and no less real – perhaps in fact even more real – than that of the Judeo-Christian tradition" (9-10). By the "Judeo-Islamic tradition" – which is not Stillman's term – he was referring to that particular cultural and intellectual tradition

of Islamicate civilisation which comprised a “creative symbiosis” of ideas and even practices between Judaism and Islam, made possible, as noted, by the remarkable degree of religious similarities between the two religions in question.^[4] This tradition was not a syncretic fusion of Islam and Judaism but a historical phenomenon of religious exchange which influenced the scholarly, devotional, and mystical trajectory of both religions and which spanned a period of more than a millennium. In our contemporary North American context, the Judeo-Islamic tradition may provide us with something of a precedent for interfaith relations, and illustrate the potential for amicable exchanges between two communities which, in recent decades, have often been at loggerheads. It is to these similarities and the manner in which they contributed to the medieval and late medieval symbiotic exchange between the two religions that I would like to devote much of the remainder of this paper. There are three major areas of structural overlap I will briefly analyze: (i) theological, (ii) legal, and (iii) mystical. The analysis below is by no means exhaustive; it is meant, instead, simply to shine a light on certain areas of convergence between two religions which are all too often overlooked or insufficiently acknowledged, even within segments of the scholarly community.

Theological Intersections

By far the most significant religious intersection between Islam and Judaism, particularly post-biblical Judaism, is the virtually identical concept of God that lies at the heart of both faiths. It would be difficult to find theologians of any other religion who understand the nature of the divine in the same way that Jews and Muslims do. Christianity, which is also monotheistic, sets itself apart from the Abrahamic family of which it is a member by virtue of certain distinctive theological doctrines such as the incarnation^[5] and the Trinity which are shared neither by Islam nor Judaism. It was these very doctrines that led many medieval Muslim and Jewish theologians to question Christianity’s very status as a monotheistic faith. Maimonides (d. 1204), the medieval Jewish philosopher and rabbinic authority, did not shy away from accusing Christians of idolatry (Novak: 235). Of Muslims, however, he made no

such claim. “These Muslims are not idolaters (*‘ovdei ‘avodah zarah*) at all,” he wrote. “It has already been cut off from their mouth and mind. For they are totally and properly committed to the One God ... without deceit (*dofi*)...[from] all of them, even children and women, idolatry is cut off from their mouths” ([*Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, no. 448, 2:726] Novak: 238; cf. van der Heide: 43). This is one of the reasons why Maimonides allowed Jews to participate in prayer with Muslims because, as he saw it, they worshipped the same God. He did not, however, extend the same privilege to Jews praying with Christians because of the divinity the latter attributed to Christ. It was also for this reason he claimed that a Jew forced to adopt Christianity must prefer martyrdom to conversion, whereas this was not necessarily the case with Islam. This was because, in his eyes, it was more abhorrent to accept the divinity and divine sonship of Christ than it was to accept the prophecy of Muhammad: the former compromised one’s monotheism whereas the latter did not (Lewis: 84). This is not to say he was lukewarm regarding conversion to Islam. We know that he not only unambiguously prohibited such a change of faith, but also advocated, in the words of Novak, “rather harsh punishments for such deviants” (248). But on the issue of the Islamic understanding of God, he felt that Islamic doctrine was congruent with that of Judaism, and it was largely for this reason that he considered Islam distinctly superior to all other non-Jewish faiths (Novak: 243). The unique status of Islamic monotheism among world faiths was, for Maimonides, symbolised by the ritual of circumcision which Muslims alone shared with Jews. In the *Guide to the Perplexed*, he wrote:

According to me, circumcision has another very important meaning, namely, that all people professing this opinion – that is those who believe in the unity of God – should have a bodily sign uniting them, so that one who does not belong to them should not be able to claim that he was one of them, while being a stranger [...] circumcision is a covenant made by Abraham our father with a view to the belief in the unity of God (Kasher: 103 [Part III, ch. 49]).^[6]

To the extent that classical Islamic and Judaic theology espoused almost identical notions of the divine, it was only natural that they would wrestle with the same logical dilemmas which such a theology presented. The central problem lay in reconciling the transcendence and immanence of God, both of which had their basis in Scripture. As far as transcendence is concerned, both Judaic and Islamic Scriptures postulate a radically unknowable, ineffable deity. In the book of Genesis, God says to Moses, “I am that I am” (26:3). And the Quran declares about God, “There is nothing like unto Him” (42:11). With respect to divine immanence, both Jewish and Islamic sacred texts are replete with seemingly anthropomorphic descriptions of the deity, either wrestling with Jacob or resting on the Sabbath, in the case of Judaism, or descending into the lowest Heaven at the last third of the night, affectionately laughing at His servants, or sitting on the Throne, as in the case of Islam. These conflicting images created an uneasy dialectic within Judaic and Islamic theology of affirmation and negation, of simultaneously positing transcendence and immanence, dissimilarity and similarity. The theologians and philosophers tended to emphasise transcendence or otherness, minimising or metaphorically interpreting away allusions to Divine similarity, without ever successfully denying it altogether. But the more poetic and mystically inclined thinkers did not shy away from the implications of an immanent deity and embraced the use of “cataphatic” language to describe God.^[7] Although this tension between divine transcendence and immanence also appears in other monotheistic religions and philosophies, it became a particularly vexing problem in Judaism and Islam because of the sharp ontological distinction that both traditions tended to draw between God and the created order, especially in their more Greek inspired philosophical and theological formulations.

Due to the structural similarities which lay at the heart of Jewish and Islamic notions of divinity, it is not surprising to find occasions in which thinkers within the Jewish and Muslim communities influenced each other in some remarkable ways in their attempts to systematically delineate the nature of God, [with Muslim influence, in this area at least, being greater.] We may consider, as but one example, the case of

Saadia Gaon (d. 942), the head of the rabbinic academy in Sura, near Baghdad, and founder of Jewish theology. He explained the divine nature using arguments that were almost identical to that of the Mutalizes, who formed the earliest school of Islamic theology or *kalam*, and advocated a belief in the power of rationality to interpret revelation. This he did in his *Book of Opinions and Beliefs* (*Kitab al-Amanat wa al-I'tiqadat*), the first work of systematic theology to appear in Jewish intellectual history, the format of which follows, particularly in its discussion of God, standard Mutazilite texts. Arthur Hyman did not shy away from describing Saadia as a “Jewish proponent of Mu’tazilite *kalam* [theology]” (681; cf. Sirat: 22). In fact, there were quite a few Jewish Mutazilites in the medieval world, with their influence discernible in both Rabbanite and Karaite circles (Hyman: 681; Stroumsa: 86-87).

The relatively irenic theological exchanges should not lead us to presume that Jewish and Muslim thinkers recognised each other’s approaches to God as entirely equal, or on the same footing. Maimonides’ privileged Jewish over Islamic monotheism on the grounds that the former was original and the latter derivative and secondary, borrowed from Judaism. Likewise, a good number of medieval Muslim thinkers argued that Jewish notions of God had a tendency to tilt too strongly in the direction of anthropomorphism, likening God to creation (*tashbih*), even towards espousing divine corporeality (Shahrastani: 252 [section on Jewish beliefs]; cf. Wolfson: 563). The great Muslim theologian, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), however, must have been too well-acquainted with Jewish writings to make such a claim. In his encyclopaedic Qur’anic commentary, he stated that the Christians are in greater error than the Jews, as far as doctrines are concerned, because they are mistaken both in their views of God (*ilahiyat*) and prophecy (*nubuwwa*), whereas the Jews err only with respect to the latter (vol.12, p. 55).^[8]

Legal Intersections

In the legal domain, Judaism and Islam also display a remarkable similarity. Both traditions are heavily orthopraxic, that is to say, concerned with rules which involve proper conduct. This is not to suggest that other religions lack a legal tenor, nevertheless, the extent to which Islamic and Jewish law permeate the life of the believer is not easily matched by other faiths and extends beyond simply the realm of ethical activity. In a work published not long ago, entitled *Judaism and Islam in Practice*, a comparative anthology of Jewish and Muslim legal writings, the editors fittingly described the two traditions in their preface as “monotheisms of law in the service of the All-Merciful” (Neusner et al.: vii). Indeed, jurisprudence consumed most of the intellectual energy of the classical thinkers of Judaism and Islam. Even today, to receive seminary training in more orthodox or conservatively aligned institutions is to receive an extensive education in jurisprudence.

As far as structural similarities go, both traditions possess a written and an oral law: a primal revelation believed to have been received from God by the central prophets of each tradition, embodied in the Torah and the Quran,^[9] and an oral tradition that was also later written down and would have a secondary legal importance. Even the actual religious laws of the two faiths are extraordinarily similar, ranging from the rules of marriage and divorce to the dietary prohibitions and regulations taken to ensure animals are killed according to strict guidelines which both preserve the purity of the meat and minimize the suffering of the animal. It is true that the Qur’an states that “the food of those who were given the book is lawful for you,” (5:5) implying that meat of Jews and Christians is equally lawful. But as Lewis notes, in practice this license was more often than not extended only to kosher meat, because of the lengths to which Jews went to ensure the purity of meat. In the Ottoman Empire it was common for Muslims to purchase meat from Jewish butchers (205). This same tendency is observable even in the modern West, where Muslims who adhere to stricter, more conservative rules regarding dietary regulations are more prone to consuming kosher meat in the absence of readily available meat slaughtered by fellow Muslims.

The legal vocabulary of both traditions is also strikingly similar. The Jewish *teshuvot*, a formal response to a legal inquiry by a juridical authority, for example, finds its parallel in the *fatwa*. The Arabic *shariah* and Hebrew *halakah*, both of which refer to similar domains have the same meaning, “path.” Bernard Lewis has observed that since the *halakah* originated some centuries before Islam, there would likely have been Jewish influences in the developments of Islamic law (80). But as Rosenthal notes, since Jewish law itself evolved in Muslim lands, the rich tradition of *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence exercised an impact on the development of the *halakah*, particularly from the 9th century onwards. Saadia Gaon’s *teshuvot* and Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, for example, evince clear debts to the patterns of *fiqh* classification (62-63; cf. Lewis: 80).

Related to these legal intersections we may note the parallel status of the *‘alim* and the rabbi. Neither of them is officially ordained through a church like institution nor does either hold a sacerdotal office. Both acquire their statuses through study and communal recognition. Their education is also certified through a very similar process, the acquisition of the *ijaza* in the case of the *‘alim*, and the *semikha* in the case of the rabbi. And although they are both professional men of religion, neither of them are priests in any sense of the term. In the absence of altars and ordination, there is no function either one of them performs that a sane adult male from their respective communities cannot (Lewis: 79). In this light we can draw attention to a somewhat humorous story cited by Lewis regarding a spirited exchange which occurred between a reform and orthodox rabbi many years ago in the columns of a weekly Jewish newspaper. The orthodox rabbi accused reform rabbis of deviating from tradition by imitating Christians and transforming their roles into that of “Jewish clergymen.” The reform rabbi retorted that if this was indeed the case, then orthodox rabbis, being blindly faithful to tradition, were akin to “Jewish ulema,” recognising the parallel roles of both religious authorities (79).

Mystical Intersections

When we come to the rich and complex domain of mystical piety and thought, one might argue that affinities in this arena are discernible across the spectrum of world religions and not particularly unique to the Judeo-Islamic nexus. While one does not have to subscribe to the idea of a “perennial philosophy,” or what has been called the “transcendent unity of religions” (Schuon; cf. Nasr), to recognise that the great mystical theoreticians of the world, particularly the proponents of non duality, have articulated strikingly similar views of ultimate reality, what is peculiarly distinctive about Jewish and Muslim mysticism is that the forms of devotional piety and practice which serve as the preliminary steps to deeper, more interiorised states of consciousness, are noticeably alike. In other words, the religiously specific “shells” of the mystics, in the case of Judaism and Islam, bear a closer resemblance to each other than other traditions. Paul Fenton has spoken of the “remarkable parallelism” that “exists between Islamic and Jewish mysticism” (Fenton: 201), while another scholar has argued that a “point-by-point comparison of Sufism and Jewish mysticism would uncover many similarities – structurally, conceptually and phenomenologically” (Kiener: 26).^[10]

With respect to these intersections, one may note, as an example, the emphasis placed in both traditions on the role of law in the mystical life. Popular New Age expressions of Kabbalah and Sufism aside, Muslim and Jewish mystics of any historical repute were in agreement about the need to surrender oneself to the precepts of outward or “exoteric” religion in order to ascend into the divine presence, with the former serving as a gateway to the latter. As we might expect, some of the leading figures of both mystical traditions were also noted authorities of jurisprudence. The supposed tension between spirit and law, a recurring motif in Western writings on spirituality, was never as pronounced in Islam and Judaism, where the two aspects of the religious life were symbiotically interwoven.^[11] We may also consider the significance that both mysticisms attached to “letter symbolism,” whether it was due to the contributions of such luminaries as Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896) and Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) in Islam, or Abraham Abulafia (= Abu al-‘Afiya, d. after 1291) in Judaism (Fenton: 202). The possibility of such a science was in

many respects a natural outgrowth of traditions which viewed their central texts as direct, verbatim, word-for-word revelations which had their origin in an infallible divine author, infinite in wisdom and knowledge. No letter within such Scriptures, all the way down to its morphological structure and numerical value, could be without a cosmic significance. The iconography of the divine *logos* led to the creation of mystical practices which involved the prolonged, meditative contemplation of sacred names that were imagined and then visually “held” in the mind of the aspirant. That the communities even shared their knowledge with each other of such esoteric matters is attested to by fact that Ibn ‘Arabi recounts a conversation he had in medieval Spain with a rabbi on the symbolism of the letter *ba*.

The cross-pollination between the two traditions worked in both directions. With the spread of the Islamic empire shortly after the death of the Prophet, Muslims found themselves ruling over an extremely diverse range of communities comprising of a large expanse of the Near East, of regions which would have included the great Talmudic centres of Mesopotamia. It is difficult not to see how some of the Jewish modes of mystical piety, especially those of the *Hasidim* or charismatic holy men, could not have diffused into the fledgling Muslim populations, either through conversions or close inter-religious contacts, especially among the more ascetically inclined members of the *ummah* (Gotten: 149-150; Fenton: 203). Aside from the Muslim integration of the tales and folklore of the Israelites, for which there is ample evidence, the exact scope and nature of this diffusion, however, remains confined to the realm of speculation. Less speculative, however, is the osmotic flow of Islamic patterns of thinking and practice into Jewish communities, for which there is a growing body of corroborated data. “Muslim culture,” observed Moshe Idel, “is the primary source of influence upon Jewish mysticism” (Anidjar: 97; cf. Kiener : 147; Goiten: 150-151).

A fitting illustration of this influence can be found in *Guidance to the Duties of the Heart (al-Hidaya ila Fara'id al-Qulub)*, one of the most widely read and circulated works of Jewish spirituality in the medieval world. Penned by the great 11th century rabbinic authority, Bahya ibn

Paquda, the work was translated from Arabic into Hebrew and later into Jewish vernaculars, and remains, to this day, extraordinarily popular. The imprint of Islamic piety on the treatise is evident from its very title: the “duties of the heart” a theme which Muhasibi (d. 857), the first major moral psychologist of Islam, addressed in his own many writings, usually contrasting them with the “duties of the limbs,” the *fara’id al-jawarih* (Lobel: 196). His intention in drawing attention to this distinction, like that of Bahya after him, was to foster an awareness in the spiritual aspirant of the need not only to remain faithful to the external obligations imposed on him by the revealed law, but also to recognise the value of the higher internal virtues of the heart. While Bahya’s text creatively weaves together strands of Mutazilite theology and Neoplatonic philosophy, the predominant element (besides the obvious Jewish one) is that of Islamic mysticism. The work reads very much like classical manuals of Sufi ethics, broaching such topics as trust in God (*tawakkul*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), detachment (*zuhd*), and repentance (*tawba*), with the subject matter of each chapter corresponding roughly to the itinerary of the soul’s journey to God, beginning with an understanding of divine unity (*tawhid*) and culminating in a state of genuine love (*mahabba*). The full extent of Bahya’s debt to Muslim sources, however, is only discernible when the *Fara’id* is closely read alongside Sufi manuals of a similar genre in Arabic.^[12] I recall showing the work to a scholar of Islamic studies years ago who initially thought he had before him a medieval text of Islamic mysticism, until he noticed the Hebrew biblical passages which intersperse its Arabic pages in very much the same manner as the Quranic quotations that permeate Sufi literature. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that were all the uniquely Islamic or Jewish Scriptural references removed from many of the medieval Jewish and Muslim mystical works written in Arabic, it would not be easy to determine the religious affiliations of the authors. And why is this so, if not because of the deep structural affinities between the two religions?

Perhaps the most curious feature of Bahya’s work is that he does not shy away from quoting Muslim authorities (albeit anonymously) when he feels it is necessary to give persuasive, rhetorical force to his arguments.

Judiciously, he preempts any criticism that might be levelled against him by co-religionists for his use of such sources by relating the Talmudic proverb, “Whoso pronounces a word of wisdom, even a gentile, is to be called a wise man.” This allows him to go so far as citing, on more than one occasion, even the very prophet of Islam, as when he quotes the famous hadith, “we have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad [the jihad against lower soul],” attributing it to the “sage” (Fenton: 205; cf. Lobel, ix).^[13] Usually, however, his use of Muslim sayings is preceded simply by *qila*, “it has been said.” Some later writers, however, were more transparent in their use of extra-Judaic Islamic material. Ibn ‘Aqin (d. 1220) in his *Medicine of the Soul (Tibb al-Nufus)*, did not refrain from referring to well known masters such as Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 778-9) and Junayd (d. 910) by their Sufi epithets. We also know that 15th century Yemenite Jews freely quoted the poetry of the mystic-martyr Hallaj (d. 922) (Fenton: 205).

The theological reasoning behind the use of Jewish material by Muslims, and vice-versa, although slightly different in character, bore a curious resemblance. On the Muslim side, the justification for the extensive use and integration of the “tales of the Israelites,” the famous *isra’iliyat*, into pietistic and mystical discourses relied (at least partially) on the hadith, “Relate (the tales) of the Children of Israel; there is no harm.”^[14] The tradition gave Muslims some degree of license to recount edifying stories circulating in the Near East, many of them likely of Talmudic origin, to encourage the faithful to piety, sincere devotion and the love of God. The underlying belief in the use of these narratives was that they had their origin in the lives of previous prophets, and were therefore, in this respect, relatively authentic residues of earlier revelations. So long as the tales did not conflict with theological doctrine, there remained no danger in retelling them, especially because of the inspiration the faithful could draw from them. On the Jewish side, the reasoning was not all that different. The aspects of the Sufi tradition which were integrated into Jewish practice were, or so the argument sometimes went, not of Muslim but Jewish origin, and therefore part of a lost heritage that had appeared among the “Ishmaelites.” Abraham the son of Maimonides, the leader of Egyptian Jewry, and one of the most well-

known advocates of a form of Jewish Sufism made this very claim when he wrote of the customs of the Muslim mystics, "Observe then these wondrous traditions and sigh with regret over how they have been transferred from us and appeared among a nation other than ours, whereas they have disappeared from our midst." "My soul shall weep," he adds, "because of the pride of Israel that was taken from them and bestowed upon the nations of the world." He blamed the "iniquities of Israel" for the loss of this heritage (Fenton: 89-91). What both Jews and Muslims had in common was a belief that they were not transferring foreign elements into their own respective faiths, but rather reintegrating what was truly their own to begin with. This argument of indigenous origins, needless to say, did not always convince their coreligionists.^[15]

Conclusion

As two remarkably similar religions which have together stood "on the edge" of the West for a greater part of Euro-Christian history, Jews and Muslims have much more in common than they may be aware of, let alone acknowledge, at least within the boundaries of their own confessional settings. One of the ironies of this is that the apprehensiveness felt towards the other in each of the religious communities (recall the Pew study) is in the end directed to a faith tradition strikingly similar to one's own. It is as if the interlocutors, without recognising it, are gazing at mirror images of themselves. One of the arguments of this paper is that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which seems to have no immediate resolution in sight, and which has now dragged on for well over half-a-century, need not entirely arrest the advancement of Jewish-Muslim relations, nor prevent the creation of amicable bonds between communities with deeply contrasting political loyalties abroad. By learning to bracket-out the conflict, and by drawing on the memory of the Judeo-Islamic legacy, those on opposite ends of the political spectrum, especially those who cherish their own religious traditions, may be capable of realising not only the extent of their theological, legal and mystical affinities, but also the common challenges they face as kindred faiths in a steadily changing world. This awareness

can then become the basis for the establishment of broader communal ties of fellowship and solidarity.

With the rapid spread of globalisation, and the increasing heterogeneity of our societies, inter-religious dialogue should indeed, as Fredericks has argued, be encouraged as a civic virtue. While the “mutual acceptance of the legitimacy and authenticity of the religion of the other as a divinely inspired faith” (Ayoub: 315) may be too ambitious a goal for the Jewish and Muslim communities at large, a more modest and realistic end might be to simply foster a greater awareness of shared values and beliefs, along with mutual respect, ties of friendship and solidarity. This solidarity might even translate into “bilateral dialogue” for the obtainment of common goals and ends. The themes addressed in this paper can offer both Jews and Muslims a variety of avenues through which they may approach such engagements. It remains up to the religious and communal leaders and thinkers of both faiths in the West to harness their own theological and scriptural resources, of which each tradition has vast reservoirs, for such an ecumenical enterprise.

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2.As an example in this trend, a recent Pew Poll found that in the US, 46% of American consider themselves Christian first, while an equal percentage consider themselves Americans first (Pew).

[2] A survey conducted by the Centre in 2009 found a noticeable increase of interest in Jewish-Muslim dialogue within both communities at the grass roots level, especially after 9/11 (Firestone: 232).

[3] Despite the Rabbi's honorable intentions, he unfortunately concluded his statement rather unamicably, "Muslims leaders have the opportunity to echo the historic declaration of the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate*," thereby putting the onus for redeeming past wrongs almost solely on the Muslim side.

[4] The best general scholarly overview of this tradition, in the opinion of this author, is still to be found in Bernard Lewis's *Jews of Islam*.

[5] See note 11 below.

[6] Novak notes that "the fact that this practice was based on Islamic monotheism seems to have enabled Maimonides to regard it as an acceptable practical application of the Islamic monotheism he so admired in theory," but this, it should be qualified, was because of the Judaic origins of all that he considered to be "truly valid in Islam" (242-243). Maimonides understanding of the Muslim practice of circumcision is a complicated one, regarding which the reader is directed to consult Hannah Kasher's excellent treatment (103-108); cf. Novak (240-246). The passage above may be compared with M. Friedlander's translation of the *Guide* (378).

[7] According to Novak, Maimonides considered anthropomorphism to be the “ideational corollary of polytheism,” very much in keeping with the Muslim philosophers and rationalist theologians.

[8] And yet the virtually identical nature of God within mainstream Jewish and Islamic theology is sometimes lost even to the most well-meaning of scholars. Consider the remark in an otherwise thoughtfully written introductory work on Judaism, in which the author, in his attempt to note the various, competing ways in which God is conceptualized across the world’s religions, can only state that in “the Christian faith God is understood as the Father, in Judaism as Lord, in Islam as Allah” (Cohn-Sherbook: 31), failing to recognize the Allah is simply the Arabic word for God, and is used by both Arabic speaking Muslims and non-Muslims.

[9] Muslim and Jewish views of the Torah and the Quran have been described as doctrines of “inlibration,” of the divine word or logos becoming book (*liber* in Latin), as opposed to the incarnation of Christianity, of the logos becoming flesh (*carne* in Latin). See Wolfson (1976).

[10] Recently, Thomas Block has brought together the research of a wide range of scholars in the field of Jewish-Muslim mysticism in the medieval Islamic world in *Shalom/Salaam: A Story of a Mystical Fraternity* (2010), a thoughtful and well-written work intended for an educated lay audience.

[11] The same Andalusian Ibn al-‘Arabi who famously declared, “My heart has become capable of all forms. It is a cloister for monks, a temple for idols, a tablet for the Torah, a Kaba for the pilgrim” (43), could also state, and with no less conviction (though in a much less frequently cited passage), “we have no way to God except through the Law, and whoever says otherwise has spoken falsehood.”

[12] Lobel has done this admirably in her recent study, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart* (2007).

[13] And in Bahya's chapter on repentance, we find another prophetic tradition, "he who repents from sin is as if he had never sinned" (*al-ta'ib min al-dhanb ka man la dhanb lahu*) (296).

[14] *Haddithu 'an bani isra'il wa la haraj* (Abu Dawud [book 25, #3654]).

[15] On the Muslim side, opponents of the use of *isra'iliyat* sometimes argued that the traditions which could be related were those confined to what the Prophet himself explicitly taught. On the Jewish side, the argument was that there was no way of determining whether Muslim practices which also formed part of Sufi customs were actually part of a lost Jewish heritage (Goiten: 182-184). This same argument was also made by Muslims who objected to the free use of *isra'iliyat*, and came to exert greater force in the later Islamic tradition. An example of this tendency today can be seen in an otherwise well-edited edition of Abu Talib al-Makki's *Nourishment of Heart* authored in the 10th century. The editor excised some of the *isra'iliyat* in the original text which he felt conflicted with the spirit of Islam (see bibliography).

Poems

This section of Cloverleaf contains poems on all-encompassing spirituality ...

Monday Night Outing

Author:

Dennis Haskell

Monday nights, one kilometre
of Beaufort St is strung
with stalls: Sicilian arancini
crepes francaises, curries, kebabs,
kangaroo skewers, crème brulee...
The atmosphere is purely
carnival, friendly, casual, and
deliciously inexpensive.
Amongst the throng
we went to sit
on a low brick wall

when suddenly I keeled
out of the world.
My friend, a cardboard
plate of Moroccan something
in hand, screamed
and grabbed my shoulder
– I know these details
only from her –
> a stranger jumped
and stopped me
hitting the pavement.
When I came back
the ambos said,
“Come to our van”,
but I needed
to just sit

in the cold, clammy sweat
up and down<
my face and arm.
Fluttering-stomached
I sipped their water
then stumbled over.

They put me in a chair,
torchlit my eyes,
and pricked my fingers
as in a fairy tale.
When I went again
out of existence
or existence went out of me
they were worried.
I was soon back
but they were firm:
"See a doctor!"

Hazy-headed and queazy
I vaguely directed
my friends the cornering,
darkened way to hospital.
Taken through into
medically organised
frenetic night actions:
people staggering,
people on crutches,
behind curtains
an eight months pregnant victim,
a man whose rat of pain

ran up the clock
of his spine.
I lay back
for an ecg,
for all the tests,
gave blood and urine,
and was drip-filled
for hours. All tests
fine, then
they took out
the canula,
ripping the hairs
from my arms.

The experience of nothingness
is nothing
but somehow you
know you've had it:
a vacancy registers
in the brain.

I staggered out
with my friends,
wondering if it was
a warning, a dry run
for the nothing
I and we
will all become,
for there's nothing like
five hours in Emergency

to make you think,
“How quick?”, “How long?”

The Unspeakable Mystery

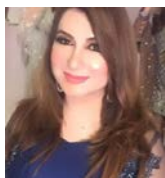
Author:

Sami Rafiq

No unspeakable magic
Or mantra or talisman
Helps me across;
To reach the metaphor Of abstraction of completeness
The nakhuda is a silent one;
The light of his lantern---
It comes from the rays
In the chinks of my broken floor
Or from coincidences of collapsing beams
Maybe even from old fractures
Or scars or abrasions or bruises
Even pains, gnawings, stirrings
Longings, pleadings, solitudes
Echoing from some unknown world
Within and without
Which no words can define
It flashes like lightening sometimes
Stretching across the length and breadth
Of my dark blue skies
Then I yearn to be reborn
Like leaf
Like bud
Like pupa
But when I voice it
They tell me its nothing--
Women cannot aspire
Beyond the kitchen stove
Or understand patterns
Other than plates on the table
Or recognise but cobwebs

In dusty nooks---
But I become sure
The second time
That light touches my heart
There's someone there
Even if I cannot see
There's a footstep
Even if I cannot hear
Its not to no one that the dove coos
On my window each morning
Its not for no one
The ant carries her burden of sugar
Not without some thought
The bitter neem seems to breathe
And not without some hidden message
Is the perfume laden white rose
Not without some resolve
The branches of avocado
Claw into space and light.

Our Contributors



Azeemi, Aneela is the Executive Director of a non-profit organization in Islamabad, Pakistan called “Sufi Awakening” rendering services to humanity by spreading the message of universal peace and love through spiritual education and meditative practices. In the last 12 years she has hosted weekly and monthly meditative gatherings including class room lectures for different groups to foster healthy and positive communities.

Aneela’s focus is to help humanity through self-awareness and values based education centered on love and compassion affirming the principle of unity in diversity, the only antidote to the evil of hate and terror.

Aneela’s educational background includes degrees and diplomas in psychology, law, social studies, gender studies, public administration, local government and leadership management.



Bedford, Barbara has been a meditator for over 30 years starting with Transcendental Meditation and then a student of an intense Buddhist meditation practice since 2001. She has been actively teaching courses on Spiritual Living and Living in Oneness throughout the KW community. Currently, she is also the founder of Spirit Quest Café on Meetup offering both the Beginner and the Adept a space to share with like-minded Spiritual Seekers utilizing the practice of meditation to experience Oneness and Insight. In addition, Barb is on the Board of Directors for the organization Humanity’s Team Canada which promotes Oneness.

Rabbi Hillel, a renowned Babylonian Jewish scholar, philosopher and teacher asked, “ If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I?” These words of profound wisdom

have become Barb's personal mantra giving her strength and courage to be a Light for others to become aware of their own power and Oneness.



Best, Danny is a popular poet and artist. He has written widely for different readers especially for children. He has received numerous awards and medals for his poetry such as the Editor's Choice Awards from the International Library of Poetry. He has also given public performances and readings of his poetry.

sandmanthedreamer@yahoo.com



Bryant, M. Darrol is the founder & director of the Centre for Dialogue & Spirituality in the World Religions at Renison University College in the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada. He was educated at Concordia College (BA in Philosophy & Political Science), Harvard

Divinity School (S.T.B. in Theology), and the Institute of Christian Thought at St. Michael's in Toronto (PhD). He was the first Protestant graduate of this Catholic institution. He began teaching in 1967 and retired in 2007. He has been engaged in the inter-religious encounter since the late 1970s. A sabbatical in India in 1986-87 profoundly altered my own approach to the study of religion. My Religion in a New Key outlines that approach I have edited & written more that 25 volumes in the study of religion including God:The Contemporary Discussion, Muslim-Christian Dialogue., Mahayana Buddhism, and, most recently, 3 volumes entitled Ways of the Spirit: Celebrating Dialogue, Diversity, & Spirituality, Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women, and Ways of the Spirit: Persons, Communities & Spiritualities.

He recently led a India Mystic Express that encountered Bahai, Sikh, Tibetan Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi communities in New Delhi, Vrindaban, and Rishikesh and concluded with a wild ride down the Ganga to Rishikesh.



Dubey, Rajendra Narain. (b.1938) Educated in mathematics and civil engineering. With early education in Bihar, India, he was awarded a Ph.D. in civil engineering by the University of Waterloo in Canada. Dr. Dubey's interest in spirituality and Indian Philosophy began in 1977 under the guidance of his guru,

Brahmarishi Vishwatma Bawra. He translated two of his guru's books

from Hindi into English and is a founding member of Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc.



Haskell, Dennis is the author of 8 collections of poetry, the most recent *Ahead of Us* (Fremantle Press, 2016) and *What Are You Doing Here?* (University of The Philippines Press, 2015) plus 14 volumes of literary scholarship and criticism.

He is the recipient of the Western Australia Premier's Prize for Poetry, the A A Phillips Prize for a distinguished contribution to Australian literature (from the Association for the Study of Australian Literature), and of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from The University of Western Australia. In 2015 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for "services to literature, particularly poetry, to education and to intercultural understanding". He is currently Chair of the Board of writingWA. His website is dennishaskell.com.au



Dr. Atif Khalil is an Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge's Department of Religious Studies where he teaches courses on Islamic theology, mysticism, art and world religions. His main area of research lies in Sufi thought, with secondary interests in comparative mysticism, inter-religious relations and medieval philosophy.

His articles have appeared in *Studies in Religion*, the *Journal of Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, *Sacred Web*, the *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*, *Philosophy East and West*, and the *Muslim World*. He is also the author of the forthcoming book, *Repentance and the Return to God in Early Sufism*. In the summer of 2016, he is scheduled to hold the Ken'an Rifai Distinguished Professorship of Islamic Studies at the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University in China.



Lawlor, Fred is a seasoned hotel industry professional with a background and experience in all aspects of the business. A charismatic leader with over 30 years of results and relationships built from progressive leadership roles in the hospitality industry, active academic and community board memberships.

He presently sits on the advisory committee for Ryerson University Hospitality and Tourism Program and is a member of innovation committee for George Brown College' hospitality management Chef's school. He is a board member and passed executive on the board of the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association. Fred is presently part of a North America hotel advisory group member called G7 Hospitality Inc.



Dr. Sami Rafiq is a professor of English at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. She is a translator, writer, poet and novelist who celebrates human values.

Sami Rafiq had her education from St. Mary's Convent Naini Tal and Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya, Gwalior. Her undergraduate and graduate studies are from Aligarh Muslim University in India.

She is the founding editor of *Cloverleaf: Journal of Education in Evolvement and All Encompassing Spirituality*,
<http://cloverleaf.spiritualeducation.org/>



Talwar, Shiv. Received his undergraduate degree in civil engineering from the Punjab University, India and his graduate degrees from Lehigh University, USA and the University of Waterloo, Canada. He retired from his career in 1996 and established Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc. in 2000. He has been serving as its President since its inception. He owes his spiritual education

to his parents, his school teachers in India and his mentor,
Swami Vishwatma Bawra to whom he is eternally indebted.



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All Encompassing Vision