

The Purpose of Life is Enlightenment



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*I dedicate this book to
the Divine Mother and Archangel Michael,
whom I serve*



Ch. 1 Introduction



This book derives from a vision I had while driving my car on February 13, 1987. That vision, discussed in the last chapter, showed me the total journey of a soul, through lifetime after lifetime in matter, from God to God. It demonstrated that the purpose of life is enlightenment. The purpose is that God should meet God in one of many moments of illumination that each of us shall have.

The vision was wordless. It took nearly twenty years to find the words to describe it. The first fruit of that research on the teachings of the world's saints and sages was the dictionary of enlightenment that appears on this website under the name of *From Darkness Unto Light*. (1) The second was this book.

In summary, this book says that God has a Plan for all life – that it should journey out from Him (Her or It), (2) a spark of the Divine, and rise from one rung to another of a ladder of physical and spiritual evolution, expanding in consciousness always, until it comes to know itself as God. The Bible is a magical treasury of parables and encoded teachings about this journey and how to complete it. (3)

Eastern teachings, like the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Dhammapada*, or *Tao Teh Ching* are more direct and simply tell us why we're here and what we need to do to fulfil our

mission. We can correlate these teachings and shine a clear light on the Divine Plan and the purpose of life.

Every one of us is destined for enlightenment. All sincere and genuine paths will carry us there. The entire world is designed as a school for our education with natural laws that keep us within bounds and moving in the right general direction. These are the implications of that vision and they are borne out by research in the scriptures of all the world's religions.

We may have a collapsed view of life. We may, for instance, think that we live just one lifetime and then turn to dust, to be raised on Judgment Day in our original bodies. The saints and sages in these pages say this interpretation of what's a true but encoded message is not accurate.

We lead many lives and gradually move along a spiritual arc away from and back to God. The last day is the last day of bondage to rebirth, followed, after a particular level of enlightenment, (4) by the first day of liberation from rebirth.

We may also have a collapsed view that sees some accepted paths as mistaken and others as the one "true path." This is inaccurate as well.

Perhaps we don't like idol worship. And yet we're obliged to see that "idol worshippers" too reach the Kingdom of Heaven. All sincere and genuine paths, followed to their end, lead to God, the same God revered in every faith.

We may believe that only our religious compatriots will be saved. That is not true either. All will be saved. A key passage in scripture has been misunderstood and leads to this conclusion – Jesus's teaching that "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (5)

Yes, I am the way, the truth, and the life and no man cometh to the Father but by me. No, I don't think this passage refers to the man Jesus although contemplating Jesus can lead to the same result. I think it refers to the immortal "I," called in these pages the Self, the Christ, and the Atman. That "I" is the way, the truth, and the life that Jesus pointed to in the code in which the Bible is written.

No man cometh unto the Father but through knowing that Self, that treasure buried in a field, pearl of great price, measure of leaven that leavened the whole loaf, mustard seed, and door for the flock to go in. We may know that Self by

worshipping a form of God, like Jesus or Krishna or the Divine Mother, but we're still revering the one Self in all.

Why can we not know God until we know ourselves? Because, as with all that is investigated here, God designed it that way. That may not be an answer that the scientifically-inclined warm up to, but It's a true answer in my view nonetheless.

We live inside a finely-crafted construction, with a degree of free choice and a degree of divine determination. We're to go within to seek the Kingdom of Heaven. We're to know the Self, the "I" of every one of us and follow it home, stripping away layer after layer of veiling illusion, until It's revealed as the one "I" of the All-Self or God.

This book invites us to expand our faith, to drop our biases, to see that all religions worship the same one God and that we are That. I am *that* "I am." You're that same "I am." We're That and when we discover that Truth and completely surrender to it, we've finished the journey for which our forms were created.

This is grounds for great jubilation. You're invited to read this book with joy. When we know, for example, that what Christians call the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Hindus call Brahman, Atman, and Shakti, there is reason to be exultant and to welcome each other as co-religionists.

Here are grounds for seeing that all religions pursue the same goal and that only rites and rituals – only the "hats" we wear – are different. As Gandhi said, "I am a Muslim. I am a Hindu. I am a Christian. I am a Jew." (6)

So I invite you to read this book with the same joy I had in writing it.

A word about the sources used. All research has been restricted to three groups. The first is the saints and sages of all ages and traditions who have fulfilled life's purpose and reached one stage or another of enlightenment.

Representative of this first group are St. John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, Jacob Boehme, Bodhidharma, Lin-Chi (Rinzai), Lao Tzu, Rumi, Bayazid of Bistun, Al-Ghazzali, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, and Paramahansa Yogananda.

The second comprises the "avatars" ("avatar" = "Descent of the Divine"), who come down to Earth in all eras to remind us of God's Plan and the purpose of our

lives. They include Zarathustra, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Sri Ramakrishna, and Anandamoyee Ma.

The third comprises advanced spiritual aspirants such as Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Prabhavananda, Sister Vandana, and Aldous Huxley, who restrict their writings to what they've gleaned from the first and second group.

Today, more and more genuine sages are to be found incarnating or arising among us. Moreover, it would seem as if the world is never left without at least one avatar in our midst as one can see in India from the time of Sri Ramakrishna to the present.

In North America, where I live, more people are experiencing enlightenment today than in any other period of history of which I am aware. (7) I am very hopeful that a spiritual revolution is underway that will sweep aside confining religious boundaries.

My pen is dedicated to the service of the One God, who shines in all our hearts as God the Child, who made this world as God the Mother, and who reigns over all from His transcendent Kingdom as God the Father.

In deep gratitude, I offer my thanks to my Chosen Ideals, Avatar Sri Ramakrishna and Sage Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Aum/Amen,

Steve Beckow

Footnotes

(1) http://goldengaiadb.com/From_Darkness_to_Light.

(2) “The One Principle under its two aspects (of Parabrahman [the Father] and Mulaprakriti [the Mother] is sexless.” (H.P. Blavatsky, *An Abridgement of the Secret Doctrine*. Ed. Elizabeth Preston and Christmas Humphreys. Wheaton, Ill: Theosophical Publishing House, 1968, 14.

(3) On the Biblical code, see here: <http://goldenageofgaia.com/2010/12/26/the-biblical-code/>

(4) Sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi. To read more on this subject, go here: <http://www.angelfire.com/space2/light11/fdl/e1.html#e117> and search elsewhere on the page on "sahaja."

(5) Jesus in John 14:6.

(6) Attributed to him in the movie Gandhi by Richard Attenborough.

(7) When this was written I was unaware of the significance of Ascension. I'm now certain the "spiritual revolution" is underway.

Ch. 2 Is There a Plan to Life?



Last revised: 2 Aug. 2011

If there is, what might it be?

In 1996, Time Magazine asked its readers a question that probably, at one time or another, has occurred to everyone:

"Why does life exist at all? Is it simply that if enough cosmic elements slop together for enough eons, eventually a molecule will form somewhere, or many somewheres, that can replicate itself over and over until it evolves into a creature that can scratch its head? Or did an all-powerful God set in motion an unfathomable process in order to give warmth and meaning to a universe that would otherwise be cold and meaningless?" (1)

Spiritual psychologist J.G. Bennett was plagued by a similar question: "All teaching and all religions agree that there is something that man is required to do in this life, but no one has hitherto explained why and for what purpose." (2)

Is there a purpose to life? If there is a God, does He or She or It have a Plan? What are we doing here, in this physical universe? Does anyone know?

In fact, as we shall see in this book, many men and women have explained why this physical universe was created. They've told us what to do and how to do it. Collectively, these men and women are the wisest among us, who share one thing in common: they all have experienced what we may call "God meeting God" (3) or enlightenment.

They include familiar names – Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Lao Tzu – and unfamiliar names – Hermes, Zarathustra, Bayazid of Bistun, Blessed Henry Suso. Collectively I call them "saints and sages" or "enlightened masters" (4) – the latter because they've mastered life; they've achieved what they came to know as life's purpose.

God has a Plan for Life

God's Plan existed before the creation of the world and therefore prior to the invention of words. Our knowledge of it comes down to us from the recorded experiences of saints and sages, who've seen its wordless representation in a vision.

The Plan is implied in the vision that Sri Krishna gave Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"The son of Pandu beheld the entire universe, in all its multitudinous diversity, lodged as one being within the body of the God of gods.

"Then was Arjuna ... overcome with wonder. His hair stood erect. He bowed low before God in adoration." (5)

Arjuna sees the whole physical universe nestled in the transcendental vastness of God, but Krishna doesn't go on to say (at least not in this passage) why the world that Arjuna sees was created.

Edward Carpenter goes a step further, describing an inner illumination

"... by which we can ultimately see things as they are, beholding all creation – the animals, the angels, the plants, the figures of our friends, and all the ranks and races of human kind – in their true being and order." (6)

In his case, a great procession of species, and different types of humanity, including faces he knew, all appeared before him, in their true being and order. But Carpenter too doesn't explicitly state what process this ordering of beings serves.

The Buddha spent the night after his supreme enlightenment with his mind also fixed on the Plan, which he called the "chain of causation." (7) Others have called it the great chain of being, the eternal wheels, or the mandala of birth and death. (8)

The Upanishads say that beholding it proves to us beyond the shadow of a doubt that "the One who is above all ... has established perfect order among objects and beings from beginningless time." (9)

We've seen that gazing on a vision of the Plan proves awe-inspiring. Those to whom It was revealed are moved to work for it ever after. Upon beholding it, the young J. Krishnamurti was certain that "the really important thing is ... the knowledge of God's plan for men. ... When once a man has seen that and really knows it, he cannot help working for it and making himself one with it, because it is so glorious, so beautiful." (10)

God's Plan is Spiritual Evolution

Can we put a name to that Plan? Krishnamurti did. He said that "God has a plan, and that plan is evolution." (11) As Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov described it: "The law of life is evolution, that is, development all the way to perfection." (12)

But the evolution the saints and sages have in mind is not just the physical evolution that Darwin described, but, more importantly, spiritual evolution. It's not the body that we live in from birth to death that evolves to perfection; it falls away and dies. It's the consciousness inside it which is expanded, perfected, and liberated from the need to be reborn.

Now let's attempt to visualize it. In Genesis, Jacob was shown a ladder. On it angels were descending from and ascending to God. Jacob was being shown a particular part of the ladder of evolution.

"And he dreamed. And behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

"And, behold, the Lord stood above it." (13)

This same ladder of life, in its entirety, the Persian poet, Hafiz, called “the stairway of existence”:

"Through the stairway of existence
have you now come,
have we all now come,
to the Beloved's door." (14)

How does Jacob's ladder or the stairway of existence help us to visualize God's Plan?

Let's give each being a torch of light and have him or her descend and ascend the whole of the ladder or stairway of life. The trajectory of light would describe an arc, a parabola, with a downward and an upward arm.

The Divine Plan for life – for all of us Children of God – is to follow this divine trajectory out and away from God the Father, into this physical universe, the domain (as we shall see) of God the Mother, where we learn our true identity and come back to Him illumined.

I believe it was this divine trajectory that Jesus was referring to when he said: “I came forth from the Father, and am come out into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” (15)

Rumi names some of the phenomenal realms the journeying soul passes through in the course of spiritual evolution. Observe how he places the realm of the angels above that of humans and cites it as our next destination:

"I died as mineral and became a plant.
I died as plant and rose to animal.
I died as animal and I was man. ...
Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar
With angels blest; but even from angelhood
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
Oh, let me not exist! For Non-existence
Proclaims in organ tones, 'To Him we shall return.'" (16)

Rumi will die once more as a man – the death at the end of his present incarnation. After that, his human evolution will be finished; that is, he will be liberated from the need to reincarnate. He knows the lesson that humans are required to learn: namely, that God is all there is.

His ultimate goal is complete extinction as an individual entity through submergence in God — upon his return to Him — a stage of enlightenment, as we shall see in the course of our story, that comes later than the human stage of evolution (after Rumi has “sacrificed his angel soul”).

Ibn Arabi also describes our wandering down the ladder of consciousness, through lifetime after lifetime, realm after realm of matter. Note his contention that our birth as a human marks only the halfway point on the journey.

"Level after level he traverses the seven spheres and comes down into the Globe of Fire, then Air, then Water, then falls on earth; after that to the Minerals, Plants....

"Until he reaches the degree of human being he passes through many tribulations at every level of his descent; he meets with difficulties. Sometimes he rises; sometimes he goes low; and half a circle is completed till he is lodged with ... mankind." (17)

Rumi and Ibn Arabi describe our physical forms evolving, as Darwin said they would. But they also describe our spiritual forms evolving.

As we dive like dolphins into the sea of materiality, entering at birth and leaving at death, we're spirits who evolve, under the tutelage of the Divine Mother, all the way back to Perfection – that is, all the way back to the Holy Father.

The physical and the spiritual have their own rounds of life, but the overarching Plan for both of them remains evolution. In the end, the answer to the argument between “evolutionism” and “creationism” may be that both are true.

Sacred arc and spiritual spiral

But let's return to Ibn Arabi's statement of the Plan. Note that he describes two movements. One is the overall parabolic descent into matter and ascent into spirit over countless lifetimes. The second is a periodic rising and falling in any one lifetime as the being responds to its “many tribulations” due to karma.

Sage Vasistha, millennia ago, referred to this second movement as the “rise and fall in evolution” that is brought about by “the law of cause and effect.” (18)
Twentieth-century Christian Master Beinsa Douno described it as a “partial rise and descent in an oscillating curve.” (19)

This second pattern of movement — rising, falling, all the time moving forward — can be thought of as the “oscillating curve” or spiral journey of the soul towards the realization of God. It's us responding to the law of karma, which, in the long run, keeps us moving towards God.

Let's now combine the two movements — the sacred arc and the spiritual spiral. As we travel through the sacred arc over evolutionary periods of time, we follow a spiritual spiral on a day-to-day basis.

While the movement of the arc may be away from and back to God, the movement of the spiral is through the same situations again and again until we learn our lessons. In the course of this parabolic and spiral journey of many lifetimes, says Al Ghazzali, the individual being “rises from the rank of beasts to that of angels.” (20)

Perhaps this contention that we rise from the humblest beginnings in the mineral and plant kingdoms to the most exalted status as humans and angels is why Jesus could say with confidence that “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (21)

In a mystical sense, God has already raised up children unto Abraham from stones. We're they. We're all of us what Peter called “lively stones” (22) that have evolved through many kingdoms of phenomenal reality.

Design Element: Reincarnation

If we accept that God has a Divine Plan for life, then it logically follows that this Plan will have elements or features. Usually these design elements or design features are called “natural laws.”

As we work our way through our story, we'll have occasion to identify some of them. They'll be seen to include the law of spiritual evolution, the law of reincarnation, the law of karma, the longing for liberation, universal redemption, and so on.

They're the “givens” in our situation, built-in features, laid-on circumstances. We're not presented with a choice. As one teacher used to say in the Seventies, we don't get to vote on them. We arrive in the midst of them and they shape our lives, always with the function of moving us generally onwards towards the Father.

There are many more of them than I could possibly guess at. What I'm trying to do here is merely suggest that they exist and leave it to others to add to the list.

As our first design element, which we'll explore in greater depth in Chapter 7, we're told that we move towards God, and finally reach Him, through many lifetimes. This design element is the law of reincarnation. Let me simply point at it here so that we can make a note of it as a design element of God's Plan for life.

The best epitome of it that I'm aware of occurs when Sri Krishna reveals to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra:

"There never was a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be.

"Just as the dweller in this body passes through childhood, youth and old age, so at death he merely passes into another kind of body. The wise are not deceived by that.

"Bodies are said to die, but That which possesses the body is eternal. It cannot be limited, or destroyed." (23)

According to the design element of the law of reincarnation, we take birth continually in progressively higher planes of reality, as evolving spirits operating in more and more complex physical forms.

When we reach the level of humanity, we arrive at a place where we can make of ourselves and anything else we wish an object of thought. We arrive at culture, the ability to transmit an idea of something through symbols. We use this ability to make an object of ourselves and become self-conscious. We also use it to make an object of God Himself and become God-conscious.

No other realm below us has this capacity. We've evolved through the reincarnational cycle, the wheel of birth and death, from unconscious to self-conscious beings. Our next destination is God-consciousness.

Let's summarize then. God has a Plan for life and that Plan is spiritual evolution. That Plan is best depicted by Jacob's Ladder or the staircase of existence. It decrees that we go out from God as points of consciousness and descend into matter. Having descended as far as we must go, we begin our slow ascent back to God, passing through higher and higher kingdoms of phenomenal reality. In our movement away or back, we spiral past the same situations again and again, but seen from an increasingly-higher perspective.

If we accept matters so far, then what are we to do? If spiritual evolution is the Plan for life, then what's its purpose? Does this divine parabola or sacred arc, decreed by God, have a reason for its existence or is it simply a perpetual motion machine, in which we act out our parts like robots?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the the end of this book.)

(1) Time, August 19, 1996, 40.

(2) SP, 38.

(3) I thank my wife, D'Arcy, for this felicitous definition of enlightenment.

(4) Clearly "avatars" or "descents of God" are not enlightened masters in the same sense as ordinary people, ascending to God. To use the word "enlightened masters" to cover both descenders and ascenders is taking some license, for which I beg indulgence.

(5) BG, 92. Sri Krishna tells us that this vision is to be attained in enlightenment: "When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer. In the light of that knowledge you will see the entire creation within your own Atman [i.e., Self] and in me." (BG, 54-5.)

(6) CC, 85.

(7) Loc. cit.

(8) Ibid., 85 and 137.

(9) UPAN, 27. See also CC, 137.

(10) AFM, 17.

(11) Loc. cit.

(12) AQU, 19.

(13) Genesis 28:12-3.

(14) Hafiz cited at <http://hometown.aol.com/MassoudBeliever/Six.html>.

(15) John 16:28.

(16) ILWL, 58. I now (2017) no longer believe this narrowly evolutionary view of the ladder of consciousness, but it remains the most common view.

Compare with Helena Blavatsky:

"The Secret Doctrine teaches ... the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul – a spark of the [Universal Over-Soul] – through the Cycle of Incarnation (or 'Necessity') in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term. In other words, no purely spiritual Buddhi (Divine Soul) can have an independent (conscious) existence before the spark which issued from the pure Essence of the ... OVER-SOUL ... has (a) passed through every elemental form of the phenomenal world of that Manvantara [round of life], and (b) acquired individuality, first by natural impulse, and then by self-induced and self-devised efforts (checked by its Karma), thus ascending through all the degrees of intelligence, from the lowest to the highest Manas [thought-form or mind], from mineral and plant, up to the holiest archangel (Dhyani-Buddha). The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations." (H.P. Blavatsky, SD(A), 13.)

(17) KK, 20.

(18) CYV, 94.

(19) "Brother of the Smallest One," Lectures, 1 January 1917, www.beinsadouno.org., downloaded 7 March 2005.

(20) AH, 32.

(21) Matthew 3:9

(22) I Peter 2:5.

(23) BG, 36.

Ch. 3 The Purpose of Life is Enlightenment



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We're here for a purpose

As it turns out, we're not here as robots or automatons. We've much conscious and creative work to do.

We're here for a reason. Sufi sage Al Ghazzali hints at that reason: “Know, O beloved, that man was not created in jest or at random, but marvellously made and for some great end.” (1)

“Although he is not from everlasting, yet [man] lives for ever; and though his body is mean and earthly, yet his spirit is lofty and divine. When in the crucible of abstinence he is purged from carnal passions he attains to the highest, and in place of being a slave to lust and anger becomes endued [sic] with angelic qualities. Attaining that state, he finds his heaven in the contemplation of Eternal Beauty, and no longer in fleshly delights.” (2)

When we as individuals separate ourselves from all that is sensory and temporal (“purge ourselves from carnal passions”), at least in our heart, we're ready to

realize the true nature of that body celestial or spiritual. (3) Realization of this Spirit (ultimately God) proves to be the end, the goal for which we were made. We become “endued with angelic qualities.” What results is called, in many spiritual traditions, “enlightenment.”

“Enlightenment” is, as we shall see, not a name that applies to a single event. The name applies to all events in which the individual directly and immediately perceives, in a discontinuity of knowledge, something sacred, beyond this material dimension. It may be the Child of God, God the Mother, or God the Father.

Or it may be beyond all Three.

The Child of God is called by various religions, the Self, the Christ, the Son of God, the Atman, the Buddha Nature, the Inner Fire. It's the Transcendental in the Phenomenal, the Treasure buried in the field; specifically, in the field of the heart.

We may recognize this as Jesus’s description of it; he also called it the pearl of great price, the mustard seed, and the leaven in the bread. It may be seen as a brilliant point of Light in which one recognizes his or her true nature. It may be experienced as a stateless state of consciousness. Or it may be known in another form.

Or enlightenment could be of another level of Reality: a glimpse of the Divine Mother, called by religions the Holy Ghost, Shakti, the Divine Energy, the primal or universal creative vibration, and the Phenomenal.

It's called by Jesus the Comforter, the Revealer of truth, and the Amen or true and faithful Witness of creation. It's called by Hindus and Buddhists the Aum (cf. Amen), Prakriti (Procreatrix), and Dharma (Nature or the natural law). It may be seen as a brilliant Light that suffuses all of material creation or it may be known in other forms.

Or it may be a glimpse of the Holy Father, called by religions Jehovah, Allah, the Transcendental, the Way.

Jesus called it the Father, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Truth revealed. Hindus call it Brahman (God), Paramatman (the Supreme Self), and Satchidananda (Being, Awareness, and Bliss Absolute). It may be seen as the Light beyond creation – or not seen at all, since the aspirant’s mind usually (but not always) stops working and leaves no observer.

While I could turn directly to plain statements of the purpose of life, I'd like to examine one more Sufi sage, Rumi, even though he, like Al-Ghazzali, doesn't answer our question directly. I do so because his evocation of our mission is so well-crafted that I wish to draw it to our attention.

The indirectness of his teaching method, his use of an extended metaphor, may be part of his teaching style or it may have been necessary for him to couch the mysteries in metaphors so that knowledge of them did not fall into the wrong hands. Whatever the case, he's still speaking of enlightenment as the purpose of life.

Rumi says:

"There is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, but did not forget that, then there would be no cause for worry; whereas if you performed and remembered and did not forget every single thing, but forgot that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever." (4)

Why nothing whatsoever? He doesn't answer. It's simply something we're commanded to do.

"It is just as if a king had sent you to the country to carry out a specified task. You go and perform a hundred other tasks; but if you have not performed that particular task on account of which you had gone to the country, it is as if you have performed nothing at all. So man has come into this world for a particular task, and that is his purpose; if he does not perform it, then he will have done nothing." (5)

If we unravel Rumi's meaning, we've the same message again. The King has sent us into the country to achieve enlightenment, the knowledge of our true identity. If we do everything else, but not that one thing, we've not done anything whatsoever. We've not done what the King has sent us into the country to do.

Saints and sages of older times had many reasons for couching the mysteries in parables and extended metaphors. After all, Jesus was crucified because he was accused of saying he was the Son of God and King of the Jews. (6) Catholics were subject to the Inquisition. Heretics of all religions could be put to death.

Dangerous times faced many of the masters, dangerous in ways that we of this generation have never experienced. It's a wonder that they were able to get their message across at all, couched as it was in mysticism.

But, in some parts of the world, we live in a time of relative spiritual freedom. Spiritual masters now are able to speak more freely.

Knowing God is the purpose of life

Sri Ramakrishna speaks quite openly of the purpose of life. His use of parables was not to hide the truth, but to make his images stand out in the minds of his listeners. He plainly explained the meaning of his metaphors and other teachings to all who visited him.

In India when he spoke there was a climate of religious tolerance that has partly survived today. This climate meant that he did not have to worry about religious censors or fundamentalists.

What does Sri Ramakrishna tell us? Will he tell us that there is an altogether-different purpose to life than what we've heard so far?

He doesn't. He says that "the only purpose of life is to realize God." (7) "Without the realization of God everything is futile. This is the great secret." (8) Realizing God is enlightenment.

Both Ramakrishna and Rumi picture humanity as if rushing around accomplishing countless futile tasks, but never looking to the one task that is really necessary. All else, they both say, is futile. But try to tell us. We won't listen. Thus, this important knowledge remains a secret.

In fact, all the world's saints and sages will be found to agree that enlightenment is the purpose of life. That we're destined for enlightenment is decreed, laid down by the Divine Plan. Listen to Hindu, Christian, and Muslim mystics on the subject. They may call it by various names – Kaivalya (liberation), freedom from sorrow, the dawn of the morning star, Self-Realization, knowledge of the Truth — but it remains what's meant by the umbrageous term "enlightenment."

Shankara

“I am blessed indeed! I have achieved life’s only purpose. The dragon of rebirth can never seize me now. The Infinite is mine. I recognize my true nature in eternal joy.” (9)

Sri Aurobindo

“There is no I nor thou, but only one divine Self equal in all embodiments, equal in the individual and the group, and to realize that, to express that, to serve that, to fulfill that is all that matters.” (10)

Patanjali

“The purpose of this world is to provide us with experience and thus to lead us to liberation.” (11)

John Ruusbroec

“[For] the rational creature to attain the sublime beauty of God and to possess it in [a] supernatural way ... is [the] reason that God created heaven and earth and all that is in them.” (12)

Hazrat Inayat Khan

“The purpose of life ... is that the only Being makes his oneness intelligible to Himself. He goes through different planes of evolution ... to make clear to Himself His oneness.” (13)

Sri Yukteswar Giri

“[The] unification of Self with God is [called] Kaivalya, which is the Ultimate Object of all created beings.” (14)

“Man’s purpose is complete freedom from unhappiness.

“Once he has banished all pain beyond possibility of return, he has attained the highest goal.” (15)

Beinsa Douno

“To see God means to strive toward that Supreme Eternal Law which rejuvenates, revivifies and brings Light and warmth to man. ... Do you know what it means to see God? This is the meaning of life.” (16)

“All trials through which you pass at present are for the sole purpose of coming to know God: the Primary Cause.” (17)

Sri Ramakrishna defined being enlightened as “to know the real nature of one’s own Self.” (18) I accept that definition. To know who we are. To know our real identity, our true nature. While the accomplishment of this aim is anything but easy, its difficulty doesn't affect its always remaining the end and purpose of our lives.

To be enlightened also means to perfect ourselves, as Beinsa Douno and Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov point out.

Beinsa Douno

“What is man’s task? Continuous self-development and self-perfection. God is the continuous Manifestation of Perfection, and man is the continuous self-improvement on the Path to Perfection. This is the meaning of the verse: Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect. Man must continuously correct his imperfections on the Path to Perfection.” (19)

Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov

“Each one of us has come down to earth with a mission. ... That God might select someone from time to time for a special mission is ... possible, but the collective mission of human beings is for each one to develop himself more and more every day until he reaches perfection.” (20)

Though our ascent towards enlightenment is gradual, through lifetime after lifetime, when it comes, enlightenment itself is sudden, as the masters explain:

Hermes the Egyptian

“Straightway, in the twinkling of an eye, all things were opened unto me.”
(21)

First Ch’an Patriarch Bodhidharma

“Seeing through the mundane and witnessing the sublime is less than an eye-blink away.” (22)

Anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing

“In the twinkling of an eye heaven may be won or lost.” (23)

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within.” (24)

Walt Whitman

“As in a swoon, one instant,
Another sun, ineffable, full-dazzles me,
And all the orbs I knew, and brighter, unknown orbs;
One instant of the future land, Heaven’s land. ...
Hast never come to thee an hour,
A sudden gleam divine, precipitating, bursting all these bubbles, fashions,
wealth?
These eager business aims — books, politics, arts, amours,
To utter nothingness?” (25)

There is thus no real difference between proponents of a gradual and sudden enlightenment. The synthesis is that men and women may work in gradual ways over long stretches of time for an experience which, when it happens, is sudden, happening in an instant.

Enlightenment is the reward of all action

Enlightenment will bring with it everything we could possibly wish for and set us free from suffering in the end. We lose nothing by it, but gain everything, according to Paramahansa Yogananda: “To know God is not the negation of all desires, but instead their complete fulfilment.” (26)

“Once you have tasted the wine of spiritual ecstasy, you will find that no other experience can compare with it,” he wrote. (27)

To Sri Ramakrishna, “the bliss of worship and communion with God is the true wine, the wine of ecstatic love.” (28)

Sri Krishna advises us that “the reward of all action is to found in enlightenment.” (29) St. Paul found that “the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us [when] the creature ... shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” (30)

When the masters are touched by Truth, some appear intoxicated, some abandon words, and some dance without inhibition. Such was Sri Ramakrishna’s condition much of the time. He was often “completely intoxicated with divine love” or motionless in Samadhi.

When he reeled or sang the praises of God, unconscious of all around him, “the devotees felt its contagion and danced with the Master in an ecstasy of love.” (31)

For St. John of the Cross, enlightenment was a deep delight, like a soft feather drawn through the heart.

"Such is the sweetness of deep delight of these touches of God that one of them is more than recompense for all the sufferings of this life, however great their number. (32)\

O gentle hand! O delicate touch

That tastes of eternal life,

And pays every debt!

In killing, You changed death to life." (33)

Whitman was so grateful for his one glimpse of God that, as an old man, he depicted himself on bended knees before Him, singing his gratitude for an event that happened many years before.

"Thou O God my life has lighted,

With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,

Light rare untellable, lighting the very light, ...

For that, O God, be it my latest word, here on my knees,

Old, poor, and paralyzed, I thank Thee." (34)

To Plotinus, who repeatedly experienced high enlightenments, no earthly prize could compare.

"It were well to cast kingdoms aside and the domination of the entire earth and sky," he wrote, "if by this spurning, one might attain this vision." (35)

What good is long life without it? the Buddha asks.

"Though one should live a hundred years,
Not seeing the Region of the Deathless,
Better were it for one to live a single day,
The Region of the Deathless seeing." (36)

This is the impact of the prize we seek - enlightenment - on the masters.

The Truth will set us free

The masters stress the liberating impact of realizing the truth. Jesus reminds us that "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (37) The twentieth-century Sufi sage Hazrat Inayat Khan also taught that "the secret of life ... will make the soul free." (38)

God is the Truth, the secret of life. Having realized God we're set free from suffering and sorrow. We're liberated from the need to reincarnate in matter; as Jesus said, we need "go no more out." (39)

Paramahansa Yogananda explains what Jesus meant by this phrase. God brings all things "by beautiful evolutionary coaxings back to His home of All-Blessedness when they [have] overcome all mortal tests.... [They need] reincarnate in matter no more; i.e., 'go no more out.'" (40) By realizing God, we've fulfilled the purpose of our lives.

Thus, to realize God, to know our true identity, to become enlightened is why we descended and now climb back up Jacob's Ladder of consciousness, the spiritual parabola. It's the goal that we seek. It's what lies ever before us, lifetime after lifetime, as we tread the spiritual arc away from and back to God. It's our final reward and the cause of our liberation from bondage to sorrow.

That is what enlightenment means to us. But for what purpose of His own did God create this incredible world? Where do we fit into God's larger plan?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the end of this book.)

(1) AH, 17.

(2) Loc. Cit.

(3) I Corinthians 15:40.

(4) DR, 26.

(5) Loc. cit.

(6) Matthew 26:63.

(7) GSR, 273.

(8) Ibid., 95.

(9) CJD, 114.

(10) SOY, 316. (Page numbers will vary from edition to edition.)

(11) EB, 76.

(12) JR, 72.

(13) WOI, 237.

(14) HS, 53. Kaivalya is "absolute independence or emancipation through oneness with God." Editors, Self-Realization Press, HS, p. 43. Sri Ramana associates Kaivalya Nirvikalpa Samadhi with Brahmajnana, which is short of Ascension. Ascension is Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi, mulkti, moksha (liberation).

(15) Ibid., 50.

- (16) "The Meaning of Life" in WOG, n.p.
- (17) "The Love of the One," WOG, n.p.
- (18) GSR, 387.
- (19) "Be Perfect," WOG, n.p.
- (20) AQU, 25, 20.
- (21) DPH, 8.
- (22) ZTB, 56.
- (23) CU, 56.
- (24) SW, 258.
- (25) CC, 228.
- (26) SCC, I, 16.
- (27) MEQ, 161.
- (28) GSR, 94.
- (29) BG, 54.
- (30) Romans 8:18+21
- (31) PR in GSR, 807.
- (32) PSJC, 717-8.
- 33) CC,149.
- (34) Ibid., 233.
- (35) EP, 41.

(36) TCB, 46.

(37) John 8:32.

(38) WOI, 196.

(39) Jesus in Revelation 3:12.

(40) Paramahansa Yogananda in SCC, 1, 28.

Ch. 4 When God Meets God



Last Revised: 19 May 2010

Why did God create this world?

We've seen what the purpose of our lives is. We've seen the Divine Plan. We've seen our glorious future. But for what purpose of His (Her, Its) own did God create this world?

Thousands of years ago, the Upanishads explained:

"Brahman [i.e., God] at rest
Wished
To create.
He wished to be many,
To grow forth,
To enjoy his own exuberance and play,

To know himself in manifestation.
Like a hen on her eggs ...
After hatching, He impelled the All, 'what is'
Simply to be.
Having created,
He entered into His creation...." (1)

God at rest – that is, beyond manifestation – wished to enjoy His own exuberance and play. The Formless took form to know Itself and enjoy Its own bliss. God created a cosmic charade, masquerade, game of hide and seek. It's He who hides everywhere in the illusion of His own manifestation and It's He who seeks Him.

Other mystics offer the same explanation. Twentieth Century Christian mystic Beinsa Douno: "Why did God desire to create the world? So that He might be made manifest." (2)

And why did He desire to be made manifest? Says Sufi Sage Ibn Arabi: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, and I created the creation so that I be known." (3)

And why does God want to be known? Explains Paramahansa Ramakrishna: "The Godhead ... has become these two [God and the devotee] in order to enjoy Its own bliss."(4) He made Himself manifest so that He might know Himself and enjoy His own Bliss, His own Fulness, through Self-Knowledge.

Albeit in metaphor, Sri Ramakrishna delightfully depicts God, or Shiva, meeting Himself in the moment of illumination: "When Siva realizes his own Self, He dances about in joy exclaiming, 'What am I! What am I!'" (5)

Sufi master Bayazid of Bistun also evokes the blissful moment when God meets God (6): "I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O thou I!'" (7)

God meets God

"O thou I" — that "I" and the Father are One. But that is not the "I" of the ego, the personality, the separate individual. It's the "I" of the Self.

Master Beinsa Douno referred to it when he said that "it is a law – when ... you find God, you will find yourself as well. When you see God, you will see yourself. To see God and to see yourself – that is the most sacred moment in life. Man lives

for that very moment". (8) In that sacred moment, the ego dissolves in the Father, leaving only Him. In that moment, form becomes formlessness again and God meets God.

The Koran teaches: "Who shall reign supreme on that day? Allah, the One, the Almighty." (9) And Zarathustra: "The final victory is the Lord God's own." (10)

In fact, as the masters make clear, it's only God who can know Himself, only God that can meet God.

Sage Vasistha

"[The] absolute cannot be realized or experienced by another; only the absolute can realize itself." (11)

"Only Brahman can really see or realize Brahman." (12)

Ibn Arabi

"Only God sees God." (13)

"Advance, find an eye [i.e., the Third Eye].
Remedy by it [open up non-dual vision]
And now, look from Him to Him." (14)

"The one who journeys through all degrees and reveals Himself is Him."
(15)

Beguine Sister Catherine

Catherine: "Sir, rejoice with me. I have become God. ... I am confirmed in the bare Godhead, in which there is neither form nor image."

[Fictional] Meister Eckhart: "Are you there for good?"

Catherine: "Yes ... I am as I was before I was created: just God and God. ... In God there is nothing but God. No soul gets to God until it is God, as it was before it was made." (16)

Sri Ramakrishna

"Only grandeur appreciates grandeur: and God realizes God." (17)

Swami Brahmananda

"Only God can know himself. Be a god, that you may know the infinite God." (18)

God created this world so that God might meet and know Himself and in that meeting rejoice. Every time someone realizes his or her nature as Him, God meets God. For this meeting, for this day, was all of nature created.

And who shall meet God? Who shall be enlightened? Is it really only the followers of one master who shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the the end of this book.)

(1) UPAN2, 70.

(2) "Life is the Musical Manifestation of God," WOG, n.p. Cf. Franklin Merrell-Wolff: "This space I produce that My Glory shall be revealed; yet I alone Realize that Revelation." (PTS, 18.)

(3) KK, 3.

(4) TLWG, 126.

(5) GSR, 393.

(6) With thanks to my wife, D'Arcy, for this felicitous phrase.

(7) PP, 12.

(8) MAS, 83.

(9) KOR, 160.

(10) GZ, 23.

(11) CYV, 46.

(12) Ibid., 56.

(13) KK, 48.

(14) Ibid., 14.

(15) Ibid., 33.

(16) JR, 6.

(17) LSR, 47.

(18) EC, 205.

Ch. 5 Who Will Know God?



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Who will be saved?

Who among us shall see God? When we ask ourselves that question, different answers might arise. We might soon find ourselves in bitter disagreement with our fellows as to who shall be saved and who not.

In fact, over the centuries, a deep and bitter quarrel has developed on the subject, resulting in endless, deadly conflicts with ironic names like “holy wars” and “crusades.” We’ve committed the most disgraceful behaviour in the name of God.

But all this division and conflict is spiritually unwarranted, or so we’ll find out here. The differences and divisions that have sprung up between us have no independent reality to them.

Let’s take the example of quarreling over whose God is God. Sri Ramakrishna thought it ridiculous to dispute such a thing. He had followed several religious

paths to their end and found their destination was always the same nameless, formless God.

“I have practiced all religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity – and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. ... Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion – Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos [a small sect of westernized Hindu intellectuals], Vaishnavas [worshippers of Vishnu], and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Siva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy [also called the Divine Mother or Holy Spirit], Jesus, and Allah as well – the same Rama with a thousand names.

"A lake has several ghats. At one, the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it 'jal'; at another the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it 'pani.' At a third the Christians call it 'water', Can we imagine that it is not 'jal', but only 'pani' or 'water'? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. (1)

What lies at the root of our religious and social conflict?

At the root of the world's conflict is the ego. The ego is our sense of ourselves as separate beings and the world as a place of competition for survival.

The ego is comprised of our thoughts. In fact, it's as if we wander through life immersed in a cloud of thoughts (waves in the mind or vrittis). This cloud of thoughts keeps us from seeing God.

It's the only real barrier to enlightenment, but it's no easy barrier to remove. When the mind is completely stilled, the ego quieted, we're able to know God.

We discover on the spiritual path that the ego is pervasive, persuasive, but unreal. We find that we're not, after all, separate selves, but the Universal Spirit. But, until we're enlightened, the ego seems very real.



We've committed the most disgraceful acts in the name of God.

It's the source of our wanting. It thrives on action and excitement, friction and quarrels. It craves to feel right, justified, and validated, and, worst-case scenario, will lash out at those it thinks threaten it or any of its interests.

It attaches itself at an early age to what it considers “me and mine.” In later years that attachment expands to include the “us and ours” of family. It can expand to include a block, a neighbourhood, a school district, a city, a province, a nation.

Finally, after acquiring things, it feels the need to hold onto them and creates a self-interest, an agenda, which eventually it comes to share with others. Up rises the notion of “our side” and “their side.”

“Our side” can be anything — a club, nation, or religion. We bend all our efforts to see that our side and what belongs to our side persist and thrive.

One of the ways in which ego shows itself in the religious world is to maintain that only our side will reach paradise or heaven. Is it accurate to say that only one group will be saved and the rest will be lost? Can any enlightened master be found who teaches such a thing?

Redemption is promised to all

In fact none can. The masters are unanimous that all of us will be saved, that redemption is not exclusive to one faith, but the birthright of all. They're united and unequivocal in saying that exclusivity is not true. Universality is.

Everyone will see God. Everyone is destined to enter Heaven. Some sooner; some later; but all will eventually.

Let's listen to Sri Ramakrishna teaching his devotees the truth of universal redemption, another design element of God's Divine Plan for life.

"All will surely realize God. All will be liberated. It may be that some get their meal in the morning, some at noon, and some in the evening; but none will go without food. All, without any exception, will certainly know the real Self." (2)

"The Mother will not allow any of her children to go hungry. He who is hungry in the morning will be fed in the morning. He whose appetite is aroused late in the evening will be fed in the evening." (3)

"Everybody will surely be liberated." (4)

Jesus taught this as well in his mystical teaching that "Wisdom is justified of her children." (5) In the Biblical code, who is "Wisdom"?

As we shall see, "Wisdom" is another name (popular in the Old Testament and Apocrypha), for the Holy Spirit or Divine Mother (for examples of sages calling the Holy Spirit "Wisdom," see footnote 6). We are Her children.

God has charged the Mother/Spirit with creating and administering the natural law. The purpose of the natural law is to educate us and keep us moving towards our goal: knowledge of God the Father.

The Child, Christ, or Son of God works hand-in-hand with the Divine Mother or Holy Spirit to bring all lost sheep back to God. This whole book is a description of how that happens.

God has commanded that all should return to Him after wandering in the world, without one being lost. When each individual does, Wisdom is justified of Her Child. When all of us do, Wisdom is justified of Her Children.

God's Plan is to see that all of us, all points of consciousness, go out into the world, realize Him, and return, at which time Wisdom, the Holy Spirit or Divine Mother, is justified of all Her Children.

“Universal” vs. “exclusive” redemption

Everyone will eat; some in the morning, some in the afternoon, and some in the evening. This is universal redemption. There is no trace of exclusivity here; God, it would seem, has no partiality.

Sri Krishna, an Incarnation of the Divine, taught this truth to Arjuna:

"All mankind
Is born for perfection
And each shall attain it
Will he but follow
His nature's duty." (7)

He doesn't equivocate: All are destined for perfection and each shall attain it. There's room for great rejoicing here.

I wish to turn again to Jesus in a minute. But before I do, I'd like to communicate how I see him. In my view, Jesus is an “avatar” or a “descent of the Divine” into the world and is similar in this respect to Rama, Krishna, Ramakrishna, and Anandamoyi Ma.

Jesus declared he was an avatar in the following passage:

"Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." (8)

Sri Ramakrishna was given a vision of Jesus during which Jesus merged in his physical form.

In the spiritual sense, Sri Ramakrishna “knew” Jesus in a way that you and I could only wish to. His considered opinion of Jesus was that he was a Divine Incarnation of God, as the following story makes clear.

"One day at Dakshineswar a Christian minister was brought to meet Sri Ramakrishna.

"Shivanath Shastri told Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, one of my Christian friends has come to see you. Having heard of you from me, he was very eager to meet you.'

"On hearing this Sri Ramakrishna bowed his head to the ground and said: 'I bow again and again at the feet of Jesus Christ.'

"Surprised at such [an] utterance, Rev. Sannyal said: 'How is it, sir, that you bow at the feet of Christ? What do you think of Him?'

"Sri Ramakrishna: 'Why, I look upon him as an Avatara [Incarnation of God].'

"Rev. Sannyal: 'Incarnation of God! Will you kindly explain what you mean by it? Is he one like Krishna and the others?'

"Sri Ramakrishna: 'Yes, exactly like that. An incarnation like our Rama and Krishna. Don't you know there is a passage in the Bhagavata where it is said that the incarnations of ... the Supreme Being are innumerable?'"
(9)

I'd like now to turn to Jesus' teachings because Jesus' use of the first-person pronoun "I" for the Christ rather than for the man Jesus, I think, has escaped many people, leading to the conclusion that only followers of Jesus will be saved.

I don't think this is what Jesus meant.

[This book was written around 1997, well before I interviewed Jesus on *An Hour with an Angel* in 2012 and asked him who he was referring to and he said the Light that is the Christ is who he was referring to.] (See AA)

What Jesus Meant by "I" and the "Christ"

To interpret all the passages in Jesus's teachings where he used "I" to refer to the Christ rather than to his person is a large task, beyond the scope of this book. Of necessity, I must restrict myself to a few passages.

Speaking as the Christ, the Light of the world, Jesus said:

"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (10)

What has the Father sent into the world? The Father has sent fragments of himself, a shower of divine, eternal sparks, into the world. The Transcendental Himself has entered the Womb of the Mother and is born into the world as the Son, Christ, or Self in each of us.

To this Christ was given the task of losing no person but saving all on the last day of mortality and the first day of immortality.

All people, all Children of God, all beings in whose heart the Christ, Atman, or Buddha-nature dwells, will be raised up in enlightenment on the day that separates their unliberated from their liberated existence; that is, on the day of their enlightenment.

Every one who sees the Son, the Christ, the Light of the world, and who focuses on that Light (and we shall hear examples, below, of aspirants who do) shall have that liberation – that “everlasting life.” Unravelling from its mystical meaning, the Christ, the Light of the world, will raise him up on the last day.

The First Sight of the Christ

Later chapters will examine what the event of God-Realization looks like, but in this chapter I'd like to examine what the first sight of the Christ looks like.

Let's listen to masters who've “seen the light” in the experience of illumination that occurs when the spiritual energy, or kundalini, reaches the fourth or heart chakra (not to be confused with the spiritual heart). Hindus call this event “spiritual awakening” and Buddhists call it “stream entering.”

Sri Ramakrishna

"The fourth center of consciousness (anahata) is in the region of the heart. Spiritual awakening comes when the mind rises to this center. At this stage man has a spiritual vision of the Divine Light and is struck with wonder at

its beauty and glory. His mind then no longer runs after worldly pleasures." (13)

St. Paul

"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts." (14)

Jacob Boehme

"A wonderful light arose within my soul. In it I recognized the nature of God and man." (15)

John Ruusbroec

"In the abyss of this darkness in which the loving spirit has died to itself, God's revelation and eternal life have their origin, for in this darkness an incomprehensible light is born and shines forth; this is the Son of God, in whom a person becomes able to see and to contemplate eternal life." (16)

"It is Christ, the light of truth, who says, "See," and it is through him that we are able to see, for he is the light of the Father, without which there is no light in heaven or on earth." (17)

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"No man ever forgot the visitations of that power to his heart and brain, which created all things new; which was the dawn in him of music, poetry, and art." (18)

J. Krishnamurti

"I sat crosslegged in the meditation posture. When I had sat thus for some time, I felt myself going out of my body. I saw myself sitting down with the delicate tender leaves of the tree over me. I was facing the east. In front of me was my body and over my head I saw the Star, bright and clear. ... There was such profound calmness both in the air and within myself, the calmness of the bottom of a deep and unfathomable lake. Like the lake, I felt my physical body, with its mind and emotions, could be ruffled on the surface but nothing, nay nothing, could disturb the calmness of my soul. ...

I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same. I have drunk at the clear and pure waters at the source of the fountain of life and my thirst was appeased. Never more could I be thirsty, never more could I be in utter darkness; I have seen the Light. I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering.... Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of Joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated." (19)

Ruusbroec testifies that the brilliant light he saw was “the Son of God, in whom a person becomes able to see and contemplate eternal life.” In my opinion, this universal Light is the Son of God that Jesus was referring to when he used the first person “I.”

If we read Ruusbroec’s passages carefully, we’ll recognize in them the parables that Jesus used. I’ll restrict myself to the parable of the treasure buried in a field, but other parables can be seen. (20)

Seeing in the darkness an incomprehensible Light is like the man who comes upon a treasure buried in a field. The Light is buried in the field of the human body; specifically, in the spiritual heart.

Ruusbroec contemplating eternal life is the same as the man selling all that he had. Remember that Sri Ramakrishna said a man no longer runs after worldly pleasures after spiritual awakening. The significance of the man selling all he has is that he divests himself of all other desires save that of owning the treasure, which he now knows but doesn’t possess.

Having focused himself upon that Light – that is, selling all that he has — Ruusbroec now reaches the point of seeing the Light of the Father. Owning the treasure is the same as seeing the redemptive Light of the Father.

The day of seeing that Light is “the last day” of his unenlightened existence. The man has been raised up. Thus, as Ruusbroec helps us to see, all of Jesus’ parables are mystical teachings on how to gain the Light of the Father through the Light of the Son.

Jacob Boehme recognized the nature of God and man in that mysterious light. When speaking of this Light, neither Boehme nor Ruusbroec is referring to the man Jesus, but to the Light that the Christ is.

All living beings have in their hearts this same Light, this Child of God, or Christ. It's our original, unborn, and undying nature.

It's been called the divine spark, (21) the fire always burning on the altar, (22) and a firebrand plucked from the burning. (23)

In another place, Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (24) and "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." (25) These two passages have been used by some to indicate that only Christians will be saved.

But we can see now, from Ruusbroec's description, that contemplating the Christ-Light is in fact the Way to the Father, who is the Truth and the Life (that is, the end of the need to be reborn in matter). That same Christ-Light is to Hindus the Atman and Buddhists, the Buddha-nature.

It would be an error on our part, therefore, to suggest that Hindus contemplating the Atman and Buddhists contemplating the Buddha nature will not reach salvation; they're contemplating the Christ-Light just as Christians are –just using different names

The Christ is the Self

Given that the Christ is our own true Self, another way of saying that the Christ is the way to God is to say "know thyself if you wish to know God." Knowing our Self is the way to know God. The Self is the Christ and penetrating into It leads us to the All-Self or the Father.

The twentieth-century American mystic Franklin Merrell-Wolff demurred from confusing the man Jesus with the Christ. Merrell-Wolff knows the Christ as the Self through his own experience.

“‘No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.’ Thus spake Jesus. But many heard, though few understood, and so they sought the Father through belief in a man who dwelt for a short time upon this earth. But no man is ‘I,’ since ‘man’ is an object while I AM [is] always the subject. Hence, to translate the above quotation as meaning, ‘no man cometh unto the Father but by Jesus,’ is completely to change its meaning.” (26)

According to Merrell-Wolff, Jesus was saying that no man approacheth the Father except by the Self, the universal subject. In knowing the transcendental Self, we shall know God.

"Only through the 'I' is Identity realized. Approached in any other way, God is ever something other than the seeker and, therefore at a distance. To come to the Father is to be one with the Father, and this can be achieved only through the pure Subject or the SELF." (27)

There is wide agreement among other masters that knowing the Self is the way to know the Father.

Bodhidharma

"Whoever sees his nature is a buddha." (28)

"To attain enlightenment without seeing your nature is impossible." (29)

Ibn Arabi

"To know God is not an easy matter, until one becomes a knower of one's self." (30)

Al-Ghazzali

"Knowledge of self is the key to knowledge of God, according to the saying: 'He who knows himself knows God.'" (31)

Anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*

"Strain every nerve in every possible way to know and experience yourself as you really are [i.e., as the Christ-Light]. It will not be long, I suspect, before you have a real knowledge and experience of God as he is." (32)

St. Catherine of Genoa

"My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself." (33)

Sri Yukteswar Giri

"The highest aim of religion is Atma-jnanam, Self-knowledge." (34)

Thus, God laid down that we must approach Him by knowing ourselves first. We have to approach him through the Christ, our Self.

As divine sparks or Children of God, we're joint-heirs with the Christ that Jesus is and was. When we realize our true and full identity as that Son of God, one with the Father, we'll have fulfilled the purpose for which we were born. We'll be fully enlightened. The lost lamb, the Prodigal Child, will have left behind the things of the world and come Home.

In my view, then, Jesus doesn't promise salvation only to those who follow Jesus the man. The Christ in all creation promises it freely to all, by virtue of our being the Children of God. There are no strings attached to our birthright. There may be strings attached to when we shall inherit it.

The crooked shall be made straight

Let's examine two other examples of sages predicting universal redemption. In this case, we're not listening to an avatar, a Descent of the Divine, like Jesus, Krishna, or Ramakrishna. We're listening to two enlightened masters — Isaiah and Lao-Tzu — who say strangely parallel things.

Isaiah says:

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it." (35)

All shall be perfected or made straight. Once we're perfected, all of us shall see and know God.

Lao Tzu made the same prediction.

"The crooked shall be made straight
And the rough places plain;
The pools shall be filled
And the worn renewed....
The saying of the men of old

Is not in vain:
'The crooked shall be made straight' -
To be perfect, return to it." (36)

All human beings shall be made straight, their hills and valleys levelled, their pools filled, resulting one day in universal redemption. All can and will return to their original perfection and be redeemed.

So ... we're not the ego. We're aware of how much death and destruction has arisen by thinking that our side will be saved and the other side won't. God is not on our side exclusively; God is on all sides universally.

By thinking in confused ways, we've divided ourselves into tribes and camps, circles and stripes. Unfortunate and mistaken ways of being have arisen and endlessly multiplied. They did so because of our misidentification with the ego and all of its states, moods, and desires.

We've come upon two more design elements of God's Plan for Life: (1) our nature as we've just described it; and (2) the known outcome (universal redemption) of the cosmic drama that we're all involved in.

In regards to the first, our nature is that of the Self, Christ, or Child of God – a firebrand plucked from the Burning. In regards to the second, all of us have God's Promise that we will be reunited with the Fire one day.

Both these design elements are in fact our inheritance, our legacy, our birthright. They're intrinsic to us, inalienable. The situation cannot be changed by act of legislature. It doesn't bend before religious edict. A dictator could not make the situation different even if he killed us in the process (and we begged for mercy). We're all Children of God and we're all bound for salvation.

What difference does knowing this make?

When it's known that we all are Children of God, that all are loved by Him and destined to be redeemed, each one of us faces a choice. Do we continue to conduct ourselves as if only our fellows in faith will sit on the Right Hand of God? Or do we drop that false notion and see things as the masters say they are?

We were not designed to push the service of our own projected self-interest into areas where it works to the detriment of others. Why not? Because life will push back. And why is that? Apparently, because God has designed it that way.

Viewed from a pragmatic social angle, gone is any valid basis for such views as master races and subject races, “ethnic cleansing” and genocide, crusades or jihads, slavery, dictatorship, class domination. Gone is any valid basis for male enslavement and mistreatment of women or the exploitation of children.

Viewed from a personal angle, gone is any valid basis for my asserting myself over others to their detriment. It has to be win/win. We're all of us Brothers and Sisters, Children of God, part of the same family, and universally bound for redemption.

Our entire worldview could shift if we allowed it. The “hundredth-monkey” effect might tip us into global religious tolerance as we realize that we're all Spiritual Brothers and Sisters, on the road to mutually-assured perfection.

One event will occur regardless of whatever else happens. The basis of all subordinating (superior vs. inferior) worldviews is, by these revelations, removed. The secret is out: there is no superior or inferior to be found anywhere. Spiritually, we're all equal and alike, in nature and in destiny.

Having settled that question, what path will lead us to God? Is it only the one we follow?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see “Bibliography” at the end of this book.)

(1) GSR, 35.

(2) GSR, 818.

(3) RAWSH, 172.

(4) Ibid., 98.

(5) Luke 7:35.

(6) See, for instance, Isaiah's appositives: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom." (Isaiah 11:2.) Or Solomon's, in the Apocrypha:

"And who has learned your counsel
Unless you gave him wisdom,
"And sent your holy spirit from on high."
("Wisdom of Solomon" in APO, 195.)

Compare with St. John of the Cross:

"The Spouse ... is the Wisdom of God." St. John of the Cross in CWSJC, 75. "This flame of love is the Spirit of the Bridegroom, which is the Holy Spirit." (St. John of the Cross in CWSJC, 580.)

(7) BG, 126.

(8) John 8: 23.

(9) FMSR, 106-7.

(AA) Here is part of that conversation with Jesus:

Steve: When you say, "I am the light," who is "I am"? Are you speaking as Jesus, or are you speaking as the Christ, as the light?

Jesus: No, I am speaking as the light. ... The light that then transfers into the Christ light, that then transfers into the being that you, sitting here this night, call Jesus. But you were asking about my essence. ("Transcript of an Hour with an Angel, with Jesus, Jan. 16, 2012," at <http://goldenageofgaia.com/ascension-as-of-2012/the-masters-speak/transcript-of-an-hour-with-an-angel-with-jesus-jan-16-2012/>.)

(10) John 6:39-40.

(11) John 16:28.

(12) I Corinthians 15:24 and 28.

(13) Sri Ramakrishna cited in Usha, RVW, 25.

(14) II Corinthians 4:6.

(15) CC, 183.

(16) JR, 147

(17) Ibid., 74.

(18) ESS, 166.

(19) KYA, 171-2.

(20) Jesus in Matthew 13:44.

(21) Omraam Michael Aivanhov, LAS, Part 1, 22; also Meister Eckhart in Huxley, PP, 15-6.

(22) Leviticus 6:13.

(23) Amos 4:1.

(24) John 14:6.

(25) John 10:9.

(26) PTS, 19.

(27) Loc. Cit.

(28) ZTB, 5.7

(29) Ibid., 9.

(30) KK, 3.

(31) AH, 19.

(32) CU, 71.

(33) PP, 11.

(34) HS, 6.

(35) Isaiah 40:3-5.

(36) WOL, 22, 74.

Ch. 6 What Paths Lead to God?



Last revised: 6 Aug. 2011

All genuine spiritual paths lead to God

A second debate concerns which path will take us to God and which won't. The avatar Sri Ramakrishna had heard devotees quarreling so many times about it that he was weary of it.

All genuine paths, Sri Ramakrishna taught, will lead to God:

“Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, ... he will surely realize Him. “(2)

God Himself, Sri Ramakrishna teaches, arranged the various paths to take into account our levels of knowledge and temperaments:

"God Himself has provided different forms of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.

"The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children. If there is a fish to cook, she prepares different dishes from it — pilau, pickled fish, fried fish, and so on — to suit their different tastes and powers of digestion." (3)

He reassured us that, if we transparently seek God, we can confidently take up a new path. We needn't worry about offending Him through imperfect efforts: "Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being evoked? He will be pleased with that worship." (4)

A word of caution though

That having been said, we must emphasize that Sri Ramakrishna is talking about "genuine" spiritual paths.

To emphasize this, Sri Ramakrishna told his beloved Naren, later Swami Vivekananda, that "of one hundred persons who take up the spiritual life, eighty turn out to be charlatans. ... Therefore, beware." (5)

His message is meant for all of us. We must beware of charlatans.

How are we to sort out the genuine masters from the charlatans and the genuine paths from the non-genuine? We would do well to apply two of Jesus' teachings. One is that the truth will set us free (6) and the second is that by their fruits ye shall know them. (7)

If we're not feeling increasing release and joy following a path, we may wish to question it. Its truth isn't setting us free. Moreover, if we're not impressed with the type of fruits (teachings, practices, aspirants, etc.) that arise from the path, we again may wish to lay it aside. If we don't like its fruits, we won't like its impact on us.

Have we any standards against which to measure our perceived attainment on a particular path? Yes, Shankara advises us:

"The words of the scriptures, your own power of reasoning, and the teaching of your master should all help to convince you [that you have produced desirable results] — but the only absolute proof is the direct and immediate experience, within your own soul." (8)

Swami Nikhilananda, the great compiler of Sri Ramakrishna's works, draws on Vedanta to answer the same question, leaving out the fourth criterion that Shankara includes: "the teaching of your master."

"To protect the aspirant from error and delusion the seers of Vedanta lay down three criteria of Truth. These are scriptural authority..., reasoning..., and personal experience.... Any one of these, singly, may enable a man to realize partial truth, but when all three point to the same conclusion, the aspirant may be assured that he has realized the whole of Truth." (9)

This advice can help us distinguish the genuine from the non-genuine path. If we keep these warnings in mind when we listen to other masters on the subject of path, we'll hear their teachings in a productive light.

A path wherever you turn your face

Although Sri Ramakrishna's advice that any genuine path will lead to God may startle us, we hear it again and again from other masters of enlightenment. "Which ever way you turn your face," the thirteenth-century Sufi sage Ibn Arabi tells us, "there you will find a road which leads to God." (10) The ancient Hindu Sage Vasistha counsels us that "this [Supreme Self] can be attained by a hundred ways and means." (11)

Contemporary Mother Meera advises that "there is no difference. All paths lead to the same goal; that is, to realize the Divine." (12) Sri Krishna underscores the point:

"Whatever path men travel
Is my path:
No matter where they walk
It leads to me." (13)

He gives examples:

"Some see me one with themselves, or separate:
Some bow to the countless gods that are only
My million faces." (14)

"Some [yogis] withdraw all their senses from contact with exterior sense-objects. For these, hearing and other senses are the offering, and self-

discipline the sacrificial fire. Others allow their minds and senses to wander unchecked, and try to see Brahman within all exterior sense-objects. For these, sound and the other sense-objects are the offering, and sense-enjoyment the sacrificial fire." (15)

He says that we can take matters by degrees. There are many roads in.

"If you cannot become absorbed in me, then try to reach me by repeated concentration. If you lack the strength to concentrate, then devote yourself to works which will please me. For, by working for my sake only, you will achieve perfection. If you cannot even do this, then surrender yourself to me altogether. Control the lusts of your heart, and renounce the fruits of every action." (16)

In fact, Sri Ramakrishna tells us, God doesn't mind, if we jump into the lake, dive in, or fall in. All entrances work the same effect.

“You see, the thing is somehow or other to get into the Lake of the Nectar of Immortality. Suppose one person gets into It by propitiating the Deity with hymns and worship, and you are pushed into It. The result will be the same. Both of you will certainly become immortal.” (17)

Each path but a step

Master Hilarion, speaking through Mabel Collins, surveyed the vista of spiritual evolution and taught that each path took us but a step up Jacob's ladder of consciousness.

"Seek [the way] not by any one road. To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable. But the way is not found by devotion alone, by religious contemplation alone, by ardent progress, by self-sacrificing labour, by studious observation of life. None alone can take the disciple more than one step onwards.

"All steps are necessary to make up the ladder. The vices of man become steps in the ladder, one by one, as they are surmounted. The virtues of man are steps indeed, necessary — not by any means to be dispensed with. Yet, though they create a fair atmosphere and a happy future, they are useless if they stand alone. The whole nature of man must be used wisely by the one who desires to enter the way." (18)

“Entering the way” for him is a journey that contextualizes and surpasses any one level of enlightenment. As we shall see in later chapters, he looks very much farther down the road than we're used to looking.

Life beyond path

Paths carry us as far as the teacher we're dealing with can. Many individuals, like Ramana Maharshi and Eckhart Tolle for example, have reached enlightenment without following a formal path or teacher. Many others, like Bernadette Roberts or Sri Ramakrishna himself, have gone beyond the reach of the paths available to them.

Bernadette Roberts, when the Self fell away, found herself in a place not described by any existing, conventional path that she knew of.

"[During my] two-year journey ... I experienced the falling away of everything I can call a self. It was a journey through an unknown passageway that led to a life so new and different that, despite forty years of varied contemplative experiences, I never suspected its existence ...

"I came upon a permanent state in which there was no self, not even a higher self, a true self, or anything that could be called a self. Clearly, I had fallen outside my own, as well as the traditional, frame of reference when I came upon a path that seemed to begin where the writers on the contemplative life had left off." (19)

The avatar Sri Ramakrishna left paths behind after God-Realization and went further. The highest level he makes known to us he calls *vijnana* (for more on *vijnana*, see “Beyond God-Realization” and “When Gods Meets God”).

I'll include a mention of it here to show one level of enlightenment beyond where many conventional paths end.

"What is *vijnana*? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is *jnana*, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is *vijnana*. To know by one's inner experience that God exists is *jnana*. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is *vijnana*. The realization

that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnana."
(20)

He describes one occasion when he experienced vijnana and, with it, intimate contact with God:

"God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyen-tree. I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then we laughed so much! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. ...

"For three days I wept continuously. And He revealed to me what is in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures." (21)

Because of these sublime experiences, beyond the paths of his day, he was able to say in later life: "I can swear that you can see God and talk with Him as intensely as you see me and talk with me. You can hear His words and feel His touch." (22)

Paths reflect the highest attainments of their spiritual originators. New paths undoubtedly will be found or fashioned to suit our circumstances or take humanity collectively further.

While we, as humans, never reach an end to our journey of enlightenment (see "Enlightenment is Virtually Endless"), we achieve enlightenment as an act of grace, as Franklin Merrell-Wolff explains.

"As the lower cannot command the Higher, the individual ego is not lord over the Universal SELF. Hence, from the individual standpoint, the Realization is spontaneous and thus is often called an act of Grace. The SELF, which it must be remembered is Identical with Divinity, doesn't stand within the causal sequence. Consequently, strictly considered, Realization of the SELF is never an effect of causes set up by the individual man acting in space and time. The latter through his efforts prepares the candle, as it were, but the Flame is lighted through a spontaneous act of Spirit." (23)

Bernadette Roberts emphasizes that this point is often reached after we've exerted ourselves to the utmost on our path. Having sunk down in despair at the inadequacy of all our efforts, we let go and God, by His Grace, closes the distance: "At a certain point, when we've done all we can [to bring about an abiding union with the divine], the divine steps in and takes over." (24)

We'd be wise to remember that this exhaustion of our own efforts will occur for us time and time again as we journey up the staircase of existence back to God. God remains always outside of path and beyond it.

What keeps us journeying, lifetime after lifetime, towards God? Is there a divine feature of life that keeps all sentient beings moving up Jacob's ladder?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the end of this book.)

(1) VIV, 28.

(2) Ibid., 30.

(3) GSR, 81.

(4) Ibid., 80.

(5) VIV., 30.

(6) Jesus, John 8:32.

(7) Jesus, Matthew 7:20.

(8) CJD, 112.

(9) SK, 20-1.

(10) KK, 25.

(11) CYV, 84.

(12) MTHR, back cover.

(13) BG, 51.

(14) Ibid., 81.

(15) Ibid., 53.

(16) Ibid., 98.

(17) PR in GSR, 217.

(18) LOP, 12-3.

(19) ENS, 9 and 10.

(20) GSR, 288. Now of course (2017) we know Sahaja Samadhi as the culminating point of Ascension.

(21) Ibid., 830.

(22) VIV, 21.

(23) PTS, 23.

(24) PNS2, 131.

Ch. 7 The Longing for Liberation



Last revised: 19 May 2010

What keeps us moving ever onward toward God?

As we journey outwards from God and into the world and then away from the world and back to God, what ensures that we continue moving up Jacob's ladder of consciousness?

The sages say that we're driven onward by a kind of homing device – a low-level, steady, and eternal thirst, an undying but sub-sensible yearning which a considerable number of the enlightened masters are very familiar with. I consider it to be another design feature of life.

This thirst or yearning operates on us continuously, but so subtle is its impact and so powerful are our desires that we often misinterpret it and think that we're longing for a relationship or an experience connected with the material life of the body and the mind.

Thus misinformed, we seek one relationship or experience after another in an endless cycle of desiring, acquiring and experiencing. Yet none of our acquisitions or experiences finally satisfy that endless longing.

And this is as it should be because that endless longing can only be satisfied by spiritual union with God and not by anything material.

The masters use various terms to denote it. In these pages, I follow the Hindu Vedantist Shankara's lead by calling it "the longing for liberation." He describes it thus:

"[The] longing for liberation is the will to be free from the fetters forged by ignorance — beginning with the ego-sense and so on, down to the physical body itself — through the realization of one's true nature." (1)

Realizing one's own true nature is another way of saying uniting with God. We've seen that realizing ourselves is the purpose of life. Therefore, the longing for liberation is only satisfied when we realize the purpose of our lives. Nothing else affords us final relief.

We may be temporarily satisfied by the thrill of falling in love, exploring a new locale, or acquiring a new possession, but the longing for God will reassert itself and we'll find ourselves again dissatisfied.

Shankara was a Hindu from India; Pseudo-Dionysius, living around two centuries earlier, was a Christian from Greece. But Pseudo-Dionysius also knew this phenomenon.

He tells us that "all things long for" God. (2) Their longing, if properly understood, is for the spiritual and not for the material:

"It is a strong and sure desire for the clear and impassible contemplation of the transcendent. It is a hunger for an unending, conceptual, and true communion with the spotless and sublime light, of clear and splendid beauty. Intemperance then will be an unyielding and unturning power, seen in the pure and unchanging yearning for divine beauty and in the total commitment to the real object of all desire." (3)

Adyashanti is a contemporary American teacher. I've never heard him refer to either Pseudo-Dionysius or Shankara. Notwithstanding, he knows the longing. He calls it the "impulse to evolve."

"The impulse to be free is an evolutionary spark within consciousness which originates beyond the ego. It is an impulse toward the divine, unity, and wholeness. It is an impulse originating from the Truth itself. This impulse to evolve is often co-opted by the ego, which then creates the illusion of the spiritual seeker. This impulse, which is inherently innocent,

is something, which in and of itself, has nothing to do with any seeking to attain. It is only when the ego co-opts the impulse and then tries to attain something that the seeker is born. This impulse, this spark of evolution, becomes almost instantly corrupted by a wanting which gives birth to the seeker." (4)

To my way of thinking, it's vital that we understand how this longing operates or we can easily mistake its pull for something else. Without that understanding, we will find ourselves in relationships we find we never truly wanted or with possessions that never quench our thirst. We will fall into the countless pits that people do who try to fill a spiritual void with material things.

Responding to our inner ache this way, we set in motion an endless cycle of desire and spend countless lives trying to satisfy our cravings. We fail to realize what Pseudo-Dionysius called "the real object of all desire."

Consumed with longing for God

One of the most ancient of spiritual texts, the *Upanishads*, says that God, who is our own true Self, will only make Himself known to the one who longs for Him.

"The Self is not known through study of the scriptures; nor through subtlety of the intellect, nor through much learning; but by him who longs for him is he known. Verily unto him does the Self reveal his true being."
(5)

If we wish the final consummation of union with God, we must fan our longing until we're nearly consumed by it. Says Shankara:

"When renunciation and the longing for liberation are present to an intense degree within a man, then the practice of tranquillity and the other virtues will bear fruit and lead to the goal." (6)

Speaking from the fourteenth-century, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* emphasizes that, if we're serious seekers, then nothing must be allowed to overtake the longing of our heart for God. Satisfying it must be our only concern.

"Your whole life now must be one of longing, if you are to achieve perfection. And this longing must be in the depths of your will, put there

by God, with your consent. ... Hate to think of anything but God himself, so that nothing occupies your mind or ever will but only God. Try to forget all created things that he ever made, and the purpose behind them, so that your thought and longing do not turn or reach out to them in general or in particular. Let them go, and pay no attention to them: it is the work of the soul that pleases God most. All saints and angels rejoice over it, and hasten to help it on with all their might." (7)

Sri Ramakrishna used many homely metaphors to awaken in his devotees that degree of yearning.

"This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has someone ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again, one should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work. If he is rejected at a certain place which has no vacancy, he goes there again the next day and inquires, 'Is there any vacancy today?'" (8)

Always he can be heard ending his talks or summarizing his teachings with an exhortation to long, yearn, or weep for God.

"Nothing whatever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning." (9)

"The gist of the whole thing is that one must develop passionate yearning for God." (10)

"Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms." (11)

"If the devotee but once feels this attachment and ecstatic love for God, this mature devotion and longing, then he sees God in both His aspects, with form and without form." (12)

Is this the degree of longing that Jesus had in mind when he blessed those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (13) or who “mourn: for they shall be comforted”? (14)

Given that Jesus discussed only what belonged to God, and not to Caesar, could the people he’s describing be thirsting for anything other than God and mourning for anything other than their separation from Him?

My soul fainteth for Thy salvation

Can we point to other examples of an intensely-yearning heart? Indeed, we can.

There are many saints and sages from all ages and traditions who weep for God. All who have been touched by the Divine hunger for more.

Zarathustra

"O Lord (my) God, these two things I long for — a Vision and a Talk with Thee." (15)

King David

"My soul fainteth for thy salvation...
Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" (16)

St. Paul

"For we that are in this tabernacle [of the body] do groan ... that mortality might be swallowed up of life." (17)

St. Augustine

"When a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm, bringing a mighty shower of tears. ... I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice to Thee.

"And ... I spake much unto Thee: And Thou, O Lord, how long? how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry, for ever? ... Why not is there an hour to end my

uncleanness? ... I seized [the Bible], opened, and in silence read that section, on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in spite and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away." (18)

Blessed Henry Suso (of himself)

"When I sang these venerable words sursum corda at mass, it usually happened that my heart and soul dissolved in tearful longing for God, a longing that immediately caused my heart to flee out of itself." (19)

"At this same time an immense fire was sent into his soul that inflamed his heart utterly with love of God." (20)

Sri Ramakrishna assures us that, when we can match these profoundly-yearning devotees of God, we too will surely see Him.

"He who from the depth of his soul seeks to know God will certainly realize Him. He must. He alone who is restless for God and seeks nothing but Him will certainly realize Him." (21)

"After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God." (22)

We now know how to look upon this eternal yearning in our hearts. It's not for a new house or a vacation. It's for union with the Divine.

Let's take our next step on the endless journey of enlightenment: What's the one indispensable move we must make to bring us onto the straight and narrow path to illumination and liberation?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the end of this book.)

(1) CJD, 36

- (2) CWPD, 54.
- (3) Ibid., 151.
- (4) IA, 3.
- (5) UPAN, 19.
- (6) CJD, 36.
- (7) Anon., CU, 52-3.
- (8) GSR, 96.
- (9) GSR, 96.
- (10) Ibid., 183.
- (11) Ibid., 149
- (12) Ibid., 173.
- (13) Matthew 5:6
- (14) Matthew 5:4.
- (15) GZ, 201.
- (16) Psalm 119:81-2.
- (17) II Corinthians 5:4.
- (18) CSA, 170-1.
- (19) SUSO, 79.
- (20) Ibid., 70.
- (21) GSR, 777.

(22) Ibid., 83

Ch. 8 Turn From the World to God



Last revised: 7 Aug. 2011

The Turn in the Road

Let's pause a moment.

We've reached a point in our understanding of the purpose of life that might have been unattainable a few centuries ago.

And simply by attaining this insight, a new resolve might be born in us. As the twentieth-century guru, Sri Yukteswar Giri, says:

"When man understands even by way of inference the true nature of this creation, the true relation existing between this creation and himself; and when he further understands that he is completely blinded by the influence of Darkness, Maya, and that it is the bondage of Darkness alone which makes him forget his real Self and brings about all his sufferings, he naturally wishes to be relieved from all these evils. This relief from evil, or liberation from the bondage of Maya, becomes the prime object of his life." (1)

I'm not suggesting that most of us will form a single-minded determination to end the bondage of Maya. Most of the readers of this book will be Western householders, many with families. Most of us aren't going to drop our responsibilities. That's not our destiny.

But we can know our situation and strengthen our resolve to move gradually in a wise direction.

We find now that there is one indispensable move we must make if we're to make enlightenment our target: that move is to turn from the world to God.

According to Paramahansa Yogananda, Sri Yukteswar's pupil, as long as we simply abandon ourselves to the worldly life, we remain lost souls who "greedily indulge in the pleasures of the senses of touch, smell, taste, sound, and sight." (2)

All the while, our pursuits are ultimately futile, as Milarepa reminds us.

"All worldly pursuits have but the one unavoidable end, which is sorrow: acquisitions end in dispersion; buildings, in destruction; meetings, in separation; births, in death. Knowing this, one should renounce acquisition and heaping up, and building, and meeting; and, faithful to the commands of an eminent Guru, set about realizing the Truth." (3)

And, even if we set about seeking the Truth by looking outwards for it, we condemn ourselves, as Ammachi one put it, to the futility of "trying to catch fish by emptying the ocean." (4) We "ignorant ones who are drowning [ourselves] in worldliness would never know the Truth" that way. (5) Having determined to find the Truth, we must seek another way than looking outwards.

Many of us who are still lost in the world of the senses, trapped in animal-like behaviour, grazing on sensory objects and experiences, don't realize our situation. As a race, we've evolved past the animal kingdom, but as individuals we may drag along with us many less-evolved responses.

One new potentiality, which has been added to us as life forms, combines with the persistent longing for liberation to make our search for God more pressing. God has now bestowed on us self-consciousness by which we're enabled to know ourselves as separate beings.

Our newly-evolved self-consciousness allows us to make an object of ourselves – and of God. ‘

This is a vital step on the way to realizing Him. Our next step is to exhaust our useless efforts to know Him objectively, after which we drop object-consciousness and realize Him as the only Subject of every action. This involves a turning away from the outward and objective to the inward and subjective.

On turning inward, the masters are agreed.

The Upanishads

"The Self-Existent made the senses turn outward. Accordingly, man looks toward what is without, and sees not what is within. Rare is he who, longing for immortality, shuts his eyes to what is without and beholds the Self." (6)

The Buddha

"When objects of sense experience are all ignored, then the transcendental brightness of Intuition will shine forth mysteriously, and you will have found the true source of cognition and tranquillity." (7)

Jesus

"Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (8)

Ch’an Master Lin-Chi (Rinzai)

"If you want to attain Buddhahood, don’t chase around after the ten thousand things." (9)

"Fellow believers, I tell you there is no Dharma to be found outside." (10)

"If you want to be no different from the patriarchs and the buddhas, then never look for something outside yourselves. The clean pure light in a moment of your mind — that is the Essence-body of the Buddha lodged in you. ... And simply because you do not rush around seeking anything outside yourselves, you can command these fine faculties." (11)

Blessed Henry Suso

"Live inwardly, die in blessedness." (12)

Sri Ramakrishna

"The real Christ and Buddha are in us." (13)

"God dwells within us. If one knows that, one feels like giving up all activities and praying to God with a yearning soul." (14)

Master Hilarion

"Regard most earnestly your own heart. ... For through your own heart comes the one light which can illuminate life and make it clear to your eyes." (15)

Spirit Guide Silver Birch

"You have the greatest riches within yourselves. You are part of the Great Spirit. There are no riches or fortunes in your world that can be compared with that. We seek to teach you to explore your own gold mines, to reveal the diamonds of the spirit that are within the clay of your own natures." (16)

"I can only teach you the laws. You were told many years ago that the kingdom of heaven is within. It is not without. It is not to be found in the rush of the world of matter. It is to be found within the soul." (17)

Ammachi

"There will be no sorrow if and when the sense organs are withdrawn from sense objects." (18)

Whether we speak of the world of the senses, the ten thousand things, or the things of Casar, we're counseled that we can't find God there. If we wish to know God, we must shut our eyes to that which is outside, relinquish the evidence of our senses, and turn our attention within.

In a sense, God has created a universal masked ball, a cosmic game of hide and seek. He Himself (or She or It) has agreed to pose as all the dancers, donning a mask, in order to hide Himself so that He can be found. But this is a masked ball with a twist. It's not the outer mask that must be discarded but a mystical inner mask.

We work our way through doffing the outer masks and not finding Him to beginning the more subtle work of identifying and removing the inner masks. The more absorbed we become in seeking Him inwardly, the more subtle the requirements of this mystical masquerade become. To end the game, we must detach the senses from their objects, still the mind, and find God in His hiddenness within - in the heart.

The ultimate twist in the game comes when, the mind stilled, we see that God cannot be found for our looking. That which looks is That we're looking for. Then, even looking falls away.

Weak longing for God

As long as we're separate selves turned to the world, we'll find that we cannot fan our longing for God into a deep and constant yearning. Other things compete for our attention.

Our philandering awareness is what calls forth mystical Old-Testament teachings like:

"I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." (19)

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (20)

The Lord won't reveal Himself to us as long as we prefer "other gods," other desires, before Him. The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* explains our situation and what we must do about it.

"A word of warning: [God] is a jealous lover, and will brook no rival; he will not work in your will if he has not sole charge; he does not ask for help, he asks for you. His will is that you should look at him, and let him have his way." (21)

Apparently God so designed life that only He could be lawfully desired. Sri Krishna tells us that:

"I [God] am all that a man may desire
Without transgressing the law of his nature." (22)

Thus it's not desire itself that must be killed off, at least in the beginning stages of spiritual practice. It's the desire for anything else but God or that which God is – such as love, wisdom, and bliss.

The desire for God – to know Him, to approach Him, to love Him, to serve Him – is the one desire that doesn't harm us and will in fact carry us swiftly on our journey. Whatever other desires we have, if our duty enjoins them on us, must be divinized or spiritualized.

To the degree that we're able to as householders, we must "become introverted." (23) We must shift our attention from worldly matters such as a concern for security, love of drama, fascination with gadgets, thirst for sexual pleasures, and so on, to a curiosity about our own inner nature, a desire to quiet our minds, a willingness to complete our inner "unfinished business," and a yearning to know God.

The proper degree of divine restlessness will only come, Sri Ramakrishna reminds us, "when [our] heart becomes pure and [our] mind free from attachment to the things of the world." (24)

Subject/object vision

The second difficulty we encounter by remaining turned to the world has to do with vision. As long as we look outwardly and see the world, we see with dualistic or subject/object vision. Again this vision has allowed us to develop our individuality and survive until now in the world as God designed it. Our stage of evolution demanded dualistic vision of us then.

Dualistic vision may be a design feature of a phase of life, but it's insufficient to allow us to see God. The shift from dualistic (or natural) to unitive (or supernatural) vision happens with the flowering of spiritual faculties within us, in the course of our spiritual practice. While I'm not sure if it's always the case, the opening of the Third Eye, in the centre of the forehead, is one entrance to spiritual vision that masters of all ages draw our attention to. Seeing with dualistic vision

causes subject and object, the world of names and forms, to arise. Seeing with unitive vision causes these to disappear, revealing the underlying essence to us.

Jesus is undoubtedly describing this moment of seeing with unitive vision when he teaches that "if ... thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." (25) When we experience superconscious vision, we're filled with light. But so long as our two physical eyes operate, looking outwards, we're filled with darkness.

Many of the masters tell us that we'll see God when our eye is single. In superconscious vision, the outside world will disappear, they say, and the Transcendental will be revealed.

Upanishads

"This Effulgent Self is to be realized within the lotus of the heart by continence, by steadfastness in truth, by meditation, and by superconscious vision." (26)

Sage Vasistha

"The cosmic intelligence in which the universe, as it were, ceases to be, is the Lord. In him the subject-object relationship appears to have ceased, as such. He is the void in which the universe appears to exist. In him even cosmic consciousness stands still like a mountain. ...

"Only when the creation is known to be utterly non-existent is the Lord realized." (27)

Sri Ramakrishna

"As long as one is conscious of the body, one is also conscious of objects. Form, taste, smell, sound and touch — these are the objects. It is extremely difficult to get rid of the consciousness of objects and one cannot realize 'I am He' as long as one is aware of objects." (28)

"As long as a man remains conscious of the body, he is conscious of duality. ... Man dwells in the realm of Maya. Maya does not permit him to see God. [Here is an intimation that dualistic vision is a design feature of material life.] It has made him a victim of ignorance." (29)

"Pure mind sees God and ordinary mind does not function." (30)

Ammachi

"When there is awareness of the world there is no awareness of the Self. When there is awareness of the Self, awareness of the world is not there either." (31)

In relation to God, our physical vision is blindness itself. Ibn Arabi exhorts us to develop ourselves spiritually so that we may open our superconscious vision:

"Advance, find an eye [i.e., the Third Eye].
Remedy by it.
And now, look from Him to Him." (32)

It is God that "gives [the] man of knowledge a Divine sight," Ibn Arabi says. (33) In the Bhagavad-Gita, we see the embodied God, Sri Krishna, bestowing superconscious vision on Arjuna so that he can behold Him in His universal form.

"This very day you shall behold the whole universe with all things animate and inert made one within this body of mine. And whatever else you desire to see, that shall you see also.

"But you cannot see me thus with those human eyes. Therefore, I give you divine sight. Behold — this is my yoga power." (34)

Undoubtedly Sri Krishna bestows this gift on Arjuna because the son of Pandu already has a mind purified from a lifetime of following the dharma.

What does "turning from the world" mean?

When I say "turn from the world," I mean the phrase generically. Some will use other words: settle into being; sink into the heart; fill oneself with love; meditate; get present; serve humanity humbly; enquire into the Self.

All of these words point in some way to a similar inward movement or to a relinquishing of something outward. If you prefer another phrase instead of "turning from the world," by all means, please use that.

Turning from the world need not be done physically, but emotionally and spiritually. It need not to be done forever, but only until realization of our true nature is achieved. As Franklin Merrell-Wolff explains:

"In principle there is no need of denying any phase of external action, save as a temporary discipline, so that the necessary inward concentration may be effected. The Man who has made the Ineffable Transition is Free. Outwardly He lives the life that He chooses." (35)

Merrell-Wolff was working as a geological explorer at the time that he had his major enlightenment breakthroughs. He was a married man with responsibilities and yet, by the end of his life, he had travelled a very great distance down the road of enlightenment.

Every non-eternal plant shall be rooted up

We must not be deluded about the degree of effort that's required to know God. The masters emphasize that we cannot see Him as long as the least trace of worldliness remains in us.

We may be able to see the Child or the Mother in lesser moments of enlightenment, but not the Father. Let's listen to them on the need for a purified mind.

Jesus

"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." (36)

St. John of the Cross

"The soul ... will not be transformed in God if it has only one imperfection." (37)

Sri Ramakrishna

"Can one not see God as formless Reality? Of course one can. But not if one has the slightest trace of worldliness." (38)

"Match-sticks, if damp, won't strike fire though you rub a thousand of them against the match-box. You only waste a heap of sticks. The mind soaked in worldliness is such a damp match-stick. (39)

[God] is constantly attracting us, as a magnet attracts iron. But the iron cannot come to the magnet if it is covered with dirt. When the dirt is washed away, the iron is instantly drawn to the magnet. Weep for God and the tears will wash away the dirt from your mind." (40)

"The truth is that you cannot attain God if you have even a trace of [worldly] desire. Subtle is the way of dharma. If you are trying to thread a needle, you will not succeed if the thread has even a slight fibre sticking out." (41)

Now Jesus' teaching makes perfect sense: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." (42) Of course we must. That's the very task that God has assigned us.

This total love for God, this complete absorption in Him can arise in one perfect moment, by any genuine spiritual practice, but arise it must.

Must we cover the entire ground in just one lifetime? If the desire for enlightenment grows slowly within us and the purification of our minds takes time, how can we hope to accomplish the spiritual journey in one incarnation?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at the end of this book.)

(1) HS, 45.

(2) SCC, 1, 86.

(3) ZTG, 65.

(4) Mata Amritanandamayi (Ammachi), AC, I, 45.

(5) Ibid., 48-9.

- (6) UPAN, 20.
- (7) BB, 209
- (8) Jesus, Luke 17:21.
- (9) ZTML, 72.
- (10) Ibid., 57.
- (11) Ibid., 24.
- (12) SUSO, 57.
- (13) LSR, 47.
- (14) GSR, 112.
- (15) LOP, 27-8.
- (16) SBA, 12.
- (17) Ibid., 16.
- (18) AC, 1, 24.
- (19) Exodus, 20:5; cf. Deuteronomy 5:9.
- (20) Exodus 20:3.
- (21) CU, 52.
- (22) BG, 71.
- (23) Ammachi, AC., 45.
- (24) GSR, 375.
- (25) Matthew 6:22.

(26) UPAN, 47.

(27) CYV, 43-4.

(28) GSR, 181.

(29) Ibid., 269.

(30) Ibid., 687.

(31) AC, 1, 39. Cf. Sri Ramana Mahrshi: “When the mind, which is the cause of all cognitions and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.” (WHO, 12.)

(32) KK, 33.

(33) Ibid., 35.

(34) BG, 91.

(35) PTS, 21.

(36) Matthew 15:13.

(37) CWSJC, 98.

(38) GSR, 213.

(39) Ibid., 173.

(40) Ibid., 1024.

(41) Ibid., 769.

(42) Mark 12:30.

Ch. 9 One Journey, Many Lives



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Must we attain enlightenment in this one life?

One reason why universal redemption doesn't sit well with some people is that they believe that we've only one life to achieve salvation. In this chapter, we hear the masters say that we lead many lives, gradually moving towards a culmination, for everyone, in enlightenment or redemption.

I must say from the outset that I've difficulty imagining how a Mozart could become such a virtuoso in only one lifetime. He was a genius at an early age. Or how an Einstein could become an overarching genius. The distance covered was too great to traverse in only one life.

I also find it strange that so many books on sale today originating in different ages and climes tell us about life in the world beyond and yet we still resist the reality of life after death. (1)

Moreover, we resist that knowledge though many people testify to out-of-body and near-death experiences. But we'll hear survival of bodily death and reincarnation discussed again and again in these pages.

Some in Christian circles say that discussions of reincarnation were removed from the Bible at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Others say it happened at the Council of Constantinople in 553. I know very little about the subject and cannot comment. But the doctrine of reincarnation does seem to have disappeared from the Bible except in a few instances.

Theosophist Annie Besant felt that “the doctrine of reincarnation [was] rather taken for granted in the New Testament than distinctly taught.” (2) There is in fact that quality about some of the few surviving discussions of reincarnation in the New Testament, such as this exchange between Jesus and his disciples over the prophet Elijah, an exchange that can't be understood apart from reincarnation.

"And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with [Jesus]. ...

"And his disciples asked him saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

"And Jesus answered them and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

"But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. ...

"Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." (3)

I'm convinced that Jesus is saying here that John was Elijah in a previous life. (4) Certainly the sight of Elijah and Moses with Jesus is an undeniable proof that we survive bodily death.

Besant's point also makes sense here. There's an apparent “taking of reincarnation for granted” in this passage. The disciples knew that, when Jesus spoke of Elijah, he was referring to John the Baptist in this lifetime. They didn't discuss it with him. There seems to have been no need to.

Two deaths and two resurrections

Many people today believe that, in a relatively vague manner, we sleep after death until a trumpet sounds on the final day of the world. The fact that the Bible was spoken and written in a code has often made it difficult to understand the “dark sayings” of the wise. (5)

The interpretation that we all sleep after death doesn't help us to understand other comments made by him and Jesus.

For instance, unless we acknowledge that the spirit goes on living after the body's death, how are we to interpret the passage in Mark where Jesus, on the cross, "cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost"? (6) What's this ghost that left him but his undying spirit?

How are we to interpret Jesus' teaching in Matthew that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"? (7) In Mark, Jesus is quoted as saying "as touching the dead, that they rise..." (8) In Luke he says, "now that the dead are raised..." (9) God is not the God of the dead body, but of the living spirit. The dead that rise are the physically-deceased who leave their bodies and continue on into the afterlife.

In fact, we'll find Jesus (and his disciple, St. Paul), referring to two types of "death" and two types of "resurrection." The first is ego death and is followed by the resurrection of enlightenment.

The second is physical death and is followed by the resurrection of the afterlife. They often don't tell us when they're referring to the first and when to the second, a practice which may sometimes prove confusing.

For example, Jesus said to a would-be disciple: "Let the dead bury their dead." (10) Here he uses the word "dead" to cover two situations. The first is the situation of the unenlightened; all of us who are not alive in the resurrection of enlightenment. The second is the situation of the deceased, those whose physical bodies are dead but who are alive in the resurrection of the afterlife. If we were to put his teaching another way, we might say, let the unenlightened, who believe in physical death, bury the bodies of those they think have died.

As a second example, St. Paul in Ephesians says: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (11)

I think he's referring to people who are unenlightened as "thou that sleepest." They're asked to rise from their worldly concerns ("arise from the dead"), following which "Christ shall give thee light" (i.e., they shall be enlightened).

Interestingly, another enlightened master, alive at the same general time as Jesus, was explicit in his acceptance of reincarnation. The Greek master, Apollonius of Tyana, appeared before the Emperor Domitian, in much the same manner as Jesus did before Herod and Pontius Pilate, accused of inciting the people against the emperor.

In his written notes for his defence, Apollonius discusses the past lives of his master, the mystic Pythagoras. He too refers to reincarnation as if assuming that his auditors took his points for granted.

"[Pythagoras] derived many advantages from his purity, above all that of perceiving his own soul [i.e., enlightenment]. He had been born [as Euphorbus] in the time when Troy was fighting on behalf of Helen, and he was the most beautiful of the sons of Panthus and the most beautifully equipped. He died so young as to give Homer a subject for a lament, and passed into several bodies according to the law ... whereby souls migrate. Finally he ... was born the son of Mnesarchides of Samos [i.e., his present incarnation], so that he became a wise man who had been a barbarian, an Ionian who had been a Trojan, and a man so immortal that he did not even forget that he had been Euphorbus." (12)

After proving himself innocent, Apollonius disappears from the courtroom to emphasize to the emperor that he couldn't have been tried unless he willed it.

(Jesus also disappeared from the midst of his questioners in the synagogue and told Pontius Pilate that he could not have been tried unless it was fated. Apollonius in fact performed many of the same miracles as Jesus, but remains little known.)

God has ordained that all will be enlightened in some lifetime. When they are, as St. Paul says:

"When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (13)

When we become enlightened, we will put an end to this cycle of birth and death; we shall have "put on immortality." Then shall we be victorious over death. Where will the sting of death be then? How will the grave ever win again against us?

Remember that Jesus said: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." (14) "Overcoming" the ego is followed by enlightenment, which causes us not to be hurt by the second death of the body. Paramahansa Yogananda explains how this can be:

"In the drama of life and death, when beheld with Divine understanding [i.e., when seen from the vantage point of enlightenment, the first death], there can be no pain in death [i.e., the second death], but only the showing or stopping of the motion picture of life at will without physical or mental pain." (15)

Thus, to recap, Jesus says that Elijah was John the Baptist in a previous life. We reincarnate again and again, whether by choice, as is likely with John, or by necessity, as with us. We've seen that other people alive at the time of Jesus, like Apollonius of Tyana, recognized reincarnation. Many educated Jews of Jesus' time (perhaps not Nicodemus) would doubtless have been aware of it as well.

Reincarnation in Eastern teachings

When we enter classical Eastern teachings, we find less need to write in such a complicated code as appears in the Bible.

Hindus, for instance, speak plainly of an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. In the course of their teaching on the subject, they reveal profound spiritual truths.

Reincarnation was explicitly taught in the Bhagavad Gita. When Arjuna feels himself unstrung at the prospect of fighting his own relatives, Sri Krishna assures him that no one really ever dies:

"Your words are wise, Arjuna, but your sorrow is for nothing. The truly wise mourn neither for the living nor for the dead.

"There never was a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be." (16)

Sri Krishna is a divine Incarnation and remembers all his "lives" on Earth. Arjuna is under the veil of maya and remembers none.

"You and I, Arjuna,
Have lived many lives.
I remember them all.
You do not remember." (17)

"Just as the dweller in this body passes through childhood, youth and old age, so at death he merely passes into another kind of body. The wise are not deceived by that. ...

“Bodies are said to die, but That which possesses the body is eternal. It cannot be limited, or destroyed.” (18)

St. Paul made a similar distinction between “celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.” (19) The celestial — the living soul — is not destroyed by death. It inhabits the body terrestrial for a short time, leaves it to experience the afterlife, and reincarnates again on the virtually-endless road of successive enlightenments.

Throughout the universe, the body celestial continues assuming a body terrestrial until the individual is illumined. Said Sri Krishna: “All the worlds ... are subject to the laws of rebirth.” Only one exception occurs: “For the man who comes to me, there is no returning.” (20) Physical rebirth or reincarnation ends when we reach sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi.

I believe that God Himself has entered the divine drama numerous times and demonstrated that He Himself also incarnates. Sri Ramakrishna has shown that to my satisfaction when he lay on his deathbed, reduced to a skeleton by throat cancer.

"At that moment, his beloved disciple Naren, later Swami Vivekananda, had a stray thought. If his master now, under these extreme conditions, could acknowledge his identity with Sri Krishna, Naren would accept that he was an Avatar, an Incarnation of the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna slowly rolled over in his bed and whispered to Naren: 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna.'" (21)

Here Sri Ramakrishna is confirming that God has reincarnated as Rama, Krishna, and Ramakrishna. In my view, God has Himself shown, by His own example, that reincarnation, re-embodiment, is an intentional design feature of His Plan.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that “it takes a long time to achieve liberation. A man may fail to obtain it in this life. Perhaps he will realize God only after many births.” (22) What Sri Ramakrishna meant by “liberation” was liberation from the need to be physically reborn. It means moving from a situation where we need to reincarnate – to be born and die in the world of matter – to a situation where, in

Jesus' words, we need "go no more out." (23) Liberated from the wheel of birth and rebirth, for us there is "no more death." (24)

Here are the masters on God's intention that we reincarnate until we're free from ignorance.

Sage Vasistha

"As long as the highest wisdom does not dawn in the heart, the person revolves in this wheel of birth and death. ... Not until the supreme being is realized will the dreadful miseries of birth and death come to an end." (25)

Shankara

"When your heart is free from ... ignorance, there will no longer be any possibility of your rebirth. You will reach immortality." (26)

"Realize Brahman [that is, God], and there will be no more returning to this world — the home of all sorrows." (27)

The Koran

"Allah has brought you forth from the earth like a plant, and to the earth He will restore you. Then He will bring you back afresh." (28)

"It is Allah who has created you and given you your daily bread. He will cause you to die hereafter and will then bring you back to life." (29)
Paramahansa Yogananda

"Him that overcometh will [I] make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out (i.e., shall reincarnate no more)." (30)

Omraam Michael Aivanhov

"Busy yourselves ... with the mission that God gave mankind: to become perfect like Him. And, as you cannot possibly accomplish that in one short existence, you will have to come back on earth to continue your work.

"When Jesus said, 'Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect,' he meant after several reincarnations. He who was so wise and clairvoyant,

would he have asked humans to become perfect in a single lifetime?
Reincarnation makes everything possible." (31)

Notice that we're already immortal. This spirit that we already are survives bodily death as Jesus, Paul, and Sri Krishna have pointed out. But, when we achieve the level of enlightenment called *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*, we end the need to reincarnate physically. Enlightenment is the end of reincarnation in this world of matter as well as the fulfillment of the purpose of life. It's not however the end of life as an individual.

Die before you die

The masters urge us to die the first death of the ego before dying the second death of the body. These physical lifetimes are given to us to raise corruption into incorruption, to teach us, to mould us.

We can only realize God while we're in a physical body; this too is a design element of life. Say the *Upanishads*: "If a man fails to attain Brahman before he casts off his body, he must again put on a body in the world of created things." (32) It's God's Plan that we continue to don Earthly vestments until we realize that He is all there is.

We must "die before dying," as Ibn Arabi urges us. (33) Lao Tzu puts it this way: "Long life it is to die and not perish." (34) The individual who experiences ego death before physical death "dies and does not perish." That person attains "long life"; that is to say, that soul achieves Paul's victory over death.

What happens if we fail to die the death of the ego before dying the death of the body? What then awaits us who have sought God with a loving heart and yet have not entered the Kingdom of Heaven as a result of it?

According to Sri Krishna:

"No one who seeks Brahman [God the Father] ever comes to an evil end. Even if a man falls away from the practice of yoga, he will still win the heaven of the doers of good deeds, and dwell there many long years." (35)

"And the future lives of such a person, who has once asked the way to God? Sri Krishna says that such an individual will receive significant help in coming lives to complete the journey to God-realization.

"He will be reborn into the home of pure and prosperous parents. He may even be born into a family of illumined yogis. But such a birth in this world is more difficult to obtain.

"He will then regain that spiritual discernment which he acquired in his former body; and so will strive harder than ever for perfection. Because of his practices in the previous life, he will be driven on toward union with Brahman, even in spite of himself. For the man who has once asked the way to Brahman goes farther than any mere fulfiller of the Vedic rituals. By struggling hard, and cleansing himself of all impurities, that yogi will move gradually toward perfection through many births, and reach the highest goal at last." (36)

We reincarnate endlessly on the journey to God. We cannot escape the wheel of birth and death. But, when we know God, when we come Home to Him, we shall reincarnate no more. If we fail to reach Him in this lifetime, He bestows many blessings on us that we might reach Him in the next.

And where is the end of the journey to be found? Is there such a thing as “full” or “final” enlightenment?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see “Bibliography” at the end of this book.)

(1) See *New Maps of Heaven* on the subject: http://goldengaiadb.com/New_Maps_of_Heaven

(2) AW, 31

(3) Matthew 17:3 and 10-13. See also Mark 9:4 and 11-13.

(4) Which leads to the speculation: could Jesus have been Elishu, who asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit? A comparison of their sayings and miracles produces many interesting parallels.

(5) Proverbs 1:6.

(6) Mark 15:37.

(7) Matthew 22:32.

(8) Mark 12:26.

(9) Luke 20:37.

(10) Luke 9:60.

(11) Ephesians 5:14

(12) LA, 212.

(13) I Corinthians 15:54-5.

(14) Rev. 2:11. I realize that the “second death” is a phrase that is also used to refer to an event that occurs on the mental plane, in which the spirit drops the astral body and finds himself or herself in the mental body. See here: <http://www.angelfire.com/space2/light11/nmh/second1.html>

(15) AY, 421.

(16) BG, 36. Also cf. Levi: “Time never was when man was not. ... man himself is not the body, not the soul; he is a spirit and is part of God.” AGJC, 17.

(17) BG, 50.

(18) Ibid., 36.

(19) I Corinthians 15:40.

(20) BG, 76.

(21) GSR, 72.

(22) Ibid., 98.

(23) Rev. 3:12.

(24) Rev. 21:4.

(25) CYV, 31.

(26) CJD, 59.

(27) Ibid., 69.

(28) KOR, 22.

(29) Ibid., 190.

(30) AY, 421n.

(31) AQU, 25, 21.

(32) UPAN, 23.

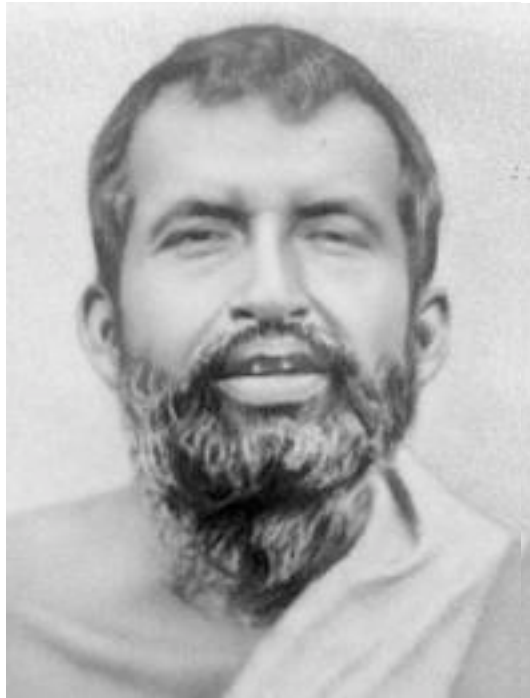
(33) KK, 37.

(34) WOL, 33, 86.

(35) BG, 69.

(36) Loc. cit.

Ch. 10 Beyond God-Realization



Sri Ramakrishna

Last revised: 10 Aug, 2011

Where is the end of the journey?

Usually the term “enlightenment” is used synonymously with Brahmajnana or God Realization. However, the term actually refers to a series of events beginning before Brahmajnana and continuing after it.

The “first” enlightenment

In Chapter 3, we heard from sages like John Ruusbroec, Jacob Boehme, and J. Krishnamurti what the first experience of enlightenment, or spiritual awakening, is like. We saw that it occurs when the kundalini reaches the fourth or heart chakra.

It reveals to us our true nature as divine Light, the Christ, the Child of God. You may wish to review their experiences before turning to the second level.

The “second” enlightenment

A second experience of enlightenment arises when the kundalini reaches the sixth or brow chakra. One goes into a type of samadhi Vedantists call “savikalpa,” which means “with form,” as opposed to “nirvikalpa,” which means “without form.”

In savikalpa samadhi, as Swami Vivekananda explains, “one feels a trace of duality, of distinction between subject and object.” In nirvikalpa samadhi, “one effaces, in the depths of meditation, all distinction between the knower and the goal of knowledge.” (1)

In savikalpa samadhi, says Swami Brahmananda, “one experiences the mystic vision of the spiritual form of God, while the consciousness of individuality remains.” (2) Sri Ramakrishna gave Swami Brahmananda exactly that boon while he was a young boy, then known as Rakhal.

”Look,” said the Master, “there is your Chosen Ideal!” Rakhal in ecstatic vision saw his chosen aspect of the Godhead standing before him — living and luminous, with a smile playing on his lips. When Rakhal regained his external consciousness and saw Sri Ramakrishna, he prostrated at his feet with loving devotion. He had known and experienced the divine power and grace of his guru. (3)

Another common form of sixth-chakra enlightenment experience is the seeing of a mystic light suffusing the whole realm of creation. It was the source of William Wordsworth’s poetry.

"Such was the Boy — but for the growing Youth
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked —
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean’s liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him:— Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,

And by them did he live; they were his life." (4)

The sense of subject and object, or duality, persists in savikalpa samadhi. It may be that St. Paul was referring to savikalpa samadhi when he wrote: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (5)

St. Paul conveys a sense of this barrier between us and God characteristic of sixth-chakra enlightenment. It's as if we were seeing through a glass pane.

The "third" enlightenment

Brahmajnana occurs when the spiritual energy reaches the seventh chakra or sahasrara, at the crown of the head. The spiritual energy has completed its circuit in the body. Sri Ramakrishna describes what can happen next, though It's not necessarily the case with everyone, as we shall see.

"After passing the six centres the aspirant arrives at the seventh plane. ... The individual soul and the Supreme Soul become one. The aspirant goes into samadhi. His consciousness of the body disappears. He loses the knowledge of the outer world. He doesn't see the manifold any more. His reasoning comes to a stop." (6)

Here are some descriptions of what Brahmajnana is like.

Upanishads

"I am life. My glory is like the mountain peak. I am established in the purity of Brahman. I have attained to the freedom of the Self. I am Brahman, self-luminous, the brightest treasure. I am endowed with wisdom. I am immortal, imperishable." (7)

Sage Dattatreya

"I am indeed that Brahman which is free from diversity. O dear friend, how can I, the Self, salute the Self? ... I am uncreated and separate from creation, for I am ever present. ... I am Self-luminous, I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss and boundless as space." (8)

John Ruusbroec

"There follows a third kind of experience, namely, that we feel ourselves to be one with God, for by means of our transformation in God we feel ourselves to be swallowed up in the groundless abyss of our eternal blessedness, in which we can never discover any difference between ourselves and God." (9)

Paramahansa Ramakrishna

"The Master went into deep samadhi. His body was motionless; he sat with folded hands as in his photograph. Tears of joy flowed from the corners of his eyes. After a long time his mind came down to the ordinary plane of consciousness. He mumbled something, of which only a word now and then could be heard by the devotees in the room. He was saying: 'Thou art I, and I am Thou — Thou eatest — Thou — eat! ... What is this confusion Thou has created?' ... There was complete silence in the room. The eager and unsatiated eyes of the devotees were fixed on the Master, a God-man of infinite moods." (10)

We can see from the following passage that Sri Ramakrishna loses consciousness at the onset of the nirvikalpa state.

“So long as [the kundalini] does not reach the brain, I remain conscious, but the moment it does so, I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of the eyes and the ears come to a stop, and speech is out of the question. Who should speak? The very distinction between ‘I’ and ‘thou’ vanishes. Sometimes I think I shall tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up through the spinal column. When it has come up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart and throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am adrift. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kundalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end to the matter.' Many a time did the Master attempt to describe this state, but failed every time. One day he was determined to tell and went on until the power reached the throat. Then pointing to the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows, he said, 'When the mind reaches this point one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman. He then sees like this —' and as he attempted to explain it in detail he fell into Samadhi. When his mind came down a little he tried again, and again he

was immersed in Samadhi! After repeated attempts he said with tears in his eyes, 'Well, I sincerely wish to tell you everything, but [the Divine Mother] won't let me do so. She gagged me!'" (11)

But not everyone does.

The more I study enlightenment, the less capable I feel of saying anything that takes in all cases. Da Free John realized in a moment what he is, without losing consciousness.

Da Free John

"In an instant, I became profoundly and directly aware of what I am. It was a tacit realization, a direct knowledge in consciousness itself. It was consciousness itself without the addition of a communication from any other source. I simply sat there and knew what I am. I was being what I am. I am Reality, the Self and Nature and Support of all things and all beings. I am the One Being, known as God, Brahman, Atman, the One Mind." (12)

The same thing happened to Franklin Merrell-Wolff. His experience of Brahmajnana occurred "with eyes opened and no sense stopped in functioning – hence no trance." (13) "I was ... prepared not to have the personal consciousness share in this Recognition in any way. But in this I was happily disappointed." (14) All through his experiences of Brahmajnana and beyond, Dr. Wolff still found the relative consciousness active:

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

"[During Brahmajnana] relative consciousness by its own momentum continued to function all this time, so that I never for one moment lost sight of my environment or the ceaseless train of thoughts. It was simply a discriminative abstraction of the pure subjective moment and Recognizing Myself as That." (15)

"Throughout this whole experience [which he called the 'High Satisfaction'] and the following more profound state [the 'High Indifference'], the egoistic or subject-object consciousness was actively present. It was present, however, as a witness on the sidelines, while all

about and through and through there was an immeasurably vaster Consciousness." (16)

Here is what he saw with eyes open in Brahmajnana:

"I found Myself above space, time, and causality, and actually sustaining the whole universe by the Light of Consciousness which I AM. Almost at once, there followed the Nectar-like Current [the kundalini] and the gentle, yet so powerful Joy." (17)

"I felt the Ambrosia-like quality in the breath with the purifying benediction that it casts over the whole personality, even including the physical body. I found myself above the universe, not in the sense of being above space, time, and causality, My karma seemed to drop away from me as an individual responsibility. I felt intangibly, yet wonderfully, free. I sustained this universe and was not bound by it. Desires and ambitions grew perceptibly more and more shadowy. All worldly honors were without power to exalt me. Physical life seemed undesirable. ... I looked, as it were, over the world, asking: 'What is there of interest here? What is worth doing?' I found but one interest: the desire that other souls should also realize this that I had realized." (18)

Vijnana

In the 1960s and 1970s, we called God-Realization or Brahmajnana “final” or “complete” enlightenment, but apparently it isn’t. Many of the sages speak of at least one level of enlightenment past it.

[2022: We would now call that next level “Ascension,” Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi, or Vijnana.]

But there are many levels beyond that as well.

In Chapter 6, we heard Sri Ramakrishna describe vijnana, a state beyond Brahmajnana or God-Realization.

Sri Ramakrishna

"There is a stage beyond even Brahmajnana, After jnana comes vijnana."
(19)

"The jnani [i.e., knower of God or Brahmajnani] gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realize Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the vijnani, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime, and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'Not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The vijnani sees that the Reality which is nirguna, without attributes, is also saguna, with attributes. ... This is known as vijnana." (20)

"Do you know what I see? I see that God alone has become everything. Men and animals are only frameworks covered with skin, and it is He who is moving through their heads and limbs. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice. ... There sits Latu [later Swami Adbhutananda] resting his head on the palm of his hand. To me it is the Lord who is seated in that posture." (21)

In vijnana, we know, not only that we're God, but also that all is God. Compared to the Brahmajnani or God-realized sage, the vijnani has gone further.

The Yoga Vasistha spoke of the "Turiyatita," the overcomer of Turiya, the fourth state of consciousness beyond wakefulness, sleep, and dreamless sleep.

Sage Vasistha

"The mind of the knower of truth is no-mind: it is pure satva [the cosmic quality of balance]. After living with such no-mind for some time, there arises the state known as turiya-atita (the state beyond the transcendental, or the Turiya, state)." (22)

"Beyond even this fourth state [of transcendental consciousness or Turiya] there is absolute purity of consciousness. One who is established in it goes beyond sorrow." (23)

"The state of liberation-while-living is ... the turiya consciousness. Beyond that is ... turiya-atita (beyond turiya). In every atom of existence there is nothing else but the supreme being [i.e., vijnana]." (24)

Millennia later, Ramana Maharshi used the same terms to signify Brahmajnana and a stage past it.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

"The Turiya ... is the self or "I"-nature; and what is beyond that is the state of Turiyatita, or pure Bliss." (25)

"Turiya means that which is the fourth. The experiencers (jivas) of the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep, who wander successively in these three states, are not the Self. It is with the object of making this clear, namely that the Self is that which is different from them and which is the witness of these states, that it is called the fourth (Turiya). When this is known the three experiencers disappear and the idea that the Self is a witness, that it is the fourth, also disappears. That is why the Self is described as beyond the fourth (turiyatita)." (26)

The Turiya is God-Realization. Therefore the Turiyatita (which I believe to be a term synonymous with vijnani) has gone further.

We saw that Sri Ramakrishna distinguished between Brahmajnana and the stage beyond it by using the term vijnana. But, as we've seen, Sri Ramana Maharshi uses different terms for these two levels. Instead of Brahmajnana and vijnana, I believe that he distinguishes between two types of nirvikalpa samadhi. In effect, I think he covers the same territory.

"Sahaja is also Nirvikalpa. You are probably meaning Kevala [sic] Nirvikalpa, which is temporary, while the Samadhi lasts. The Sahaja Nirvikalpa is permanent and in it lies liberation from rebirths." (27)

"In kevalya nirvikalpa samadhi, the spiritual heart or hridayam (not to be confused with the physical heart or the heart chakra) opens and then shuts, but in sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi, the heart remains permanently open. It is at this stage that we are liberated from the need to reincarnate, not at the stage of Brahmajnana or kevalya nirvikalpa samadhi..

"[The] Heart is the seat of Jnanam as well as of the granthi (knot of ignorance). It is represented in the physical body by a hole smaller than the smallest pin-point, which is always shut. When the mind drops down in

Kevalya nirvikalpa [samadhi], it opens but shuts again after it. When sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi is attained it opens for good." (28)

"[The hole called the Heart or hridayam, as a small as a pinpoint] is always shut, being the knot of ignorance which ties the body to consciousness. When the mind drops in the temporary Kevala Nirvikalpa it opens but shuts again. In Sahaja it remains always open." (29)

"In Kevala Nirvikalpa there is the mental bucket still in existence under the water, which can be pulled out at any moment. Sahaja is like the river that has linked up with the ocean from which there is no return." (30)

He couples this distinction with another between the jivan-mukta, who has experienced kevalya nirvikalpa samadhi (Brahmajnana, or knowledge of the Turiya) and the videha-mukta, who has experienced sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi (vijñana or the state of the Turiyatita).

Note his contention that the jivan-mukta experiences the attributeless Brahman whereas the videha-mukta experiences the transcendent attributeless Brahman.

"I am not the body; I am Brahman which is manifest as the Self. In me who am the plenary Reality, the world consisting of bodies etc., are mere appearance, like the blue of the sky.' He who has realized the truth thus is a jivan-mukta. Yet so long as his mind has not been resolved, there may arise some misery for him because of relation to objects on account of prarabdha (karma which has begun to fructify and whose result is the present body), and as the movement of mind has not ceased there will not be also the experience of bliss. The experience of Self is possible only for the mind that has become subtle and unmoving as a result of prolonged meditation. He who is thus endowed with a mind that has become subtle, and who has the experience of the Self is called a jivan-mukta. It is the state of jivan-muktithat is referred to as the attributeless Brahman and as the Turiya. When even the subtle mind gets resolved, and experience of self ceases, and when one is immersed in the ocean of bliss and has become one with it without any differentiated existence, one is called a videha-mukta. It is the state of videha-mukti that is referred to as the transcendent attributeless Brahman and as the transcendent Turiya. This is the final goal." (31)

"[The state beyond bliss] is the state of unceasing peace of mind which is found in the state of absolute quiescence, jagrat-sushupti (lit. sleep with awareness) which resembles inactive deep sleep. In this state, in spite of the activity of the body and the senses, there is no external awareness, like a child immersed in sleep (who is not conscious of the food given to him by his mother). A yogi who is in this state is inactive even while engaged in activity. This is also called sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi (natural state of absorption in oneself without concepts)." (32)

The technical terms that Hindu masters use may challenge us, but Hindu seers have laid the foundations for the cross-cultural study of enlightenment. For millennia, they've served as spiritual scientists who have done for Truth what the great western scientists have done for Science.

Again, compared to the knower of Brahmajnana or kevalya nirvikalpa samadhi, Sri Ramana's knower of sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi has gone further.

Let's look at the explorations of Da Free John. God-Realization is itself the result of the kundalini leaving the muladhara chakra at the base of the spine and uniting with the sahasrara chakra at the top of the head. The moment of Shakti meeting Shiva is God-Realization. However, Da Free John says that we reach a point in spiritual evolution where the chakra system itself drops off or falls away.

Da Free John

"In February I passed through an experience that seemed to vindicate my understanding. For several nights I was awakened again and again with sharp lateral pains in my head. They felt like deep incisions in my skull and brain, as if I were undergoing an operation. During the day following the last of these experiences I realized a marvellous relief. I saw that what appeared as the sahasrar, the terminal chakra and primary lotus in the head, had been severed. The sahasrar had fallen off like a blossom. The Shakti, which previously had appeared as a polarized energy that moved up and down through the various chakras or centers producing various effects, now was released through the chakra form. There was no more polarized force. Indeed, there was no form whatsoever, no up or down, no chakras. The chakra system had been revealed as unnecessary, an arbitrary rule or setting for the play of energy. The form beneath all of the bodies, gross or subtle, had revealed itself to be as unnecessary and conditional as the bodies themselves." (33)

If the chakras utterly drop away, that experience must be one beyond God-Realization. Da Free John has gone further.

Bernadette Roberts had her first contemplative experience at fifteen years of age and experienced what we've called Brahmajnana at age twenty-five. As far as she knew, she was at the end of the spiritual path.

However, twenty years later, she found that the Self that she had found utterly and suddenly dropped away.

Bernadette Roberts

"[During my] two-year journey [into the No-Self] ... I experienced the falling away of everything I can call a self. It was a journey through an unknown passageway that led to a life so new and different that, despite forty years of varied contemplative experiences, I never suspected its existence. ... I came upon a permanent state in which there was no self, not even a higher self, a true self, or anything that could be called a self. Clearly, I had fallen outside my own, as well as the traditional, frame of reference when I came upon a path that seemed to begin where the writers on the contemplative life had left off." (34)

Roberts turned to Buddhism for help, but found that most Buddhist authors, though they say they speak of the "no-self" were really speaking of "no-ego."

"Unfortunately what most Buddhist authors define as the no-self experience is actually the no-ego experience. The cessation of clinging, desire, the passions, etc., and the ensuing state of imperturbable peace and joy articulates the egoless state of oneness; it does not, however, articulate the no-self experience or the dimension beyond." (35)

The Buddhist writers she turned to are what Buddha described as arahants and what Hindus describe as Brahmajnanis. Roberts could not find a Buddhist author who made a distinction that took in her experience of the "No-Self." But one day Roberts' search came to an end.

"Four years later, however, I came across two lines attributed to Buddha describing his enlightenment experience. Referring to self as a house, he said, 'All the rafters are broken now, the ridgepole is destroyed.' And there

it was — the disappearance of the center, the ridgepole; without it, there can be no house, no self. When I read these lines, it was as if an arrow launched at the beginning of time had suddenly hit a bull's-eye. It was a remarkable find. These lines are not a piece of philosophy, but an experiential account, and without the experiential account we really have nothing to go on. In the same verse he says, "Again a house thou shalt not build," clearly distinguishing this experience from the falling away of the ego-center, after which a new, transformed self is built around a "true center," a sturdy, balanced ridgepole." (36)

Here's another passage in which the Buddha distinguishes between arahants (or Brahmajnanis) and buddhas.

"The reason why all devoted disciples do not at once attain to supreme enlightenment is because they do not realize two primary principles [the principles of individuating ignorance and of integrating compassion] and because of it some attain only to Arhatship." (37)

Just as the Buddha has traveled further on Jacob's Ladder than the arahant or Brahmajnani, so has Bernadette Roberts gone further.

Through what we've read here, we're invited to open our minds to the possibility that enlightenment goes farther down the road than the "complete enlightenment" we spoke of in the 1960s and 1970s; i.e., Brahmajnana or God-realization.

We see that what we call "God-Realization" is again only another step on Jacob's Ladder. Beyond it is at least one stage, and perhaps a number of stages, variously called vijnana, turiyatita, sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi, the "No-Self," etc.

Are there more stages than even these?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see "Bibliography" at <http://goldenageofgaia.com/the-purpose-of-life-is-enlightenment/ch-13-bibliography/>.)

(1) VIV, 562.

(2) EC, 189.

(3) Ibid., 25-6.

(4) ECST, 399.

(5) I Corinthians 13:12.

(6) GSR, 245.

(7) UPAN, 54.

(8) AG, 56.

(9) JR, 176.

(10) GSR, 207-8.

(11) LSR, 107-8.

(12) KOL, 134-5.

(13) PTS, 4.

(14) Ibid., 5.

(15) Ibid., 32. As I am told, those who knew Franklin Merrell-Wolff referred to him as “Dr. Wolff.”

(16) Ibid., 117.

(17) Ibid., 32.

(18) Ibid., 5.

(19) GSR, 288.

(20) Ibid., 103-4.

(21) Ibid., 70-1.

(22) CYV, 306.

- (23) Ibid., 76.
- (24) Ibid., 314.
- (25) SE, Question 28.
- (26) SI, Chapter 4, Question 8.
- (27) GR, 88.
- (28) Ibid., 96.
- (29) Ibid., 81.
- (30) Ibid., 90.
- (31) SE, answer to question 40.
- (32) SI, Chapter 3, Question 4.
- (33) KOL, 117-8.
- (34) ENS, 9-10.
- (35) PNS2, 136-7.
- (36) Ibid., 137.
- (37) BB, 123.

Ch. 11 Enlightenment is Virtually Endless



Last revised: 11 Aug. 2011

Is there such a thing as full and complete enlightenment?

We've reached vijnana or sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi [2022: What we know as Ascension], which I believe are the same, in our contemplation of enlightenment. We know ourselves as God and we know that everything transcendental and phenomenal is God. At this level, we've escaped the relentless wheel of birth and death.

We've traveled up the spiritual parabola, the sacred arc represented by Jacob's Ladder, as far as we know it to go. Are there more steps to climb?

The masters seem to suggest there are. They continually hint at greater states of realization than the ones they're discussing. For instance, Sri Ramana no sooner delineates sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi than he hints at a further level he calls "nirvana." (1)

Sri Ramakrishna often repeated the story of the woodcutter, whose moral was the constant injunction to "Go forward!" (2) "Beyond the forest of sandal-wood ... are many more valuable things: silver-mines, gold-mines, diamonds, and other gems." (3)

His disciple, Swami Brahmananda, also exhorted us: "When through japam [recitation of the names of God] and meditation a little awakening comes, do not imagine you have achieved the end. Light! More Light! Onward! Onward! Attain God! Gain his vision! Talk to him!" (4) "There are so many divine experiences. How can I tell you of them all? ... There is no limit to them." (5)

They don't sound as if they're referring to one more stage of enlightenment beyond vijnana. They sound as if they're urging us to adopt an attitude that never regards its own state of realization as the end of the possibilities of enlightenment.

There's virtually no end to spiritual evolution

To help us break free from the attitude that Brahmajnana, or even vijnana, is the end of enlightenment, let's listen to Dr. Franklin Merrell-Wolff describe three stages of enlightenment past Brahmajnana.

The High Satisfaction

"I first became aware of being enveloped in an extraordinary State of Consciousness when I found myself seemingly surrounded by, and interpenetrated through and through with, a quality for which there is no adequate word but which is most nearly represented by calling it 'Satisfaction.' ... I do not mean merely an abstraction, such as a state of being satisfied, but, rather, a substantial Actuality. ... He who is enveloped in this [High] Satisfaction is in need of nothing whatsoever to satisfy him. The Satisfaction I realized is a real and substantial Existence prior to all experiencing. ... It was the essence of aesthetic, emotional, moral, and intellectual satisfaction at the same time. There was nothing more required, so far as desire for myself was concerned, for at that time I had the full value of everything that could possibly be desired. It might be called the culminating point, the highest to which desire, individually centred, could reach." (6)

The High Indifference

"As time went on there was a gradual dimming, or fusing, or being enveloped, on the part of the [High] Satisfaction, by another and considerably more profound State. The only expression that reasonably well represents this higher State is the term 'High Indifference.' Along

with this was a sense of simply tremendous Authority ... of such stupendous Majesty as to reduce the power of all Caesars relatively to the level of insects. ... The Caesars ... do not know the Powers lying beyond the utmost sweep of individual desire. But there is such a region of Authority, supreme over all below, and this is the High Indifference.

"In this State I was not enveloped with satisfaction, but there was no feeling, in connection with that fact, of something having been lost. Literally, I now had no need of Satisfaction. This state or quality rested, as it were, below Me, and I could have invoked it if I had so chosen. But the important point is that on the level of the High Indifference there is no need of comfort or of Bliss, in the sense of an active Joy or Happiness. If one were to predicate Bliss in connection with the High Indifference, it would be correct only in the sense that there was an absence of misery or pain. But relative to this State even pleasurable enjoyment is misery. I am well aware that in this we have a State of Consciousness which falls quite outside the range of ordinary human imagination. ... now, deep within me, I feel that I am centered in a Level from which I look down upon all objects of all possible human desire, even the most lofty. It is a strange, almost a weird, Consciousness when viewed from the perspective of relative levels. Yet, on its own Level, It is the one State that is really complete or adequate. What there may be still Beyond, I do not Know, but this State I do know consumes all others of which I have had any glimpse whatsoever. ...

"The High Indifference is to be taken in the sense of an utter Fullness that is even more than a bare Infinity." (7)

The Void

"And what I'll say now goes beyond the literature. Whether this is the door open to all who take this step, whether this of which I am about to speak is the door open to all, I know that it came to me and there walked into my consciousness THAT which transcended the nirvanic as the nirvanic transcended the sangsaric [sic]. Its quality was totally different. Not one of this delight, but a Principle of Equilibrium that united all pairs of opposites including Samsara and Nirvana. In some ways a kind of neutral Consciousness that knew that it could enter the nirvanic state and leave it at will, enter the sangsaric state and leave it at will. Nowhere in literature did I find any reference to anything of this sort. And then, at its peak, the

sense of I vanished and the object of consciousness, which now had appeared as the Robe of the Divine, also vanished, and only Consciousness remained. Not the consciousness of some entity, but Consciousness Self-existent, and the Source of all selves and all worlds. This is Enlightenment. This is the KEY to the Buddhist scriptures, the Doctrine of the Voidness, and so forth." (8)

Discussions like Dr. Wolff's make it quickly clear that there are probably many stages of spiritual evolution past vijnana.

In fact it becomes apparent that the future of the human soul "is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit." (10) "The Divine Life is endless; the being of God is infinite," Mother Meera's companion, Adilakshmi, tells us. (11)

"Whatever experience you have had, however extraordinary, remember that there are further and greater experiences." (12) Says the Koran: "I swear by the glow of sunset; by the night, and all that it brings together; by the moon, in her full perfection: that you shall march onwards from state to state." (13)

It's a tremendous privilege for us to have access to the sages' words on subjects such as these. This lore that we can freely draw on today would once have been considered the mystery of mysteries, the holy of holies centuries ago. Human society must surely have evolved in this time for these secret doctrines to be available to us in our bookstores and libraries. I certainly share it with you with the greatest reverence.

Here's the Master Hilarion, the ascended teacher who speaks through Mabel Collins. That teacher is a member of the Great White Brotherhood, of exalted vision: "Inquire of the inmost, the One, of its final secret, which it holds for you through the ages. ... When the time of learning ... is reached, man is on the threshold of becoming more than man." (14)

More than man? Are there more levels of phenomenal reality above the human? Does Jacob's Ladder continue above the human? Hilarion says it does.

"When after ages of struggle and many victories the final battle is won, the final secret demanded, then you are prepared for a further path. When the final secret of this great lesson is told, in it is opened the mystery of the new way — a path which leads out of all human experience, and which is utterly beyond human perception or imagination." (15)

Again, even on these subjects, which are to me majestic revelations, the masters share freely. Christian Master Beinsa Douno tells us that evolution is endless:

"We think that man is on the highest rung of the evolutionary ladder, but evolution is without end. Just as there are beings that exist below man, there are Beings that exist above man as well. These Beings evolved from the universes of the past." (16)

Pseudo-Dionysius had much to say about superior beings, which he called "the intelligent hierarchies of heaven" and "the most blessed hierarchies among the angels." (17)

Angels move freely throughout the Bible and dictate the Koran to Mohammed. Dr. Wolff may have been referring to their realm when he wrote:

"A certain Sage..., speaking of unfolded Consciousness above the level of the highest human Adepts, said: 'We attain glimpses of Consciousness so Transcendent, rising level upon level, that the senses fairly reel before the awe-inspiring Grandeur.'"

"Here, certainly, is space for evolution far beyond the highest possibility of man as man.

"Here is our future. Here is the ultimate direction of humanity's common journey. Our future lies not with exploitation, crime, and oppression. It lies not in corruption and decline. It lies in traveling through 'level upon level, [such] that the senses fairly reel before the awe-inspiring Grandeur.'" (18)

If we must travel so far that our senses stagger before the sight, then we may as well say that enlightenment is endless. It's virtually so.

Says Dr. Wolff:

"Truly, within the Infinite there are Mysteries within Mysteries, Deeps beyond Deeps, Grandeurs beyond Grandeurs. ... Mystery of Mysteries, reaching inward and outward, but ever Beyond! And from that Beyond ever there come new whisperings of other imponderable Glories. Ah! How little is this world at the beginning of the Trail, barely a point in a Space of unlimited dimensions!" (19)

"Beyond [the sage's] attainment, whatever it may be, there lie further mysteries awaiting his resolution. In other words, We find no conceivable end to evolution." (20)

Creation, which God made for our seemingly-endless enlightenment, is majestic beyond our unimaginably-small powers to conceive. How many of us take up the challenge of the masters and achieve a significant stage of enlightenment?

Footnotes

(For full details of these sources, see “Bibliography” at the the end of this book.)

(1) MG, 30.

(2) GSR, 434.

(3) Loc. cit.

(4) EC, 61.

(5) Ibid., 204.

(6) PTS, 116-7.

(7) Ibid., 118-20.

(8) Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “The Induction,” 24 January 1970. <http://www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/arInduction.htm> . Downloaded 2 January 2006.)

(9) PTS, 120.

(10) IWL, 114. Of Jacob’s ladder of consciousness, Silver Birch says:

The ladder of Jacob was not a figment of the imagination, but the symbol of an eternal reality, for up that ladder every soul can climb, rung by rung. From earth to heaven it ranges, supported always by the power of the Great Spirit. (SBT, n.p.)

It's wonderful to reflect that there will always be more to achieve. There is no nirvana, no stage of bliss when you have come to the end of your spiritual journey. (Silver Birch, LSB, 48.)

(11) Adilakshmi, companion to Mother Meera and her biographer, MOTH, 89.

(12) Loc. cit.

(13) Koran, 48.

(14) LOP, 29-30.

(15) Ibid., 11-2.

(16) "Culture of the Angels," WOG, n.p.

(17) "The Celestial Hierarchy" in CWPD, 145-6.

(18) PTS, 17.

(19) Ibid., 115.

(20) Ibid., 43.

Ch. 12 Few Desire It; Few Attain It



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Few seek it

The considerations of this chapter will bring us to the end of our story. The masters will offer us sobering words on how many people actually yearn so strongly for nothing else but God that they attract the divine gift of enlightenment to themselves.

How many care to seek for Him? Sri Krishna says: "One man, perhaps, in many thousands." (1) Swami Brahmananda is even more conservative. He estimates that "only one in a million sincerely longs for God." (2)

Sri Ramakrishna could see into people as Jesus could. He explained to his devotees: "Yes, I can see inside [a man] through his eyes, as one see the objects in a room through the glass door." (3)

As the carriage he was being driven in passed through the streets of Calcutta, he read people's thoughts and saw very few who were thinking of higher things.

"The other day I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to '[lust] and gold.' I saw only one or two with their attention fixed on higher things, with their minds turned to God." (4)

If we take mental stock of ourselves, we might find that, for the majority of us, spiritual life has not yet even begun. Sri Krishna may be describing us:

"Fools pass blindly by the place of my dwelling
Here in the human form, and of my majesty
They know nothing at all,
Who am the Lord, their soul." (5)

Absorbed in our cloud of worldly thoughts, our attention drawn endlessly outwards, we pass by His dwelling place in the heart again and again. We constitute the majority of the million, who never long for God.

Few attain it

And even of those who sincerely yearn for God, how many attain Him? "Not many," says Blessed Henry Suso. (6) Of the one in a million that care to seek God, Swami Brahmananda observes, "few sustain that longing." (7) Of the few who long for Him, Sri Krishna explains, "perhaps one only" attains him in God-Realization. (8)

Jesus knew how rare enlightenment was among people. He warned his disciples:

"Many are called, but few are chosen." (9)

"I shall choose you, one from a thousand, and two from ten thousand." (10)

"Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (11)

Turning from the world and desiring only God is the strait and narrow way. The Upanishads compared it to "the sharp edge of a razor." "Narrow [the path] is, and difficult to tread." (12)

The irrepressible Sri Ramakrishna told his devotees: "Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best but one or two break free; and Thou dost laugh and clap Thy hands, O Mother, watching them!" (13)

Among the chosen few, Sri Ramakrishna says, there are far fewer householders than renunciates.

"A few [householders] succeed in [spiritual life] through the grace of God and as a result of their spiritual practice. But most people fail. Entering the world, they become more and more involved in it; they drown in worldliness and suffer the agonies of death. A few only ... have succeeded, through the power of their austerity. ... Therefore spiritual practice is extremely necessary." (14)

Let's understand the sages. Few desire God; few of those sustain that desire; and few of them are householders.

Householder Sadhana

But most us reading this book are householders.

Let's leave the sages' teachings now. Let's come back to our daily situation and see again the situation we face.

Though we live in a society which seems under stress in so many ways, yet householders cannot escape the need to do the same basic spiritual work as renunciates: turning from the world to God and placing nothing else before the realization of Him.

Householder teachers are doing their utmost to found a literature which takes into account the increasing globalization and urbanization of our world. They're helping us to practice spiritual disciplines while leading an engaged life.

For our part, we can't postpone our spiritual search to wait for better conditions. This is our life. This is what we were given. The conditions we face now are the conditions we're expected to master. Before we win God's grace, we're to turn from the world to God in whatever circumstances we're in. How could it be otherwise?

Franklin Merrell-Wolff says that only the attainment of the wisdom of enlightenment is powerful enough to allow the individual to tackle, with any hope of success, the problems that plague world society:

"It remains true to my present state of consciousness that I would say that no accomplishment, in the world field, can be effective in solving the wrongness which is so evident..., without the insight and resources which are derived from Fundamental Realization. if we are to resolve in any durable way these difficulties It is necessary that more and more of this human whole should attain the perspective and the resources that come from Enlightenment." (15)

"... that which is needed is a seeking for the ultimate Attainment on the part of as many people as possible." (16)

"In [this that I had realized] lay the one effective key for the solving of [humanity's] problems. The little tragedies of men left me indifferent. I saw one great Tragedy, the cause of all the rest, the failure of man to realize his own Divinity. I saw but one solution, the Realization of this Divinity." (17)

Every one of us must travel the spiritual parabola of Jacob's Ladder and every one of us will be at a different place on it than anyone else. It's not a sign of imperfection that we're further back on the arc than some others may be. God released some of us earlier and some later. Where we are is exactly where we're intended to be - now.

But that doesn't change what Dr. Wolff is saying that, if we wish to alter the conditions of planetary life so that enlightenment can come within the reach of all, the answer is for all of us to reach out for Higher Consciousness, to achieve more and more illumination, which will provide us with the answers and the resources to improve the lot of the world. Without that, I fear that we'll perpetuate unworkability and stumble in darkness.

I believe that some, if not many, traditional paths will prove unworkable for householders like us. Somehow we'll arrive at approaches that allow us to practice in the midst of busy lives. Every day I see more spiritual teachers tackling the subject of how an increasingly urbanized (and now automated and globalized) world can solve the prime task before it: how to realize God.

Summary

We began by describing a period of relative moral decline in the world and saw that it was time to refresh ourselves on exactly why life was created and what role God designed us to play.

We learned that God has a Plan for life, called “spiritual evolution.” By its dictates, we go out from Him as points of consciousness, into the world, and back again, descending and climbing back up Jacob’s Ladder of consciousness, returning to Him illumined.

We heard the masters say that our journey takes us, through lifetime after lifetime, to enlightenments beyond human imagining, until we reach our final destination – complete submergence in God, in a realm beyond the human.

We heard enlightenment described as God meeting God – “O thou I!” In the twinkling of an eye, we immediately and directly experience a sacred something beyond this material dimension. We examined how God made life so that He could meet Himself (Herself, Itself) in that moment of illumination.

We saw that all are destined for enlightenment – some in the morning, some in the afternoon, and some in the evening.

We saw how all genuine paths, followed to their end, eventually lead to God. We discussed some actual levels of enlightenment and the evidence that spiritual evolution continues long after any known level. We hypothesized that, as a process, enlightenment is virtually endless.

We examined the longing for liberation that keeps us moving towards God. We heard that seeing God would require us to turn from the world to Him, from the outer to the inner, and reach a point, however briefly, of loving Him with all our hearts, minds, and souls, to the exclusion of all competing desires.

We saw that few long for God that much; fewer sustain that longing to the end; few succeed in knowing Him; and few among those are householders.

As difficult as our situation is in this modern world, will this be the moment that we let in the importance of wanting nothing else but God or will this be another lost opportunity?

If we wish to free ourselves individually from oppression and misery, then each of us must take up the task that God has set for us. If we as a world wish to free ourselves from the conditions described in the introduction, then the answers must be sought and must come from what Dr. Wolff called “the perspective and the resources that come from Enlightenment.” (18)

We can be, we can know the God that we are. All of us will one day. But we must love Him with all our hearts, Him and nothing else, unconditionally. We must know Him in a perfect moment of now – in the blink of an eye, in an instant. That enlightenment will bring the exit from our dilemma of personal misery and global decline.

If we make the turn in the road from the world to God, from the outer to the inner, we've set our feet on a path that leads to unfathomable spiritual riches.

May we all be blessed with those riches. May all our eyes behold Him. May we know Him as our Self and as everything that is. May He free us from our burden so that we can deeply and lastingly receive His vijnana, the permanent and irrevocable experience of Him.

Footnotes

For full details on these sources, see “Bibliography” at the end of this book.)

(1) BG, 70.

(2) EC, 194.

(3) GSR, 95.

(4) Ibid., 281.

(5) BG, 81.

(6) HS, 130.

(7) EC, 194.

(8) BG, 70.

(9) STJ, 24.

(10) Matthew 22:14

(11) Matthew 7:14.

(12) UPAN, 20. "There is only one Straight Path, that of Righteousness; all others are false paths." GZ, 90.

(13) GSR, 818.

(14) Ibid., 154.

(15) PTS, xi.

(16) Ibid., xii.

(17) Ibid., 5. Consider Sri Ramana Maharshi as well: "No question can be solved without Self-knowledge. On the realisation of the Self everything becomes clear and all problems are resolved." (GR, 35.)

(18) Ibid., xi.

Ch. 13 Epilogue



The small golden star, having lost its brilliance in the density of matter (mater, Mother), sees the Father in the distance.

Last revised: 13 Aug. 2011

When time stood still

What inspired this book? What motivates me as its author?

The energy I have for the subject arises from an event that happened on 13 February 1987, a vision. Rather improbably, it happened while I was driving my car.

I'll try to describe it in as much detail as I can for interest's sake. You may recognize it as a variation on the spiritual parabola or Jacob's ladder of consciousness.

The previous weekend I had been at a rebirthing workshop and had had a full breath release, an event which left me feeling incredibly clean and clear.

Moreover, I was at the time studying for my doctorate in sociology and had been counselling people on a volunteer basis. This experience as a counsellor contributed directly to what happened next.

At first, like so many counsellors, I used “problem-solving therapy,” but soon became weary of trying to “sell” solutions to people who weren't inclined to buy. They seemed to want to tell their stories no matter what and rebuffed any attempt I made to offer a solution until they had had their say so I started listening.

I found that people presented me with a puzzle and, when I listened and they talked about it long and deeply enough, they suddenly had an “Aha!” The puzzle turned into a picture which caused their upset to disappear. (Of course I'm simplifying a more complicated process.)

In all sincerity that day, I said to the universe in general, “If our early lives are a puzzle which turns into a picture, is it possible that life itself is a puzzle? And, if so, what might the picture be that life is?”

I'd turned the corner in my car and was travelling through a part of the city I knew well. Having asked my question, everything suddenly turned black. I forgot about my car and found myself staring at a wordless tableaux, a spiritual movie, if you will. All of it was relational, a cause-and-effect story in pictures. I was watching God's wordless way of speaking to me.

At the same time as I watched this spiritual tableau — and this is very important — I was filled with bliss. The experience of bliss resulted in greatly-increased comprehension. It somehow made it easier for me to take things in so that, what I could not wrap my thoughts around in everyday consciousness, I now knew and understood quite simply, intuitively, and directly. (1)

I knew intuitively the identity of the actors in the film and the nature of the drama that was unfolding before my eyes. Words just arose in my mind to explain what I saw.

There was before me a large Golden Sun, which I knew intuitively to be “God the Father” (Brahman, the irreducible Essence, the Tao).

From it emerged a small golden star, which I tknew to be “God the Child” (the Atman, the Buddha-nature, the Christ, the Pearl of great price). This small golden star streaked out into the blackness of space and disappeared.

I noticed that I had the capacity to follow the golden star wherever it went. I simply wondered where it had gone and I was there, looking at that corner of “space.”

In the corner where the golden star had gone, there was a kind of hazy cloud. I knew that cloud to be God the Holy Spirit, which I'd now call “God the Mother” (Shakti, the Word, Aum/Amen, the Word of God, the creative universal vibration).

Within the haze, I saw a spiraling tube and recognized the Star-Child, moving through it. Now it had lost its brilliance and I could only see its perfectly-circular outline, as it wended its way through what I knew intuitively to be “lifetimes in matter.”

I watched it for a time and then, suddenly, the Star-Child flashed back into brilliance and I knew that to be an experience of enlightenment.

As soon as its luminescence returned, it left the tube and raced back to the Golden Sun in which it submerged itself. I knew this to be another, more senior experience of enlightenment.

The Star-Child having disappeared, I pondered what I had seen and the words formed in my mind: “Enlightenment is the purpose of life.” This understanding summarized my experience.

As soon as I had reached this conclusion, the vision disappeared and I was back behind the wheel of a car.

Knowing that part of the city well, I looked to the right and the left of me to see how far I had moved in the roughly eight seconds I had been somewhere else. I had not moved an inch. I concluded that the whole event had taken place outside of time.

The experience was not enlightenment. It was a teaching about enlightenment. I had been given a glimpse of God’s great Plan for life, a representation of the total journey of an individual soul.

It went out from God, on a spiritual parabola, all the while spiraling forward, through the universe of matter, and back again to God once it had achieved a supreme level of mergence or enlightenment.

“It all works out in the final reel!”

I came to a red light and looked over at the worried expression on the face of the driver in the next car. I wanted to roll down my window and shout: “It all works out in the final reel!”

For the next three days, I remained in bliss. I saw that all of nature praises God and reveals His Plan. Trees raise their leafy branches to the sky as if in adoration. Their leaves drop off, as our bodies do, but the trees don't die.

The birds flying through the air leave no trace; nor do souls journeying through life. The way the sand and sea mix and yet return to their basic natures reminded me of the relationship between the soul and the body. Everything natural was a metaphor of the Divine or one of Its created processes.

Thereafter my doctoral studies seemed insipid. I tried to enroll my professors in allowing me to study enlightenment for my dissertation but no one at the university, including the religious studies department, would hear of it. Religious studies said that the university regulations prevented them from studying such a subject. I was amazed.

Empirical materialism was the dominant paradigm at my university in those days. Only what could be known through the senses was considered real. None of what I'd seen was known through the senses; hence none of what I'd seen was, to the university, real.

I felt confined by the academic paradigm, was glad to leave it, and have never looked back. Moreover, I've never allowed my research, since that day, to be subject to academic scrutiny to preserve my freedom to wander where I will.

I remained entranced by the vision. I had to find words to express its wordless message. One by one, as I read the classics, statements appeared that explained what I had seen. Jesus saying that he came out from the Father out into the world and now returns to the Father was an exact description. Jacob's Ladder was a depiction of it. Here it was discussed in Ibn Arabi; there in Krishnamurti.

I spent almost twenty years trying to put that eight-second movie into words and, in fact, this book is the latest attempt. And now it's done.

May your efforts to achieve the purpose of life and consummate God's Plan for you be blessed with success. May you be filled with divine joy and love. May all God's children be enlightened, fulfilled, and reunited with God.

Namaste,

Steve Beckow

Footnotes

(1) I say that I didn't consider this an enlightenment experience. But I've since changed my mind. I could not be bathed in bliss to that extent without being in an experience of enlightenment. Exactly what level of enlightenment it would be remains unknown to me.

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Last Revised: 8 May 2009

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