

Glimpses of God and Reality

How To Integrate
Psychedelic Experiences
of Sacredness

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*How To Integrate Psychedelic
Experiences of Sacredness*



Inner Peace Fellowship

Inner Peace Fellowship works to increase inner peace, to educate about non-divisive beliefs, and to build fellowship based on the universal concerns of all humanity. Millions of people in 236 countries and jurisdictions have used this book.

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The content of this book is the same as
the content of our book *Inner Peace Fellowship*
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Preface

Glimpses of God and Reality (Glimpses) is about how to integrate psychedelic experiences of sacredness. *Glimpses* was put together by Inner Peace Fellowship (IPF). IPF is a group that took psychedelics in the 1960s and since then has been integrating those experiences into our everyday life. We studied eastern religions and listened to holy men and women. Some of us lived with saints while others spent considerable time alone in high, remote mountains. We met in the 1970s when we came together to form a community of several thousand to explore reality through meditation. Many of us have been practicing nondirective mantra meditation now for over 40 years. Some of us have had careers and raised families while meditating two to four hours every day while others have lived in seclusion and meditate 6 hours every day. We are friends and neighbors who have been sharing one another's successes and mistakes for a lifetime, and our community continues to experiment, to learn and to thrive. This book is about what we learned and the mistakes we made.

Glimpses of God and Reality is about how to increase inner peace, goodness and sacredness. It is about how to have a direct, personal relationship with whatever created life through your experience; not through beliefs, middlemen or organizations. Millions of people in 236 countries and jurisdictions have used this book.

We are made from the dust of stars that exploded long ago. Somehow that stardust came alive 3.8 billion years ago and no one knows what made that happen. The view in *Glimpses* is that whatever created life cannot be known through words, ideas or beliefs, but rather that whatever created life is known through your experience. Further, the view in *Glimpses* is that our experience of being alive is the direct experience of our Creator. And finally, the view in *Glimpses* is that insisting your beliefs about our Creator are the truth – insisting that your beliefs somehow actually own our Creator – is idolatry that is tearing our world apart.

Glimpses describes our relationship with our Creator in terms of science. In terms of science, the story of how Earth was created and how life arose on Earth is much more astonishing and awe inspiring than any story told by religions. *Glimpses* was inspired by the work of Richard Feynman, David Christian and Edward O. Wilson who said: “*Altogether, the results of the neuroscience of religion thus far suggest strongly that a religious instinct does indeed exist ... [but] ... surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement.*” *Glimpses* expands on Wilson's view that humans came to dominate Earth through cooperation and goodness. *Glimpses* describes how to connect with your instincts for cooperation and goodness, and then use those instincts to create balance in your life and in your society.

Glimpses is about gaining self-knowledge and remaining empowered. Self-knowledge comes from the fact that you know better than anyone what increases or decreases your inner peace, what is good and what is bad, and what brings you closer to sacredness; that you know better than anyone what works best for you.

You gain self-knowledge by learning to trust yourself, your experiences and your instincts. And the self-knowledge gained is what then enables you to retain your power and not become disempowered by others.

Glimpses provides instructions for a 3,000 year old Vedic meditation technique from India based on original Sanskrit mantras from that time. This meditation has now been used and refined by yogis for thousands of years and is easy to learn. *Glimpses* provides a simple meditation practice for beginners that can be expanded into deeper and deeper practice over time. Through regular meditation you become more familiar with the silence and stillness inside of you, which in turn can increase your sense of well-being and make you more present. Some call those effects from meditation enlightenment, moksha, liberation, self-realization, awakening or nonduality.

Glimpses is about overcoming the fear of death. Throughout history we have managed our fear of death with religious beliefs. However, promising research with terminal cancer patients at Johns Hopkins University has found that psychedelic experiences can greatly diminish and even overcome the fear of death. In our view, psychedelics, when administered by qualified medical professionals, have the ability to expand inner peace and well-being, and the potential to end holy war. However we also agree with Roland Griffiths, who led the above research at Johns Hopkins and who also studied the affects of psychedelics on long-term meditators, when he said: “I would add – emphatically actually – that although these experiences [with psychedelics] were valued, none of our [long-term meditator] volunteers would claim that [psychedelics are] a substitute for meditation because meditation results in much greater day-to-day, moment-to-moment stability of awareness.”¹ We agree. While psychedelics gave us valuable insights, psychedelics did not offer the stable path through life that meditation has given us.

What readers have said about the work of Inner Peace Fellowship:

“Am 23 years, and am from Kenya. I have loved your mind relaxing technique. It has changed by mind completely. Inner Peace Fellowship is My Hero.” Eric

“Thank you for your wonderful book and instructions. The absence of models to explain the unexplainable really resonates with me. I feel I have been looking for something like this for a long time.” Julie

“The ideas in this book have transformed my life. Letting go of certainty is such an amazing experience, especially for intellectuals trapped in their minds. I could never thank you enough for writing this book.” Robert

“Reading the Quiz questions opened my heart and my mind to a deeper level than I could have even imagined.” Catskills

“I have been meditating for many years having done intensive Vipassana and Mindfulness meditation yet felt that I had not found the right technique for me. This gentle mantra meditation works quite well. Thanx.” Lecia

“I have been meditating for a very long time (I am 75 years old), but have always ended up trying or trying not to try! Your meditation instructions have relieved me of this tendency and I really find this meditation very relaxing and easy to do.” Julie

Glimpses of God and Reality

*How To Integrate Psychedelic
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Part 1 – Why We Have Sacred Experiences With Psychedelics ²

(tap or click title to scroll)

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Summary

Hi, my name is Steve. I will be your host for this podcast.

The podcast is about psychedelic experiences that were profoundly sacred. We will be looking at how to successfully integrate those types of experiences into everyday life, and our goal is to make everyday life as fulfilling and as balanced as possible.

We will be looking at the current scientific research about why we have sacred experiences with psychedelics. These researchers are quick to say that their findings today are still “primitive” and that their research is still “in its early days”. Nevertheless their findings are already providing useful insights into what is happening in psychedelic experiences of sacredness. These researchers have been studying how our brains filter information, and at how sacred experiences happen when psychedelics disrupt that filtering.

We will also be looking at the experiences of many people who have been integrating psychedelic experiences now for many decades. And we will try to learn from their experience how to recognize those same sacred experiences in everyday life.

And finally, we will be looking at how having a spiritual experience does not in itself make you a spiritual person. We will be looking at how becoming a spiritual person is about continually “doing your work” and what you end up doing with your life, not about some inner experience you should be having, or what you think you might know.

The purpose of this podcast is to provide information for people who have taken psychedelics and who are now trying to integrate those experiences. However psychedelics are illegal, and this podcast does not promote their use. Further, psychedelics are very powerful substances that can harm you if used without the guidance of a trained professional.

Introduction 2:34

People have many different types of experiences with psychedelics. In this podcast we will not be looking at all those experiences, but rather we will focus on experiences that felt profoundly sacred, and how to integrate those types of experiences into everyday life.

Since 2000, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have been studying the effects of psilocybin. In those studies, study participants were given psilocybin and then guided through their session by a trained therapist. Afterwards participants were given a questionnaire about what they had experienced. ³

The majority of people in those studies said that they had had profoundly sacred experiences. How people chose to describe their experiences however varied:

- some said that they felt free from the limitations of their personal self, or that their personal self dissolved
- some said that they felt a unity or oneness with everything, or with something that felt greater than their personal self
- others became more aware of a living presence in all things
- some saw the world as being absolutely perfect
- and some said that the experience of freedom from their personal self allowed them to see that ultimate reality is eternal or infinite, and that ultimate reality is beyond time and space
- and some said that they experienced a sense of fundamental well-being, or a complete acceptance of themselves.

After their psilocybin session at Johns Hopkins, many study participants said that their experience simply could not be adequately described with words. Most said that words cannot do justice to what they experienced, and that communicating their experiences in words to others is difficult if not impossible.

And after their session, many remained convinced that what they saw was the ultimate reality of everything. And they remained convinced that they had gained knowledge at an intuitive level that was absolutely true.

Remember these last two points because they are central to integrating psychedelic experiences of sacredness:

- First, that profound sacredness cannot be described, contained or conveyed with words;
- And second, that profound sacredness appeared to be absolutely true at an intuitive level.

Yet psychedelic journeys always end and their profoundly sacred experiences fade. And you find yourself back in the everyday world, which can feel much less sacred and much less true.

In this podcast we will be looking at how the sacredness experienced with psychedelics and the sacredness of everyday life are the same sacredness being experienced at different levels of intensity.

Inner Peace Fellowship 5:47

This podcast was put together by Inner Peace Fellowship. Our group has been exploring how to integrate psychedelic experiences since the 1960s. This podcast is based in part on what we have learned and the mistakes we have made.

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After taking psychedelics in the 1960s, most of our group studied with eastern holy men and women. Some of us lived with saints from the east. Others chose to live alone in the silence and stillness of high, remote mountains.

Our group met in the 1970s when we came together to form a community of several thousand to explore inner peace through meditation. Today most of us have been practicing meditation now for over 40 years. Some of us had careers and raised families while meditating two to four hours every day. Others have lived in seclusion and still meditate for 6 hours every day.

We are friends and neighbors who have been sharing one another's successes and mistakes for a lifetime, and our community continues to explore, to learn and to grow.

~~~~~

Our philosophy is about how to gain self-knowledge while remaining empowered.

Self-knowledge comes from the fact that you know better than anyone what increases or decreases your inner peace; that you know better than anyone what brings you closer to what is sacred; and that you know better than anyone what is actually working in your life.

To gain self-knowledge you must learn to trust yourself, to trust your experiences and to trust your instincts and intuition. And the self-knowledge you gain through learning to trust yourself is what then enables you to retain your power and not become disempowered and controlled by others.

Our experience has been that sacredness, inner peace, and goodness increase as you become more aware of what is obvious; not through searching for anything that is lost or hidden. The actual story of life on Earth is so astonishing that sacredness increases as you become more aware of how life has evolved. Inner peace increases through training yourself to have more silence and stillness. And goodness increases through following your instincts about how to get along with others.

Life's Intelligence 8:30

Psychedelics allow us to look deep inside our self at things we cannot usually see. To understand what is happening with that, it is helpful to understand how the intelligence of life works both within ourself and in every living thing.

Life on Earth came into existence about 4 billion years ago. That first form of life was a single cell, and all life on Earth today – ourselves included – was reproduced from that first single cell form of life.



These are your oldest living great grandparents. They are lichen called cyanobacteria growing here on dead clumps of itself called Stromatolites. Cyanobacteria first came into existence around 3.5 billion years ago and they are the second oldest life form to have ever lived on Earth. Mistakes made as the DNA of cyanobacteria reproduced itself is what produced most of life on Earth today.

That first single cell form of life contained DNA. DNA is in all living things and it contains the instructions for how life develops, functions, grows and reproduces itself. DNA has been reproducing itself over and over and over for almost 4 billion years. As you listen to this podcast, your DNA is busy reproducing and rebuilding every part of your body. You are able to relax and listen to this podcast because what is causing your heart to beat and your DNA to reproduce itself is happening automatically without you doing anything.

And the astonishing thing is that DNA learns. The way DNA learns is that sometimes mistakes happen when DNA reproduces itself. When those mistakes happen the result is that the DNA that gets reproduced is different. Those different DNA then competed with their family members for survival, and if the different DNA wins that struggle, then **they** become a new form of life. That is how DNA learns – through mistakes, and trial and error. And it was through such mistakes and trial and error that all life on Earth arose from that first single cell form of life 4 billion years ago.

In this podcast, those instructions of life contained in DNA will be called the intelligence of life, and sometimes the intelligence of nature or simply human nature. That intelligence of life comes hardwired in every living thing on Earth including you and me, and it provides the instructions – the actual coding – for how life develops, functions, grows and reproduces.

Life's Intelligence Has Many Forms 11:06

There are about 8 million different species of life on Earth today. The intelligence in the DNA of each of those species has developed differently and so the intelligence in each species is somewhat different.

For example, black bears can smell food 18 miles away and eagles can see clearly about 8 times further than humans. Each year the Barred-Tailed Godwit flies nonstop from the Arctic Circle to Christchurch, New Zealand, a 7,000 mile journey over open ocean without resting. And when they start arriving, the churches there all ring their bells to welcome them home. When it is time for salmon to spawn, they swim thousands of miles through the ocean and then hundreds of miles up rivers to the one tributary where they were born and there they lay their eggs. For humans to successfully travel such distances requires sophisticated navigational equipment that provides the intelligence that comes instinctively in the DNA of birds and fish.

Bears and eagles and birds and fish, as well as many other forms of life on Earth, have forms of intelligence that humans do not have. What that tells us is that human intelligence is simply not aware of everything around us.

Humans are not aware of all the smells that a bear can smell; we are not aware of all the things that an eagle can see; and we are not aware of what is needed to navigate open ocean with our instincts only. We simply are not aware of much of the information that is around us; information that is vital to the survival of other forms of life. And the reason we are not aware of everything around us is that over millions and millions of

years, human DNA has learned to filter out much of the information around us that is not necessary for our survival.

But now imagine if suddenly you could smell everything that a bear smells, that you could see everything that an eagle sees and that you could sense every bit of information around us that the 8 million other species do sense. Imagine if suddenly you did become aware of all the other information around us that normally we are not aware of.

Your senses would be so overwhelmed by all that additional information that you could not survive.

Luckily however our DNA has learned how to filter out information around us that is not necessary for our survival. And our DNA has learned how to allow into our awareness only information that is necessary for our survival. And that is why we are not overwhelmed and why we do survive.

The filter in us that filters all that information around us and lets into our awareness only what is necessary for our survival is called our default-mode network.

The Default-mode Network of Our Brain 14:29

Our default-mode network was first identified in 2001 by researchers at Washington University.⁴ Our default-mode network is located in our brain. It manages all the information in the different parts of our brain much like the head of a large corporation coordinates and manages the entire corporation.

What researchers have found is that our default-mode network is most active when we are thinking deeply, or when we are lost in thoughts. That point is very important to integrating psychedelic experiences, so I will repeat it: our default-mode network is most active when we are thinking deeply, or when we are lost in thoughts.

Now psychedelic experiences can be quite raucous. So you might think that activity in the default-mode network would increase when on psychedelics, but that is not what happens. What happens on psychedelics is that electrical activity and blood flow in the default-mode network drop off greatly, and the default-mode network becomes quiet.

Now remember the Johns Hopkins questionnaire we looked at earlier. In that questionnaire people who had sacred experiences on psychedelics often said that their personal self had dissolved. Well, when researchers at Imperial College studied people on psychedelics, they found that the biggest drop-offs in default-mode network activity happened when people said their personal self had dissolved. Their personal self dissolved when their default-mode network became most quiet. That suggested to the researchers that our default-mode network could be the actual physical counterpart of our personal self.⁵

So what exactly is the personal self that dissolves on psychedelics? In our experience, our personal self is that character in our thoughts who talks about what could happen next or what has happened in the past.

Strangely however when our personal self dissolves on psychedelics, the experience of being alive seems more intense, not less intense. So how can that be? Our default-mode network is now quiet and less active. So why are we experiencing such increased intensity?

One researcher has suggested the answer here is that “while the boss is away the kids do play”. Researchers at Imperial College ⁶ found that when the default-mode network shuts down on psychedelics, other parts of the brain that suppress emotions, memories, wishes and fears become more active. And when the default-mode network shuts down on psychedelics, parts of our brain that do not ordinarily communicate directly with one another start talking with one another, often with bizarre results.

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So then, what about when you are not on psychedelics? Can anything quiet your default-mode network in everyday life? Can anything quiet your personal self from chattering away inside your head so much? Luckily the answer is yes.

Researchers at Yale University <sup>7</sup> found that the default-mode network becomes less active when people meditate. And in people who meditate, they also found that their default-mode network is less active during daily activity compared with people who do not meditate. This finding suggests that people who meditate are having fewer thoughts during daily activity compared with people who do not meditate. It suggests that for meditators, their personal self diminishes and the chattering character in their head chatters less, and sometimes not at all.

Our staff has meditated for over forty years on average and that finding fits with our experience. During everyday life the chatter of our personal self has diminished, and sometimes that chatter goes away completely. And while those experiences in everyday life are more subtle and less intense than on psychedelics, they are quite pleasant.

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This concludes Part 1 of our podcast. We have looked at only some of the information we offer for integrating psychedelic experiences of sacredness. We offer much more information about this in Part 2 below, and throughout this book, including free instructions for learning [how to meditate](#).

Thanks.

Part 2 – A Conversation With Michael

(19:25)

Next in our podcast is a conversation with my friend Michael. Michael and I have been neighbors since the early 1980s when we each moved to our small midwestern farm town here in the US to help start a community of several thousand meditators.

Michael started exploring psychedelics in the early 1960s. Here he talks about how the sacredness he experienced with psychedelics profoundly changed his life, and how he then integrated those experiences over many decades.

The sacredness experienced with psychedelics can be experienced in everyday life. However the sacredness experienced in everyday life is not as intense or as flashy as it is on psychedelics. Directly experiencing sacredness in everyday life has been called *enlightenment, awakening, the peace that passeth all understanding, etc.* However those terms often cause confusion, and that confusion can actually become a barrier to directly experiencing sacredness in everyday life.

Researchers at Sophia University have studied hundreds of people who are considered enlightened and awakened. Their study identified two main characteristics that those people shared: First was that they had a sense of fundamental well-being. Second was that the amount of thoughts they once had had noticeably diminished. ⁸

It seems that contentment and happiness in everyday life are pretty good measures of your connection with sacredness.

Michael 21:06

(Laughter) ... about American sports

Steve 21:12

When I did the script [for Part1 of this podcast] I really wanted to think a lot about what I was going to say. But I thought here we would just chat.

Michael 21:29

Well, if you were doing an interview to get at something, you could have a whole bunch of pointed questions that you wanted to ask. But those are usually for political interviews.

Steve 21:45

So I thought I would ask you about your early days in California. As you know, the podcast is about integrating psychedelic experiences, but its focus is on psychedelic experiences of sacredness. Because it seems like there is a whole world of experiences people have with psychedelics

Michael

Yes

Steve

and an attempt just to focus on any one of those would be a job. So the idea was to focus it on sacredness.

Michael 22:15

In the Kool Aid acid test, I think it was Tom Wolfe who wrote this wonderful book about that whole era. He pointed out there were two schools in psychedelic use. One was the Leary and Alpert School, which was meditative. You make yourself a controlled set and try to have as inward an experience as possible. And the other was Ken Kesey's idea, which was you go for the Kool Aid acid. You get on a bus and you go out and party. Right. So those were the two kinds of diametrically different philosophies of taking acid that started up in those days.

Steve

There was a

Michael

can I go ... I want to go change my glasses. I have got the wrong glasses on.

Steve

All right.

Michael

I have got the glasses I use for ...

(Pause)

Steve 23:08

So talk a little bit about that. Talk about your early days in California.

Michael 23:14

Well, I could talk about how I got into this.

Steve

Yeah.

Michael 23:20

First of all, I am a born skeptic. In fact, the earliest memory in my life is going into my parents bedroom on Christmas morning. And I am reaching up and holding on to the doorknob to stabilize myself, right. And they are sitting on their beds. And over in the window there is this Teddy Bear, sitting in the open window. This is a Southern California, it is Christmas, it is not cold.

Steve

There is no snow.

Michael

Yeah, and they saying, Santa Claus brought you this teddy bear. And I remember very clearly – this is my oldest memory that I have – saying [to myself], “That is not true. They are playing this little game. (Laughter) They want me to agree with them. Right. And if I do not, it will hurt their feelings, and so I will play along with this.” But I knew darn well there was no Santa Claus. And that this was a kind of little game, a little lie that people were telling for some reason. I didn't not really understand why.

Steve 24:30

Yeah, but they were doing it ...

Michael 24:32

So that is my earliest memory in my life. So I am kind of born a skeptic. And I got interested as a kid in science fiction and science. And so it seemed to me that scientific inquiry, the scientific method, was the best way of understanding truth. I was always interested in wanting to know what the truth was, what is real, What is the story? And so it seemed like science had the best handle on that. And these religious traditions all were just a set of beliefs that people had. You had to have faith in them. And it seem to me that that is not what I wanted to do. I wanted to have the direct knowledge. And the best way to get that was science.

Then when I went to college I started out as a physics major. And I was saying to a friend there, you know all these religious traditions are just bullshit. There is nothing to it. And he said, wait a minute. Let me give you this book. And he gave me Huxley's book *The Perennial Philosophy*. And then he said, here are a couple other books like this, read about it. So suddenly, I got introduced to this idea that there was a whole mystical tradition of direct experience that I had never heard of before. I had never been exposed to that before. And so I said, well, that is another matter because instead of just taking something on faith, these folks are claiming that they have direct, personal, real experience of this. And so I do not want to reject that as craziness because they sound pretty real to me. And then you can also find that it is just not one person but throughout the whole of human culture, there is this tradition of people having a direct experience of reality. So that was my basic idea, that I wanted to know directly what the truth was.

And so when in the early 60s, I had a friend who came by ... he was a college friend and he came by and brought me on ampule of LSD from Sandoz Laboratory. The real, genuine stuff. I do not know how he got it, but he had one. And he just left it with us, right. With Diane and I. And so I said I would like to see what happens with that. So I tried it. And suddenly I had an expanded ability for my senses. You know, my senses were much more sensitive. I could see more colors. My mind expanded my ability to think. It was not anything radical, any radical change. But that was interesting.

Michael 27:35

So I said, Well, maybe that is something that could help provide this direct experience. So I tried to find some other place to get LSD and there was not any. It was not illegal. But nobody had it. So a friend of mine, who was interested in the same kind of thing said, well, maybe we should make it ourselves. So we went into the big library in Los Angeles, the big public library in downtown. Because they have the whole US patent system records there. And we looked up the patent for making LSD, starting with lysergic acid. And so we got this patent, and we followed the instructions. So it is quite elaborate. You had to mix two chemicals in an inert atmosphere at minus 20 degrees centigrade. And hold it there for half an hour and things like that. So we figured out how to do that. And we did it. It was not an illegal drug at that time. And so we had a bunch of LSD. I had all this LSD, more than I needed for anything. (Much laughter)

So that began this little adventure with psychedelics.

And at that time, Alpert and Leary had just begun this organization called IFIF - the International Foundation for Internal Freedom, it was called. And we joined it, right. We joined up as founding members of that organization. (Laughter)

Michael 29:28

Because we thought this was a very interesting thing, because it seems like it could produce an expanded awareness of consciousness. And I thought that was that very interesting.

But as time went on, I did not, I was not ...

I was the Alpert and Leary version. I was interested in introspection. I did not want to go out and party. I thought that would be nuts to do LSD that way. I wanted to go within and have some deep introspection. So that was my style. I had some very nice experiences and went along. But it just seemed to me that it was not, you know ...

The idea when LSD first started out was, number one, why just put it in the water supply, right? And then, as I observed people who were involved in this psychedelic movement, I saw the problems: people jumping out of windows, and having bad experiences. It did not seem quite like it was working out so blissfully as one would think. The first idea of the revolution did not seem to be working out.

Michael 30:58

So then I had this one experience, which absolutely changed my entire life. I had a direct ex ... I cannot The problem with these experiences is that you cannot describe them. You can only describe them in poor metaphors. But this experience was one where my experience of myself settled down and expanded so that it became everything. The whole universe. It was the foundation of the universe. What I was internally was the foundation of the universe. And my local identity was still there. But it was like another level had opened up that I had not seen before. That was there, behind everything. And it was my own consciousness. That is not quite the ... there is no way to describe it. Consciousness is not a not a good enough word. There is no word good enough to describe it, except it had some characteristics. And the characteristics were infinite happiness, infinite bliss. More happiness than is possible to imagine, more satisfaction than is possible to imagine. And I had this direct sense that if you could open up your awareness to that anytime you wanted, or even live that way, your life would be ... you would not have any desire to harm anybody, you would not be motivated by sex, by drugs, by power, by money. That stuff would be completely trivial and unimportant because you already had the deepest level of satisfaction that the human nervous system can experience. This bliss. And a lot of traditions call it that. But bliss is not a strong enough word. There is no word for it that works. You know, that is the really difficult thing, except that you can describe some things about it. Like in Buddhism, you know, the Sanskrit root for Buddha is (bōōd), which means awake. It means awakening. And so this experience is like you have been asleep, and you have awakened. And you have woken up from some dream and you are having an experience you never had before that is so much larger. And everything you have had before was some very small vision of what life is and what the human nervous system is like, and what you can do.

Michael 34:28

The other characteristic of this is that it is so real. The idea that it could have been some hallucination or some imaginary experience is just not the case. Anybody who is ever had that experience will know that that is just not the case. That is just not a possibility. Because it is the most awake, powerful, real experience you have ever had in your life. And so there is no doubting it.

And the other thing about it is that I saw that I was everyone. You know the Golden Rule is do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Well, this is the foundation of that. You are doing unto others because they are you, right, you are them. Why would you want to harm yourself? Right. You want to help other people, and help them in the sense that the whole universe is helping everybody. The whole universe is supporting all life and everything that is happening in it. So you kind of see that.

Michael 35:49

The other question that people would say about this is, How do you know this was not just some crazy thing that happened. That this is some kind of an illusion. Well, I think it is William James or somebody the makes this point. He says the way you can tell the difference between a psychotic experience and one of these experiences of enlightenment is how it affects your life. So the enlightenment experience means that your life changes, that you start to become a person who is more like the description of the people in the scriptures who are saints. You move in that direction, immediately without having to do anything. It is not a struggle, it is

just part of your nature, it is automatic because of the experience you have had. So that happened in my life. That very next day, I went down and rented the biggest trailer I could get, backed it up to my house, and loaded it up with all the junk and all the stuff. I completely cleaned out my life and kept just the stuff that was essential and beautiful, and wonderful, and threw away all the junk and started over. So I kind of redesigned my entire life and started over. I was never able to get over that experience.

Michael 37:27

The other thing that happened in that experience is that these ideas would come to me. In the Zen tradition there is a sutras where the Zen Master says, "Everybody has a good and learned friend inside them. And you can learn from listening to that good and learned friend." So it was kind of like that. It is was like from my own deepest self, good ideas or wisdom was flowing. And one of the things that it said was, "You know, this experience that you are having is because you introduced this chemical to your nervous system. This is a very powerful thing. It has shown you what the human nervous system is capable of being. But there is no way of knowing what it is doing to the biochemistry of your body. It is experimental, it has no tradition behind it. There is no long history of it. And if you keep taking this you might be interfering with that delicate biochemistry that supports that experience. So if you want to get there and live there, you have got to find something else to do. You have to find some way to culture your nervous system to gradually make the nervous system naturally be able to produce that experience. Because one of the other things about this experience was that it was seemed absolutely normal. And natural.

Steve 39:15

What was next?

Michael 39:16

What was next was I said okay, I need to find some tradition. I said I do not want to take any more drugs. Because I could see also – one of my visions was – I could see this whole drug thing – the future of it – sort of contracting down instead of expanding up.

Steve 39:41

You had gotten the best bit.

Michael 39:43

I had gotten what I was looking for. Now I want to know how to live that. How to make that happen. How to sustain that. What is the way to get there. So it turned out I found out that there was a Rinzai Zen master who had been coming to the town I lived in. So I studied with that guy for about a year and a half. But I can say that the meditation did not do much for me. The Rinzai Zen meditation is pretty hardcore. They teach you to sit in a certain position but they give you no instruction on what to do. When asked what should we do, the Roshi says "I could tell you but later on you would hate me for it." So we did that for a while but that was not working for me. It just did not seem like I was making much progress.

So then we decided we were going to change our lives and move out of Southern California, out of the smog, and move out to the country and do something we read about called homesteading where you go and try to live closer to nature and raise your own garden and raise your own vegetables and just live a life that is more connected with nature. Because that seemed to be the one of the most helpful things to do: to be immersed in nature. So we did that and that was in 66. And then we heard that a Roshi, I mean a guru, was coming to town and we went and heard Maharishi speak and started TM and that seemed to work better. Immediately when I started doing the TM program this tension I had, which would not go away with the Zen program, just completely relaxed. So I found it a very effective technique and got involved in it and am still doing it. Been doing it ever since. I am not much of a true believer in any organization however.

Steve 42:09

We are 50 years out now from those days. And the interesting thing is that you and I have been friends for quite a while now. We are amongst a community of people that have gone a lot of different directions with this.

Michael 42:33

It is nice, this town. I like it because it is a community of saints. The people here have a deep, underlying appreciation and desire for truth. For spiritual truth and awakening.

Steve 42:50

What I find interesting in that is that there is also a multitude of expressions. So that this person whose personality is such and such has come through the last 30, 40, 50 years, and they are expressing [their spirituality] this manner. You and I can have a conversation like this for hours because we are using many of the same expressions. But nobody is expressing their "truth" the same as the next guy. We all started out using the eastern lingo, if you will. But it goes back to what you are saying that whatever that experience was that you had, if you try to describe it with words, it is confounding.

Michael 43:39

This level of reality, there is no good ... It is beyond words, and even conception. It comes before thought, right. Thought is something that arises from it, not something that can encapsulate it. So any metaphor you have about this reality is just a metaphor. And so that is a very powerful idea. Because it means that lots of different people's interpretation and thinking about, and description of the same experience can be widely different in some way, but still be about the same thing.

Steve

Yeah.

Michael 44:26

And the problem with organized religion is that people start saying, "My image of God is the real one, and yours is not. And I am going to kill you over it." I mean, that seems so completely nuts. I mean if anybody has

any idea about what G O D could possibly mean, how can they think that they could encapsulate it in an idea? I mean it is just nuts.

Steve 44:52

I hear you, but I am much more forgiving about that at this point in life than I was early on. We were living in small groups up until not very long ago. And all the same stuff was happening: you were getting sick and dying. Terrible things were happening. So you were trying to get some control over your life.

Michael

There was a lot more violence then.

Steve 45:18

There was a lot more danger.

Michael

Yeah, a lot more danger.

Steve 45:21

People died early. And it was a scary business.

Michael

And they would all war with each other for scarce resources.

Steve 45:29

Right. And so your group thinks that you are going to avoid these calamities by sacrificing something to the God that lives up on the mountain, and everybody decide you are going to do it. And that all works fine because the effect of that is – I guess it is called the placebo effect – that when you decide strongly to believe that God lives up on the mountain and you have an intention to be whatever, a good person or whatever. Those are very strong psychological forces have been well documented.

Michael

Placebos work.

Steve 46:08

Right. And so you are using this language, and all this stuff is going on. And then all of a sudden people start to ride horses and they get over to the next village. And there they are using different language [about God]. It is like, hold on! What is going on here?

Michael 46:24

What I am saying is that I think that all religious traditions can come out of the same reality.

Steve

Well, they must.

Michael 46:38

And the people who found them usually have the deepest experience of that. But as [their deep experience] becomes more codified, then people discover conflict rather than unity from it. They become less unified. They begin to use it as a way to compete with each other. So that is the loss of that reality. And I think of it as the concept of idolatry. Idolatry is not just mistaking statues for God, right? People do not try to eat pictures of food, they know better, right? It is thinking your ideas are the real thing, you start worshipping your idea. And when you elevate that to that level, then that is the true meaning of idolatry. To avoid idolatry you have to understand that what you are talking about is beyond any conception. That that level of life is beyond conception. And therefore you do not own it. Your ideas do not own it. Nobody owns it. No metaphor can own it. Nothing can own it. It is That. There is no good words for it. Nobody has come up with a good ... everyone has a different word for it like Brahman, or Atman, or Tao in Chinese.

Steve 48:19

The problem as I see it is that we became really good at making words and abstractions make our life better. So you get a piece of bronze, and you get some fire, and you bang this stuff around, and you go kill bigger animals, and pretty soon you are building Apple computers. And this thing of the concepts and ideas is brilliant for having to work less and putting food on the table. It really delivers the goods. But then you go back to this area that we are talking about, which is that you want to have that kind of primal experience of sacredness or reality that we are talking about. And some guy comes along and says, "Well, you believe these words and we are gonna get you there. Give us 10% to fix the building, but let us go."

We are programmed to think that words are going to make it work, when in fact what people were after and are still are after is the experience. So when you and I started meditating 40 or 50 years ago, we all of a sudden had an experience we had never had. It was not a bunch of words. There were some words that came along with it that tried to describe it. But the actual physical experience of having your physiology sorted out or feel better, and have some happiness and some bliss in your life. We had never experienced that. We were brought up in the Protestant traditions, and we lit the candles, and we were good boys, or at least we tried to be. But then all of a sudden these Eastern traditions delivered the goods. We are just coming out of this period of ... maybe the way to say it is: Imagine what it going to be like in 1,000 years?

Michael

Yeah.

Steve 50:20

Yeah.

Michael 50:21

Here is the interesting thing. If you have had an experience of enlightenment, you have some notion of what the human nervous system is capable of experiencing. There have been people on the planet, lots of them, there is a lot of tradition, a lot of writing about it, who have lived that experience. So it is there. My direct experience was that it was normal ...

Steve

Yeah.

Michael 50:52

... that it was the normal way to be, the natural way to be. Far more natural than the stressful vision of life that one might have without it. So the question is, it seems that to solve any problems that we might have as a species, we need to have that experience start to blossom in more people, in more human beings.

Steve 51:25

You once said that if someone asked you if you were enlightened, you would have to, in all honesty, say yes and no.

Michael 51:35

Correct. I would be lying if I said either thing.

Steve 51:40

Yeah.

Michael 51:42

I mean, I have got a long way to go to get back to that deepest experience that I have had. But it was interesting ... I went to a six month course. And during that six months course, I got back there. I would meditate all morning usually and in the afternoons. And gradually I watched my physiology just settle down. And suddenly, I could start to see my thoughts. In Buddhist scriptures, sometimes they say that thoughts are like clouds going across the sky. And my thought process had become quiet enough and my awareness had been quiet, my physiology was quiet enough, that I could see the thoughts as things out there. And between the thoughts, there was silence. And the more that happened, the same experience of expansion would appear [as appeared in my deep experience on psychedelics]. So when I would go out and walk – there was a walk and talk every day – I felt that I was the street. I was the environment. I was not just confined to my physiology. That was not as powerful as that first experience [on psychedelics]. But it was the same thing. And so I could see that that was there. One could see that all you had to do was let your physiology settle down and you would see it.

I am suggesting that meditation, some form of meditation as long as it is non directive and you are not TRYING to meditate [is a way to experience that without psychedelics]. The secret of meditation is letting go. Is just accepting. Is being completely, totally objective. Absolutely saying okay, whatever is there that is there.

I am accepting it. I am not going to try to change it. I am just going to completely and totally observe it. In my experience ...

Steve 54:29

Can I add something? Because this is the point I should add it. In the training of psychedelic therapists, that point is hammered home over and over to the therapist, which is to convey to the person having a psychedelic experience to just go with it. Do not fight it.

Michael 54:46

The thing is that what a person needs to do is accept things exactly how they are. Not how you want them to be, but how they actually are. And it seems to me that meditation is good training for that. And for just living a normal life. I am no longer trying to get enlightened. I do not think about it. I meditate because it makes me feel better physiologically, I get some deep rest, some stresses relax, that clears up my physiology some. I like [meditation] that way. But it does not matter whether I am meditating. What I am is the same whether I am meditating or on the trail or trying to fix my electric vehicle. (Laughter) I have gotten everything apart and I have dropped something down where I cannot reach it, and I have to figure out how to get it out. Those kinds of things are fun to me. And as I get older, I get more forgetful. But I think it is funny. I am not at war with myself in any way. I have kind of accepted my existence for how it is. Now I have a pretty pleasant life, and maybe that would be different if I did not.

Michael 56:17

I ended up on my 80th birthday up in the hospital having a colonoscopy with the prediction that it was going to be colon cancer and I was going to have to have my bowel resected. So that was a pretty uncomfortable kind of thing. But somehow, I do not know what it was, but it did not upset me like I think it should. I was uncomfortable. I did not like hospital bed, the sheets. I wanted to be home in my comfortable bed and stuff like that. But I was not scared about it. I said, Well maybe this is it. This body is gonna drop, right?

This body is going to disappear and when it is going to happen, or how it is going to happen, I do not know. But I know that every day my life is happier than it has ever been. And I do not know why. I do not feel I deserve it. (Laughter) I do not think I have earned it (laughter). Right? (Much laughter)

Michael 57:35

It is like that Kris Kristofferson song; "Tell me Lord. What have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I have known?" You know, that line kind of gets to me. I say, I do not deserve this. And then I think, well I should not be saying that because I am rejecting what nature has provided for me and I do not want to do that either. So then I laugh about it.

Steve 58:08

We have been phenomenally fortunate.

Michael 58:10

I am not looking to gain enlightenment anymore. I am not worrying about it, I am not trying to do it. I am just living my life as happily and fully as I can, and trying to make every decision that I make good, and life supporting, and helpful to other people as much as I can. Starting with my dear wife, who I cause the most trouble for, and help the best.

Michael 58:45

You do not want to look outside if you are looking for happiness. You want to look inside. You want to be able to accept what you are and what you have and what you have got, and whatever is going on in your life, and deal with it. Right? If you have got a problem, you have got to face it, you got to deal with it at that time. And that is the only way through. That is the only way that you will ever find happiness. You cannot escape, you cannot get out, you cannot go anywhere else. Wherever you go, there you are is the old saying.

Michael 59:21

I have started to look at problems as great opportunities for more enlightenment. To solve that problem is a great [opportunity]. How do I fix this issue? How do I make this thing work? What parts do I need? Who do I talked to? What is the solution to make this thing happen? What is the right path to take to solve this problem? Fix it yourself? Get somebody else to fix it? Because I would like to fix things myself anytime I can. I get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

Michael 1:00:00

How to get there, how to gain enlightenment? I do not know how to do that. I have practice Zen and TM and yoga and things like that, but I cannot really ... What you are finding out is what you always were, right. So it is, it is ... it is mysterious.

I really have gotten a lot out of TM. It is a way to learn how to be. What you are really doing is just finding a way to do nothing. To really do nothing. Not try to make anything different happen. Not try to have some this or that. Just accept everything. Just be. It is a way to learn how to be. And it teaches you how to do absolutely, completely, totally nothing. (Much laughter). Which is very hard to do strangely enough. (Much laughter). Because I know, because I tried for years to do it, and it was very hard. I failed at it. (Much laughter)

Steve 1:01:17

I will start now ... just close my eyes, sit there and do nothing.

Michael

Be.

Steve

Just be. Just do nothing. Just whatever is here is here.

Michael 1:01:30

“Sitting quietly doing nothing, spring comes and the green grass grows of its own.” Beautiful Zen poem. Describes it perfectly.

Steve 1:01:39

When I kind of fall into the place where I consider I want to be, and I am the most – I do not like the word deep so much – I am just completely relaxed, then there is nothing watching it. All there is is a singular experience of ...

Michael

Being.

Steve 1:02:04

Being. And it seems to be in the area of my chest, even deeper, further down in my body. And there is just that experience of that. That is it. There is nobody watching it. There is just that. There is just that being. It is that: if you try to do something to get there you are not going to get there sort of thing.

Michael 1:02:30

It basically teaches you how to take things as they come. Thy Will Be Done is the same idea. It teaches you how to be. The purpose of meditation is to teach you how to be. And I see it as the most scientific possible point of view. If you think about science as trying to be as completely accepting and objective about everything as possible without putting your own biases, you are suppose to look at things as they are.

Steve 1:03:10

The notion of finding something hidden. It is all here. There is nothing hidden. It may not be as intense as it was during my psychedelic experiences. But the wondrousness of being is ever-present. There is nothing hidden that I gotta go find. I might have to get some crap out of my nervous system so I can settle down and appreciate it more, or I may be completely motored up and doing nothing but thinking and I do not even notice anything around me that is beautiful.

Michael 1:03:52

Non-enlightenment is part of the story. Right? (Much laughter)

Steve 1:04:02

Thinking that you lost something.

Michael 1:04:04

You have a flashy, wonderful experience and then you come back to being more “normal”. Maybe you cannot quite come all the way back to the same way you were before but still that ordinary life that you have – that not-being-fully-enlightened-yet in the sense that there could be something deeper that you could go to – that is part of the story of life.

A New Beginning



We are living in the dawn of a new beginning. Traditional religious and spiritual ways are in decline and new ways are replacing them. This is happening because people want inner peace, not just promises of inner peace. People want to experience what is sacred directly, not through the words of middlemen. People want lives filled with love and fellowship, not lives filled with stress and separation. People want communities that truly have their back, not communities that let the powerful prey on them. This book provides tools for this new beginning.

How To Approach This New Beginning

This Astonishing Mystery Called Life

We are stardust that somehow came alive and no one knows how or why that happened – no one knows what created life. Yet here we are – alive on a tiny speck of dirt and water floating through endless space. For most people including us, this mystery called life is most sacred, and it fills us with awe and wonder. This book is about how to relax into this mystery and be present in it every moment.

This book is about being more aware of what is obvious, not about finding something that is hidden or lost. It is about connecting with what is sacred through your experiences, not through beliefs or faith. Our experience is that life itself is already so sacred that reverence is enough – that faith and beliefs need not even figure in unless you want them to. In short, this book is about how to replace words and thoughts about life with your direct experiences of life, and how to then evaluate and trust your experiences. It is about connecting directly with sacredness through increasing inner peace, love, fellowship, and goodness in your life.

“Altogether, the results of the neuroscience of religion thus far suggest strongly that a religious instinct does indeed exist ... [but] ... surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement.”

Edward O. Wilson;
The Meaning of Human Existence;
The Social Conquest of Earth

Another Approach

Long ago our ancestors created religions and spiritualities that promised inner peace, love, fellowship, goodness, and connection with what is most sacred. Today most people still want those promises fulfilled but many now distrust traditional religions and spiritualities because those often divide society and separate people from one another.

The view in this book is that traditional religions and spiritualities do provide ways to fulfill those promises, and some of those ways are described in this book along with new ways of fulfilling those promises developed by medicine and science in recent years. However our view is also that traditional religions and spiritualities are based on a flawed principle that undermines the fulfillment of those promises, that divides society, and that separates people from one another:

Traditional religions and a great many spiritual teachings today are based on the flawed principle that someone else knows better than you what is best for you. They require you to accept that they alone know how to connect you with what is sacred and provide you with inner peace, love, fellowship and goodness. By accepting that requirement you thereby give them your power and your authority, which disempowers you and empowers them. They can then tell you what is best for you because you gave them the power and authority to do so.

This book is based on a different principle, which is that you know better than anyone what actually works best for you; that you know better than anyone what increases or decreases your inner peace and brings you closer to what is most sacred. With this approach you do not give your power to some other authority – you retain your power and you are the authority.

With this approach you continue to learn by watching how others do things but you then decide what works best in your life. With this approach you choose friends and advisors who agree to be good listeners and provide their perspectives, and to respect you by not pushing their agendas and beliefs on you.

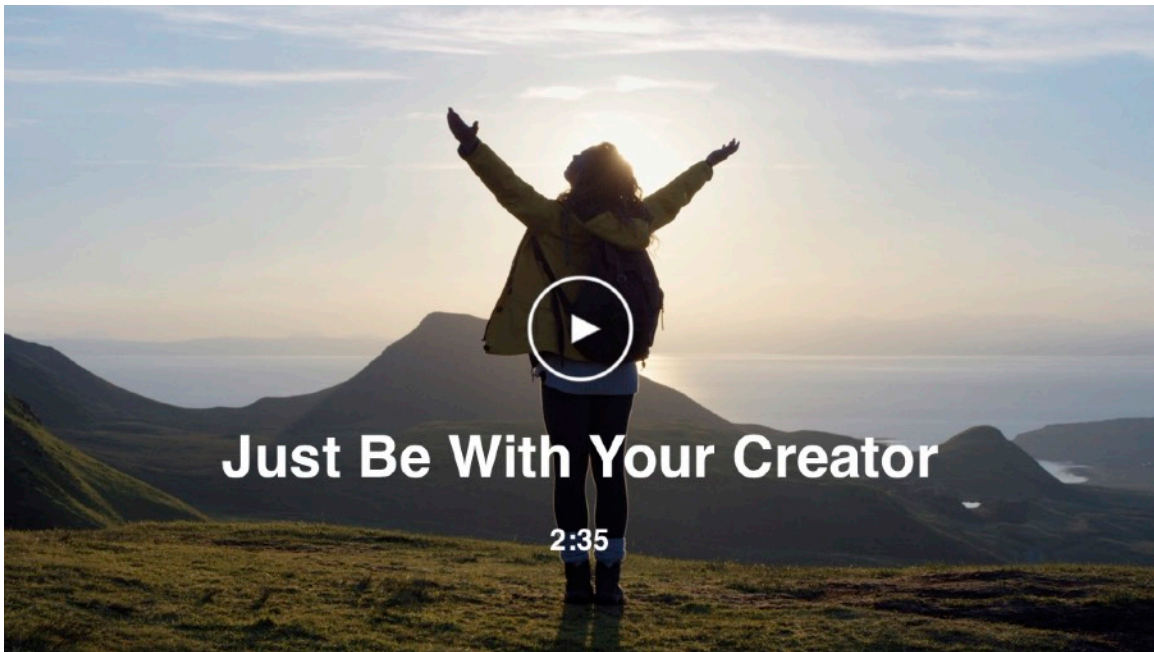
In short, this book is about learning to trust yourself and build your self-confidence. It is about learning to connect with your intuition and trust what it is telling you. It is about learning to see and think for yourself.

Through your own eyes you learned what the moon looks like: how could you learn that through the eyes of someone else? In that same way learn for yourself what expands inner peace, love, fellowship, goodness and what is most sacred in your life.

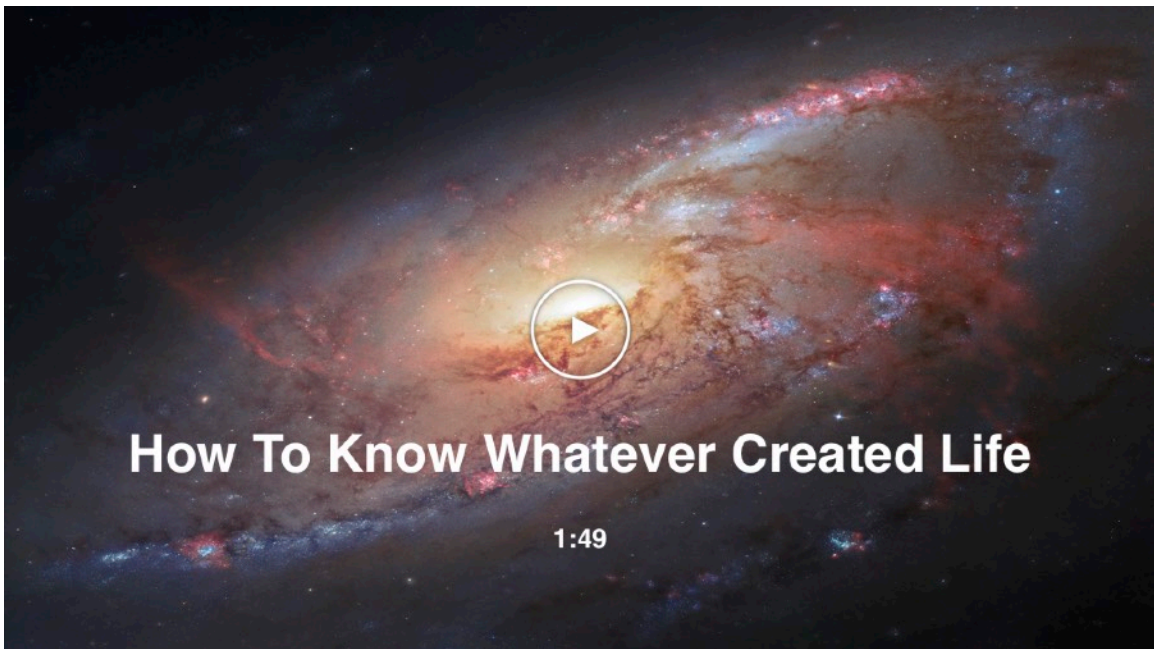
Good luck.

“Thank you for your wonderful book and instructions. The absence of models to explain the unexplainable really resonates with me. I feel I have been looking for something like this for a long time!”

Julie



Video - *Just Be With Your Creator* (2 minutes)



Video - *How To Know Whatever Created Life* (2 minutes)

Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation



*For More Inner Peace
Well-Being and Happiness
Learn How to Meditate*

Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation (IPF Meditation) comes from the Vedic tradition of India, which is over 3,000 years old. IPF Meditation uses the same Sanskrit mantras that yogis in India have been using and refining for thousands of years. Meditation is one form of Yoga. Some consider meditation to be the highest form of Yoga, and call it Royal Yoga. IPF Meditation is very easy to learn, and you can get many valuable benefits from practicing it. Millions of people in 235 countries and jurisdictions have used these meditation instructions.

Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation is nondirective mantra meditation. Nondirective meditations are based on effortlessness and acceptance of mind wandering whereas directive meditations such as Mindfulness and Vipassana are based on exerting effort to resist thoughts and to resist mind wandering. Other meditation techniques classified as nondirective are the Relaxation Response, Acem meditation and Transcendental Meditation® according to the research report “Nondirective meditation activates default mode network and areas associated with memory retrieval and emotional processing” in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*; 2014: 8:86.

Meditation Instructions

Introduction

You learn to meditate by meditating. The silence and stillness you experience in meditation and the increased happiness and diminished stress you experience outside meditation are so attractive and welcomed that you naturally teach yourself how to go deeper into that silence and stillness each time you meditate.

Your First Meditation

When you meditate you silently repeat a sound, which is called your mantra. You say your mantra silently inside yourself without moving your tongue or lips. You do not say your mantra out loud, and you do not chant your mantra.

Your mantra is on the audio below. Your mantra is not a word that has meaning. Your mantra is a sound that has no meaning. It is okay if you do not say your mantra exactly as it sounds on the audio – close enough is okay.

To begin meditating, find a place where you can sit comfortably and quietly. Then close your eyes and do nothing for a minute or so. Thoughts may come during that time, and that is okay. Then start the audio below and play your mantra** at a whisper. Each time you hear your mantra, say it quietly inside without moving your tongue or lips. After one minute the audio will fade to silence. Then, at roughly the same pace as you had been saying it, continue saying your mantra quietly inside for four more minutes. If thoughts come during that time, gently return to saying your mantra quietly inside. The audio will tell you when four minutes is over. Follow these instructions for your first meditation only. After your first meditation, follow the instructions in the Daily Practice of Meditation section below.



(If you created your own mantra from our instructions in the past, from now on use the mantra above and then expand your mantra as described below.)

Daily Practice of Meditation

Meditate 20 minutes every morning and every evening. Use your mantra in Your First Meditation above. It is best to meditate before you eat. Try to meditate in a quiet place but if you do not have a quiet place to meditate that is okay. Noise is not a barrier to meditating.

Sit quietly, close your eyes, and do nothing for a minute or so. Thoughts will come and that is okay. It is natural to have thoughts during meditation. After a minute or so, in the same natural way that thoughts come, and without moving your tongue or lips, quietly inside start saying your mantra. Slowly repeat your mantra until you are done meditating. When thoughts come, gently return to saying your mantra. When you finish meditating, lay down and rest for 4-5 minutes.

At times you may be saying your mantra unclearly, and that is okay. At times you may not be saying your mantra at all, and instead your mantra may be a sense or a feeling of your mantra, and that is okay. At times all thoughts and your mantra may disappear and you may simply be aware, and that is okay.

You may go to sleep during meditation, and that is okay. When you wake up after being asleep, meditate for a few more minutes and then lay down and rest for 4-5 minutes.

Common Mistakes

Do not TRY to meditate. Trying to meditate is the biggest mistake people make. During meditation, just do nothing. It is very important to do absolutely nothing during meditation.

The benefits of meditation come from meditating regularly. The benefits come naturally over time, and there is nothing you can do to MAKE those benefits come. So avoid looking for particular experiences or signs of progress or failure with your meditation because that will block you from getting the benefits of meditation.

Meditation can make you happier, it can make you feel more at ease and calmer, and it can help you get along better with others. You may notice those changes soon, or you may meditate for six months before you notice any changes. So just get in the habit of meditating regularly twice every day, and then be patient. Getting in the habit of meditating regularly is very important. And if you stop meditating, just start back meditating again.

Expanding Your Mantra

*(**DO NOT** expand your mantra until you have been meditating regularly for the times specified below. If you jump ahead and expand your mantra before the times specified below, or if you have not been meditating regularly twice a day, you will not get the benefits from expanding your mantra.)*

After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for **six months**, start using this mantra. Play the mantra at a whisper.



After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for **one year**, start using this mantra. Play the mantra at a whisper.



After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for **one year**, start using this instruction during meditation also:

Until now your mantra has been coming from your head, or from nowhere in particular. From now on during meditation, gently shift your attention so that the mantra comes from your chest. To help center your mantra in your chest, occasionally notice your breathing there.

After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for **eighteen months**, start using this mantra. Play the mantra at a whisper.



After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for **two years**, start using this mantra. Play the mantra at a whisper.



Advanced Meditation

Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation is probably the most effective meditation available today. We also provide Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation, which is even more powerful.

After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for 2 years, you will then be eligible to start Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation, which is described at the end of this chapter.

Side Effects and Cautions

There are side effects to meditating. Immediately after meditating you can be more vulnerable to suggestions and outside influences. So avoid making decisions or taking on things of importance immediately after meditating.

If you find that sitting quietly is difficult for you, stop meditating. Instead try walking in nature, doing yoga, or exercising to relax.

If you find that meditating is disturbing, upsetting, or disquieting for you, stop meditating and do not meditate any more.

Finally, meditation is not for solving serious emotional or psychiatric problems. So if you think you might have such problems, do not try to fix them by meditating but instead get professional help.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: “Where does Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation come from?”

Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation (IPF Meditation) comes from the Vedic tradition of India, which is over 3,000 years old. Since then meditation has been handed down freely from generation to generation. Meditation is taught as a responsibility, and for the joy of helping others without expecting anything in return.

The mantras of IPF Meditation are in the Sanskrit language that was spoken 3,000 years ago. Yogis in India have been using and refining these same mantras in meditation since then.

Vedic tradition is about expanding bliss, joy and happiness in life. It is a tradition that understands how the intelligence of nature works, and how to align life with that intelligence so that you are happy and healthy. It is a tradition that knows how to decrease stress in life.

“What are the benefits of meditating regularly?”

Scientists have studied meditation and found that meditating regularly can decrease stress, increase inner peace and improve relationships. Our experience confirms those findings. We have enjoyed those benefits and many others from meditating. Those benefits arose naturally and spontaneously in our lives the longer we meditated on a regular basis.

“What kind of meditation is IPF Meditation?”

The two main kinds of meditation are nondirective and directive. Nondirective meditation is based on effortlessness and acceptance of mind wandering. Directive meditation is based on exerting effort to resist mind wandering.

IPF Meditation is nondirective meditation.

“Which is easier to learn: nondirective or directive meditation?”

Nondirective meditation is easier to learn than directive meditation. Mindfulness meditation is directive meditation. A top researcher of mindfulness meditation said this about learning mindfulness meditation:

“When I was first learning to meditate the instruction was to simply pay attention to my breath and when my mind wandered to bring it back. Sounded simple enough. Yet I would sit on these silent [meditation] retreats sweating through T-shirts in the middle of winter. I would take naps every chance I got because it was really hard work. Actually, it was exhausting.”

Judson Brewer MD, PhD
Director of Research and Innovation
Mindfulness Center, Brown University USA
TEDMED Talk: “A Simple Way To Break A Bad Habit”

When meditation is difficult to learn, people stop meditating. Or they never learn to meditate well enough to get much benefit from it.

“Why is nondirective meditation easier to learn than directive meditation?”

Nondirective meditation is easier to learn because it takes your mind to silence and stillness more quickly and easily than directive meditation does. The reason is their techniques for meditating are quite different:

The instructions for nondirective meditation are to do nothing, to allow your thoughts to wander, and when your thoughts wander, to go back to thinking your mantra. Thoughts have meanings that engage the mind. Your mantra does not engage the mind because its sounds are meaningless. Plus, the sounds of your mantra have been refined by yogis over thousands of years to quiet the mind. By repeating your mantra, the mind is quieted more and more until your mantra becomes faint and you experience silence and stillness. Experiencing silence and stillness more and more in meditation is what then balances your life, your health and your thoughts.

The instructions for directive meditation are when thoughts come, to concentrate on something else such as your breath, chanting, or the flame of a candle. You try to force thoughts from your mind by concentrating on something else. The reason directive meditation is difficult to learn is because concentration requires effort, and silence and stillness are difficult to experience when you are exerting effort.

“What meditation technique works best? What does science say about this?”

Scientific research of meditation is still in its early days. Research has been done on specific meditation techniques. However research that compares meditation techniques has not yet been done (2021). So today science cannot say which meditation technique works best.

The reason we meditate is to experience silence and stillness. When we experience DEEP silence and stillness in meditation, no thoughts are present. During that thoughtlessness, our self that lives in thoughts is missing, and unity, truth and timelessness are present. Experiencing deep silence and stillness repeatedly in meditation seems to have infused thoughtlessness into our physiology, and into our everyday life. During everyday life we have fewer thoughts than we once did. And we experience silence and stillness pretty much all the time.

For us the important question here is: Do all meditation techniques deliver that same experience of DEEP silence and stillness? Our answer is: probably not. The reason we say that is because when we are TRYING to experience deep silence and stillness in meditation (trying being the main instruction of directive meditation), we never experience deep silence and stillness. The only time we experience DEEP silence and stillness in meditation is when we are doing absolutely nothing, which is the main instruction of nondirective meditation.

So it appears to us that the best meditation techniques for experiencing DEEP silence and stillness are nondirective meditation techniques.

“Is IPF Meditation really so simple and easy to learn? Is it really about doing nothing?”

Yes. IPF Meditation is really simple and easy to learn. It really is about doing nothing. IPF Meditation is about letting go of any outcome and accepting things exactly as they are, which is excellent training for how to live your life.

Your mind will wander during IPF Meditation, and that is okay. You accept that your mind is wandering, and then you return to thinking your mantra. Sometimes you have many thoughts during meditation, and that is normal. Other times you have fewer thoughts during meditation and you experience more silence and stillness, which we call Being. Sometimes people experience Being in its most innocent form during meditation, and also during their day.

Being is simply the experience of Being alive. For many people however, thoughts form a “cloud” that obscures Being alive just like clouds block the light of the Sun. When you are in that cloud of thoughts, you are living life more in your thoughts instead of living life as Being alive. Meditating regularly can melt those clouds of thoughts both during meditation and also during your day. And when those clouds of thoughts have melted, what remains is silence and stillness – is Being.

Meditation teaches you how to be. The experience of Being arises naturally and spontaneously over time as you meditate regularly. You should never try to have the experience of Being, or any experience. If you TRY to have some experience, IPF Meditation does not work. IPF Meditation works when you do absolutely nothing. Just do absolutely nothing during meditation, repeat your mantra, and the benefits of meditating will arise in your life naturally and spontaneously over time as you meditate regularly.

“What does it mean that the benefits of meditating will arise naturally and spontaneously over time as you meditate regularly? How does that work?”

Life on Earth arises and replicates itself from a chemical molecule in you called dna. Dna is what carries all genetic information. Sometimes the word *nature* is also used to describe life on Earth more generally. So when we say the benefits of meditating “will arise naturally and spontaneously” we mean that those benefits will arise naturally and spontaneously from within your “inner nature” – from within you – without you doing anything.

So why does that happen? Life works best when your inner nature is in balance. When your inner nature is out-of-balance life doesn’t work as well. Your inner nature can get unbalanced from stress. Regular meditation can diminish unwanted stress. And when unwanted stress is diminished, our inner nature becomes more balanced and life just gets better – naturally and spontaneously.

“Please describe the experience of Being in its most innocent form.”

Usually during meditation you notice something. For example, you notice an itch. Or you notice a sound, some tiredness or your mantra. That is normal.

Once in a while during meditation, some people experience Being in its most innocent form. During that experience “you” “notice” and “something” are absent and only Being is experienced. The word *singular* describes that experience well because the three elements – “you”, “notice” and “something” – are absent and the experience contains only Being – only silence and stillness.

Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation, which is described at the end of this chapter, is designed to help you become more familiar with Being in its most innocent form.

“What Is Inner Peace Fellowship?”

Inner Peace Fellowship is an informal fellowship of volunteers, and most of us have been practicing nondirective mantra meditation now for over 40 years. Our purpose is to help increase inner peace, to educate about non-divisive beliefs, and to build fellowship based on the universal concerns of all humanity.

Instructions For Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation

*After you have been meditating regularly twice a day for 2 years,
you are then, and only then, eligible to start Advanced Inner
Peace Fellowship Meditation.*

“You learn to meditate by meditating. The silence and stillness you experience in meditation and the increased happiness and diminished stress you experience outside meditation are so attractive and welcomed that you naturally teach yourself how to go deeper into that silence and stillness each time you meditate.” That instruction applies both to Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation and to Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation.

Instructions

After you finish practicing Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation for 15-30 minutes in the morning and in the evening, continue to sit quietly with your eyes closed and do not lay down. Then, after 10 to 15 seconds faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips say the word “*kindness*” once. As that word fades let your awareness be with whatever you are experiencing in your body, which in these instructions is also called your *being* or your *self*.

(Whatever you are experiencing in your body may or may not include the sensation of your body, a humming in your ears, feelings on your skin, the sound of your breathing, your heart beating, your bottom against the chair-floor-bed, simply being aware that you are aware, or any combination of these or any other bodily sensations. There is nothing in particular that you are suppose to be experiencing in your body however. So just relax, do nothing and let your awareness be on whatever you are experiencing in your body.)

Then, after 10 to 15 seconds faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips say the word “*kindness*” again once, and as that word fades let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self.

Then, after 10 to 15 seconds faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips say the word “*kindness*” again once, and as that word fades let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self.

Then, after 10 to 15 seconds faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips say the word “*kindness*” again once, and as that word fades let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self. You have now said the word “*kindness*” four times.

(It is okay if the word “*kindness*” or any of the other words below becomes so faint and silent that it is no longer a word but rather is just the feeling of “*kindness*” or an impulse of “*kindness*”.)

10 to 15 seconds after saying kindness for the last time, faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips say the word “*goodness*” once and as that word fades let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self – for 10-15 seconds. Then, three more times, exactly as you did with the word “*kindness*” above, repeat saying “*goodness*” faintly and silently inside without moving your tongue or lips and as that word fades each time let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self – for 10-15 seconds.

Then, as you did with the words “*kindness*” and “*goodness*” above, repeat saying the following words and phrases 4 times each without moving your tongue or lips, and each time let your awareness go back onto whatever you are experiencing in your body – onto your being, your self – for 10-15 seconds.

When learning these words and phrases, it is best to learn only 4 at one time and to practice those 4 for a week or two. Learning and practicing only 4 words or phrases at a time helps with memorizing them well before moving on and learning 4 more words or phrases.

Well-being
Contentment

Compassion
Cooperation
Fairness
Integrity

Honor
Honesty
Loyalty
Trust

Fellowship
The Absence of Thoughts
I Am Stardust That Came Alive
The Difference Between Experiencing Life and Thinking About Life

Saying the above 16 words and phrases 4 times each and letting your awareness go back onto your being, onto your self each time for 10-15 seconds should take about 20 minutes. When you are finished doing that lie down and rest for 20-30 minutes depending on what amount of resting time leaves you feeling refreshed. Then get up and go about your day or evening.

Expanded Practice Time

The instructions below are for expanding the amount of time that you practice Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation. Expanding your practice time is not a requirement but rather it is something that you may or may not choose to do. Also, you may choose to expand your practice time for only 1 or 2 days (or 1 or 2 weeks or months) after which you may then go back to practicing for a shorter time.

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After you have been practicing Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation regularly for 6 months, you can then choose to expand the amount of time that you practice Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation. Expand the amount of time that you practice by repeating each of the above 16 words and phrases 8 times each instead of 4 times each. After you finish repeating each of the above 16 words and phrases 8 times each, lay down and rest for 30-45 minutes depending on what amount of resting time leaves you feeling refreshed.

If you want to expand your practice time even more, once you have finished repeating the above 16 words and phrases 8 times each and have rested for 30-45 minutes, then sit up and practice Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation with your mantra for 10 minutes. Then, practice Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation a second time repeating the 16 words and phrases above 8 times each. When you are finished, lay down and rest for 30-45 minutes depending on what amount of resting time leaves you feeling refreshed.

## **Discussion**

When you practice Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation there is a 10-15 second gap between saying each word or phrase. One reason for practicing Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation is to become more familiar with and to expand the silence and stillness experienced in that gap. As your experience of the silence and stillness in that gap expands, what you are experiencing is more of your being, more of your self.

After you have been practicing Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation for some months or years, you may start to notice that same silence and stillness – your being, your self – in daily life. This silence and stillness in daily life can be very subtle and may come into daily life so gradually however that they seem normal and natural, which they are. And for those reasons they can also go largely unnoticed, which is okay.



Doing nothing while meditating and not TRYING to meditate are the keys to getting the most benefit from Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation, just as they are with Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation. Relaxing and doing nothing is discussed in detail in the [Meditation Instructions](#) section of this chapter and we strongly suggest that before you start practicing Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation that first you reread that section. And reread it again whenever you notice that you are TRYING to meditate or that your meditation is “not working”. You will find that rereading that section is very helpful for getting the most benefit from the large amounts of time that you are investing in meditation.

## **Side Effects and Cautions**

There are side effects to practicing Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation and Advanced Inner Peace Fellowship Meditation. Immediately after practicing those you may be more vulnerable to suggestions and outside influences. So avoid making decisions or taking on things of importance immediately after meditating.

Also, if you find that sitting quietly is difficult for you for any reason then give up meditating and instead consider doing yoga, exercising, walking or running to relax. Also, if you find that meditating is disturbing, upsetting, or disquieting to you, then stop meditating and do not meditate any more. Finally, meditation is not for solving serious emotional or psychiatric problems; so if you think you might have such problems, do not try to fix them with meditation but instead get professional help.



# Freedom Is Being Present



*We live two lives: we live life in our thoughts and we live life as our experience of the present moment.*

*Freedom comes as our life in thoughts diminishes and our experience of the present moment predominates.*

*Freedom comes through learning how to balance thoughts and the present moment.*

## Overview

We developed the ability to think abstractly only about 70,000 – 95,000 years ago<sup>9</sup>. Apparently the part of life we live “in our head” today simply did not exist before that time, and instead human life was solely a series of immediate experiences, like the lives of other creatures. (To learn more about “The Rise of Abstract Thinking” see the last section below.)

Abstract thinking has certainly improved the human condition but it has also created some serious problems. Stress accounts for over 60% of doctor visits and much of that stress results from people continually thinking and worrying about the past and the future. Often we literally “are not here” but instead are “in our head” thinking and worrying. It appears that meditation and other practices were originally developed as ways to help maintain a healthy balance of the life we live “in our head” and the life we live as immediate experiences.

In our [Your Beliefs Quiz](#) this question is asked: “Are there times during your day when you notice you have no thoughts?” Over 10,000 people have answered that question and 66% say they are thinking all the time while 34% say they notice some absence of thoughts during their day. The following are some of their written answers, which are reprinted here with their permission:

From those who say they never notice any absence of thoughts:

*“I wish my brain would stop, but it goes on all the time worrying.”*

*“sometimes I try to just not think but I always end up thinking”*

*“There is not a single moment in the day where I have no thoughts”*

*“I always think. My mind races always.”*

*“My mind is usually a train-wreck. Thoughts whirl around my head constantly.”*

From those who say they do notice the absence of thoughts:

*“yes, that is when I am at peace”*

*“Yes, it is nice.”*

*“during gardening”*

*“when I relax and meditate, my mind rests”*

*“It is a great feeling”*

## Exercises

It appears that many people are thinking most of the time and would like to be thinking less. If you are one of them, then do these exercises:

As you read these words your attention is on the thoughts and ideas presented. As you read these words you are also aware of the light around you. Being aware of the light around you does not involve having any thoughts.

Now stop reading this, look around briefly, and come back to reading this. Do that now. Look around briefly and come back to reading this.

When you looked around you noticed things, and you noticed those things without thinking thoughts about them.

Just then when you noticed the light around you and then looked around briefly and noticed things, what you did was shift your attention away from your thoughts about these words and put your attention on what is happening around you.

Having your attention on words and thoughts or having your attention on what is happening around you is a choice you make about where to put your attention. If you choose to have your attention on thoughts, then thoughts will predominate, which in turn will obscure what is happening around you. On the other hand, if your attention is innocently noticing the light around you or innocently noticing things around you, then the light and the things around you will predominate, which in turn obscures thoughts.

To help you connect more with what is happening around you, do this exercise several times a week:

Notice the light around you and that you notice the light without thinking about it.

(For this exercise to work, you must not anticipate doing it. Instead, it should happen innocently and spontaneously.)

This exercise combined with regular meditation can help shift the balance from living life “in your head” towards living life more in the present moment.

In meditation thoughts tend to diminish at times and so you become more familiar with the silence and stillness that remain. Through meditating regularly, you become more and more familiar with that silence and stillness, which then helps you recognize and expand that silence and stillness in everyday life (see [How To Meditate](#)).

Spending time alone in nature is another way to become more familiar with and expand silence and stillness. Take long walks alone in the forest, fields or parks. (Note that when you walk in nature with someone else you tend to talk, which obscures silence.) To experience even deeper silence and stillness, put on a backpack, walk deep into nature and spend many days there alone. If you have children, take them camping and send them to a school held in nature that teaches them about nature.

For you however, meditation and time alone in nature may not shift the balance of thoughts and experience. For you, that balance may shift through gardening, dancing, yoga, singing, tai chi, sports, making music, knitting, etc. You are the only one who can know what shifts the balance for you from living life “in your head” towards living life more in the present moment.

And when you notice the silence and stillness, stay with them and sink into them.

## **Words and Teachings About Freedom**

Silence and stillness – the absence of thoughts – cannot be known through thoughts and words. They can only be known through experiencing them, just as you can only know what honeysuckle smells like by experiencing the smell. Words can be written about the smell of honeysuckle, but words can never describe, contain or convey the smell of honeysuckle.

~ ~ ~

Freedom is about having fewer thoughts. However many people believe that freedom is gained by putting evermore thoughts and words into their head through studying teachings. Then what often happens is that all those words and thoughts become actual barriers to achieving freedom:

What happens is that when you start glimpsing the absence of thoughts you dismiss your glimpses as irrelevant to gaining freedom because your glimpses do not match up with any of the words and teachings you studied: no hidden reality is revealed; you do not become one with the universe; you do not become consciousness.

Or perhaps glimpsing the absence of thoughts feels pleasant to you. But feeling pleasant was not discussed in the teachings you studied about freedom. So again, you dismiss your glimpses of the absence of thoughts as irrelevant to achieving freedom and you continue on – endlessly looking for freedom and expecting that when you do find it, it will match up with the teachings you studied.

Learn to trust yourself and logic: how could your experience of the absence of thoughts match any words or teachings if the absence of thoughts cannot be described, contained or conveyed with thoughts and words. Your experience of freedom can never match any words or teachings.

Remember that through your own eyes you learned what the moon looks like: how could you learn that through the eyes of someone else? In that same way, learn for yourself what freedom looks like for you, and learn to trust what you see.

In summary, freedom – the absence of thoughts and being present – cannot be known through thoughts and words; it is known only by experiencing it. You navigate your way to freedom on your own. You learn to trust yourself. And once the absence of thoughts becomes more established in your life, you may then notice at times that the present seems eternal, your self that lives in thoughts is missing, and you are simply what is smelling the honeysuckle.

Good luck.

## **Our Biggest Problem**

The biggest problem that arose from our development of abstract thinking was worrying about death, which can trigger intense and sometimes debilitating fear. To manage that fear we long ago developed replacement, more positive abstract thoughts such as eternal life, salvation, liberation, and reincarnation; and we developed religions and spiritualities to manage those ideas.

In addition to those idea-based approaches to managing that fear, many religions including Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity also developed approaches such as meditation that decrease stress in the physiology, and hence fear. (Yoga, tai chi and qigong are other forms of this approach.) While these approaches are practiced differently, in general they can help shift the balance from living life “in your head” towards living life more as immediate experiences.

The above approaches can take the edge off the fear of death. However when faced with life threatening medical situations, those approaches do not extinguish the fear of death for many people. In that regard recent research into a third approach from traditional religions is encouraging. In research at Johns Hopkins University and New York University, terminally ill cancer patients were given a psychedelic that had the long-term effect for many of greatly diminishing their fear of dying.<sup>10</sup>

Johns Hopkins also studied the affects of psychedelics on long-term meditators. Roland Griffiths, the lead researcher of both studies at Johns Hopkins, said: “I would add – emphatically actually – that although these experiences [with psychedelics] were valued, none of our [long-term meditator] volunteers would claim that [psychedelics are] a substitute for meditation because meditation results in much greater day-to-day, moment-to-moment stability of awareness.”<sup>11</sup>

We agree with that conclusion. While psychedelics gave us valuable insights, psychedelics did not offer the stable path through life that meditation has given us.

## The Rise of Abstract Thinking <sup>12</sup>

200,000 years ago human brains were 400 – 500 cubic centimeters in size and we ate vegetation. Then we figured out that eating meat was a much more efficient way to obtain the protein that is vital to our survival, and that cooking that meat over fires enabled us to digest it more easily and thus utilize its protein more efficiently.

That steady diet of vital, dense meat protein then caused our brains to increase in size from 400 – 500 cubic centimeters to 1,500 – 1,700 cubic centimeters today. It was this tripling of brain size that provided us with the memory capacity that was essential for developing what was to become our breakout skill as a species – abstract thinking and language.

Our ability to think abstractly started to develop about 95,000 years ago. We know that because archeologists have not found any tools that required abstract thinking to make from before that time, nor have they found any remains of burial rituals.

So why do remains from burial rituals indicate that we had started to develop abstract thinking? Because we started having burial rituals only after we became self conscious. Only after we were able to ask ourself “What becomes of *me* – of my *self* – after *I die*?” And to ask that question we first had to have developed the ability to think about our self abstractly in the future. We had to have created the abstract world that today exists only in our thoughts – the world we now take so for granted today; the world that can now so overshadow us and diminish our inner peace.

We first started expressing our ability to think abstractly by drawing images of people, animals, plants, etc. on stones. Then we developed more complicated pictures and symbols that eventually became our lettering and words. Over the past 70,000 years we continued to develop and refine our abstractions until they became the language, reason, and mathematics that form the incredibly powerful, precise, and instantaneous system of communication we use today.

Once we developed abstract thinking and language no longer did the information that accumulated in our individual brains die with us but for the first time information that accumulated in our brains could be written down and passed on to future generations. Thus abstract thinking and language enabled collective learning and memory in which information outlasts individuals and is accumulated, stored and handed on from generation to generation. Abstract thinking and language enabled each new generation of humanity to start out standing on the informational shoulders of what prior generations had learned.

Our development of abstract thinking and language was arguably the most significant development ever to have occurred on Earth. Abstract thinking and language coupled with our eusocial behaviors are what have allowed humans to dominate Earth and to live in ease, comfort and prosperity compared with other creatures.



(Eusocial behavior is described in the [Building and Defending An Established Nest](#) section in the chapter Why Be Good.)

But with those benefits came the challenge of learning how to better manage the stress and the worry that result from thinking too much.



# Who Am I



*Inner Peace Comes Through Knowing Who You Are.  
Knowing Who You Are Starts With Knowing Where  
You Came From And How You Got Here.*

*“Altogether, the results of the neuroscience of religion thus far suggest strongly that a religious instinct does indeed exist ... [but] ... surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement.”<sup>13</sup>*

Edward O. Wilson

## You Are Stardust

You are stardust<sup>14</sup> that somehow came alive, and how and why that happened is a mystery. So the question is, Where did that stardust come from and how did it become alive?

The universe was created 13.7 billion years ago in an instant called the Big Bang.<sup>15</sup> No one knows how or why the Big Bang happened, or how or why life came to exist on Earth. However science continues to better understand the conditions that were present at those times.

At first the universe was smaller than an atom, was incredibly hot and contained everything in today's universe. The universe then expanded at incredible speed and within the first second energy shattered into the forces of electromagnetism and gravity. Then energy congealed to form matter.

380,000 years after the Big Bang the first atoms appeared as huge clouds of hydrogen and helium. Those clouds had a temperature difference of just 1/1,000 of a degree, which was just enough for gravity to start compacting those clouds.

As those clouds compacted their density increased, which caused gravity to become more powerful; and as gravity became more powerful the temperatures in the clouds rose. When temperatures finally rose to 10 million degrees, protons started to fuse, which released a huge amount of energy that caused billions of stars to form throughout the universe.

However those new stars eventually died and as they were dying their temperatures rose so high that the protons in them fused into atoms of various elements such as carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sodium, gold, etc. And when those stars finally died they exploded, which scattered the dust of those elements across the universe. At the same time as those old stars were dying and exploding new, young stars were forming and the dust from the dead, exploded stars started swirling around the new stars. That swirling dust then combined to form minute particles and small bits of rock that eventually combined to form asteroids, planets and moons.

That is how our Earth and solar system were formed 4.5 billion years ago. Dust that had been scattered across the universe by exploding, dead stars started swirling around a new star, our Sun. That dust then combined into larger and larger chunks, which then combined to form Earth and the other planets and various moons and asteroids around us.

And as it turned out Earth had just the right combination of energy, chemical elements and water for life to form. Today your body is made up of the dust of that exact same carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sodium, gold, etc. that was scattered across the universe by exploding stars billions of years ago.

## **Stardust Comes Alive**

Life needs energy, but not too much energy or too little. In the center of a star, there is so much energy (heat) that any atoms that do combine immediately get busted apart by the heat. In intergalactic space there is so little energy (cold) that atoms cannot combine because it is too cold. What is needed for life is just the right amount of energy, and Earth has just the right amount of energy because we are close, but not too close, to the Sun.

Life also needs many chemical elements and it needs a liquid like water. Why a liquid? Because atoms in gasses move past each other so fast that they cannot combine. And in solids, atoms are stuck so tightly together that they cannot move around and combine. In liquids, atoms are free to move around and link up to form the molecules that are essential for life.

The Earth formed 4.5 billion years ago and it had almost perfect conditions for life to form. It was just the right distance from our star the Sun to contain huge oceans of open water. And deep beneath those oceans at cracks in the Earth's crust there was both heat seeping up from inside the Earth and a great diversity of elements. So at those hot cracks deep in the oceans fantastic chemistry began to happen, which enabled atoms to combine into all sorts of exotic combinations.

Life is more than just exotic chemistry however. For life to exist required that the huge molecules that were forming deep in the ocean become stable and reproduce. Somehow 3.8 billion years ago those huge molecules did become stable and they did start to reproduce, but no one knows how or why that happened. No one knows how or why life on Earth came to exist.

What we do know is that while the energy in our universe moves toward entropy (dissipates) according to the second law of thermodynamics, our universe is also able to transform itself in a direction that is positive, progressive and ever more complex.

We do not know why the universe is continually transforming in this positive, progressive, ever more complex direction, yet clearly this transformation continues to occur right in front of us every day.

## **Life Learned How To Learn**

Again, for life to exist required the huge molecules forming deep in the ocean to become stable and reproduce. Those stable molecules of life that formed deep in the ocean and learned to reproduce themselves 3.8 billion years ago are called DNA. A DNA molecule is made up of a double helix connected by rungs, and it contains all the information necessary to reproduce itself. When you cut yourself and then it heals, that happens because your dna has reproduced itself automatically without you having to do anything.



*DNA Molecule*

The DNA of humans (also called our genome) contains 6 billion bits of information. 99.9% of that information is the same in every person. Only .1% of that information varies, which is why we are slightly different from one another. <sup>16</sup>

DNA does not always reproduce itself and its information exactly however – it has imperfections. As DNA copies itself, once in every billion replications there tends to be an error. Some of those DNA with errors end up working and thus become new types of living organism. And those new types of living organisms with errors then start competing with their original parent DNA for resources, and whichever version wins those resources is the only one that survives.

Through such internal errors of reproducing itself DNA accumulates new information about what works best in its circumstances, and in so doing it literally learns how to better adapt to the circumstances in which it finds itself.

~ ~ ~

The first forms of life that appeared on Earth 3.8 billion years ago were simple, single cells like these:





*These are your oldest living great grandparents. They are lichen called cyanobacteria growing here on dead clumps of itself called Stromatolites. Cyanobacteria first came into existence around 3.5 billion years ago and they are the second oldest life form to have ever lived on Earth. Mistakes made as the DNA of cyanobacteria reproduced itself are what produced most of life on Earth today.*

As the DNA in those single cells replicated itself, those cells learned through such DNA replication errors how to better adapt to their circumstances, and through that process the cells became more diverse and complex. Then starting about 600 to 800 million years ago this trial and error process of DNA learning resulted in multi-celled organisms such as fungi, fish, plants, amphibia, reptiles, and dinosaurs.

During that time DNA was also having errors that resulted in faster ways of learning, and that process eventually resulted in organisms with brains that learned in real time. However when those organisms with brains died the information that accumulated in their brain died with them.

Then 65 million years ago an asteroid struck Earth near the Yucatan Peninsula creating conditions equivalent to those of a nuclear war, which wiped out the dinosaurs. The absence of dinosaurs left niches on Earth in which the ancestors of humans could flourish and so DNA then learned how to transform itself into humans.

## **Still The Same Old Mystery**

The above sections describe how science views the conditions that were present when and since stardust and life came into existence. It is very important that you understand however that neither scientists nor anyone else knows HOW and WHY stardust and life came into existence. How and why stardust and life came into existence remains a mystery.

Yet here you are – stardust that somehow came alive – reading these words while floating through endless space on a small speck of dirt and water surrounded by a very, very thin layer of air. The chances of that ever happening were way, way, way beyond infinitesimal.

Many people today claim that this mystery is no longer a mystery but rather that this mystery is easily solved simply by adopting their beliefs, which they claim are true. Yet such true beliefs about this mystery have almost always caused divisions in society and separateness in individuals.

Mankind has always held this mystery to be that which is most sacred and holy to us.<sup>17</sup> Further, for most people this mystery inspires wonder, awe, reverence and gratitude, and for many a need to express those feelings. You can express your feelings about this mystery and fully [Celebrate Life](#) without searching endlessly for beliefs that are true, which you will never find. Instead you can simply accept that this mystery is a mystery to you, which then allows you to relax, be content and get on with life.

You alone decide what to believe. You alone choose your path through life.





# Why Be Good



*We are here today because our ancestors learned that survival depended on every person doing the right thing and having each other's back. Today our survival still depends on that, as do our inner peace and sense of well-being.<sup>18</sup>*

*“Our actions change our reality. Our intentions matter. Most people believe that their actions have consequences but do not think through the implications of that belief. But Steve [Jobs, owner of Pixar] did. He believed, as I do, that it is precisely by acting on our intentions and staying true to our values that we change the world.”*

Ed Catmull, President  
Pixar Animation Studios<sup>19</sup>

## How Humans Came to Dominate Earth

The extinction of dinosaurs 65 million years ago left niches on Earth in which the ancestors of humans could flourish. Yet from the time the dinosaurs were wiped out it took 64.8 million more years before humans (*Homo sapiens*) first appeared on Earth about 200,000 years ago.

About 99% of the 3 billion species that ever lived on Earth are now extinct,<sup>20</sup> mainly because they did not adapt to changing conditions. You are here today because your ancestors in every one of the past 10,000 generations figured out how to survive against such very long odds. They survived because each generation figured out how to adapt to the changing conditions in which they found themselves. Now it is our turn to figure out how to adapt to the changing conditions in which we find ourselves, thus insuring the survival of coming generations.

In *The Social Conquest of Earth*, Edward O. Wilson describes how human domination of Earth today resulted from a series of adaptations by our earliest ancestors. Those ancient adaptations became deeply ingrained instincts in us that today determine many of our automatic responses and behaviors. Many of those instincts still serve to keep us alive, but some instincts from those caveman days now threaten our survival. But we are getting ahead of our story. Let us start from the beginning.

Of the many adaptations that got us here, we owe our appearance on Earth largely to having learned to control fire and to our highly unusual instinct to build and defend an established nest.

## Learning to Control Fire

Our earliest ancestors numbered a few tens of thousands at most and lived in small bands of several dozen each. At first humans ate vegetation, which has low energy per weight. Meat has more energy per weight than vegetation and thus is a more efficient way to obtain the protein that is vital to survival. Eventually our ancestors figured out that when they ate meat they spent less time and energy finding food. At first they killed animals and ate their flesh raw, but they found that the meat of animals killed in and cooked by wildfires was easier to digest, and thus its protein could be utilized more easily.

At first they intentionally set wild fires to kill and cook animals but that was inefficient. So they learned to control fire and to hunt. On vast, expansive grasslands hunters on foot would run animals down and kill them. They would station themselves at different locations and trade off running after an animal until it was totally exhausted.<sup>21</sup> Then they would return to their campsite where a fire was always burning, and cook and eat their kill.

Thus through learning to control the use of fire, humans insured themselves a steady diet of vital, dense, meat protein. That high energy diet then caused the human brain to increase in size from 400 – 500 cubic centimeters to 1,500 – 1,700 cubic centimeters today. It was this tripling of brain size that provided the memory capacity that was essential for developing what were to become our breakout skills as a species – abstract thinking and language. (To learn more about how abstract thinking and language developed, and how those limit our freedom today, see [The Rise of Abstract Thinking](#).)

## **Building And Defending An Established Nest**

Most creatures on Earth build nests. Yet once a nest has served its purpose most creatures abandon their nest and build a new one when needed. Humans are one of only seven creatures on Earth that build permanent nests and defend them, which is called *eusociality*.<sup>22</sup> Our eusocial behavior was the primary reason humans came to dominate Earth.

Learning to control the use of fire at campsites (our “nest”) so that meat could be cooked greatly amplified behaviors that today defined what it means to be human – the division and specialization of labor, trust and cooperation.

Wilson describes this: “The advantages of cooperation in the harvesting of meat led to the formation of highly organized groups. These consisted of extended families and allied tribes, so the population could be as large as could be sustained by the local environment. This became an advantage when resources became limited and the need to fight other tribes [to the death] for resources was needed.”

“The cohesion forced by the concentration of groups to protected [camp] sites was more than just a step through the evolutionary maze. It was ... the event that launched the final drive to modern Homo sapiens.”

Our ancestors build campsites around fires and defended those. Some group members would leave the campsite to forage and hunt while others would stay behind to defend the camp and keep the children safe. In that division of labor, mutual trust and cooperation were vital. Survival was extremely difficult and each person HAD to fulfill their designated role and responsibilities because failure to do so threatened the survival of everyone in the group. And when food became scarce, which it often did, the group had to battle neighboring groups for available food, often to the death, which demanded great cooperation and trust among everyone in the group.<sup>23</sup>

Thus group members had to behave in ways that were acceptable to everyone because if they did not, it weakened the bonds that held the group together. Survival was based, literally, on doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Certainly group members competed with one another for status, for shares of food, for access to an available mate, and for a comfortable sleeping place. These pressures conferred an advantage on those who were able to read the intentions of others. The ability to gain trust, to form alliances, and to manage rivals had value. Thus human social intelligence grew and became central to life.

Despite the emergence of human social intelligence however, Wilson says there is an iron rule in genetic social evolution: within a group, selfish members beat altruists (unselfish members) but groups of altruists beat groups with selfish members. So, while selfish activities provide competitive advantage within a group, they also are destructive to the group as a whole. That is why today each of us experiences an ongoing tension between our selfish wants and desires and pleasing others in our group(s). That tension often feels uncomfortable, yet our creativity arises through finding the balance in that tension between selfishness and pleasing others.

Wilson says of this tension, “Or risking oversimplification, individual selection promoted sin, while group selection promoted virtue. Humans are suspended in unstable and constantly changing positions between [those] two extreme forces that created us ... [and that tension] might be the only way in the entire Universe that human-level intelligence and social organization can evolve. We will find a way eventually to live with our inborn turmoil, and perhaps find pleasure in viewing it as the primary source of our creativity.”

Selfishness pays off; we see that everywhere. But, mutual trust, cooperation and selflessness determine which group wins. So, if you want your family, your friends and their children to survive, your best bet appears to be to belong to group(s) with individuals who truly trust and cooperate with one another rather than group(s) of selfish individuals who look out mainly for themselves.

## **What Has Value**

You are here today because cooperation was highly valued by your ancestors. Their survival depended on it. Thus cooperation became a deeply ingrained instinct in humans, one that is waiting to guide you as you look for the people and groups in life that you can trust. But, you will not find those people unless those people see that they can trust you also.

How do people determine if they can trust you? They look at whether you share their values. They look at whether you are truly living their values and not just talking about them. They look at whether you are truly living your life with integrity, goodness, humility, honesty, fairness, loyalty, honor, kindness, patience and courage.

So, how do you build those values in yourself? How do you figure out if others share your values? Those questions and others are discussed below.

Circumstances may be forcing you to rely on people and groups today that you do not trust. However, when people are free to choose whom to trust, they usually make that choice based on shared values. You encounter a new person or group that might become important in your life and you immediately start to wonder, “Are they committed to doing the right thing? Will they back me when the going gets tough? Do they value what I value?” Just remember: they are probably asking those same questions about you.

## **How To Build Good Values**

You build good values in yourself by continually acting on your intention to do the right thing. Through continually acting on your intention to do the right thing, doing the right thing becomes a habit that arises more spontaneously when you need it.

So why do the right thing when so many people do not?

- because you know instinctively that doing the right thing will benefit you because it will result in others trusting you, cooperating with you and supporting you in getting what you need in life;
- because you know instinctively that by doing the right thing you become the person you were meant to be – the best person you can be, who you are then proud of;
- because doing the right thing appears to be the only way humans will continue to survive on Earth.

## **Learning To Do The Right Thing**

What is the right thing to do? How do you learn to recognize it, and then act on it? Life is usually happening too fast to stop and recall the information you have gathered. Instead you must learn to “feel your way” for the right thing to do. Feeling your way for the right thing to do is about finding the right balance of instincts, intentions and values that results in everyone involved being closer to their goals.

Finding that balance feels like standing on a balance board – one of those planks of wood that is resting on top of a cylinder in the middle. You place a foot on each end of the plank and try to balance yourself as the cylinder rolls beneath you. You sense your instincts, you sense your intentions and you sense what you value; and then you start to sense some balance of those where everyone involved is getting closer to their goals. Often that balance is found through shifting or redefining everyone’s goals, but that balance is never achieved through abandoning or relaxing your intention to stay true to what you value, or by not doing the right thing by everyone involved.

In situation after situation you practice finding that balance, and eventually doing the right thing becomes a habit that arises spontaneously in you. You will certainly fall off the plank, unexpectedly and often, and sometimes with a crash. Everyone does. When you do, remember that your creativity arises from those mistakes. So forgive yourself, figure out why you lost your balance, resolve to do better next time, and then get back on the plank. Do not worry endlessly about your falls and crashes; they are in the past and worrying about them can cripple you as you attempt to move forward in life. Just learn from your mistakes and move on.

A good rule of thumb for finding your balance here at every point in life is simply to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

### **Good Values Are Earned and Quiet**

Integrity, goodness, humility, honesty, fairness, loyalty, honor, kindness, patience and courage are quiet values. They are earned words that must be attributed to you by others; proclaiming them for yourself negates your claim. When someone is living those values, people say that they are a person of good character.

### **Determining The Values of Others**

How do you determine the values of a person or a group? You look at what they do, NOT at what they say. People and groups almost always say they have good values and do the right thing, even when they do not. So to find out the truth you must look at what they actually do – at how they are conducting themselves and at what others unrelated to them say about them. People and groups with poor values are often quite good at hiding that fact.

### **The Work You Do**

The work you do every day is a primary way through which you build and define your values. If you work for someone, the work you are required to do for them will usually reflect their values, not your values. So before going to work for someone or some group, carefully take the measure of what they value.

Many people find that building good values is easier when they work for themselves. Being your own boss gives you greater control over the many decisions and actions that build and define your values.

## **Are Your Caveman Instincts Making You Crazy?**

Our ancestors lived in constant fear for their life and stayed alive by relying on their instincts to sense danger. Today, we face much less danger than they did. Yet those instincts to sense danger are still strong in us and unfortunately they can tell you that you are being threatened even when you are not.

The dangers our ancestors faced were real, immediate and life-threatening. Those dangers were not abstract images displayed on an electronic screen. Yet today when we see images on an electronic screen our instincts can sense life-threatening danger even when our life is not being threatened at all. Such false danger signals are now causing widespread fear, emotional distress and unwarranted aggressiveness in individuals, and divisions in societies.

Many groups today are attempting to advance their interests by deliberately inflaming your primal fear for survival and your primal distrust of “other” groups and people. Business advertisements try to inflame your primal fears and distrust of others for the purpose of selling you their solutions. Media tries to inflame your primal fears and distrust of others for the purpose of getting you to respond to their advertising. Politicians try to inflame your primal fears and distrust of others for the purpose of turning you against others and gaining your support. Religions try to inflame your primal fears and distrust of others for the purpose of disempowering and enslaving you.

Where you put your attention is what your life becomes. So, if you want a good, happy life, then you need to get really good at filtering out all the crap that is constantly coming at you. Reading the news in print on an electronic screen will upset you much less than watching it as video. Watching stupid stuff or people hurting each other on an electronic screen is what you are becoming.

## **We Are One Group**

For the first time in human history, sufficient resources are now available for everyone on Earth to live in safety and with dignity. This good fortune results from increasing knowledge and technological advancements, coupled with the fact that the world’s population will start to decrease dramatically around 2050 (because women are now having fewer than 2.1+ children each, which is the number required to replace the world’s population.<sup>24</sup>

No longer do Homo sapiens need to kill one another for scarce resources.

The main barrier to everyone on Earth finally living in safety and with dignity is not seeing yourself as a member of this one group that is hurtling through endless space, all of us dependent on this small speck of



dirt and water called Earth for our survival. If you can see yourself foremost as a member of this one group, that should help trigger your instincts of fairness and cooperation towards others.

If humanity as a whole cannot overcome that barrier and instead continues to view one another as members of threatening, competing tribes, then life will continue to be Hell for a great many people. And our brief 200,000 year experiment of learning how to survive as a species could end in our extinction, which it has for 99% of the 3 billion species that existed on Earth before us.

People love to talk about the sorry state of the world, but then do nothing to improve it. The only way to achieve safety, dignity and fairness for everyone is for a great many people to live lives of fairness over the coming generations. If enough people commit to living lives of fairness, and insist that fairness be the standard of good behavior for their group(s) and their society, then humanity can make it to our long-sought-after promised-land of inner peace, well-being, safety, dignity and fairness for everyone. That will not happen quickly or easily, but it can happen.

Liberals and conservatives generally support the fair distribution of resources. However that support comes only when the story of the people involved is known. When that story is missing, the fair distribution of resources is generally less supported. So the hard work of fairness is, in part, making sure that people share the same information and have access to the same truth. <sup>25</sup>

Human history has always been about the powerful benefitting at the expense of the less powerful. The powerful have always resisted sharing their power and its benefits. Certainly their resistance will continue to be the main obstacle to achieving universal safety, dignity and fairness. However, throughout history, when the less powerful have demanded more power from the powerful, the powerful have gradually conceded it; so we are optimistic.

We are optimistic also because there is something in human nature that compels most of us to get up every day and do the best we can for our families, for our group, and for ourselves. Responding to that impulse day-in and day-out through history has resulted in slow but steady improvement to the human condition. That process should continue to serve us well going forward.

Our instincts to do the right thing, to trust one another and to cooperate are why humans survived to dominate Earth today. Those instinctual human values are well-tested. They work. You should continue to bet your life on them.



Video – *Martin Luther King's Last Speech* (2 minutes)



# Celebrate Life



*If you want your heart to be more open, if you want to feel more connected to others, get together with friends and sing.*

*Below are some songs we like to sing to celebrate being alive, and to express our gratitude, our wonder and our joy.*

*And remember, do not let the words you sing to celebrate life divide and separate you from those who are singing different words.*

## Amazing Grace

Sing along to “Amazing Grace” by John Newton:



Amazing Grace!  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see

When we have been there ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We have no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we have first begun

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come  
It is Grace has brought me safe thus far  
And Grace will lead me home

Amazing Grace!  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see  
Was blind but now I see

\* \* \*

Other verses of Newton's original lyrics:

It was Grace that taught my heart to fear  
And Grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures

Yet, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will forever mine

Written by John Newton circa 1800

## Shri Guru Charanam

Sing along with Krishna Das to “Shri Guru Charanam”:



Shree Guru Charanam

Shree Hari Sharanam

(Repeats throughout)

Composed and Performed by Krishna Das  
Published by Mustamullah Music (BMI)  
Used Under License Through A Train Entertainment

## My Sweet Lord

Sing along with George Harrison to “My Sweet Lord”:

(This is one of our favorite songs but we do not have rights to play it here. So purchase it online and play it as you sing along with the words.)

My sweet Lord  
Hm, my Lord  
Hm, my Lord

I really want to see you  
Really want to be with you  
Really want to see you Lord  
But it takes so long, my Lord

My sweet Lord  
Hm, my Lord  
Hm, my Lord

I really want to know you  
Really want to go with you  
Really want to show you Lord  
That it will not take long, my Lord (hallelujah)

My sweet Lord (hallelujah)  
Hm, my Lord (hallelujah)  
My sweet Lord (hallelujah)

I really want to see you  
Really want to see you  
Really want to see you, Lord  
Really want to see you, Lord  
But it takes so long, my Lord (hallelujah)

My sweet Lord (hallelujah)  
Hm, my Lord (hallelujah)  
My, my, my Lord (hallelujah)

I really want to know you (hallelujah)  
Really want to go with you (hallelujah)  
Really want to show you Lord (aaah)  
That it will not take long, my Lord (hallelujah)

Hmm (hallelujah)  
My sweet Lord (hallelujah)  
My, my Lord (hallelujah)

Hm, hm Lord (hare krishna)  
My, my, my Lord (hare krishna)  
Oh hm, my sweet Lord (krishna, krishna)  
Oh-uuh-uh (hare hare)

Now I really want to see you (hare rama)  
Really want to be with you (hare rama)  
Really want to see you Lord (aaah)  
But it takes so long, my Lord (hallelujah)

Hm, my Lord (hallelujah)  
My, my, my Lord (hare krishna)  
My sweet Lord (hare krishna)  
My sweet Lord (krishna krishna)  
My Lord (hare hare)  
Hm, hm (Gurur Brahma)  
Hm, hm (Gurur Vishnu)  
Hm, hm (Gurur Devo)  
Hm, hm (Maheshwara)  
My sweet Lord (Gurur Sakshaat)  
My sweet Lord (Parabrahma)  
My, my, my Lord (Tasmayi Shree)  
My, my, my, my Lord (Guruve Namah)  
My Sweet Lord (Hare Rama)

(hare krishna)  
My sweet Lord (hare krishna)  
My sweet Lord (krishna krishna)  
My Lord (hare hare)

by George Harrison, Sandeep Chowta  
© Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC



## prātaḥ smarāmi

Sing along with Shree Maa to “prātaḥ smarāmi”:



(bhagavatīstutiḥ)

prātaḥ smarāmi śaradindukarojjvalābhāṃ  
sadratnavanmakarakuṇḍalahārabhūṣāṃ  
prātaḥ smarāmi  
divyāyudhojitasunīlasahasrahastāṃ  
raktotpalābhacaraṇāṃ bhavatīṃ pareśāṃ  
prātaḥ smarāmi

prātarnamāmi mahiṣāsuraçaṇḍamuṇḍa-  
śumbhāsura pramukhadaitya vināśadakṣāṃ  
prātarnamāmi  
brahmendrarudramunimohanaśīlalīlāṃ  
çaṇḍīṃ samastasuramūrtimanekarūpāṃ  
prātarnamāmi

prātarbhajāmi bhajatāmabhilāṣadātrīṃ  
dhātrīṃ samastajagatāṃ duritāpahantrīṃ  
prātarbhajāmi  
saṃsārabandhanavimocanahetubhūtāṃ  
māyāṃ parāṃ samadhigamya parasya viṣṇoḥ  
prātarbhajāmi

prātaḥ smarāmi prātarnamāmi prātarbhajāmi  
om hrim chandikayai namo  
om hrim chandikayai namo  
om hrim chandikayai namo  
om hrim chandikayai namo

*(Below is an English translation of this song)*

# A Song Of Praise To The Supreme Goddess

In the morning I remember the Foremost, She who shines like the autumn moon, wearing a shining necklace and earrings studded with fine jewels. She holds divine weapons in Her thousand arms of excellent blue, She gives divine life. The bottoms of her feet are red like a lotus. She is the Highest Divinity.

In the morning I bow down to the Foremost, to the Slayer of the Great Ego, Anger and Passion, and the Destroyer of other negativities of duality led by Self-Conceit. Her graceful activities delude even Brahmā, the Creative Consciousness, Indra, the Rule of the Pure, Rudra, the Reliever of Sufferings, and other wise beings. She is Chaṇḍī, She Who Tears Apart Thought, the image of divinity to all the Gods in so many forms.

In the morning I laud the Foremost, the Fulfiller of all Desires for those who worship, the Creator of all the worlds and Remover of all difficulties. Take away all the bondage from the world of objects and relationships, and bring us to the pure intuitive vision of the Supreme Consciousness which resides beyond Māyā.

From: *Chaṇḍī Pāṭhaḥ*  
(*She Who Tears Apart Thought*)  
900 - 500 BC; pages 420 - 421  
Sung by Shree Maa  
Translations by Swami Satyananda Saraswati

“I dance, and all that you perceive are its manifestations. If you like, you can watch me dance, or if you like you can make me stop. He who can make me stop, I make him a seer, a being of wisdom, one of Intuitive Vision, my husband, Lord Siva, the Consciousness of Infinite Goodness.”

Swami Satyananda Saraswati  
Forward to *Chaṇḍī Pāṭhaḥ* app



# Adi Shankara - Advaita Vedanta



Advaita Vedanta is a three thousand year old school of Hindu philosophy and spiritual practices. The term Advaita first appeared as the Sanskrit term अद्वैत वेदान्त, which means not-two. Advaita teaches that moksha or freedom (sometimes translated as *liberation, enlightenment, spiritual awakening or self-realization*) can be achieved in your lifetime. The most prominent exponent of Advaita was Adi Shankara who lived around 800 AD. Today some call Advaita *non-duality* or *direct inquiry*.<sup>26</sup>

This chapter discusses what freedom means in Advaita and how to achieve that freedom.

## Freedom

What is freedom in Advaita? Is it freedom from death, from illusion, from suffering, from bad luck, from this world?

In our experience freedom in Advaita means freedom from thoughts. Each of us lives two lives. We live the life in our thoughts and we live the life we experience at present. Those two lives are the duality of Advaita and freedom from that duality – the *not-two* of Advaita – is when thoughts are absent and our experience of the present is all that remains, which is the oneness of Advaita.

## Achieving Freedom

So how do you achieve that freedom? You achieve that freedom by shifting the balance from living your life as thoughts to living your life more in the present.

That balance towards freedom is not shifted through words and teachings. Putting more words into your head does not decrease thoughts. No, you shift that balance by training yourself to have less thoughts.

Meditating regularly is one way to shift that balance. In meditation thoughts tend to decrease and you become more familiar with the silence that remains – with the absence of thoughts that remains. And by meditating regularly you become more and more familiar with the absence of thoughts, which then helps you recognize and expand the absence of thoughts in everyday life.

Spending time alone in nature is another way to decrease thoughts and shift that balance. Take long walks alone in the forests, fields or parks. Better yet, put on a backpack, walk deep into nature, and spend many days there alone.

Meditation and time alone in nature may not shift that balance for you however. For you that balance may shift through gardening, dancing, yoga, singing, tai chi, sports, making music, knitting, etc. You are the only one who can know what shifts that balance for you.

Adi Shankara, the most prominent exponent of Advaita Vedanta, said around 800 AD:

*“A clear vision of [freedom] may be obtained only through our own eyes, when they have been opened by insight – never through the eyes of some other seer. Through our own eyes we learn what the moon looks like: how could we learn this through the eyes of others?”* <sup>27</sup>

Again, freedom is not achieved by reading or listening to words about Advaita, non-duality, direct inquiry or unity consciousness. In fact such words become actual barriers to achieving freedom because whenever you

do experience the absence of thoughts you might dismiss it as irrelevant to achieving freedom because your experience of the absence of thoughts does not match up with any of the words you have learned.

That the absence of thoughts cannot be described or expressed with words is central to achieving freedom. Shankara said:

*“He who seeks [freedom] must meditate upon it in the shrine of his heart. The intellect cannot understand it. It is out of the reach of thought. It is beyond the expression of speech.”* <sup>28</sup>

Those who believe that Advaita’s freedom can be achieved through words also tend to believe that that freedom will reveal things that are hidden such as the true nature of consciousness, the true nature of the self, their oneness with the universe or witnessing sleep. However when some people first start to notice the absence of thoughts it brings no such revelations. Nothing hidden is revealed and everything remains the same, except perhaps that life is more pleasant. So you dismiss your glimpses of the absence of thoughts as irrelevant to achieving freedom since the absence of thoughts revealed nothing that the words you learned said they would. So you continue on, endlessly seeking freedom.

In summary, you navigate your way to freedom on your own, you avoid words and you trust yourself. That’s it.

Good luck.

## **After Thoughts**

Once the absence of thoughts is established in your life you might notice that:

When thoughts are absent the present seems eternal.

When thoughts are absent your self that lives in thoughts disappears and you are what smells the honeysuckle.

*Above photo: Relaxing sadhu, wood & paint, 19th century  
Uttar Pradesh State Museum, Lucknow; anonymous*



# Your Beliefs Quiz



*True freedom is seeing that whatever created life cannot be described with words or contained by thoughts.*

*Seeing this dissolves the idea that beliefs about this can be “right”, and frees you to have beliefs that simply fulfill you.*

*This Quiz is for exploring and better understanding your beliefs and how they increase or decrease your inner peace.*



*You can take this Quiz online at [YourBeliefsQuiz.org](http://YourBeliefsQuiz.org) where the Quiz is easier to take and you can download your results.*

*(unless that web site has been discontinued)*

# What Other Say About This Quiz

*"Reading the questions opened my heart and my mind to a deeper level than I could have even imagined." (Catskills)*

*"I think some of your questions are very thought provoking. Sincerity & happiness versus being right ... I did not know you could be happy without being right. lol. Thanks for making me think."*

*"Beautiful and insightful, this quiz has left a precious jewel with me, thank you." (Keilayn)*

*"You guys have an amazing website. This is the first quiz I have ever taken about this stuff. Doing this quiz helped me to understand the words swirling around in my head and made them more organized and understandable ... like I already had the answers I needed, but you helped bring them out with the questions. Thank you. This means so much to me today:)." (Stephanie)*

*"It is a good test, best I could imagine about so mysterious and difficult a subject. Thank you!" (Mike)*

*"Very interesting and to the heart of it. I liked it very much!" (Rebecca)*

# Quiz Introduction

This Quiz is designed to help you better understand your beliefs about Whatever Created Life.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the Quiz. Instead the Quiz works best if you just answer with the simple truth of who you are.

Following the Quiz, six Principles are then discussed that will help you explore and better understand how your beliefs may be affecting your life.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Having beliefs about Whatever Created Life forces you to navigate some hazardous terrain. It forces you to deal with your arrogance and your desire for power. You must also deal with your mind's craving for certainty. And you are forced to choose between being right and having an open heart.

Further, different ways of holding beliefs result in different outcomes. For example, if you expect certainty from your beliefs, that can close your heart, separate you from others, and create divisions – even holy war – in your society.

So approach beliefs with caution, unflinching honesty, and trust in yourself. And most importantly, remember that your relationship with life and with Whatever Created Life depend on you treating others the way you want them to treat you. If you do not do that, all of this becomes just another bunch of empty words.

# Orientation

*Write your answers to the Quiz on your phone, device or on a piece of paper, and plan on saving those.*

## 1. Do you have faith that the sun will come up tomorrow?

- Yes
- No

Or write your own answer

## 2. When the sun comes up tomorrow or you plant a seed and flowers grow, or when a child is born or someone dies, what do you call whatever causes and governs those things happening?

*You may choose more than one answer:*

- whatever created life
- nature
- God
- science
- love
- earth
- oneness
- energy
- a mystery
- universal spirit
- enlightenment
- consciousness
- a miracle
- Allah
- reality
- evolution
- Brahman
- true self
- zen

- no self
- tao
- nirvana
- unity

Or write your own answer

### 3. When you have good luck, why does that happen?

- Whatever causes and governs life is looking favorably on me
- Good luck happens by chance; some of the time my luck just has to be good
- Good luck happens because I work hard, am honest, and treat people right
- Good luck happens because I was a good person in a former life
- I do not have enough good luck to comment on this

Or write your own answer

### 4. Do you think the power that animates life is:

- impersonal
- personal
- human-like
- not human-like

Or write your own answer

# Happiness

## 1. How often are you happy?

- I am happy most of the time
- Sometimes I am happy and sometimes I am not
- Much of the time I am unhappy

Or write your own answer

## 2. Can you increase the amount of happiness in your life?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Or write your own answer

## 3. Do you deserve to be happy?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

Or write your own answer

## 4. Do you feel it is wrong to be happy?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

Or write your own answer

**5. What is the one question, which if it was answered, would make you happy, content and at peace with whatever you believe created life?**

Write your own answer

# Thinking

## 1. Being able to think about the future and the past is:

- An ability I have that is like an animal's ability to migrate
- A divine gift that has raised humans above all other creatures

Or write your own answer

## 2. Do animals think about dying some day?

- Probably
- Probably not

Or write your own answer

## 3. Are there times during your day when you notice you have no thoughts?

- Yes
- No

Or write your own answer



# Feelings

## 1. How do you get to really know about Whatever Created Life?

- By adopting what you think might be correct beliefs about how Whatever Created Life works
- Through watching how life feels and appears

Or write your own answer

## 2. When you are happy, is your happiness a feeling or a thought?

- A feeling
- A thought

Or write your own answer

# The Battle

## 1. Which of these do you want from your relationship with Whatever Created Life?

*You may have more than 1 answer*

- to possess the truth about Whatever Created Life
- an open heart
- to avoid suffering
- more love in my life
- better luck
- brotherhood with others
- to be one up on others

Or write your own answer

# Truth – Humility

## 1. Which one of these do you want **MOST** from your relationship with Whatever Created Life?

- I want my beliefs about the relationship to be correct and true
- I want my relationship to open my heart and fill it with love and brotherhood with others

Or write your own answer

## 2. For thousands of years many sincere, capable people have been trying to describe Whatever Created Life and how It works, yet after all that time there is still no description of Whatever that people can agree on. What is the most reasonable conclusion you can reach from all that research over all that time?

- That Whatever Created Life works differently in different parts of the world
- That the people who have done this research were not trained scientists
- How Whatever Created Life works cannot be described, contained, or conveyed with mere words
- That there is only one correct description of how Whatever Created Life works and all the other descriptions are incorrect

Or write your own answer

## 3. There are hundreds of different belief systems in the world about Whatever Created Life. What are your chances that the beliefs you just happened to have chosen (or might choose) are the beliefs that correctly describe Whatever Created Life?

My chances appear to be:

- 0%
- less than 1%
- 1 - 2%

- 2 - 99%
- 100%

Or write your own answer

# Freedom

**1. Which TWO of these would you most rather be?**

- Right about Whatever Created life
- Truly free
- Happy and at peace

Or write your own answer

**2. Does Whatever Created Life seem to be hidden from you, and if so, why?**

- Yes
- No

Or write your own answer

**3. How do you feel about trying to have a direct relationship with Whatever Created Life without getting much help from others, or their approval?**

Write your own answer

**4. If you were to sing a song of gratitude to Whatever Created your Life, what would be more important to you: that the words you sing are true, or that you sing your song with an open heart and sincerity.**

- That the words be true
- That I sing it from my heart with sincerity

Or write your own answer

**You have completed the Quiz.**

The Quiz is based on the following Principles:

# Happiness

*The purpose of life is  
to expand happiness,  
well-being and inner peace*

Sometimes we are happy  
Then we suffer  
Sometimes we are at peace  
Then we are in turmoil  
That is natural  
That is just being alive

What is not natural  
What can damage you  
Is believing

that being happy is wrong  
that you do not deserve to be happy  
that you cannot increase your happiness  
that you will never be at peace

# Thinking

*Happiness and inner peace come  
when watching life and thinking  
about life are in balance*

Every creature on Earth  
Watches life happen

Unlike other creatures however  
Our mind both watches life happen  
And thinks abstractly about life happening

We alone think about dying some day

\*

Life happens so fast  
We only have time  
To watch it happen

We do not have time  
To think (abstractly)  
About life happening  
While it is happening

For example  
You bump something  
It starts to fall  
You grab it

You grabbed it by instinct  
Not by thinking

You do not stop to think  
“Should I grab it?”  
You just watch  
And grab it out of instinct

We think about things  
Only before or after they happen

\*

Watching life happen  
When thoughts are absent  
Is peace

Then thoughts come

Peace and thoughts  
Can be in balance  
Or thoughts can disrupt peace

Your challenge  
Is learning how  
To manage  
The disruptiveness  
Caused by thoughts

To learn that

watch life happen  
occasionally notice thoughts  
occasionally notice when thoughts are absent

meditate

spend time alone in nature

\*

Happiness and inner peace  
Are not thoughts

Happiness and inner peace  
Are how you feel  
When you are  
Happy and at peace



# Feelings

*Whatever Created Life is “known”  
through feelings, not thoughts*

Plant seeds  
And flowers bloom  
It is miraculous

No abstraction:  
no book  
no description  
no thought

Can contain or convey  
That miraculousness

Yet the mind’s arrogance insists  
Its thoughts can  
Contain and convey  
That miraculousness

So the mind’s arrogance  
Starts spinning  
Sticky, unsatisfying webs  
Of logic, reason, and thoughts  
Attempting to capture  
To “know” with certainty  
That miraculousness

Meanwhile our heart  
Just wants our mind  
To shut up and  
Get out of the way  
So we can get closer to  
And embrace  
The miraculousness

Logic, reason and thoughts  
Serve us very well  
Much of the time  
They just cannot  
Contain or convey  
The miraculousness  
Of life unfolding

They just cannot “know”  
Whatever Created Life

# The Battle

*Beliefs cannot satisfy  
both your heart and your mind.  
So you are forced to choose.*

Our heart wants to be open  
To love and fellowship

Our mind insists  
Thoughts, logic and reason  
Can “know” Whatever Created Life

\*

What the mind wants is very appealing  
to possess THE truth with certainty  
to avoid suffering – even death  
better luck and fortune  
to be better than others

But the mind will not settle just for that

The mind’s logic then insists:

“now that I know the truth  
now that I am certain I am right  
those with a different truth  
MUST be wrong”

That is how the mind’s arrogance  
Separates you from others  
Closes your heart to love  
And fellowship with them  
And breeds yet more holy war

\*

With beliefs we try to satisfy  
Both the heart and the mind

The mind wants beliefs  
To be certain and true

The heart wants beliefs  
To open it more  
To love and fellowship

Yet beliefs that are certain and true  
Exclude others  
And close your heart  
To love and fellowship with them

That is the battle  
You must always fight  
Regardless of whether  
Your beliefs are in

god  
science  
earth  
consciousness  
nature  
whatever created life

# Truth – Humility

*Uncertainty is the truth abstractly*

*Humility is the truth emotionally*

This comes down to one question:

What do you want MOST  
From your relationship  
With Whatever Created Life?

What most people want  
Is for their heart to open  
And fill with more love  
And fellowship for others

For that to occur  
However  
Something else must occur first:

You must accept  
That how and why  
Whatever Created Life works  
Cannot be described  
Contained or conveyed  
By thoughts

Only by accepting that  
Can you hope to get your mind  
Out of the way enough  
So that your heart can open

\*

First use your mind's own logic  
To reason with it  
That uncertainty  
Really is the most logical conclusion here

Once your mind accepts  
That uncertainty is the truth  
Thoughts and feelings come into balance  
And you feel that as humility

# Freedom

*True freedom is seeing that the  
universe cannot be contained  
by mere thoughts*

How you hold your beliefs  
Determines how well they work

Expecting your beliefs  
To be certain and true  
Closes your heart  
And separates you from others

Accept that Whatever Created Life  
Cannot be contained  
By mere thoughts  
And then  
Let happiness, well-being, and inner peace  
Guide your relationship with Whatever

\*

It is obvious  
To almost everyone  
That life unfolding  
Is the work  
Of Whatever Created Life

Most people  
Believe in Whatever because  
Whatever's work is so obvious

However

How and why  
Whatever does that work

Cannot be described  
Contained or conveyed  
With abstract thoughts

That is why  
"True" descriptions  
Of Whatever  
Hide Whatever

That is why  
Seeking the "truth"  
About Whatever  
Hides Whatever from you

That is why  
Getting Whatever to fit  
The "truth" you have found  
Can make you crazy

\*

Only through your own eyes  
Did you learn what the moon looks like  
How could you have learned that  
Through the eyes of another

In that same way  
Learn about Whatever Created your Life  
By trusting yourself and what you see  
And then choose beliefs that suit you  
And make you happy

Hold your beliefs quietly  
With uncertainty and humility

But then joyfully sing its words  
With an open heart  
In celebration and gratitude  
For this miracle of being alive

Good luck



## **Quiz Conclusion**

The Quiz and Principles were designed to help you better understand your beliefs, and your relationship with Whatever Created Life. If you want to change your beliefs or that relationship, save your answers from the Quiz and use those to guide you in making those changes.

Your beliefs and your relationship with Whatever Created Life will probably change over time. So take the Quiz again sometime and see how your beliefs and your relationship with Whatever have changed. And by saving your answers now, your answers will then be a “time capsule” that allows you to see where you have been and what changes have happened in your life.

## **Holy War**

Almost everyone (92% in the USA) <sup>29</sup> believes in a higher power. Such consensus has tremendous power to unite people and nations. Such consensus has tremendous power to open hearts, dissolve separateness, and bring people closer to one another. But that is not what is happening.

What is happening is that in the name of God we separate ourselves from one another and end up divided, which is overwhelmingly irresponsible and sad.

This book is about doing everything you can to help stop this madness. This madness arises from individual psychology where it feeds on fear. This Quiz and its Principles helped you explore and better understand those aspects of psychology that both diminish and further this madness.

## **All Beliefs Work When Held In Balance**

You can have a fulfilling relationship with your higher power through any set of beliefs provided you hold your beliefs with balance.

Beliefs can be a cornerstone of your inner peace and happiness or your beliefs can disempower you and sap your resources as they close your heart, separate you from others and divide your nation.

Why is it that some people can hold beliefs with balance but others cannot? It is because with beliefs you are attempting to balance your mind and your heart, and many people never figure out how to maintain that balance in a healthy way.

The mind and heart are always competing over how to hold and express beliefs. The mind needs beliefs to be true while the heart needs beliefs to open it to love, but you can never fully satisfy both those needs. (Why not is explained in the Principles that follow the Quiz.) So that forces you to make choices that favor either your mind or your heart, and the choices you make about that are what create balance in your life.

The Quiz is for helping you better understand your beliefs. The Principles provide guidance about how you can adjust your beliefs so that your life is more balanced and fulfilling. Together, the Quiz and the Principles can help you make choices about your beliefs that can result in a healthier balance between your heart and your mind.

### **Is Your Higher Power Hidden Or Obvious?**

Almost everyone (92% in the USA) <sup>30</sup> believes some higher power created life. They believe that because they see life unfolding, they seem to be largely powerless over that unfoldment and so some "higher power" must be controlling and governing the unfoldment of life.

Further, it is obvious that you have been having a relationship with your higher power ever since you were conceived. Your higher power has been dividing your cells, growing your food, and guiding the Earth around the Sun. You did nothing to earn or deserve that relationship — it just happens, it is free, and it requires no middlemen.

Spiritualities and religions are businesses that try to sell back to you the relationship with higher power that you already have. For those businesses to work they must convince you that your higher power is hidden, that you must earn and deserve to have a relationship with it, and that they alone can deliver your higher power to you. If you buy what they are selling, they then help you TRY to find your higher power and to earn deservedness from it, which, it turns out, always takes no less than the rest of your life.

Your belief about whether your higher power is obvious or hidden greatly affects your life.

### **Keep It Simple**

Being alive is miraculous. What we want from our relationship with higher power is a way to celebrate and express our wonder and gratitude for this miracle.

The words you use to sing your gratitude and celebrate life are not important since higher power cannot be contained or described with words. What is important is that you sing your songs with an open heart that is filled with love.

That's it, that is all this is about; do not let it get any more complicated than that. Be kind. Treat yourself and others, and all life on Earth with reverence.



# How To Know Whatever Created Life

*Our mind wants our beliefs to be certain and true, which separates us from others, while our heart wants our beliefs to bring us closer to others and increase love.*

*And so we are forced to choose between love and the certainty of our beliefs. This chapter is about how to resolve this conflict.*

## Forward

“Altogether, the results of the neuroscience of religion thus far suggest strongly that a religious instinct does indeed exist ... [but] ... surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement.”

Edward O. Wilson  
*The Meaning of Human Existence;*  
*The Social Conquest of Earth*

“Western civilization, it seems to me, stands by two great heritages. One is the scientific spirit of adventure – the adventure into the unknown, an unknown which must be recognized as being unknown in order to be explored; the demand that the unanswerable mysteries of the universe remain unanswered; the attitude that all is uncertain; to summarize it – the humility of the intellect. The other great heritage is Christian ethics – the basis of action on love, the brotherhood of all men, the value of the individual – the humility of the spirit.”

“These two heritages are logically, thoroughly consistent. But logic is not all; one needs one's heart to follow an idea. If people are going back to religion, what are they going back to? Is the modern church a place to give comfort to a man who doubts God – more, one who disbelieves in God? Is the modern church a place to give comfort and encouragement to the value of such doubts? So far, have we not drawn strength and comfort to maintain the one or the other of these consistent heritages in a way which attacks the values of the other? Is this unavoidable? How can we draw inspiration to support these two pillars of Western civilization so that they may stand together in full vigor, mutually unafraid? Is this not the central problem of our time?”

Richard Feynman  
*The Pleasure of Finding Things Out:*  
*The Best Short Works of Richard P. Feynman*

## The Terrain

In what follows the term *higher power* means whatever created life. If you prefer another term use it instead. For example you may prefer to use the term God, Allah, universal spirit, nature, love, science, consciousness, Brahmin, true Self, Zen, no self, Tao or Whatever.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The Pew Foundation found in a 2008 study that almost everyone in the United States (92%) believes in God or a universal spirit. <sup>31</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that universities are dominated by those who think that God can safely be excluded from all serious questions. <sup>32</sup>

The above statements appear to contradict each other, but they do not. Rather they point to the shift in recent decades in how people relate to and describe higher power. Many who believe in higher power no longer describe their views with traditional expressions from religions. Further, many now describe themselves as being spiritual but not religious.

This ongoing shift has now resulted in deep tensions and divisions in the U.S. and elsewhere over whose faith is true.

The view in this chapter is that no one knows how life came to be present on Earth – that that is a mystery. Some people respond to this mystery humbly with an attitude of acceptance of the uncertainty involved while others respond arrogantly with an attitude that their beliefs about higher power are *the truth*.

How you respond to this mystery has nothing to do with whether you view yourself as spiritual or religious, or with your political leanings. How you respond to this mystery has to do with who you are – with how your particular psychology works.

This chapter is about how individual psychologies respond to this mystery and about affecting those responses.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Today's conflicts over who possesses the true beliefs about higher power are not new, they simply repeat human history – they are the same old holy wars that have been raging for centuries.

In the United States this comparatively polite holy war is part of what are called the *culture wars*. In countries where it is being fought less politely it is simply called hell.

For the first time in history it appears to be within our grasp to create and manage our future on Earth for the prosperity and well-being of all. That future is possible because our activities have now become so advanced and far reaching. However those same activities are also altering how civilization will be on Earth far into the future.

A future of prosperity and well-being for all is possible only if we properly manage our activities. If we do not properly manage our activities their effects are now so large and far reaching that their impact can be devastating.

Today's holy wars are a threat to properly managing our activities. Political attention and resources are limited and much of those are now spent feuding over whose beliefs are true, which leaves less attention and resources for managing the serious business that affects everyone.

In U.S. politics the tensions and divisions that have resulted from this holy war can now be felt at almost every turn. People of every political view are reporting deep frustration at best, and often hopelessness, fear and hatred.

Horror lies in the fact that holy wars have successfully defied us for centuries and are proving fully capable of defying us still today.

What can we do to affect that defiance? How does that defiance work? How do you cut off what feeds it? What is it about the craving to be *right* about your beliefs and your need to please your group that can be so overpowering that you will NOT do what is best for yourself and your family?

This book attempts to describe what upholds that defiance both in individual psychology and in society, and ways to work with or around that defiance while building a relationship with higher power that increases happiness, well-being and inner peace.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

You might think the defiance that upholds holy war lives in and arises from dogma and institutions but it does not. That defiance first arises and lives in our psychology where it feeds on fear and our craving for certainty. Only after we have fed it well do we then turn to groups and their dogma and institutions to further nurture and feed it.

How to affect that defiance then is a question of how to affect our psychology. It is a question of how to best manage our fears and our need for certainty.

An appeal of faith is the promise of salvation from fear and suffering, and often the promise of eternal life.

Life comes in a package that includes fears and insecurities and so we all look for ways to deal with those. We wonder, how can I improve my luck and avoid fear and suffering? How can I gain salvation and eternal life?

To deal with those questions many adopt faith, and their faith usually includes descriptions – beliefs – of how higher power works.

The problems start when your beliefs about how higher power works conflict with the beliefs of others. Our mind loves logic and certainty, and the mind insists there can only be one right description of anything. So when the mind has to deal with conflicting descriptions of faith that each claim to be right, you feel threatened since what is at stake here appears to be your safety from fear, suffering, and death.

Mix the fear of suffering and death in with the mind's need for certainty about your beliefs, pour those into a like-minded group, add a political agenda or two, whip that all together, and you have the ingredients of holy war.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

In holy war, one group fights another group. Certainly individuals are involved, but it is the influence that groups have over individuals that leads to holy war.

When someone adopts a faith usually they become a member of a like-minded group. Once that happens a person's fulfillment starts to come more from pleasing their new group and less from pleasing themselves and their family. Thus pleasing your like-minded group becomes the dominant influence in your relationship with higher power.

The truth is there is but one group on this small patch of dirt out here in endless space and hopefully we will soon come to see ourselves foremost as members of that one group. In the mean time however the trick is to properly manage our activities to make sure there are sufficient resources for everyone. If we do not manage our activities properly and there are not sufficient resources for everyone, then there will probably be global war.

By 2021 there are expected to be 5 billion people connected to the internet <sup>33</sup>, which will help with mustering us into a single tribe. Having to focus on global warming may also help unite us as a single group. Thus we are cautiously optimistic.

Cautiously because humans go for each other's throat when resources get tight, and holy war has every reason to be strutting its stuff defiantly today given its unrelenting successes both recently and throughout history.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



Why is it that adopting beliefs about higher power increases happiness and inner peace for some but not for others? How do beliefs go so off the rails here?

To lessen fear and increase safety the mind demands that faith be *right* and *true*, and the only way to satisfy that demand of the mind is through adopting the belief that your faith is *right* and *true*. However if you adopt that belief, the mind's logic then further demands that the different, conflicting faiths of others must be *wrong* because that is how the mind's logic works – only one description of something can be right.

So for your faith to be *right* means that the different beliefs of others must be wrong or inferior, which in turn closes your heart to love and brotherhood with them and separates you from them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Establishing that you are better than others is a strong motivator in life and we learn early that happiness does come through being better than others. We learn how to compete with one another and we learn that sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. We also learn that people will accept and even admire our success at winning.

There is one catch, however. People do not like it when you are arrogant about your success. People admire success when it is accompanied by humility. For example people like the successful athlete who then helps young people, or the successful business person who then helps in their community.

What happens when you are arrogant about your success – when you are too proud and parade it – is that people shun you, which separates you from them.

It works the same with faith. The meaningful measures of success with faith are more happiness, well-being and inner peace. That success comes of holding your beliefs humbly and quietly, which serves to keep your heart open to others, whereas holding your beliefs loudly and arrogantly puts others off and separates you from them.

Insisting to yourself and others that the beliefs you just happened to have chosen out of the multitude of different beliefs available just happen to be THE *right* ones and thus better than everyone else's beliefs is the villain of this book.

Such arrogance says to your higher power, "Yo Higher Power! Over here! It is ME! This is how I have chosen to describe you, now fall in line behind my description and behave accordingly."

Such arrogance – such a complete lack of humility – is disrespectful of other people and it is disrespectful of your higher power, and it will separate and isolate you from everyone but those in your like-minded group.

Of course no one wants to be separate and isolated. So if you do choose arrogance and certainty, then your friends end up being mostly the other arrogant ones in your like-minded group. You team up with them and now you are all primed and ready for holy war.

You alone build your relationship with your higher power, no one does this to you or for you. You alone are responsible for it.

Where you end up here is entirely your choice.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Traditionally churches have fulfilled many needs in society. (The term *church* is used here to mean a gathering for the purpose of communing with higher power.) In church is where people gather to express to their higher power awe, wonder, and gratitude for being alive. Church is where people share fellowship, celebrate their greatest joys, and express their deepest grief. In church people inspire one another to live lives of integrity and to help others.

However the role of churches in fulfilling those needs has been diminishing in recent decades. While 92% of everyone in the U.S. in 2008 believed in God or a universal spirit, only 20% in 2012 attended church on a given weekend, which is half the number that attended church in 1991. <sup>34</sup>

The Pew Foundation study also found that:

- 28% have left the church in which they were raised in favor of another religion or no religion at all, which increased to 44% when shifts between denominations were included;
- 16% said they were unaffiliated with any particular church today, which is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular church as children; and of this 16%, only one in ten described themselves as atheists;
- 25% of those 18-29 years old said they were not currently affiliated with any religion;
- Traditional religions have been losing a significant number of followers among younger people. <sup>35</sup>

In short, 250 million people in the United States – 80% of the population – do not go to church on a given weekend and almost all of them believe in a higher power. This raises the question, Are their needs that were traditionally fulfilled in church getting fulfilled?

Our need for fellowship, for inspiration to live lives of integrity, and to help others can be fulfilled elsewhere in society; churches never had a monopoly over fulfilling those needs.

Churches however are the only places where people gather with others to commune with higher power and express their gratitude and awe at the wonder of being alive. For many non-church-going believers who desire to gather with others to commune it appears those needs are going largely unfulfilled. It appears they are communing with higher power mostly alone.

Perhaps flying solo here works for some people. Others however prefer gathering with others to sing and commune with one another and with their higher power.

This then raises the question of why non-church-going believers who like gathering with others to commune have not been doing so more? <sup>36</sup>

These are some best guesses about answers to that question:

Only in the past few decades have people gained the freedom to choose how they relate to their higher power, before that they usually adopted their parent's religion. That freedom to choose is still very new and still very untried, so people are still very unsure how to exercise and express that freedom.

Higher power is – well – higher power. We are very reluctant to screw around here. This is powerful yet tender stuff that could land us in trouble. BIG trouble. Lightning bolt in the back of the head sort of trouble.

That is why we always entrusted churches with our forms of communion. Churches were supposed to know how higher power works, so we relied on them to tell us what to do. Yet when your church goes missing your physical place to meet goes missing as does your congregation and your forms of communion. That leaves a huge hole that is not easy to fill.

Also, how do you replace the *special person* with the special connection to higher power to whom many have always looked for guidance and inspiration? Individuals probably do not feel their personal relationship with higher power is sufficient to fill that *special person* spot. Is it not arrogant to even assume your mere personal relationship with higher power is sufficient to fill that spot?

Perhaps most non-church-going believers will continue to commune alone from hereon. However our sense is that we are in a long period of transition in which some are feeling for the next right steps – for the right words and expressions to use to find others with whom they can again gather and commune.

Until that happens however it appears that traditional churches will continue to provide our default setting for funerals, weddings, etc.

What will be critical in driving the outcome of this situation in the long term is that traditional churches cannot change their basic messages because doing so would nullify their core purpose, yet apparently most believers will continue to avoid traditional churches.

To us this points at seismic tensions that have been building for millennia – to a slow but definite shift in which one of the largest, oldest cultural/business enterprises on Earth is in the process of coming apart and, probably, being reinvented.

It is our experience that many non-church-going believers do yearn to come home – to come together once again with others for fellowship and to commune, and our sense is that that desire at some point will result in the creation of new, innovative churches. Our hope is that those new churches will be more democratic, more pragmatic and will deliver on the promise of more joy and inner peace.

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What is important is not whether you are drawn to your parent's church, to some other church, or to some newly created church, that is simply a question of what suits you.

What is important is how your relationship with higher power ends up affecting your life. Your relationship with your higher power can become a cornerstone of your happiness and inner peace, or it can disempower and enslave you as it saps your resources, separates you from others, makes you unhappy, and divides your nation.

What will largely determine the outcome for you here is how well you manage your personal power and authority.

You alone form your relationship with your higher power, and so you alone control the outcome here. You start out having all the power and authority in this situation but soon you encounter hazards such as your fear of suffering and death, your desire for safety, your need to be better than others, your desire to please your like-minded group, and your need for certainty.

These hazards make you vulnerable to manipulation by others who want your power and your authority for themselves, and who, once they have your power and authority, will then turn around and use those to dictate to you how you must live your life.

Perhaps the traditional beliefs of your family will serve you best.

Perhaps your greatest happiness and inner peace will come through adopting other traditional beliefs.

Perhaps your home church does not yet exist and you will help start your home church from scratch by gathering together with like-minded people – borrowing what works for you from traditional religion and spiritualities while leaving the rest behind, and making the rest up as you go.

Perhaps you will combine one of the above approaches with approaches from medicine and science that retrain your physiology and result in more happiness and inner peace as described later in the chapter “Managing Abstract Thought”.

In this chapter it is assumed that:

- Life is unfolding and since we appear to be powerless over that unfoldment some other *higher power* exists that is unfolding life.
- How and why that higher power works is a mystery that has not yet been described. Consequently no description or interpretation of how or why higher power works is promoted in this book.
- However, even though how and why higher power works is a mystery that cannot be described, most people are nevertheless compelled to understand and describe higher power, and how you end up doing that will have important consequences in your life and for harmony in your society.

## Background

Throughout history your relationship with higher power would likely have been the same as your parent’s. There is nothing wrong with that approach, it has worked well for many people. It keeps life simple, which has great value. Often the old and familiar right in front of us works just fine.

If however you are thinking about adopting another approach, first ask yourself if you really want to wander around for years looking for other ways to have your relationship with your higher power? Is what your friends are doing really a better way, or are you just wanting to piss off your elders and show them that you can stand on your own, or perhaps you just want to spend more time with those hot looking items of the opposite sex who are part of that different faith group?

Regardless of whether you adopt the beliefs of your parents or strike out anew however, be careful of one very important thing, which is your craving for certainty (see the chapters “The Mystery”, “Uncertainty” and “Faith and Beliefs”). Your craving for certainty is what leads to arrogance, and arrogance and certainty are what close your heart to love and brotherhood, separate and isolate you from others, and make societies crazy.

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Your relationship with your higher power is a serious, long-term relationship that will affect the rest of your life. So regardless of how you proceed, take a moment right now and give some careful consideration to what you are doing.

Before reading any further stop and ask yourself, Why do I want to have a relationship with higher power? What do I expect to get from it? Then write down your reasons and put those someplace where you can look at them again over the coming years to check on your progress or lack of progress.

Now go to this footnote <sup>37</sup> and read the expectations others have had about this.

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Since the 1960s a major shift has been occurring in how people relate to higher power. It used to be that you simply adopted the faith of your family, but today you have much greater freedom to choose your beliefs.

Often you hear that this shift is a retreat away from God and religion in favor of the advancement of science and atheism, but that is not correct. Today almost everyone believes in higher power (92% in the U.S.), which certainly is not a retreat from higher power but rather points at the shift that has been occurring in how people describe and relate to higher power.

What has been happening is that while many continue to describe their relationship with higher power using the language of traditional religions, more and more people are describing their relationship using the languages of spirituality, nature, non-traditional religions, environmentalism, etc.

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This shift started about fifty years ago and for some of our staff it felt like storming heaven. ³⁸

Tom Wolfe has said that history will record the migration of thousands of young men and women to San Francisco in the late 1960s as one of the most extraordinary religious fevers of all time. ³⁹

Most who took LSD then reported having brushed against a higher power or ultimate reality, ⁴⁰ and they revised their relationship with higher power accordingly. Experiences with psychedelics are so intense however that they cannot be repeated for long, so that experimentation stopped. Also, the absence of trained professionals to provide guidance during those experiences resulted in some people becoming psychologically damaged for life. It became obvious that much more responsible research and testing were needed before society could safely utilize the benefits of psychedelics. ⁴¹

In addition, many in our generation were ordered to go kill people in Viet Nam over vague notions about dominoes and communism while our churches that had preached morality and integrity to us during our upbringing then stood silently by and watched that killing happen. This caused many to lose trust and respect for their churches.

Also, our generation was the first to experience the new sexual freedoms and while some openly indulged in those others refrained, sometimes in envy. That has now resulted in deep tensions over what is appropriate sexual behavior, which tensions underlie many of the political divisions of today (2012).

Then, as if those shifts were not enough to really stir things up, in the early 1970s the need to take better care of the Earth appeared. The approach of many to that responsibility has been open minded, pragmatic problem solving. Others however have addressed those problems with an ideological rigidity that suggests the will and laws of Earth have somehow been divinely revealed to them.

Together these shifts helped create the *culture wars* that today underlie many of the political tensions in the United States and around the world.

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Many in our generation swapped our old familiar religions for new, unfamiliar ones, but as it turns out we often just gave religion a paint job. Our new ways of relating to higher power were certainly different and exciting, but many in their enthusiasm never saw – even today after a lifetime of involvement – that we disempowered ourselves with them and separated ourselves from others just as we probably would have had we stuck with the religions of our family.

Our parents' religions were easy to dismiss, but what we could not dismiss so easily was their orientation that was embedded in us, which was our orientation that happiness, inner peace and fulfillment can come through blindly trusting the authority of religious or spiritual forms, institutions and teachers. Our new religions and spiritualities looked so good in their new paint jobs that we just assumed without question that they would deliver the inner peace the old ones had promised, but that assumption was wrong – that assumption was mere hope.

We thought the trick was simply to find and possess the *right* beliefs. We thought that finding and possessing the *right* descriptions of higher power and how it works would bring us what we were after.

We repeated the same mistake so many before us had made – we gave away our power and authority to those we thought had the authority that was necessary to pull the trick off.

We believed someone else can know better than us what is best for us.

Power and Authority

When you first start formalizing your relationship with your higher power you have all the power and all the authority in the situation – you alone make all the decisions. You may decide to let someone else make those decisions for you, but in that case you are still the one who decides to let someone else make those decisions for you.

When you make decisions about formalizing your relationship with higher power you will rely on some authority to guide your decision. That authority will be attractive to you, it will resonate with you, it will seem to point you toward the right way to go. It may appear to be the truth.

Several examples of what that authority might be are:

Intuition – Your intuition is your inner voice – your gut – telling you that a direction or decision seems or feels right. Since one of your main goals probably is to be happy and fulfilled, and since happiness and the sense of fulfillment come from inside you, your intuition has authority because it provides a direct, firsthand report from inside you about the state of your happiness and fulfillment. Thus intuition is inner authority, not outer authority.

Tradition – Tradition has authority because people have used it for a long time, which makes it appear tested and true. Its authority also comes from its sacred texts, ceremonies, and how it all looks and feels. Tradition is outer authority.

Embodiment – You are drawn to a group of people or to a person (either living or dead) that seems happy and fulfilled. Since you too want to be happy and fulfilled, their example provides outer authority that sways your decisions in the direction of what they do and say.

Expectations of Others – Your family, friends, spouse, or community expect you to adopt their faith and beliefs. You value, respect, or fear them, so you do what they expect of you. Their expectations are outer authority.

In life, everyone looks outside themselves to see how others are doing things, that is how we learn. How others are doing things provides us with valuable information. However that information does not have authority for you until you start to base your decisions on it.

People are very different from one another regarding how they make decisions and the authority they base their decisions on. Some people have more self-confidence, and so they trust themselves and their intuition more when making decisions. Others have less confidence in themselves and in their intuition, and thus they are quicker to look outside themselves for the authority on which they base their decisions.

The authority you end up basing your decisions on about higher power will simply reflect who you are.

The Business of Selling You Back Your Higher Power

Long before you make any decisions about how to formalize your relationship with your higher power you already had a relationship with your higher power. Your higher power has been unfolding your life since its inception and continues to replicate your cells, to grow your food, and to keep the Earth revolving around the sun.

You do nothing to deserve or earn that relationship or to keep it happening; it just happens, and it is free.

So when anyone tries to sell back to you your relationship with your higher power, examine their motives very carefully, and if what they are selling interests you, then examine your motives very carefully. Ask yourself, What are they selling that I must have? What are they selling that I do not already have?

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It is human nature to want power. Having power makes us feel good. Pyramids, multinational organizations and civilizations get built because a few people organize and manage the power of many others. To seek power is the way we are; that is neither good nor bad, it simply is.

Power comes to people through having money, votes, status, guns, information, territory, etc. Power regarding higher power comes through *appearing* to possess the truth about how higher power works and why. Appearing to possess that truth has power because that truth appears to directly affect luck, suffering, salvation, and eternal life.

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Selling you back your relationship with your higher power is one of the largest, oldest, wealthiest business enterprises on Earth.

Since you already have a relationship with higher power, for that business to make a sale they must persuade you that they – not you – know how your higher power works. The way they try to persuade you is by promising to help increase your luck and fortunes, to help protect you from suffering, and perhaps to help negotiate for you to live forever.

That is an appeal to your fear and your desire for safety.

It is also an appeal to your arrogance. If you can be persuaded by these promises you will then come to possess *the truth* about how higher power works, which can make you feel powerful, proud, and better than others.

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If the business does persuade you and you decide to buy what they are selling, the price will be that you give the business all or some of your power, your authority, and your self-confidence, and in return the business will promise that you MAY get what you are after.

However before the business can actually deliver what they promised you must first deserve to get what they promised. It turns out that everyone is broken somehow and needs to be fixed, and it is through getting fixed that you earn the *deservedness* you need to get what was promised. So you and the business get to work fixing you and earning you deservedness, which always takes no less than the rest of your life.

With some divisions of the business not only is your deservedness never enough but also what you see and experience in life are not really what is happening. There is a barrier between you and what is really happening, and the business promises to help you see past that barrier, after which you will then get what you are after. Here again, learning how to see past the barrier always takes no less than the rest of your life, and no one ever reports seeing what is really happening out there past the barrier except those in the business.

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It is said that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. ⁴² In politics, law and government the absolute corruption of power is tyranny and dictatorship; in business and economics it is monopoly.

In the business of higher power the absolute corruption of power is division and holy war in society, and disempowerment and separateness in individuals.

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To counter abuses of power, citizens in free democracies enact laws so that (ideally) no individual is unfairly abused by power.

The business of higher power however is neither democratic nor free but rather is organized around the will and laws of higher power as interpreted by its divisions and leaders. The business tells you what its laws are, the business is not at all interested in your opinions about how they interpret or enforce their laws.

For the business to work you must first give it your power and authority. Only then can its leaders impose their laws on you. If you do not agree with their interpretations of its laws you can always leave, but leaving becomes very difficult once you have convinced yourself the business holds the keys to you getting whatever it is you are after.

The Mystery

That life is unfolding is obvious, that is not a mystery. How life was created and why it is unfolding is the mystery.

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You may not call this *the mystery*. Instead you may call it God, Allah, higher power, universal spirit, love, science, nature, consciousness, Brahmin, true Self, Zen, no self, Tao, or Whatever.

Or perhaps all such names put you off, yet when you plant seeds and flowers bloom, or when you are alone in nature at first light, what you experience seems miraculous.

These all are the same mystery, and how that mystery works cannot be described for reasons that will soon be discussed.

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The reason almost everyone believes in a higher power is because life is unfolding in front of them. They know they are powerless over that unfoldment, so some *higher* power must control that.

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Almost everyone believes in higher power. Where else in society is there such complete consensus?

Such complete consensus has tremendous power to unite people and nations. Such complete consensus has tremendous power to open hearts, dissolve separateness, and bring people closer to one another, which would also serve to increase well-being and inner peace.

That in god's name such tremendous power and hope end up getting trampled in the mud and dividing us is overwhelmingly irresponsible and sad.

Do everything you can do to help stop this madness.

Uncertainty

For thousands of years we have been trying to figure out how higher power works and why. During that time many sincere, capable people have spent their lives trying to understand and describe this.

What we have learned from that exhaustive research is that there is yet no agreed upon description of how and why higher power works. What we have instead are many different, conflicting descriptions.

Given all those different and conflicting descriptions to choose from, the question is, What are your chances of choosing the *right* and *true* description?

Your chances appear to be slim, that is why descriptions of higher power are called *beliefs*, not *truth*.

Slim chances make many people uncomfortable, and so for many the question is, How to ease that discomfort? Here are four approaches for doing that:

Certainty and Arrogance – You convince yourself the description of higher power you just happen to have chosen is *right* – is the *truth*. You convince yourself that higher power will behave according to the description you have chosen.

Tolerance – Tolerance means that you allow others to practice without interference something that you do not necessarily like or agree with. Certainly tolerating the faiths of others is better than bashing them over the head, so an attitude of tolerance is an improvement over certainty and arrogance. However if basically you do not like or agree with the beliefs of others and you choose to keep your mouth shut, that probably means there is still significant tension in the situation.

Some Bit of Truth – In this approach, every faith is said to contain some bit of *the truth* about how and why higher power works. This approach assumes that there is a *right, true* description of how higher power works but that you must settle for possessing just a small bit of that truth as part of your faith.

Our view is that there is no *right* or *true* description of why and how higher power works, so while this approach may relieve some tensions it is also misleading.

Simply Declare The Holy War Is Over For You – For thousands of years we have been working this question of why and how higher power works yet there is still no description we can agree on. The reasonable conclusion here is that there is no *right* or *true* description of how higher power works and why – that higher power cannot be contained, conveyed or described with the abstractions we call words.

If you agree with that, simply declare that holy war is over for you.

Faith and Beliefs

Faith and beliefs are not the same. Faith arises from the emotional desire for safety, which in the extreme is the desire for safety from death. Beliefs arise in abstract thoughts and serve to support and uphold faith and the emotional desire for safety.

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If you agree that higher power cannot be described with words – with beliefs – then what becomes of faith? How does your faith get expressed? How do you express to higher power your awe, wonder, and gratitude for being alive?

If you agree that higher power cannot be described, the sun still comes up, crops still grow, and cells still divide. Higher power does not go anywhere, higher power is still on the job. That aspect of faith remains unchanged.

If you agree that higher power cannot be described, you can still describe and express your faith as you did before.

For example, many of our staff really enjoy getting together with others and singing spiritual songs from different religious traditions. In doing that we sing words that describe higher power differently, but the words we are singing no longer are giving voice to *the correct answer* we have found. Instead our words simply voice our gratitude, our wonder and our joy at being alive.

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This book does not pretend to know what will bring you inner peace and happiness. However it appears the terrain each of us must navigate here may have some similarities:

First, being alive seems to take place on the edge between the abstract thoughts of our mind and the emotions of our heart, and the mind and the heart are always competing over how to express and hold faith. The mind wants faith to be *certain* and *true*, which separates us from others, while the heart wants faith to open it more to love and brotherhood, and to bring it closer to others.

Inner peace then appears to be a function (in part) of striking the right balance between our mind and our heart (more on this later).

Second, while others may provide us with some tips about how to best live our life and our faith, what ends up happening in life seems to result mostly from our own doing.

Finally, we seem to be living our lives naked and defenseless in the face of our higher power, yet we forget that much of the time. Then a child is born, someone close to us dies, or our own life is threatened, and we glimpse and remember that in this relationship with higher power we are completely humbled. We glimpse and remember that our fleeting presence on Earth does absolutely nothing to change how higher power works.

At those times we do *know* whatever created and is unfolding life, and it is as true and as complete as knowing can be; it is not knowing that comes as thoughts. We know that something indescribable created our life, and that in awe, wonder and complete humility all we do is watch this incredible experience of being alive unfold in front of us.

Then such knowing is again forgotten usually. So write it down, it helps with remembering it later.

Abstract Thought and The Fear That Arises From It

200,000 years ago human brains were 400 - 500 cubic centimeters in size and we ate vegetation. Then we figured out that eating meat was a much more efficient way to obtain the protein that is vital to our survival, and that cooking that meat over fires enabled us to digest it more easily and thus utilize its protein more efficiently.

That steady diet of vital, dense meat protein then caused our brains to increase in size from 400 - 500 cubic centimeters to 1,500 - 1,700 cubic centimeters today. It was this tripling of brain size that provided us with the memory capacity that was essential for developing what was to become our breakout skill as a species - abstract thinking and language.

Our ability to think abstractly started to form about 95,000 years ago. We know that because archeologists have not found any tools that required abstract thinking to make from before that time, nor have they found any remains of burial rituals.

So why do remains from burial rituals indicate that we had developed abstract thinking? Because we started having burial rituals only after we were able to ask ourself "What becomes of *me* - of my *self* - after *I* die?" And to ask that question we first had to have developed the ability to think about our *self* in the future. We had to have created that abstract world that today exists only in our thoughts - that world we now take so for granted today; that world that can now so overshadow us and diminish our inner peace.

We first started expressing our ability to think abstractly by drawing images of people, animals, plants, etc. on stones. We then developed more complicated pictures and symbols that eventually became our lettering and words. Over the past 70,000 years we continued to develop and refine our abstractions until they became the

language, reason, and mathematics that form the incredibly powerful, precise, and instantaneous system of communication we use today.

Once we developed abstract thinking and language no longer did the information that accumulated in our individual brains die with us but for the first time information that accumulated in our brains could be written down and passed on to future generations. Thus abstract thinking and language enabled collective learning and memory in which information outlasts individuals and is accumulated, stored and handed on from generation to generation. Abstract thinking and language enabled each new generation of humanity to start out standing on the informational shoulders of what prior generations had learned.

Our development of abstract thinking and language was arguably the most significant development ever to have occurred on Earth. Abstract thinking and language coupled with our eusocial behaviors are what have allowed humans to dominate Earth and to live in ease, comfort and prosperity compared with other creatures.

But abstract thinking also created a big problem, which is the fear that comes from knowing you will die. ⁴³

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“I may suffer.”

“I am going to die.”

An appeal of religion and spirituality is minimizing the fear that arises from such abstract thoughts by providing some safety.

Is not the threshold question here, Exactly what is that I that may suffer and will die?

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At some point in human history our ability to think abstractly was minimal after which it developed into language, reason, logic, math, etc. Western religion describes that point as its founding event:

“...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” ⁴⁴ Genesis 2:17

Only humans *know* – abstractly – “you shall die”.

Eating of the tree of (abstract) knowledge and thus *knowing* (abstractly) “you shall die” is exactly the problem that gave rise to religion and spirituality.

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Whether humans came with abstract thought fully booted up or whether it developed over time is not what is important. What is important is that intense, debilitating fear can arise from abstract thought, and thus that individuals and societies must devote significant time, energy and resources to managing that fear.

The I That Will Die

Sometimes we just do stuff and thinking is absent:

- Something starts to fall and we grab it quickly before thinking.
- We putter in the garden and notice we have not been thinking much.
- Backpack alone and after a few days you will likely be thinking less.
- A bear crosses the trail and fear comes before thinking happens.

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The fear that comes of encountering a bear crossing the trail has great value to any creature – it helps keep them alive. Note however that that fear does not arise from abstract thought, it arises solely from what is happening.

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“I saw a bear!” someone shouts.

Now two things have happened: a bear crossed the trail happened and those word-sounds happened. Those two things are not the same thing.

Do you agree with that statement? Think about that statement for a moment. Are seeing the bear and saying “I saw a bear!” the same thing?

No, those two things are not the same thing. Seeing the bear was seeing the bear. “I saw a bear” are words – abstractions that stand in place of actually having seen the bear.

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You are puttering in your garden on a glorious summer day not thinking. It is warm yet still a bit cool, fluffy cumulus clouds hang in clear air under a rich, blue sky, and everything seems to be in bloom. There has been a diagnosis of possible terminal illness but thinking is absent so the diagnosis is absent. Puttering in the garden is all that is happening, and being alive is wonderful and miraculous.

Then words go through the mind: “I may be dying.”

Fear comes, fear every bit as intense as the fear that was experienced when the bear was seen.

However once the bear had gone the fear from seeing it soon went away, but the fear that comes from thinking “I may be dying” can arise at any time, it never really goes away; it is always just there waiting in our mind.

That is the situation each of us must deal with, whether there has been a diagnosis or not.

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The fear from thinking, “I will die” or “I may suffer” can be so intense and lingering that it can be debilitating.

To manage that threat of debilitating fear from abstract thoughts and to increase hope, humans long ago developed other abstractions – *better luck*, *salvation from suffering* and *eternal life* – and systems for delivering and upholding those abstractions called *religions*.

For thousands of years now we have used that approach as a primary intervention for managing the threats abstract thoughts pose to our mental health, and that approach has served many people well.

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What is *I* in the phrase “*I* will die?”

I is a thought – a word – an abstraction that stands for the thing puttering in the garden. That *I* exists only when thinking is occurring. When thinking is not occurring, that *I* does not exist.

That *I* is not the thing puttering in the garden.

The Questions

What am I?

What was I before I was born?

What am I after I die?

These questions are at the core of philosophy, religion, and spirituality.

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These questions assume I and the thing puttering in the garden are the same thing, but that is not correct; they are not the same thing.

I is a word – a sound – an abstraction.

The thing puttering in the garden is the thing puttering in the garden.

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In nature there are many highly developed, remarkable abilities of which language and our ability to think abstractly are but one.

Certainly our ability to think abstractly has enabled humans to adapt very successfully to conditions on Earth. However abstract thought is still just an ability like a salmon's ability to find its home stream after swimming thousands of miles.

A salmon is not contained entirely by its ability to migrate, there is much more to a salmon than that ability.

Likewise humans are not contained entirely by our ability to think abstractly, there is much more to us than that ability.

However our deeply ingrained habit is to believe that language and our ability to think abstractly can and do entirely contain us – the thing puttering in the garden. Our habit is to believe that the I in the phrase "I will die" and the thing puttering are the same thing.

Out of that mistaken belief then fear arises that is every bit as intense as the fear of seeing a bear, and we seek safety in faith and beliefs.

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Certainly the thing puttering in the garden and the abstraction I both exist. Yet we are entirely the thing puttering in the garden of which its ability to think abstractly is an aspect that is used only part of the time.

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Our deeply ingrained instinct of believing that our abstract I and the thing puttering are the same thing structures a paradox that has now been forging in us for tens of thousands of years:

Abstractions in our mind inform us we are threatened at times when, in fact, there is no immediate threat at all.

Traditionally we have managed this paradox through managing abstract thoughts and the way forward here appears to be through learning how to better manage abstract thoughts – through learning how to better work with and around our ability to think abstractly.

Managing Abstract Thought

Religion and spirituality provide ways of managing abstract thought. There are other ways we manage abstract thought also:

Of the countless living organisms on Earth only humans have highly developed abstract thought. So when we are walking alone in nature – in an environment that is *not* at all concerned with or driven by abstract thought – we relax and do not think as much as usual, and we like that. That is why travel businesses selling holidays display beautiful scenes of nature – because our deepest instinct about what makes a successful holiday is being back in nature in its purest, least humanized form. Spending time in nature shifts the balance in us away from abstract thoughts towards what we are mostly – the thing puttering in the garden not thinking. Spending time in nature rebalances us and we become – we remember – that what we really are is the experience of being alive, not just thoughts about being alive.

Another way of managing abstract thought is by keeping busy and occupied during a life crisis rather than sitting around brooding over your thoughts about the crisis. Keeping busy serves to redirect attention away from negative thoughts of the crisis on to more positive thoughts that arise from keeping busy.

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The approach of many religious and spiritual traditions to managing abstract thoughts is to replace threatening thoughts such as “I will die” with positive, hopeful thoughts such as eternal life, liberation, reincarnation, and salvation from suffering.

The approach of some traditions is also to do exercises such as meditation that retrain how thoughts, emotions and the physiology interact. In the [Meditation](#) chapter of this book there is an easy Vedic meditation practice for beginners that was developed in India 3,000 years ago and has been used by yogis since then.

The above two approaches can take the edge off the fear of death. However, when faced with life threatening medical situations, those two approaches do not extinguish the fear of death for many people. In that regard recent research into a third approach of traditional religions and spiritualities is encouraging. In research at New York University and Johns Hopkins University terminally ill cancer patients were given psilocybin, a psychedelic that had the ongoing effect for many of greatly diminishing their fear of dying. For more information about this, watch the video “A New Understanding” on either vimeo.com or amazon.com, and read Michael Pollen’s article “The Trip Treatment” in the *New Yorker* magazine; February 9, 2015.

The Mind and The Heart Compete

You plant seeds in your garden and watch them grow into flowers. The growing of plants is described in many books yet no book – no abstract description – can contain the miraculousness of planting a seed and watching it become a flower.

Yet the mind’s arrogance insists it can *know* fully– that it can contain, describe, and convey that miraculousness. So the mind’s arrogance starts spinning endless, unsatisfying webs of abstraction in its attempt to capture – to *know* – miraculousness.

Meanwhile the heart just wants the mind to shut up and get out of the way so that it can get closer to and embrace the miraculousness.

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With faith we try to satisfy both the mind and heart.

The mind wants faith to be *true*.

The heart wants faith to open it more to love and fellowship.

Yet faith whose beliefs are *true* excludes others, and thus closes the heart to love and fellowship with them.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Faith also reflects our fear.

The need to persuade others to believe as we do – to convince them our faith is *right* – is a reflection of fearfulness, not inner peace.

Inner peace does not need to convince others about your beliefs, or to find their beliefs wrong.

An Idea The Heart Can Follow

This all comes down to one question: What are you really after?

What many people including us want most from our relationship with higher power is for our heart to be open to fill with love for and fellowship with others.

It appears that for that to occur something else must occur first, which is that we must accept that how and why higher power works cannot be described. Only by accepting that can we hope to get our mind out of the way enough so that our heart can be open.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Uncertainty is *the truth* abstractly.

Humility is *the truth* emotionally.

Good luck.

About Us



True fellowship among men must be based upon a concern that is universal. It is not the private interests of the individual that create lasting fellowship among men, but rather the goals of humanity. That is why it is said that fellowship with men in the open succeeds. If unity of this kind prevails, even difficult and dangerous tasks, such as crossing the great water, can be accomplished.

On the mountain, a tree:
The image of DEVELOPMENT
Thus the superior man abides
in dignity and virtue
In order to improve the mores.

I Ching; 1,000 – 700 BC
Wilhelm/Baynes; pages
56-57, 204-205

Inner Peace Fellowship is an informal fellowship of volunteers, and most of us have been practicing nondirective mantra meditation now for over 40 years. Our purpose is to help increase inner peace, to educate about non-divisive beliefs, and to build fellowship based on the universal concerns of all humanity. To those ends the contents of this book have been used by millions people in 236 countries and jurisdictions.

Many of us grew up in the traditional western churches of our families and left those churches in search of other ways of gaining inner peace. In the decades that followed we took psychedelics, studied eastern religions, listened to holy men and women, lived with saints, and spent considerable time alone in high, remote mountains.

We met in the 1970s when we came together to form a community of several thousand to explore inner peace. Some of us had careers and raised families while meditating two to four hours every day. Others went into reclusion and continue to meditate about 6 hours every day. We are friends and neighbors who have been sharing one another's successes and mistakes for a lifetime. [Our community](#) continues to experiment, to learn and to thrive.

If you are living the approaches described in this book, then you already belong to our fellowship.

Your Spiritual Home

People ask about joining our group. They are looking for their spiritual home.

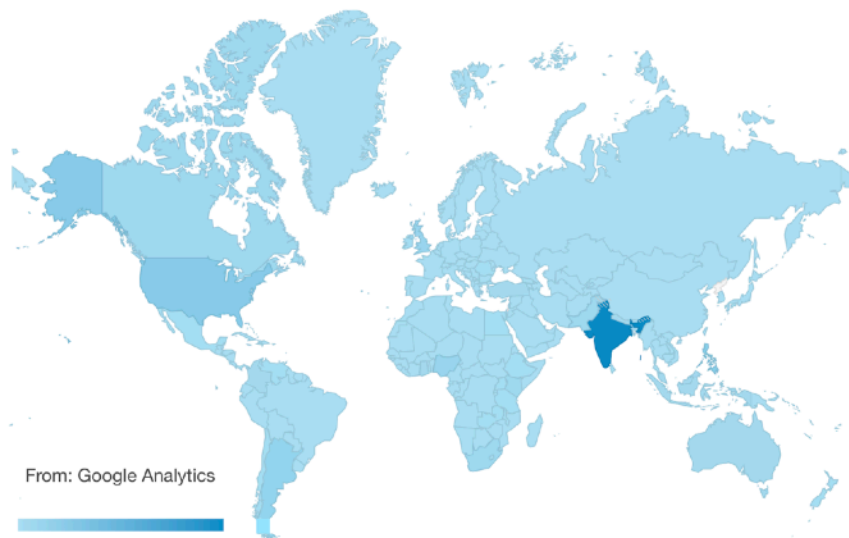
Traditionally people found their spiritual home by joining a group that shared their beliefs. However, that approach is now dividing societies and separating people from one another. But we humans are social by nature. We want to get together with others. So then, how do you find your spiritual home while avoiding the need for shared beliefs? You find your spiritual home by dividing your search into two parts:

First, you accept that being spiritual is about what you do in life, not about joining the RIGHT group of people who share your beliefs. You accept that being spiritual is about how you treat every person in your day, especially your life partner. You accept that being spiritual is about making tomorrow better than today for everyone on this planet. When you recognize and accept those truths, then your spiritual home becomes simply everyone and everything.

Second, get together with others and sing. Sing out your gratitude for this astonishing miracle of being alive. Sing to your creator; do not sing to middlemen. (For songs we like to sing, visit our [Celebrate Life](#) page.) And when you are done singing, share some words of inspiration and support in secular language that includes everyone. And if you want to socialize more, bring some food and share it with others afterward.

Finally, be watchful for these pitfalls of such groups:

- Do not allow any personal promotions, especially of beliefs or worldviews.
- Avoid organizing formally, the need for money, and building buildings.
- Make decisions that affect the group democratically.
- Discourage those who NEED to be seen as the group's leader.
- Accept that people experience the world differently and do not be a scold, or irritating to others. If you have a problem, quietly leave the group and join or start another one.



InnerPeaceFellowship.org

*Serving Millions of People
In 236 Countries and Jurisdictions*

Fairfield Iowa USA



Fairfield, Iowa USA is a farming community of 10,000 people where corn and soybeans are grown in some of the richest soil on Earth. On summer evenings bands play music in the town square (above) as children dance around and people sit in the grass relaxing (watch video below). Fairfield is in the center of America, a region called “the heartland” where good values remain tightly bound with the soil.



Video - *A Summer Evening - Fairfield Town Square* (1 minute)

Since the 1970s thousands of meditators have moved to Fairfield. Initially many shared the same world view, but in recent decades many, including our staff, adopted different world views and practices. Today Fairfield is a diverse community of people exploring how to expand inner peace, freedom and sacredness in many different ways.

[Fairfield](#) continues to be a growing, vibrant community that Iowans proudly point to as our state's entrepreneurial success story. Smithsonian magazine ranked Fairfield #7 on a list of America's Best Small Towns. We invite you to settle here, raise your family or attend university.



Terms of Use

By using the instructions in this book, including the instructions for learning meditation, you are thereby signifying your agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the owner of this book and its directors, officers, agents, and representatives from any and all claims and actions arising from your use or conveyance of any instructions in this book including instructions for learning meditation.

Footnotes

¹ Roland Griffiths; “Johns Hopkins Psilocybin Project – Implications for Spirituality & Therapeutics”; at 00:25:49 of video presentation to the Psychedelic Science 2017 Conference

² Portions of Part 1 were adapted from David Christian’s *Big History Project*

³ “Factor Analysis of the Mystical Experience Questionnaire: A Study of Experiences Occasioned by the Hallucinogen Psilocybin”; *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2012) 51(4):721–737; MacLean, Leoutsakos, Johnson, Griffiths; Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences; Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The Questionnaire was developed by Walter Pahnke (1963, 1969), who referenced the work of W. T. Stace and Abraham Maslow.

⁴ “Searching for a baseline: functional imaging and the resting human brain”; Gusnard D.A, Raichle, ME; Washington University; *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*. 2001 Oct; 2(10):685-94

⁵ “The entropic brain: a theory of conscious states informed by neuroimaging research with psychedelic drugs”; Robin L. Carhart-Harris, Robert Leech, Peter J. Hellyer, Murray Shanahan, Amanda Feilding, Enzo Tagliazucchi, Dante R. Chialvo, David Nutt; Imperial College; *Front. Hum. Neurosci.*, 03 February 2014 | doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2014.00020

⁶ “Neural correlates of the psychedelic state as determined by fMRI studies with psilocybin”; Robin L. Carhart-Harris, David Erritzoe, Tim Williams, James M. Stone, Laurence J. Reed, Alessandro Colasanti, Robin J. Tyacke, Robert Leech, Andrea L. Malizia, Kevin Murphy, Peter Hobden, John Evans, Amanda Feilding, Richard G. Wise, and David J. Nutt; Imperial College; www.pnas.org/lookup/suppl/doi:10.1073/pnas.1119598109/-/DCSupplemental; 2012

⁷ “Meditation experience is associated with differences in default mode network activity and connectivity”; Judson A. Brewer, Patrick D. Worhunsky, Jeremy R. Gray, Yi-Yuan Tang, Jochen Weber, and Hedy Kober; Yale University; edited by Marcus E. Raichle, Washington University St. Louis, St. Louis, MO; *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*; December 13, 2011 108 (50) 20254-20259; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1112029108>

⁸ Jeffery A. Martin, *The Finders*; Integration Press; 2019; and “Clusters of Individuals Experiences form a Continuum of Persistent Non-Symbolic Experiences in Adults”; 2014, and revised in *Consciousness: Ideas and Research for the Twenty First Century*; 2020, Vol 8, Issue 8

⁹ E. O. Wilson; *The Social Conquest of Earth*; Liveright, 2013

¹⁰ “A New Understanding”; <http://vimeo.com/ondemand/anewunderstandingpa/> or from Amazon.com; “The Trip Treatment”; *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015

¹¹ Griffiths 2017, *op. cit.*

¹² This section was adapted from: E. O. Wilson; *The Social Conquest of Earth*; Liveright, 2013, and David Christian’s *Big History Project*

¹³ Edward O. Wilson; *The Meaning of Human Existence*; Liveright, 2014 [and] *The Social Conquest of Earth*; Liveright, 2013

¹⁴ You are 93% stardust by mass. The remaining 7% of our mass is hydrogen, which was created at the time of the Big Bang and thus is not stardust.

¹⁵ The following sections were adapted from David Christian's *Big History Project*.

¹⁶ David Reich; *Who We Are And How We Got Here*; Pantheon, 2018

¹⁷ Recent surveys by the Pew Foundation have found that most people in the United States still believe in God or a universal spirit.

¹⁸ Parts of this chapter were adapted from *The Social Conquest of Earth* and *The Meaning of Human Existence* by E. O. Wilson; and from David Christian's *Big History Project*.

¹⁹ Edwin Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*; Random House, 2014

²⁰ Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden*; Basic Books, 1995

²¹ Christopher McDougall, *Born To Run*; Knopf Doubleday, 2009

²² The six other permanent nest builders are the naked mole rat, the Damaraland rat, honeybees, mound-building termites, leaf cutter ants, thrips and aphids.

²³ Steven A. LeBlanc, *Constant Battles – Why We Fight*; St. Martin's, 2002

²⁴ Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Discipline*, "Urban Promise"; Penguin, 2009

²⁵ Alison Gopnik, "Our Sense of Fairness Is Beyond Politics"; *Wall Street Journal*.; January 21, 2021

²⁶ Wikipedia

²⁷ *Viveka-Chudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination)*; Isherwood, Prabhavananda translation; p. 40

²⁸ *Ibid*; p. 75

²⁹ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington: Pew, 2008), p.162.

³⁰ *Ibid*; p. 162

³¹ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington: Pew, 2008), p.162.

³² Barton Swaim quoting Brad Gregory from his book *The Unintended Reformation* in the *Wall Street Journal*. article "Blame It On Calvin & Luther"; January 14, 2012.

³³ Marc Andreessen in the *Wall Street Journal*. article "Why Software Is Eating the World"; August 20, 2011.

³⁴ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins 2012)

³⁵ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 5 - 7.

³⁶ Amy Sullivan, "The Rise of the Nones", *Time*, March 12, 2012.

³⁷ What most people want from their relationship with higher power is to have their heart filled with more love and brotherhood, to increase happiness and inner peace, to improve luck and good fortune, and to keep stuff they are afraid of away from their life.

³⁸ Jay Stevens and Ralph Steadman, *Storming Heaven; LSD and the American Dream*; New York, Grove Press, 1998

³⁹ Tom Wolfe, *Hooking Up*; London, Macmillan 2010

⁴⁰ Stevens and Steadman, op. cit.; page 178; references the *Journal of Neuropsychiatry*; Nov-Dec, 1962

⁴¹ Michael Pollen, *How to Change Your Mind; What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*; New York, Penguin 2018; also, Michael Pollen, "The Trip Treatment"; *New Yorker*, February 9, 2015

⁴² John Edward Dalberg (Lord Acton) in an 1887 letter to Mandell Creighton; from "Notable & Quotable" in the *Wall Street Journal*.; May 19, 2012

⁴³ This section was adapted from Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, and from David Christian's *BigHistoryProject.com*

⁴⁴ King James Version of the *Christian Bible*