

# **Finding the True God**

## **A Journey of Discerning Discovery**



**James Coke**



Copyright © 2006 by James Coke

*Finding the True God*  
by James Coke

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 1-60034-228-0

All rights reserved solely by the author. The author guarantees all contents are original and do not infringe upon the legal rights of any other person or work. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the permission of the author. The views expressed in this book are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Quotations from the *Holy Bible* are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. (www.lockman.org) Used by permission.

Quotations from the *Noble Qur'an* are from the single volume English language edition, Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. 1999. Maktaba Dar-us-Salam Publishers and Distributors. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Cover photo of the Small Magellanic Cloud is provided by the Hubble Heritage Project.

[www.xulonpress.com](http://www.xulonpress.com)





# CONTENTS



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....                      | vii |
| NOTES TO THE READER.....                   | ix  |
| INTRODUCTION .....                         | xi  |
| PART 1 - EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES ..... | 19  |
| 1 PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF .....     | 21  |
| 2 INDIGENOUS BELIEFS .....                 | 33  |
| Scandinavia.....                           | 35  |
| North America.....                         | 38  |
| China.....                                 | 40  |
| Japan .....                                | 44  |
| Africa .....                               | 48  |
| 3 FAR EASTERN RELIGIONS .....              | 51  |
| Hinduism.....                              | 54  |
| Buddhism .....                             | 63  |
| Taoism.....                                | 67  |
| Sikhism .....                              | 71  |
| 4 NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS.....              | 79  |
| Judaism .....                              | 81  |
| Zoroastrianism .....                       | 87  |
| Christianity.....                          | 93  |
| Islam.....                                 | 101 |
| 5 ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY.....            | 111 |
| Atheism and Agnosticism .....              | 112 |
| Neo-Paganism and Earth Religions .....     | 113 |
| New Age.....                               | 115 |
| Higher Powers.....                         | 117 |
| 6 CHOOSING WHAT TO BELIEVE.....            | 119 |

*Finding the True God*

---

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| PART 2 - GETTING TO KNOW GOD ..... | 133 |
| 7 THE NAMES OF GOD .....           | 135 |
| I Am .....                         | 138 |
| Allah.....                         | 147 |
| Yah’shua.....                      | 155 |
| 8 GOD’S RELATIONSHIP TO MAN.....   | 159 |
| Creation.....                      | 160 |
| Corruption.....                    | 167 |
| Correction .....                   | 176 |
| Covenant .....                     | 182 |
| Accountability.....                | 187 |
| Restoration .....                  | 192 |
| 9 THE WAYS OF GOD .....            | 197 |
| The God of Fatherly Love.....      | 197 |
| The God of Holy Judgment.....      | 204 |
| The God of All People .....        | 215 |
| Salvation and the Afterlife .....  | 220 |
| Prayer .....                       | 240 |
| 10 PRINCIPLES AND ATTRIBUTES.....  | 247 |
| PART 3 - THE JOURNEY .....         | 251 |
| 11 TAKING THE JOURNEY.....         | 253 |
| Spiritual Exploration.....         | 255 |
| Relationship .....                 | 260 |
| Renewal.....                       | 276 |
| Faith .....                        | 288 |
| Service.....                       | 294 |
| 12 PARTNERSHIP .....               | 303 |
| INDEX .....                        | 311 |

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



In any work of this sort there is the danger of addressing too many topics and none of them well. The spiritual legacy of ages is by necessity reduced to a few convenient principles, sound bites, and anecdotes. Thousands of pages of divine revelation, commentary, and testimony must be synthesized into a pitiful handful. No author can give place to the accumulated lifetimes of introspection that spiritual leaders and philosophers have spent trying to understand God.

It is not even possible to treat one faith fairly because each is understood and expressed so differently among its own followers. Shia'a and Sunni see the legacy of Islamic leadership as differently as Pentecostals and Anglicans view the present work of the Holy Spirit.

I therefore acknowledge up front that this is an inadequate effort, and that readers will find issue with the representations and conclusions herein. That is to be expected, and I can do no more than stand before you humbly. My only defense and consolation is the grandeur and magnificence of any being that can speak all of Creation into existence.

I am as unable to do justice to the world's views of God as the world is unable to describe him.

The supernatural by definition can only be perceived by its reflection on things we can see in our world, just as moonlight dances across the surface of a white-capped sea.

I have had good help in this effort and want to thank some talented and gracious people for keeping me honest. These include Brian Gallagher, Rabbi Bruce Kadden, Mandeep Krishna, and Shaik Husam Rabi. The book is also much better thanks to the many hours of review given by others who are on their own individual journeys of discovery. All have provided insight, but the errors and omissions are mine alone.

The basic research for this book benefited greatly from the tremendous resource offered by the *Internet Sacred Text Archive*

operated by John Hare. There is, as of this writing, no better single place to find what the world has written about God.

Gerri Maynard provided editing support.

Some of the conclusions and interpretations herein are inevitably colored by my personal experiences with the Creator, both alone and in the company of others more spiritually mature than I. Among those I have been blessed to have as mentors are Pastor Wayne Butchart and his wife Arlene, Phil Gatensby, First Nations spiritual leader, and Ismael, one of the peacemakers of Jerusalem. Each has profoundly impacted my understanding of the power and love of God. Each is a true servant of the Most High.

Finally, the preparation of this book was supported by the prayers and encouragement of my beloved wife Linda and dear friends Steve Babbit and Bernadette Kalafatich. This would have been much harder without you.

# NOTES TO THE READER



There are several conventions used in this book of which you should be aware.

1. “God” is capitalized out of honor and respect when speaking of the highest spiritual personality. It is used interchangeably in the text with “Creator”, “All-Father”, “Almighty”, “Great Mystery”, “Great Spirit”, “Divine”, and so on, to illustrate the variety of ways this single being is known. The lower-case “god” or “gods” is used when describing highly-ranked spiritual beings generally. The words “angels”, “demons”, or “spirits” appear when referring to those of a lower rank.
2. The book follows societal convention in referring to God in the third person by using the masculine “him” and “his”. This is not to dismiss the female qualities in God, or the fact that matriarchal societies often viewed God in the feminine. God’s nature combines all of what we know as both male and female. For an example of this, consider the Hebrew name *El Shaddai* as used in the *Holy Bible* (i.e., Genesis 49:25). While normally translated “God Almighty”, the root Hebrew word *shad* most commonly refers to the female breast. El Shaddai can therefore also convey “God of abundant breasts”. The notion here is that a mother’s breast is all sufficient for her newborn’s nourishment, just as God is all sufficient for his people’s needs.
3. There are a variety of excerpts from the world’s sacred texts included in the book. They are reproduced along with the translators’ comments shown in (parentheses). Where this author adds additional in-line clarification, he does so using [brackets], and where he wishes to add emphasis to illustrate a point, does so using underlines.

4. Dates are suffixed with CE (Current Era) or BCE (Before Current Era). The Common Era began the year Jesus Christ was originally thought to be born, and is known as year 1 of the Gregorian calendar we use today. Note that there is no year "0". 1 CE immediately follows 1 BCE.

# INTRODUCTION



If you were to put pen to paper right now and describe your view of God and religion, what would you write?

I am a good person. I treat others well, give to a few charities, and respect the religious beliefs of others. My relationship with the Divine guides how I live my life, and I am comfortable with that. I do not need a church looking over my shoulder.

-----

I have seen both good and bad things happen to both cruel and gentle people. I have seen those who don't believe in a god get healed, and prayers of faith go unanswered. The events of the world feel so random that it is hard to believe any god is involved. Frankly, since Buddhists, Marxists, Jews, and so on all view God so differently, I have come to doubt that there is any singular truth. Religion is there primarily to help people feel better. So, I've been quite happy to ignore it and spend my time and money in other ways.

-----

There are numerous religions with plenty in common. I like the peace I get from Buddhist meditation, respect the piety of the Muslims, and accept that Krishna, Jesus, and the Gurus were all manifestations of God. All religions teach peace and lawfulness, and the notion of right and wrong is consistent pretty much

everywhere. So I believe in God and follow the rules.  
There are lots of paths to paradise.

- - - - -

I am a spiritual person who is free to discover truth anywhere I find it. My higher power does not have to be the same as yours, and it does not need to fit into any formal religion. I see the universe as an interconnected energy that flows through everyone and everything. I am constantly learning new ways that the universe can provide me with a good life and good karma.

- - - - -

I was born into my religion. My family and friends are all members. We go to church/mosque/synagogue/temple regularly and listen as the pastor/imam/rabbi/priest performs the rituals and teaches on the doctrine contained in the old writings. Some of the teachings get you thinking, but much of it leaves me feeling empty. I've certainly never seen God do any of the amazing things they talk about. I go because it seems the right thing to do.

If, on the other hand, you just wrote a long essay celebrating the richness of your faith, how real it is to you every day, how often your prayers are answered, and how your spiritual gifts are being actively used to bless others, then I celebrate with you! Put this book down and ask God as you understand him to make you even more fruitful.

This book is for those who are still sorting out who God is, how to relate to him, and what hope might be found in that relationship.

As human beings, we have both a physical and a spiritual side to us. Even the most fervent atheist gets a special feeling when he or she beholds a beautiful sunset, the face of a newborn baby, or an awesome thunderstorm. There is something intangible within us

that connects with raw nature and the miracle of life. If we are faced with a traumatic life event for which we are unprepared, a piece of us wants to grab onto something unseen in the hope that help can be found. For some, the sense of things spiritual is always nearby, and for others it is buried deeper. Whether we call it consciousness, mind, spirit, or something else, it represents the intangible; it is that part of us which is linked into a spiritual realm beyond our physical selves.

There is a particular tug on our spiritual side during childhood exploration, in times of trial and disappointment, in the transition to middle-age, and when we are near to death. We wonder about things spiritual when we observe loved ones and friends around us begin to pass on — people that we implicitly assumed would be with us forever. It is during these times that we reach out and try to connect with the spiritual for a sense of comfort, control, and purpose. We are most open during these times to finding out what else is “out there”.

The Hebrew Scriptures shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims also indicate that there are special times when God himself calls on us. These scriptures suggest that all persons will experience a spiritual awakening at some point in their lives.

“It will come about after this That I will pour out  
My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters  
will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams,  
Your young men will see visions. Even on the male  
and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in  
those days”.

[*Holy Bible. Joel 2:28-29*]

For whatever reason, we all pass through seasons of wanting to know more about both our purpose and our Maker. “Spirit calls to spirit”, and we cannot avoid forever the feeling that there is more to who we are than the bodies we inhabit and the thoughts that occupy our minds. We sense there is more happening around us than we can see with our human eyes. Even in the midst of practicing a religion, we may still feel a nagging suspicion that we might be missing

something. We begin to search for a truth that will settle comfortably within us and give meaning to our lives.

Throughout much of human history, decisions about one's faith were made collectively by the members of the community in which one lived. It is only relatively recently that some cultures now encourage individual choice. This notion has been reinforced by a general skepticism many now have toward authority and organized religion. The result in the West has been an explosion of non-traditional spiritual expression, and religion no longer provides the unifying definition of culture and its values as it once did.

In one sense this is freeing, because it allows each individual to find the spiritual fulfillment that "feels right" to him or her. Different spiritual gifts and interests can find expression across a wide variety of denominations and belief systems. This variety allows us to find a place of comfort wherever we are in the journey through life. We can select our "higher power" the way we do any consumer good, simply by logging onto the Internet and picking the one that offers the best value for the day. Since there is a cost to every commitment, we want to be sure our limited personal resources are invested in the place that will give us the greatest return.

Somehow though, this is not quite satisfying. If our god is whoever we want him (or her) to be, and can change depending on what we need at the time, then can we be sure our "higher power" really exists? If I can make a god into whatever form I desire, have I found the supreme authority? Frankly, "designer religion" has led us to a barren spot. If there really is a supreme deity as most indigenous people appear to have believed, then perhaps he wants us to know him as he really is and not as we think he should be. He will want us to discover his true character.

Ancient people around the world understood the need for a three-way balance among the body, mind, and soul (or spirit). Each of these needed attention in equal measure for a person to find fulfillment. Unfortunately, our modern society rewards the work of the mind while our busy schedules crowd out both the physical and the spiritual. Many of us have become unbalanced and find we are experiencing a hunger for the spiritual things that give meaning to life.

This book was written to help you navigate the spiritual crossroads of life. Human expressions of belief are numerous and include such colorful personalities as witches, monks, and faith healers. What is absolute to one is relative to another, and what gives you fulfillment will vary at different stages of life. People often experience many aspects of spirituality over time. This book will give you ways to thoughtfully consider the alternatives. Yet it will also suggest that generations of human experience with the supernatural can point us to some fundamental truths.

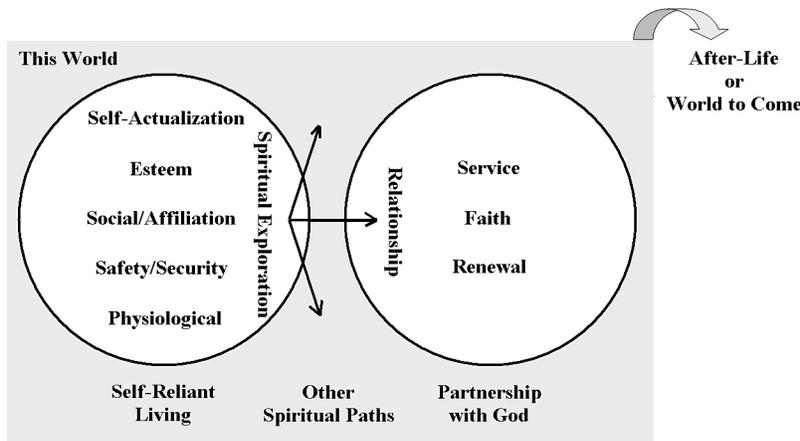
This is not a study of comparative religion. It does not dwell on the trappings, practice, and detailed theologies of the world's religious systems. These have been documented elsewhere in detail. We will look instead at what the major faiths think about God's personality, nature, and character. What does he like and dislike? Does God enter into relationships with people, and if so, how do we gain his attention? If the purpose of religion is to point us back to God, then it makes sense to put aside *religion* for a moment and focus on God *himself*. Your decision about whom or what God is can then define your life's spiritual journey.

### **Surveying the Journey**

An important part of spiritual growth is allowing the things we cannot perceive with our physical senses to increasingly influence our decisions and behaviors. Hopefully, growth does so in ways that make us better and more loving people. Over time, we notice how "coincidences" and unexplained events begin to have a marked impact on us, and we start to gain confidence that there may in fact be a greater intelligence at work. We begin trusting the spiritual dimension to take care of the things we need in this world, and not just in the world beyond. Many of us then go on to develop a relationship with this spiritual personality we call God, and find that he actually communicates with us. We discover that he responds when we invite him to take an active part in our lives. Some people find their greatest joy in giving themselves over fully to God's greater plan for the earth and humanity.

The diagram below gives some context to the journey we are on, and helps illustrate how this book has been organized. Think of it as

a guide to the winding country road you will be following. Forget the spiritual autobahn; it doesn't exist. Bulking up our spiritual side requires time and exercise, just like a muscle.



The diagram shows our life in this world as having two distinct sides. On the left are those things that we pursue while relying exclusively on our own abilities. The researcher Abraham Maslow, in his work *A Theory of Human Motivation*, identified these as needs that all humans have and seek to fulfill. They begin with basic physical health and safety, then progress up through human relationships and self-esteem, and finally culminate in satisfaction with our activities and purpose in life. Our highest level of attainment comes when all of our personal needs are sufficiently satisfied and we begin to seek meaning beyond ourselves.

The right side of the diagram illustrates those things that we learn or do in partnership with the Divine. *Renewal* refers to the transformation of our character and personality as we mature spiritually. *Faith* is required to accomplish things in the unseen realm. *Service* refers to carrying out those assignments that God gives us to better our world. It is our spiritual side that goes on to any *after-life* once our bodies cease to be useful. If there is no supreme Almighty, then spirituality is largely reduced to the realm of psychology and philosophy, and there is little hope for aspiring to something better than the life we have here.

Living in the place of partnership with God brings with it benefits that make the journey worth the effort. Maslow understood that we find greater fulfillment when we are focused on others, rather than ourselves. Our creator wired us that way, and he wants every person to live according to this principle. When we make a conscious choice to be God's people, he first takes us through a process of spiritual growth that assures we will have an abundant life in our next, primarily spiritual existence. He then makes us partners with him in helping others take the same path. This is the big picture, and it is our highest and most satisfying purpose.

Getting from self-reliance to spiritual maturity requires considering a range of faith alternatives. There are numerous paths with different gods and approaches to the spiritual. And not all roads go to the same place. We will discover how different are the spiritual landscapes to which they lead and how irreconcilable many of their gods. It is therefore reasonable to take some time at the beginning for *exploration* of the different alternatives.

If our chosen path includes a Supreme Being that we can know intimately, then becoming a partner in his plans requires taking the road of *relationship*. We cannot expect to get help from someone we don't know and with whom we cannot communicate. Relationship is all about getting to know God as a real personality and learning to hear his voice when he speaks. Only he can show you the way to his realm.

Spiritual maturity involves gaining God's heart for the world and caring for those things that move him. This is a very different orientation from the one we have when we try to be completely self-reliant. As a result, you will have to choose since you can't have it both ways. You cannot return to self-reliance without abandoning some part of the partnership. But be encouraged, the journey is worth making. The mind-body-soul balance cannot be achieved apart from spiritual development, and it is a special thing to reach a place of such fulfillment. It is there that you will discover a confident joy that you did not think possible during this lifetime. Your restless soul finds peace, and that in turn brings order and purpose to the rest of your life.

**Using this Book**

There are three parts to the book. The first is focused on exploration since that is the beginning of the journey. It surveys a variety of religious movements, faiths, and gods. Every person does a certain amount of “shopping around” and hopefully finds a base of truth on which to build. These chapters contain excerpts from the world’s sacred writings. They will help you find descriptions of God that feel right to you, and point you in directions you may wish to further investigate. If they are not helpful, then feel free to skim over them. At a minimum, consider reading the chapters titled “Principles of Religious Belief” and “Choosing What to Believe”. These provide helpful background for the rest of the book.

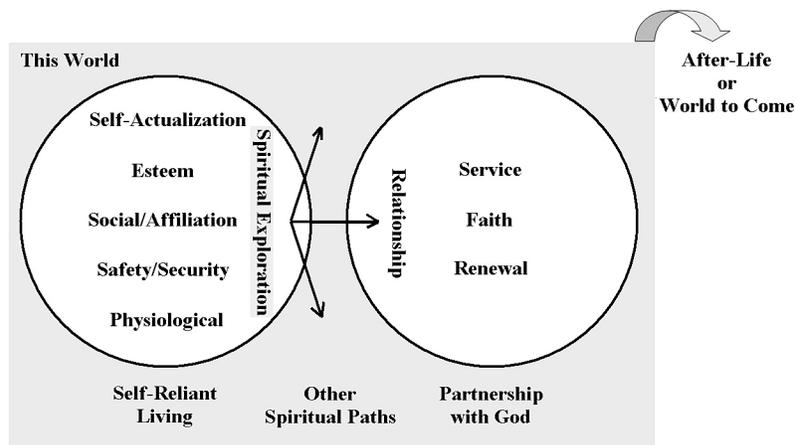
Any relationship requires knowing something of the other person. The second part of the book takes a more detailed look at the God shared by the major faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This deity is the best documented of any among the world’s sacred scriptures, and is followed by nearly half of humanity. We will begin with a survey of God’s names, which give us insight into his personality and character. We will then investigate the major interactions God has had with people over the millennia to see how creation works, and how to live successfully within it. Our objective is to learn more about the Almighty’s way of thinking about things, including those that he rewards and discourages. We will explore both the consequences of disobeying his will, and the promises he makes to those who are obedient. You may be surprised to discover that God has established an agreement with you by which he has also bound himself. We conclude this part of the book by looking in more detail at some of the issues with which people wrestle when trying to understand the ways of God.

The final part of the book departs from the focus on God and addresses the journey itself. It highlights things you can expect to encounter along the way, and provides guidance for each level of growth. If you are the sort of person that likes to survey the whole route before starting in, feel free to start here. Then come back to a study of the God that gives the whole trip meaning and purpose.

No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, there should be something here to help you along. Keep an open mind and be willing to see God in some new ways. Enjoy the trip!

# PART 1

## EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES





## CHAPTER 1

# PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF



**W**e begin by looking at the world's major religions and how each has viewed over time the character and nature of the Divine. In surveying their beliefs, we are looking for the nuggets of truth that give us real insight into who God is, how he operates, and our role in his plan. Each religion has its own, unique view of the spirit realm. Some identify a single, omnipotent creator, while others view the spiritual and material as part of one inter-connected and ethereal "All". Yet others deny the existence of a god altogether. As will become obvious, the gods described by these different faiths cannot be the same, since they contradict and conflict with one another. Our goal is to narrow the possibilities by focusing on what is knowable about a Supreme Being.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with  
a single step.” [Confucius]

Fortunately or unfortunately, this journey can be as big a project as you have lifetime to pursue. We will get a head-start on the effort by looking primarily at the major faiths. We will assume that if there is a real god that wants to be known, then he is big enough to reveal truth to a large number of people. We will not look at the infinite variety of smaller sects that dot the edges of the religious landscape.

### **Religion**

It is difficult even to define religion. Anthropologists have historically used the term to refer to aspects of supernatural expression

believed to be found in all indigenous cultures. These included belief in spirit personalities, ritual and sacrifice as a means of influencing the divine, and use of divination to discover occult knowledge. This has not proven to be adequate as a definition, however, so it may be more useful to think of religion in terms of the questions that it answers for us:

- Character and nature of the Divine.
- Origin and purpose of the universe and life.
- Aspects of human nature.
- Means and methods for relating to the Divine, the natural world around us, other people, and ourselves.
- Explanations for good and evil.
- Framework for morality and ethics.
- Source of desire, goals, and fulfillment.
- Anticipation of life after this one in paradise, nirvana, purgatory, or hell.

The primary focus of this book is the first item in the list: understanding the character and nature of the Divine itself. We will let God speak independently from the religious expressions of man, and then develop our own conclusions about the kind of relationship and religious expression that makes sense.

It will be helpful as we proceed to consider the context in which the various beliefs evolved. Here are some principles to keep in mind:

- Divine revelation came forth in some form to every people group, but has been filtered by the culture and circumstance of each community.
- Divine truths were interpreted and documented by ordinary people who used the best language and symbols available to them.
- Divine truths got packaged into religious systems and traditions that often took on a life of their own.
- Some religions were formalized to protect them from change. Others continued to be adjusted as needed.

- Indigenous religions were the only ones that developed truly independently. Subsequent religions often borrowed from those that came before by evolving prior thinking or by overturning aspects of their doctrine.

The spiritual insights originally revealed by a single individual have been supplemented over time by generations of additional commentary and packaging. It is always good to look beyond man's accumulated interpretation and try to understand the original intent of the revelation itself.

It is also worthy of note that the followers of a religious or philosophical movement would sometimes ascribe deity to the movement's founder or prophets, despite these individuals never having made such claims. Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) is a good example. Time can add mystique and significance to things that were in their day considered quite mundane.

### **Prophecy and Revelation**

All of the major organized religions we have today began because some person had his or her eyes opened to things of the spirit world and committed their insights to oral or written form. Persons who receive and convey such divine revelation are called *prophets*. These persons often become the leaders of movements that initially struggle to survive, but then go on to flourish.

Prophetic revelation can be received through spiritual beings, dreams and trances, and even carved tablets. New revelation ordinarily builds on prior knowledge but lends additional insight. Unfortunately, there is no formal process for establishing absolute truth in new revelation. It tends to become "truth" by virtue of persisting over time.

Prophetic revelation brings something new that changes the status quo. This inevitably threatens those who are invested in things staying the same. The job of the prophet is further complicated by the difficulty of communicating to others clearly what they are seeing or hearing symbolically through their spirit.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 Corinthians 13:9-12]

Each prophet or *avatar* (incarnation of God in a human form) has had a specific message to impart. Buddha rejected the role of priests as sole intermediaries between people and God. Ramakrishna and Bahá'u'lláh taught that all religions are part of one truth. Jesus revealed the primacy of God's love over man's religious legalism. Krishna taught the importance of detached action. Muhammad reinforced the message that there is only one God. Even in our present day, personalities like Adi Da Samraj and the Sai Baba continue to claim divine revelation.

As we will discover, there appear to be important differences among the Supreme Beings described by the different faiths. Test this for yourself as you read about the great faiths of this world. Focus on the deities they describe and compare their nature and personalities. See if you can reconcile them in your own mind.

### **Religious Origin and Change**

The cultural context within which each religion got its start is an important contributor to the doctrinal differences among them. The chart on the next page summarizes the geography and timing associated with the beginning of a variety of significant religious movements. Not all have survived to this day, including the extensive *pantheistic* (multi-god) religions of Egypt and Assyria/Babylonia. In the past, belief systems tended to form and evolve within specific cultures and geographies. In recent centuries, global travel and communication has allowed them to disperse well beyond their original borders.

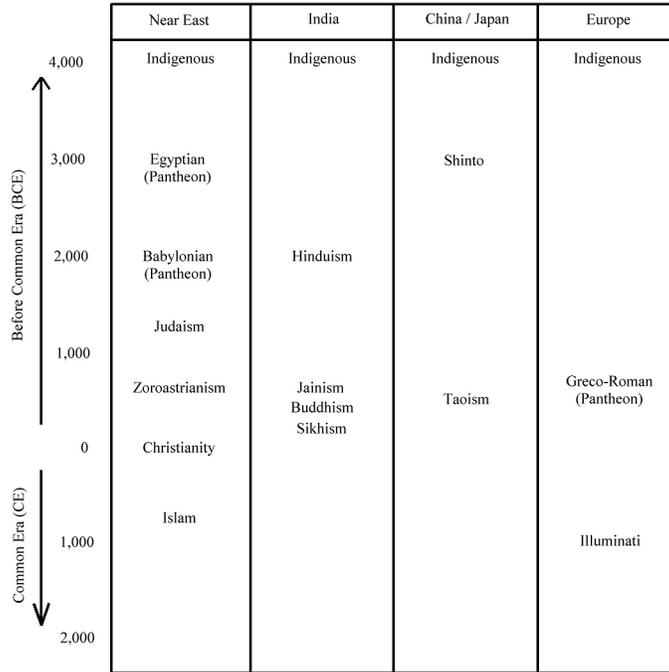
Every indigenous people group on Earth likely had some primitive knowledge of the supernatural, and most are thought to have believed in a creator of some form who made the universe. The timing varied by people and geography, but most such beliefs were formed as part of general cultural development prior to 3,000 BCE when agricultural farming and city building began. Unfortunately, we do not know very much about these early expressions of faith since the details are largely lost to history. So too is any definitive knowledge of the similarities in belief that might have existed among the widely separated groups. The beliefs and practices preserved by today's descendants of the First Nations people is, at best, a reflection of what originally existed.

There was a burst of religious development during the period between 2,000 BCE and 0 CE. In the Far East, Hinduism identified many manifestations of a single Supreme God, while in the Near East only one was recognized. Later religions were built on the foundations laid by those that came before, subsequently adjusting their doctrine in important and distinctive ways. Within any given faith there are adherents that continue to follow the old traditions even as others embrace the new.

In the last two centuries, Christianity in particular experienced a new wave of growth. This has been fueled both by the expansion of British and American influence in the world, and by the increased manifestation of supernatural signs seen in the evolving Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

Another relatively recent phenomenon has been the rejection of all gods in favor of human ingenuity and endeavor. Science began to displace the supernatural beginning in the Renaissance, and numerous quasi-religious and political experiments emerged from the resulting *metaphysical rebellion*.

### Geography and Timing of Major Religious Origins



### Spiritual Practitioners and Practices

Spiritual practitioners are those who have gained access to the supernatural realm, and have mastered the ability to perform actions that are ordinarily not possible for the rest of us. Techniques are passed through the generations from master to disciple, and generally require extensive training and practice. Practitioners are often somewhat detached from modern society, preferring to remain close to nature or in close company with God or other spiritual personalities.

Spiritual practitioners help people solve problems by serving as intermediaries with the spiritual world. They facilitate healing, protection from curses, and gathering information from sources outside the physical. Some masters are believed to *spirit-travel* from place to place without their bodies, *shape-shift* by temporarily taking the form of another creature, and move or transform objects without

touching them. Masters are known to perceive and manipulate the energy that exists in all things.

Most practitioners interact at some level with specific spiritual personalities. This often begins with the Creator God himself, and may also include helpful lower-level spirits that can be called upon to perform various services. Alternatively, a spirit may afflict a person or community, in which case the practitioner must first investigate the oppression and then either negotiate a solution with the spirit involved, or force it to stop.

Spirits are seen to be disembodied *ghosts*, *ancestors*, or created beings called *angels*, *jinn*, and *demons*. They are understood to have personalities and emotions similar to our own. Spirits may manifest as animals, dead corpses raised by witch doctors, or little people. Here are a few of the little people known around the world:

- Fairy (Scotland)
- Kontombili (Ghana)
- Menehune (Hawaii)
- Naga (Tibet)

As with many things, spiritual practices can be used for good or evil. Phenomena may be true manifestations of the divine or false imitations. The spiritual master himself can be a humble instrument used by God, or a self-promoter seeking profit.

Practitioners use a variety of techniques in their work. Some depend upon God's power, others on spiritual helpers, and yet others on advanced human abilities that tap into the resources of the invisible realm. Practitioners often use physical objects as facilitators, particularly when seeking information. Psychedelic power plants such as Peyote (American Southwest) and Ayahuasca (Brazil) are used to induce visions and open the subconscious. Above all, the attention of the spiritual world is attracted by prayer, sacrifice, and ritual.

In some cultures, techniques for activating the supernatural realm evolved into specialties such as communicating with the dead (*Necromancy*), predicting the future based on the alignment of stars and planets (*Astrology*), and performing magical arts (*Witchcraft*). Such specialties assume that the supernatural is accessible to all who

learn to use its tools, and are not dependent on the will of a Supreme God. Adepts spend their lifetimes mastering the intricacies of these *occult* (hidden) arts.

One of the more common applications of occult techniques is *divination*. This is the process of obtaining information that cannot be known by physical means. The methods used are apparently reliable enough to have persisted for long periods of time. The following example comes from ancient China, where tortoise shells and plant stalks were used to foretell the outcome of various decisions.

The practice of divination for the satisfaction of doubts was thus used in China from the earliest times... Those old methods were by means of the tortoise-shell, and the stalks of the Khî plant. 'The tortoise,' says Kû Hsî, 'after great length of years becomes intelligent; and the Khî plant will yield, when a hundred years old, a hundred stalks from one root, and is also a spiritual and intelligent thing. The two divinations were in reality a questioning of spiritual beings, the plant and the shell being employed, because of their mysterious intelligence, to indicate their intimations. The way of divination by the shell was by the application of fire to scorch it till the indications appeared on it; and that by the stalks of the plant was to manipulate in a prescribed way forty-nine of them, eighteen different times, till the diagrams were formed. The outer shell of the tortoise was removed, leaving the inner portion on which were the marks of the lines of the muscles of the creature. This was smeared with a black pigment, and, fire being applied beneath, the pigment was examined, and according as it had been variously dried by the heat, presented the indications mentioned in the text.

[*The Books of Kau*; Book IV - The Great Plan;  
Footnote 1. From Legge, James. *The Shû King, Shih  
King and Hsiào King; Sacred Books of the East*,  
Vol. 3. 1879.]

In those cultures that honor a single Creator God, most practitioners see themselves as inherently powerless but willing servants through whom the Creator himself brings healing, provision, and deliverance to those in need. For these, spiritual ministry is dependent on first hearing God's will for a particular situation, and then carrying out exactly what is shown. Sometimes this meant not performing the requested service.

The following steps are ideally followed:

- 1) Inquire of the Creator as to his willingness to perform a requested service.
- 2) Verify and strengthen the faith and correct heart of those ministering and receiving the service.
- 3) Inquire of the Creator as to the root source of the problem, and the best way to address it.
- 4) Carry out the service exactly as the Creator specifies.
- 5) Continue the service until assurance is received from the Creator that the task is completed.
- 6) Give thanks to the Creator for helping, and undertake an act of personal sacrifice to demonstrate gratitude.

Having to first hear from God distinguishes such ministry from that of the occult, in which some aspect of nature provides answers without God's intervention. Occult activity was expressly prohibited in some faiths.

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.”

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 18:9-11]

The Hebrew God did give his people a means of determining his will in the form of stones called the *Urim* and *Thummim*. The use of these stones is not documented, but they appear to have had a property (such as illumination) that would manifest when accurate prophecy was given by the priest. *Lots* could also be cast in decision-making, but the outcome was always to be attributed to the Creator and to no other source.

“Moreover, he [Joshua] shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, [both] he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation.”

[*Holy Bible*. Numbers 27:21]

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 16:33]

Many of the self-help techniques that we use in the west today originated from spiritual practices in the Far East. Prominent among these techniques are meditation and visualization. These do not depend on the intervention of a god or other spiritual personality.

*Meditation* serves to calm us and focus our attention. There are four general levels of brain activity in humans. The goal in meditation is to lower the brain's activity into the 5-13 cycle range where we are most receptive to spiritual insights and most able to creatively visualize things. One of the benefits of meditation is its ability to quell fear and anxiety. Emotion dies away and spiritual perception improves.

*Finding the True God*

---

| Brain State | Frequency (Hz) | Activity   |
|-------------|----------------|--|
| Beta        | 14-40          | Fully awake, active, alert.  |
| Alpha       | 8-13           | Relaxed, peaceful, lack of fear, creative visualization, dreaming.                 |
| Theta       | 5-7            | Deep meditation, inspiration, behavior change, detachment from physical awareness. |
| Delta       | 1-4            | Deep sleep, subconscious, physical healing.  |

There are a variety of techniques for slowing the brain's activity. They include reciting a simple mantra repeatedly (eg., "Om"), counting down numbers, and repeatedly picturing the same simple event. The idea is to bore the brain and stop its rapid, spurious thoughts. On the other hand, you do not want to slow it so far that you fall into a deep sleep. Thomas Edison was reported to meditate on problems he was trying to solve while holding metal balls in his hand. If he began to fall asleep the balls would clatter into a dish below and wake him.

Meditation and visualization are often practiced together. *Visualization* is used to change our behaviors, and some believe it can also change our reality. Many people imagine a screen before them that is somewhat elevated and a short distance in front of their closed eyelids. They mentally project images on the screen that either shows things as they are, or how they would like them to be. The deeper the person is meditating during visualization, the more vivid the imagery and better able a person is to impress new patterns of thinking.

It is during deep meditation that people believe they have a special connection to the spiritual world, and gain the ability to obtain information that would otherwise not be knowable. Answers can come in a variety of ways. Some people get a physical feeling in the body, while others may see a quantitative measure on a meter

*Finding the True God*

---

that they have projected onto their visualization screen. Whatever the technique, it does seem that we are all able to connect with the spiritual realm in some way.

## CHAPTER 2

# INDIGENOUS BELIEFS



Our survey of how the world's faiths view God begins with the dawn of agrarian civilization in various regions between 8,000 and 3,000 BCE. It was at this time that nomadic hunter/gatherers discovered the science of agriculture and began to settle in specific areas with good water for irrigation and temperate climates. Cradles of such early civilizations included the Nile Delta (Egypt), Mesopotamia (Iraq), Indus Valley (India and Pakistan), Tehuacan Valley (Mexico), and Huangho River (China).

The needs of the *indigenous* or *First Nations* people in these early civilizations were basic. They included food, shelter from violent weather, and protection from attack. Natural events were often assumed to be controlled by local spiritual personalities that could be encouraged to help the human condition. It was frequently believed that the cooperation of dead ancestors could be obtained if their afterlife needs were met for food, liquor, weapons, or blood. The *holy man* or the *shaman* in the community made regular contact with the spiritual realm to ascertain the root cause of problems and to provide whatever the gods needed.

Because community survival was of primary importance, a code of conduct was developed that described good and bad behavior. Such behaviors as murder, rape, and theft, were universally seen as anti-social. Care for elders, giving gifts, and hard work were encouraged. "Sin" was not an offense against a god so much as transgressing a rule for peaceful co-existence. In general, a sense of conscience was aroused only in times of trouble. If it was discerned that a community member had offended a god, then repentance became necessary. The people did not generally expect to find a paradise in the hereafter. Their observations about the cycles of the sun, seasons,

and life, suggested that they would reappear on a new Earth at some point in the future. They also expected their life in that world to have many of the same problems.

As remains true today, the ancient spiritual practices of indigenous First Nations peoples throughout the world were filled with ritual, ceremony, and symbolism. This included dance, drumming, regalia, chanting, meditative techniques, and the use of power plants and fire. Some of these practices were given by the inspiration of the gods. Some harnessed forces in the natural environment. All were intended either to facilitate connection to the spiritual realm, or to accomplish things in the natural that were ordinarily impossible for humans.

First Nations people have a variety of creation stories, most of which point to a single Creator or creation event. In most cases the Creator is known simply as the “Great Mystery” that gave and sustains life. Most First Nations people to this day hold a universal respect for the Earth. They believe that dishonoring creation also dishonors the Creator.

All of the indigenous groups initially taught and transmitted morals and a belief system through oral teachings in the form of stories. These stories taught important principles and were easy to remember. We are fortunate that by 2000 BCE, some of the great sagas and legends were committed to written form, allowing us a glimpse into how these people related to the spirit world. Wonderful examples of such stories are found in the historical literature of Greece, Egypt, Assyria, and the Indus Valley.

It is clear that this spirit world was much more alive for people in ancient times, not because that realm has gone away, but because we in the post-modern age have largely chosen to ignore it. Rather than viewing ourselves as part of an integrated spiritual and physical creation, we now see ourselves as standing apart from both, and taking what we want from them. This would have been a foreign concept to the primitive peoples.

With this background we are ready to further explore the ancient indigenous beliefs of a variety of people groups around the world.

▬▬▬ **Scandinavia** ▬▬▬

The *Norse Sagas* from Iceland and Scandinavia relate grand stories of the battles and heroic exploits of their many gods. In these sagas the *All-Father* created everything, but stands aloof from it all. The gods are viewed as playing with human lives as if betting at a crap shoot. They are impartial to the outcome, although perhaps amused by what they see. One gets the impression that humanity plays a minor role in their affairs. When evil gains the advantage in the heavens, it does so as well among men on Earth. It is easy in this tradition to become fatalistic about human destiny.

When the gods come unto Hela they leap from their horses and take their seats in the Thingstead. The dead are then brought before them.

To the Thingstead come men and women in full attire, with the jewels and ornaments which those who loved them placed on their bodies ere they were laid in grave-chambers. Warriors carry their weapons, and all are clad so that they may be recommended to the gods as the well-beloved among men. But silent are the dead, save the happy ones under whose tongues were placed, ere yet they were laid in their graves, magic runes, so that they might make answer when accused, and give reasons to justify their deeds. But the Hamingjes can also speak for the dead, and those who have not Hamingjes to speak for them are known to have done evil and to be deserted by their Dises in sorrow and wrath.

Those who are justified pass to the eternal realms of Hela, where joy prevails, because they have lived upright lives, and have been honourable and full of pity and have helped others; because they were brave and feared not to die; and also because

they worshipped the gods and gave offerings in the temples.

But those who are condemned are sent to Nifel-hel, the region of torture. They are judged to be unworthy if they injured others by falsehoods or wicked deeds, if they were adulterers, or murderers, or despoilers of graves, or cowards, or were traitors, and profaners of the temples.

[Mackenzie, Donald. *Teutonic Myth And Legend*.  
Chapter II - The Nine Worlds. 1934.  
W.H. Wise & Co]

The gods were not seen as communing with men. Their wisdom was made available only through sources such as mystical runes.

Secret runes, which have magical influence, did Odin also invent. For nine whole nights he hung on the high branches of Ygdrasil, pondering and searching out the secrets of the mind and of the Universe. For the power of runes was before the beginning of man. They are mixed with fate, and their potency did Odin discover when he drank from Mimer's well. They have also power over death and the world beyond. Runes there are to ward off strife and care, to charm away sickness and disease, to blunt the foeman's sword, to break fetters that bind, to still the storms, to ward off the attacks of demons, to make the dead to speak, to win the love of a maid, and to turn away love that is not desired. And many more there be also.

When runes are carved in mystic symbols the powers they convey are given to the weapons, or to the men that bear them, for they govern all things and impart power to conquer and power to subdue. He who has

a certain desire shall achieve it if he but knows the rune which can compel its fulfilment, for the runes come from Odin, the chief ruler of the Universe, the god most wise. His power and great knowledge are enshrined in them.

[Mackenzie, Donald. *Teutonic Myth And Legend*.  
Chapter III - The Deeds of Odin. 1934.  
W.H. Wise & Co]

Good and evil in the earth reflected their battle for dominance in the heavens.

With Odin and Honer, his brethren, he endowed with their various attributes the first man and the first woman. But the gifts of the gods were of unequal account. Odin gave Spirit which yearns for what is good and inspires courage and veracity, and the love of mercy and justice. Honer imparted understanding and memory and will, and by Loke, who is also called Loder, the man and the woman were given the semblance of the gods, and endowed with passions and desires and longings which ever tend to work evil and bring weakness and distress. Thus the gifts of Loke are continually at strife with those of Odin and Honer.

But not until the Golden Age was ended did Loke fail and man turn to evil ways. The innocence of gods and men passed from them when from Jotun-heim, as the Skalds have told, came three giant maids, who brought corruption.

[Mackenzie, Donald. *Teutonic Myth And Legend*.  
Chapter IV – How Evil Entered Asgard. 1934.  
W.H. Wise & Co]

Belief in these gods remains active in Scandinavia today. Take a drive over the backbone of the Jotunheimen mountains in southern Norway. When you get to the highest points of the road, you will find amidst the grandeur of the glaciers numerous small altars. They have been built with rocks that have been carried up from the lowlands below. As has been the practice for millennia, people have placed their prayers in these rocks for the gods above.

### ■■■■ North America ■■■■

The North American First Nations peoples have always been deeply spiritual, and see the presence of the Creator in everything around them. They conduct numerous ceremonies dedicated both to personal improvement and the benefit of the community. These ceremonies often involve humbling or quieting themselves before the Creator so they can better connect with his spirit to receive revelation and healing.

Native North Americans historically structured much of their oral teaching around the natural elements, typically ascribing personalities to animals such as the raven, eagle, coyote, and bear. Their conception of life and the universe was based on the cycles of nature. They believed that a Great Spirit was responsible for all of creation, loves everyone and everything in creation, and actively helps them to live life in a good way. All that is needed to heal any disease, or meet any need, can be obtained through nature with the guidance of the Great Spirit.

*Creator* and *Great Spirit* are common names given for the creative personality that is behind everything. He has no beginning or end, and can be simultaneously both the single Great Mystery, and many gods represented in the different aspects of nature. The Creator speaks to the people both directly, and through his holy men.

Each First Nations tribe had its own variant on the general themes of the supernatural. To illustrate, consider the following Oglala teaching. The Oglala tradition speaks of one God with many personalities, each of which is focused on specific areas of responsibility.

The Supernatural is Wakan Tanka, or the Great Mystery that no one of mankind can comprehend. It

may be pleased or displeased by the conduct of any one of mankind. It may be propitiated or placated by a proper ceremony correctly performed. Its aid may be secured by appropriate sacrifice. Therefore, it is the Great God. Its members are:

- The Chief God; composed of the Sun, Moon, Buffalo, and Spirit.
- The Great Spirit; composed of the Sky, Wind, Bear, and Ghost.
- The Creator; composed of the Earth, Feminine, Four Winds, Spirit-like.
- The Executive; composed of the Rock, Winged, Whirlwind, and Potency.

[Walker, J. R. *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of The Teton Dakota*. 1917. From *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* Vol. XVI, Part II]

In contrast, Frank Fools Crow (AKA Eagle Bear), one of the great holy men and healers of the Lakota Sioux, described Wakan-Tanka in this way.

“We have three Chief Gods like the Christians do. Wakan-Tanka is like the Father. Tunkashila is like the Son. The Powers and Grandmother Earth together are like the Holy Spirit.” Fools Crow sometimes referred to these plus the personages of the Four Directions collectively as the ‘Higher Powers’. Most Lakota holy and medicine men refer to Wakan-Tanka and Tunkashila as one person. Fools Crow said, “Why would we have two names for the same person, and why is it that our stories of our beginnings talk about a person like Tunkashila coming to our land long ago

and walking about among us? No one ever says that this person was Wakan-Tanka.”

[Mails, Thomas. *Fools Crow Wisdom and Power*.  
1991. Council Oak Books]

Clearly, God is viewed in a variety of ways, but for the First Nations generally, the specific theology is less important than having a close spiritual relationship with the Creator. Unfortunately, no written records exist of the spiritual beliefs of the early North American people. We must recognize that the body of oral tradition that was committed to writing is only a shadow of its original content accumulated over the millennia.

Like many indigenous peoples today, Native Americans continue to participate in a variety of sacred rituals that keep them connected with the spirit world. One of these is the *sweat-lodge ceremony*, which is deeply prayerful and reverent. A small group of people gathers inside a half-dome covered with a tarp or animal hide, and sits in a circle around a pit filled with very hot rocks. The lodge becomes completely dark when the door flap is closed, except perhaps for the soft glow of the rocks. It fills with the smell of sage and sweet grass as the air begins to heat. The spiritual leader guides several rounds of prayer for the individual, group, and creation, allowing the heat to build up and release in each round. The wonderful thing about the ceremony is that the intense heat forces you into a deep place of prayer or meditation where you often do not feel your physical body. (The Alpha and Theta brain state.) Prayers from that deep place are powerful. At the end of each round the participants talk about what they are hearing or seeing from the Great Spirit. It can be a source of revelation, comfort, and healing.

### China

When most people think of Chinese spirituality today, they think of Taoism and to a lesser degree, Buddhism. But before either of these appeared in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the people followed primitive religions based on the combined worship of the Creator *Shang Ti* (“Supreme God”), the king (or emperor), and a person’s ancestors.

Some of the earliest references to these are found in the writings of Confucius.

The Master said, “How abundantly do spiritual beings display the powers that belong to them! We look for them, but do not see them; we listen to, but do not hear them; yet they enter into all things, and there is nothing without them. They cause all the people in the kingdom to fast and purify themselves, and array themselves in their richest dresses, in order to attend at their sacrifices. Then, like overflowing water, they seem to be over the heads, and on the right and left of their worshippers. It is said in the Book of Poetry, ‘The approaches of the spirits, you cannot sunrise; and can you treat them with indifference?’”

By the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth they [King Wu and the Duke of Chau] served Shang Ti, and by the ceremonies of the ancestral temple they sacrificed to their ancestors. He who understands the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, and the meaning of the several sacrifices to ancestors, would find the government of a kingdom as easy as to look into his palm!

[Confucius. *The Doctrine of the Mean*. 500 BCE]

The ceremonies spoken of here were performed by the reigning emperors from 2200 BCE through 1911 CE. They included both an annual ritual at the winter solstice dedicated to Shang Ti that was known as the *Border Sacrifice*, and another during the spring solstice that was dedicated to the Earth. The magnificent Temple of Heaven and Altar of Heaven complex we see today in south Beijing was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to accommodate this ritual. The following Border Sacrifice liturgy was used during the time of the Ming Dynasty, when Shang Ti was still understood to be the Creator:

To Thee, O mysteriously-working Maker, I look up in thought. How imperial is the expansive arch [where Thou dwellest]...With the great ceremonies I reverently honour thee. Thy servant, I am but a reed or willow; my heart is but as that of an ant; yet have I received Thy favouring decree, appointing me to the government of the empire. I deeply cherish a sense of my ignorance and blindness, and am afraid, lest I prove unworthy of Thy great favours. Therefore will I observe all the rules and statutes, striving, insignificant as I am, to discharge my loyal duty. Far distant here, I look up to Thy heavenly palace. Come in Thy precious chariot to the altar. Thy servant, I bow my head to the earth reverently, expecting Thine abundant grace. All my officers are here arranged along with me, joyfully worshipping before Thee...Oh that Thou wouldest vouchsafe to accept our offerings, and regard us, while thus we worship Thee, whose goodness is inexhaustible!

All the numerous tribes of animated beings are indebted to Thy favour for their beginnings. Men and things are all emparadised in Thy love,, O Ti. All living things are indebted to Your goodness, but who knows from whom his blessings come to him? You alone, O Lord, are the true parent of all things. He sets fast forever the high heaven and establishes the solid earth. His government is everlasting. Your sovereign goodness cannot be measured. As a potter, You have made all living things.

[Legge, James. *The Notions of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits; Statutes of the Ming Dynasty*. 1852. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Register Office]

Further detail of the ceremony can be found in the LÎ KÎ:

The son of Heaven sacrifices (or presents oblations) to Heaven and Earth; to the (spirits presiding over the) four quarters; to (the spirits of) the hills and rivers; and offers the five sacrifices of the house,—all in the course of the year. The feudal princes present oblations, each to (the spirit pre-siding over) his own quarter; to (the spirits of) its hills and rivers; and offer the five sacrifices of the house,—all in the course of the year. Great officers present the oblations of the five sacrifices of the house,—all in the course of the year. (Other) officers present oblations to their ancestors.

[*THE LÎ KÎ*. Section 2 Part 3 Number 6. From Legge, James. *The Sacred Books of China*. 1879.]

These writings indicate that the people had a collective understanding and experience with the Divine, although by the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 24 CE) Buddhism and Taoism had begun to replace the knowledge of Shang Ti. The assumed divinity of the king or emperor also contributed to confusion over who was being celebrated at the sacrifice. The title “Ti”, meaning “God”, was eventually applied in an honorific way to the earthly ruler, just as the title “Divus” was given to the Roman emperor.

Additional evidence of a primitive knowledge of the Creator is found in the *Oracle Bone pictographs* that pre-date more modern Chinese characters. This written language was probably developed in the early days of Chinese civilization around 3,000 BCE. The pictographs were carved on bones, and appear to have been used at least in part for divination. Pictorial symbolism was also used in Egyptian and Sumerian writing of the same period.

Several of the Oracle Bone pictographs, in either standalone or compound form, are believed to describe the characteristics of a deity. For example, there is a character for the general word “god” that is formed from “great person” and “above”. A variation on this character is used for the specific Creator-God Shang Ti. These appear on inscriptions in the Temple of Heaven.

天 = 大 + 上  
God /                      Great /                      Above  
Heaven                      Noble Person

帝

Supreme God /  
Di (Shang Ti)

[Nelson, Broadberry, and Tong Chock. *God's Promise to the Chinese*. 1997. Read Books Publisher. Dunlap, TN, p. 16. Also: Chia-Ku Wen-Pien, 1965, Nos. 1.1, 10.11, 1.2]

The precise meanings of the Oracle Bone characters have been obscured by time, but the symbols appear to describe things in the natural world, and many can be traced to more modern characters. Oracle Bone writing is from the “legendary period” of Chinese history prior to the start of the Xia Dynasty in 2205 BCE. What little is known of this time can be found in the Zhou Dynasty texts written some 1,000 years later. This includes the Book of Odes and Book of Documents which contain stories of a great flood and the exploits of the patriarchal emperor Huang Ti. The Han Dynasty texts were written even later and also speak to this legendary period. These contain the well-known creation story of *Pan Gu*, describing his formation of the heavens and earth from within an egg-like universe.

### ==== Japan =====

Japan’s indigenous people migrated from continental Asia around 30,000 BCE and became known as the *Ainu*. Their religion was called *kamimomishi* or “path of the gods”. It included worship of both nature and their ancestors, whose spirits were believed to remain active in the earthly realm after death. The Ainu were gradually displaced by later immigrants from Korea and China who merged Ainu beliefs with fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism. An evolved form of these beliefs became

known in the eighth century CE as *Shintō* from the Chinese words “*shin tao*”, which also means “path of the gods”.

The gods of *Shintō* are called *kami*. They may be human ancestors who have died, or things and concepts important to life such as weather, rivers, and fertility. *Kami* are seen as abstract creative forces called *musuhi* that sustain and protect the people. They also serve as territorial spirits that act as guardians over their area. The following creation story of Japan tells how the gods came to be:

Of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and the In and Yo not yet divided. They formed a chaotic mass like an egg which was of obscurely defined limits and contained germs.

The purer and clearer part was thinly drawn out, and formed Heaven, while the heavier and grosser element settled down and became Earth. The finer element easily became a united body, but the consolidation of the heavy and gross element was accomplished with difficulty. Heaven was therefore formed first and Earth was established subsequently.

Thereafter divine beings were produced between them.

Hence it is said that when the world began to be created, the soil of which lands were composed floated about in a manner which might be compared to the floating of a fish sporting on the surface of the water.

At this time a certain thing was produced between Heaven and Earth. It was in form like a reed-shoot. Now this became transformed into a god, and was called Kuni-toko-tachi no Mikoto. Next there was Kuni no sa-tsuchi no Mikoto, and next Toyo-kumunu no Mikoto, in all three deities. These were pure

males spontaneously developed by the operation of the principle of Heaven.

[*The Nihongi*. Book I — The Age of the Gods.  
Translated by W.G. Ashton, 1896]

The kami are very different from the gods of the monotheistic religions like Judaism and Islam. There are no concepts in Shintō of omnipotence, omni-presence, or absolute right and wrong. Morality is defined as that which is good for the group, and a person's deeds merely affect one's fortune in this world. Evil and sin are called *kegare* (dirtiness), and good behavior is *kiyome* (purity). Humans are thought to be basically good, and evil is believed to be caused by unclean spirits. Therefore, the purpose of most shintō prayer and offering rituals is to invoke the kami and petition them to drive away evil spirits.

When Buddhism was introduced in Japan, it was mixed with the traditional practices and beliefs of Shintō. Many Japanese today practice Shintō to improve the quality of their life in this world, and Buddhist meditation to end the cycles of rebirth.

Japanese emperors have long been viewed as deities. The first (known as the *Mikado* or *Tenno*) was believed to be the grandchild of the sun goddess *Amaterasu*. He won a series of battles to unify Japan that were believed to have been divinely led. This introduced the notion that events on earth echoed activities in the heavens. When good prevailed in the spirit world, favor was given to human leaders.

Shintō priests have always performed most of the various religious activities. The following excerpt from the *Yengishiki* describes a portion of the Purification Ritual. It was documented around 927 CE, but like the *Nihongi* quoted above probably dates back to the earliest emperors. Nevertheless, the ritual remains largely unchanged today. It opens by having the nation's leaders list the offenses that need to be purged. The priest then repeats "the great ritual, the heavenly ritual" which is a short address asking the kami to be in attendance. The ritual then proceeds as described below:

When he [the priest] has thus repeated it [the address], the Heavenly gods will push open Heaven's eternal gates, and cleaving a path with might through the manifold clouds of Heaven, will hear; and the country gods, ascending to the tops of the high mountains, and to the tops of the low hills, and tearing asunder the mists of the high mountains, and the mists of the low hills, will hear.

And when they have thus heard, the Maiden-of-Descent-into-the-Current, who dwells in the current of the swift stream which boils down the ravines from the tops of the high mountains, and the tops of the low hills, shall carry out to the great sea plain the offenses which are cleared away and purified, so that there be no remaining offense...

And when she thus carries them out and away, the deity called the Maiden-of-the-Swift-cleansing, who dwells in the multitudinous meetings of the sea-waters, the multitudinous currents of rough sea-waters shall gulp them down.

And when she has thus gulped them down, the lord of the Breath-blowing-place, who dwells in the Breath-blowing-place, shall utterly blow them away with his breath to the Root-country, the Bottom-country.

And when he has thus blown them away, the deity called the Maiden-of-Swift-Banishment, who dwells in the Root-country, the Bottom-country, shall completely banish them, and get rid of them.

And when they have thus been got rid of, there shall from this day onward be no offense which is called offense, with regard to the men of the offices who

serve in the court of the Sovereign, nor in the four quarters of the region under Heaven.

Hear all of you how he leads forth the horse as a thing that erects its ears toward the plain of high Heaven, and deigns to sweep away and purify with the general purification, as the evening sun goes down on the last day of the watery moon of this year.

O diviners of the four countries, take the sacrifices away out of the river highway, and sweep them away.

[*The Yengishiki*. The Purification Ritual;  
Translation source unknown]

==== **Africa** ====

Ancient spiritual practices are still common in rural Africa to this day. Where scientific thinking has not taken hold the people still depend for their health and provision on good relationships with the spirits in the land. Even in areas where Christianity and other religions have been introduced, there is often a mixture of the beliefs that combine the essential elements of each. For many Africans, however, the spirits long known in their cultures are far more active and real than the formal theologies brought by the missionaries.

The *Amazulu* provide a good illustration of primitive spiritual belief. Their ancient practices have been well documented, and a strong cultural identity remains among the 8 million or so who call themselves Zulu today. The tribe was formed in 1816 by the warrior chief Shaka who combined numerous of the small tribes that lived in modern day South Africa.

The Amazulu believed in a Supreme God whom they called simply “the King”. This spirit could not be described, and lived above the sky where he was inaccessible to men. Another spirit named *Unkulunkulu* (also *Uthlanga*) created and then lived in the earth. The spirits that are of most importance to the Zulu are those of their dead ancestors which remain in the area where they lived while

alive. Men who have died are called *Amadhlozi*. Some change into snakes called *Idhlozi*.

The following transcript excerpts are from an interview conducted with a Zulu man in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They provide insight into the King, Unkulunkulu, and the ancestral Amadhlozi.

We say that Unkulunkulu was first; we do not know what belongs to that king. There remained that word only about the heaven; we know nothing of his mode of life, nor of the principles of his government. His smiting is the only thing we knew, because we said to a man who was afraid, "Why are you afraid when the king is playing for his own pleasure? What sin have you done in his sight?" That is all.

...in process of time we have come to worship the Amadhlozi only, because we knew not what to say about Unkulunkulu; for we do not even know where we separated from him, nor the word which he left with us. It is on that account then that we seek out for ourselves the Amadhlozi, that we may not always be thinking about Unkulunkulu, saying, "Unkulunkulu has left us;" or, "What has he done for us?"

[Callaway, Henry. *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. 1870. Springvale, Natal]

The Zulu believed that neither the King nor Unkulunkulu could be understood by men. These gods were not relevant to their daily lives, and a tribesman did not worry about figuring out things that he could not perceive.

He did, however, feel a connection with his ancestors and believed that their spirits were (and remain to this day) quite real. These spirits speak in voices, appear as small people, perform signs as animals, and interact regularly with people in ways they can perceive. The spirits regularly demand sacrifices of food and alcohol, and the people attest that they consume both and return the

empty containers. If a snake crawled into a hut to escape the hot sun, the Zulu did not disturb what he believed was an Idhlozi spirit. For these people the ancestral Amadhlozi rather than the King or Unkulunkulu was the center of spiritual focus.

The family's ancestors were expected to protect the family, go to war for the family, and generally meet its needs. Heads of families would get frustrated when the ancestors did not speak clearly to them about something that was needed. The family was then forced to purchase the services of a seer or shaman.

The Zulu did not have a sense of sin, because all good and evil was made by Unkulunkulu. Nevertheless, if someone got ill, a battle was lost, or something otherwise bad happened, it was assumed that either the King or one of the Amadhlozi had been offended. The Zulu often struggled with the paradox of an unknown sin creating offense. This would require divination to understand the root issue, and shamanistic practices to appease the god or gods. Both typically required a financial fee.

We said nothing about that king which is above but that which we say to a man who is afraid, "What have you injured which belongs to the king?" We know that he who has sinned against him is struck by him; but we know nothing that can save us from being smitten. Neither do we see in what respect we have sinned either in his sight or in that of Unkulunkulu. We say, "We are righteous, for all that we do we were permitted to do by Unkulunkulu."

[Callaway, Henry. *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. 1870. Springvale, Natal]

Witchcraft has always been an important part of the African spiritual legacy, and voodoo and shamanistic abuse both remain widespread today. It is not uncommon for a shaman to cast a spell over a family and then charge for its removal.

## CHAPTER 3

# FAR EASTERN RELIGIONS



The Asian Far East has developed an amazing mosaic of religions that have interwoven over the centuries. Some faiths were started by well-known personalities like Siddhartha Gautama and K'ung Fu Tzu. The founders and origins of others, such as ancient Indian Vedic Hinduism and the Chinese worship of Shang-Di, are obscured by time.

The table on the following page shows the prevalence of Asia's major religions in several countries. Data is for the year 2000. A “-” indicates a prevalence below 1%. Bear in mind four things as you look at this chart. First, aggregated statistics include a number of assumptions and adjustments. Second, individuals often claim a religion as a cultural affiliation and not as an active faith. Third, the statistics represent the primary religion reported, but Asians in particular often blend more than one at the same time. This is particularly true of Buddhism and Confucianism/Taoism. Fourth, these and all other faiths have been spread widely with globalization, so the statistics are strictly regional. The numbers of adherents given for each faith are only for the countries listed.

An important insight gained from this chart is its testimony to the enduring power of state sponsorship of a particular faith. At one time or another, laws were passed in places like China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Japan that enforced adherence to religions that remain dominant today. In several of these countries, governments continue to encourage a unity of faith that binds the people culturally. Spiritual, political, economic, and social patterns are all closely interlinked and mutually supportive. For this reason, selecting a different faith and moral standard can be disruptive to group harmony. This is very different from western practice, in which individuals are encouraged

to make their own choices regardless of their community or family heritage.

For readers in the western countries, the experiential/philosophic nature of Taoism, the many gods of Hinduism, and the non-linear thinking of Buddhism can be hard to grasp. The west was Christianized during the third century CE by the Roman Emperor Constantine, and to this day Greek logical thinking and the monotheism of the Byzantine Empire still prevail. Citizens of the west, often without realizing it, tend to think about religion in this way. It takes a different mindset to conceptualize a god that does not have a single or known personality.

The remainder of this chapter examines how the major faiths of the Far East view the character and nature of the Divine.

Prevalence of Far Eastern Religions by Country

|                  | Cambodia | China | India | Indonesia | Japan | Malaysia | Myanmar | Pakistan | Thailand | Total |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-------|
| Population       | 11       | 1,263 | 1,014 | 213       | 127   | 22       | 46      | 157      | 61       | 2,913 |
| Hindu            | -        | -     | 80    | 2         | -     | 5        | 1       | 2        | -        | 817   |
| Muslim           | 4        | 2     | 13    | 80        | -     | 58       | 4       | 96       | 5        | 492   |
| Confucius/Taoist | 5        | 29    | -     | 1         | -     | -        | 3       | -        | -        | 363   |
| Buddhist         | 83       | 8     | 1     | -         | 70    | 22       | 83      | -        | 92       | 311   |
| Christian        | 1        | 7     | 2     | 16        | 2     | 9        | 9       | 2        | 2        | 163   |
| Shinto           | -        | -     | -     | -         | 24    | -        | -       | -        | -        | 31    |
| Sikh             | -        | -     | 2     | -         | -     | -        | -       | -        | -        | 19    |
| Indigenous       | 4        | 4     | 1     | 1         | -     | -        | 1       | -        | -        | 72    |
| Non / Other      | 3        | 50    | 1     | -         | 4     | 5        | -       | -        | -        | 645   |

Note: Shaded values are percentages. Other values are in millions.  
 [Primary source: Johnstone and Mandyk, Operation World, 2001. Paternoster Lifestyle, Carlisle, UK.]

## **Hinduism**

### **Historical Context**

*Hinduism* is the dominant religion of India, and one of the world's oldest despite having no single system of theology, morality, or leadership structure. Each community practices its own variant of the faith and has its own manifestations of the Divine to which it attaches legends, teachings, and names.

Hinduism most likely developed around 6,000 BCE among the people of the Indus Valley civilization. The Indus Valley was located in an area that now forms the border between India and Pakistan. This was a strategic cross-road of trade and migration, and this allowed the people there to blend spiritual beliefs from a wide area that included northern and southern India, Persia, and Europe. The early Hindus spoke and wrote an Indo-European language called *Sanskrit* which has the same common root as Latin.

The early Hindus faced a hard agrarian life in the midst of periodic flooding, military invasion from the west and north, and the general difficulty of the times. Hope for a better existence was found in the great *Vedic literature* that showed one how to transcend this troublesome world. The *Vedas* also specified an elaborate sacrificial and ritual system for gaining the assistance of the gods in matters of daily life.

A caste system developed that was topped by the priestly class of *Brahmans* who performed the various religious rituals. Over time, the priests became increasingly elitist and abusive, and this led a later generation of spiritual leaders to introduce the reform movements that became Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. More recent spiritual teachers such as Swami Vivekananda and Mohandas Gandhi encouraged their followers to focus less on renouncing the world and more on improving social conditions.

Hindu contributions to western culture include the use of mandalas (diagrams), mantras (syllables or poems), meditation, and yogic movement.

### **Beliefs**

Hinduism is *henotheistic*, meaning there is a single supreme deity called the *Brahman* who manifests in the form of many other

gods and goddesses. Each of these represents some part of the whole, and many are associated with aspects of nature. The supreme deity binds together into itself all aspects of existence, but does not have a specific personality that can be characterized. It is always described as being “indescribable”.

The Brahman’s primary manifestations are *Brahma* (the Creator), *Shiva* (the Destroyer), and *Vishnu* (the Preserver or Protector). Each of these has additional manifestations in various forms among which are human incarnations (avatars). Probably the best known of these is *Krishna*, the eighth avatar of Vishnu. There are literally thousands of such personalities in Hindu belief. Hinduism assumes that the spiritual guides of other religions such as the Buddha, Jesus, and Confucius, are also authentic divine incarnations or prophets. As such, it is not uncommon to find Hindus incorporating into their worship elements of Christianity, Islam, and other faiths.

Each community or religious sect views the Brahman through its own local deity, and expresses its relationship to that deity through unique texts and rituals. Depending on the need at hand, a person may appeal to any of a variety of gods which can be summoned to meet individual or community needs. Vedic rituals were designed to gain the attention of these gods through recitation of hymns and presentation of offerings. Offerings were typically of two types: malted butter poured on a fire, or juice from the Soma plant placed on sacrificial grass. The word *Darshan* is a Sanskrit term that describes this process of communing with the Brahman.

The spirit inside every human is known as the *Atman* or *Self*. It is connected to everything in the universe, but humans cannot enjoy this greater existence unless they become enlightened to its true nature. Enlightenment is attained across many lifetimes through various rituals and disciplines, and allows man to escape from an endless and painful process of reincarnation.

The following excerpt from the Vedic literature gives a good sense of the many personalities that comprise the Brahman, and the rituals used to invoke them. In this passage, a chant is recited while giving an offering (oblation) of juice derived from the Soma plant. The chant addresses by name several of the Hindu gods.

1. WITH all assistants, Agni, come hither to drink the Soma-juice;  
With Gods unto our sacred gifts.
2. Come to the sacrifice, O ye whose ways are right, whose laws are true,  
And drink the draught with Agni's tongue.
3. O Singer, with the singers, O Gracious, with those who move at dawn,  
Come to the Soma-draught with Gods.
4. To Indra and to Vayu dear, this Soma, by the mortar pressed,  
Is now poured forth to fill the jar.
5. Vayu, come hither to the feast, well pleased unto our sacred gifts:  
Drink of the Soma juice effused come to the food.
6. Ye, Indra, Vayu, well deserve to drink the juices pressed by us.  
Gladly accept them, spotless Pair come to the food.
7. For Indra and for Vayu pressed are Soma juices blent with curd,  
As rivers to the lowland flow: come to the food.
8. Associate with all the Gods, come, with the Asvins and with Dawn,  
Agni, as erst with Atri, so enjoy the juice.
9. Associate with Varuna, with Mitra, Soma, Vishnu, come, Agni, as erstwith Atri, so enjoy the juice.
10. Associate with Vasus, with Adityas, Indra, Vayu, come, Agni as erst with Atri, so enjoy the juice.
11. May Bhaga and the Asvins grant us health and wealth, and Goddess Adid and he whom none resist.  
The Asura Pusan grant us all prosperity, and Heaven and Earth most wise vouchsafe us happiness.
12. Let us solicit Vayu for prosperity, and Soma who is Lord of all the world for weal;  
For weal Brihaspathi with all his company. May the Adityas bring us health and happiness.

13. May all the Gods, may Agni the beneficent, God of all men, this day be with us for our weal.  
Help us the Rhibhus, the Divine Ones, for our good. May Rudra bless and keep us from calamity.
14. Prosper us, Mitra, Varuna. O wealthy Pathya, prosper us.  
Indra and Agni, prosper us; prosper us thou, O Aditi.
15. Like Sun and Moon may we pursue in full prosperity our path,  
And meet with one who gives again, -who knows us well and slays us not.

[*Rig-Veda*. Book 5 - Hymn LI. Visvedevas]

### **Literature**

The oldest of the sacred Sanskrit literature are the *Vedas*. These contain hymns, incantations, and rituals for summoning and petitioning the gods. They are generally dated after 1,500 BCE, although some believe they may be as old as 3,000 BCE. Certainly they codify even older oral traditions. The Vedas include four parts; the *Samhita*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka*, and *Upanishad*.

- The *Samhitas* contain the sayings required to administer priestly duties such as the fire and Soma sacrifice. They are in four parts. The first three are referred to as the “threefold knowledge”. These include the *Rig-Veda*, *Sama-Veda*, and *Yajur-Veda*. The fourth is the *Atharva-Veda*. It was written several hundred years after the others and contains chants that invoke supernatural acts such as casting out diseases and evil spirits.
- The *Brahmanas* provide an explanation of the sacrifices.
- The *Aranyakas* guide individual meditation performed as a form of sacrificial ritual.
- The *Upanishads* were written later, between 900 and 400 BCE. Some elaborate important spiritual principles such as the nature

of Brahman and the connection between the Brahman and Atman. Others discuss the sacrificial system, yogic action, karma, and rebirth.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* (“Song of the Lord”) is probably the best-known and liked of the Hindu literature. It is a part of the larger *Mahabharata*, one of the great literary epics of Hinduism. It was written between 400 and 300 BCE. The Gita recites a dialogue that took place between the avatar Krishna and Prince Arjuna immediately before the battle of Kurukshetra in 3,102 BCE. Arjuna is distraught at seeing in the opposing army many of his family members, teachers, and friends. Krishna instructs Arjuna in spiritual wisdom and persuades him to perform his duty as a warrior. The Gita addresses the yogic practice of selfless action that is not concerned with outcomes, the pursuit of self-knowledge, and devotion to Krishna.

The *Puranas* are another well-known work that describes the endless cycles of the universe. The primary Hindu gods *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva* represent these cyclic elements of creation, sustenance, and destruction.

### **The Character & Nature of God**

The gods that comprise the Brahman are generally seen as benevolent beings who watch over mankind. They are protectors and providers for the righteous, and punish those who do evil.

The following passages describe the nature of the Brahman. Note that the “Self” in each of us is also a part of the Brahman. To manifest this, we have only to understand this truth through “discovery of the Self”.

1. ‘The Infinite indeed is below, above, behind, before, right and left—it is indeed all this.  
‘Now follows the explanation of the Infinite as the I: I am below, I am above, I am behind, before, right and left—I am all this.
2. ‘Next follows the explanation of the Infinite as the Self: Self is below, above, behind, before, right and left—Self is all this. ‘He who sees, perceives,

and understands this, loves the Self, delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self— he becomes a Svarâg, (an autocrat or self-ruler); he is lord and master in all the worlds. ‘But those who think differently from this, live in perishable worlds, and have other beings for their rulers.

[*Khândogya Upanishad*. VII – Twenty-Fifth Khanda]

1. ‘To him who sees, perceives, and understands this, the spirit springs from the Self, hope springs from the Self, memory springs from the Self; so do ether, fire, water, appearance and disappearance, food, power, understanding, reflection, consideration, will, Mind, speech, names, sacred hymns, and sacrifices—aye, all this springs from the Self.
2. ‘There is this verse, “He who sees this, does not see death, nor illness, nor pain; he who sees this, sees everything, and obtains everything everywhere.

“He is one, he becomes three, he becomes five, he becomes seven, he becomes nine; then again he is called the eleventh, and hundred and ten and one thousand and twenty.”

‘When the intellectual aliment has been purified, the whole nature becomes purified. When the whole nature has been purified, the memory becomes firm. And when the memory of the Highest Self remains firm, then all other ties are loosened.

‘The venerable Sanatkumâra showed to Nârada, after his faults had been rubbed out, the other side of darkness. They call Sanatkumâra Skanda, yea, Skanda they call him.’

[*Khândogya Upanishad*. VII - Twenty-Sixth Khanda]

Hinduism is uncertain about the source of the universe and its forces of nature. Creation derives from the *ether* which is itself a part of the Brahman, although the Brahman is never explicitly called a “creator”. These Bronze Age people found it easy to worship elements of nature alongside the various gods that were thought to have influence over it.

1. ‘What is the origin of this world?’ ‘Ether, ‘he replied. For all these beings take their rise from the ether, and return into the ether. Ether is older than these, ether is their rest.
2. He is indeed the udgîtha (Om = Brahman), greater than great (parovarîyas), he is without end. He who knowing this meditates on the udgîtha, the greater than great, obtains what is greater than great, he conquers the worlds which are greater than great.
3. Atidhanvan Saunaka, having taught this udgîtha to Udara-sândilya, said: ‘As long as they will know in your family this udgîtha, their life in this world will be greater than great.
4. ‘And thus also will be their state in the other world.’ He who thus knows the udgîtha, and meditates on it thus, his life in this world will be greater than great, and also his state in the other world, yea, in the other world.

[*Khândogya Upanishad. I - Ninth Khanda*]

There is no sense in Hinduism of a divine judge, or of sin creating a separation from the Divine in this life or in eternity. Instead, doing good or evil establishes a pattern of *karma* that dictates how we will reincarnate into another life or transcend altogether. Regardless of where we are in our karmic status, we can still leap into enlightenment and out of reincarnation if we successfully discover the Self. There is no eternal consequence for sin, and the evil we do to another

is only perceived as hurtful if that person already has his own accumulated “bad” karma. Otherwise the evil would be harmless.

7. ‘Those whose conduct has been good, will quickly attain some good birth, the birth of a Brâhmana, or a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya. But those whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a Kandâla.

[*Khândogya Upanishad*. V- Tenth Khanda]

In the excerpt above, the *Brâhmana*, *Kshatriya*, and *Vaisya* are the upper three of four castes in traditional Hindu society. Life is more comfortable in the higher castes, and one is better able to discover eternal knowledge through caste advantages such as better education and mentoring.

Mohandas Gandhi, taking a contemporary view of the nature of God, described him in this way:

God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. To me God is Truth and Love, God is Ethics and Morality. God is the fearlessness of the morally good man. God is the source of light and life; and yet above and beyond all these God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist.

[*YI*, 5-3-1925]

We believe — and I think it is the truth — that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and, since God has many forms, we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues, we consider Him to be speechless and so on.

[*YI*, 31-12-1931]

One of the enduring contributions of Hinduism is meditative contemplation. There are a variety of techniques that help one focus during meditation, one of which is the repetition of a mantra. The Upanishad opens with a description of the mantra *Om*. This is a sacred syllable that speaks of the very essence of the Brahman. Reciting it allows the one meditating to connect with this supreme and inclusive God.

1. LET a man meditate on the syllable Om, called the udgîtha; for the udgîtha (a portion of the Sâma-veda) is sung, beginning with Om. The full account, however, of Om is this:—
2. The essence of all beings is the earth, the essence of the earth is water, the essence of water the plants, the essence of plants man, the essence of man speech, the essence of speech, the Rig-veda, the essence of the Rig-veda the Sâma-veda, the essence of the Sâma-veda the udgîtha (which is Om).
3. That udgîtha (Om) is the best of all essences, the highest, deserving the highest place, the eighth.
4. What then is the Rik? What is the Sâman? What is the udgîtha? ‘This is the question.
5. The Rik indeed is speech, Sâman is breath, the udgîtha is the syllable Om. Now speech and breath, or Rik and Sâman, form one couple.
6. And that couple is joined together in the syllable Om. When two people come together, they fulfil each other’s desire.
7. Thus he who knowing this, meditates on the syllable (Om), the udgîtha, becomes indeed a fulfiller of desires.
8. That syllable is a syllable of permission, for whenever we permit anything, we say Om, yes. Now permission is gratification. He who knowing this meditates on the syllable (Om), the udgîtha, becomes indeed a gratifier of desires.

9. By that syllable does the threefold knowledge (the sacrifice, more particularly the Soma-sacrifice, as founded on the three Vedas) proceed. When the Adhvaryu priest gives an order, he says Om. When the Hotri priest recites, he says Om. When the Udgâtri priest sings, he says Om, all for the glory of that syllable. The threefold knowledge (the sacrifice) proceeds by the greatness of that syllable (the vital breaths), and by its essence (the oblations).
10. Now therefore it would seem to follow, that both he who knows this (the true meaning of the syllable Om), and he who does not, perform the same sacrifice. But this is not so, for knowledge and ignorance are different. The sacrifice which a man performs with knowledge, faith, and the Upanishad is more powerful. This is the full account of the syllable Om.

[*Khândogya Upanishad*. First Prapathaka – First Khanda]

## ■■■■■ **Buddhism** ■■■■■

### **Historical Context**

*Buddhism* grew out of Hinduism in the fifth century BCE, some 1,500 years after the Hindu Vedas were written. It borrowed heavily from Hinduism but prescribed a different approach to achieving enlightenment.

Its founder, *Siddhartha Gautama*, was born into a royal family in present-day Nepal in 563 BCE. At 29 years of age he gave up on wealth as the source of happiness and began exploring the different religions and philosophies of the day. After six years of study and meditation he discovered the “middle path” between extreme religious discipline and the pure pursuit of knowledge. Following his enlightenment, he spent the rest of his life teaching the principles he had discovered.

Buddhism became the official religion of India when the nation was unified by the monarch Asoka (272-231 BCE). The modern Buddhist scriptures were completed during Asoka's reign at the Third Buddhist Council in 250 BCE. Buddhism began its spread beyond India into Cambodia, Vietnam, China, and Central Asia during the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century it was established throughout the east as far as Persia.

Buddhism's major contributions to western culture are its techniques for meditation and introspection.

### **Beliefs**

Siddhartha Gautama accepted the general Vedic doctrines of karma and transcendence, but taught that priestly intermediation with the gods was not necessary. Each person could become enlightened to *Nirvana* (cessation of striving) on his own. He believed that a person became enlightened both by releasing emotional attachments to the things of this world, and by concentrating on becoming a part of the "All". Gautama never tells us what achieving Nirvana is like, just that its primary benefit is transcending the bonds of karma and rebirth.

Inconceivable is the beginning of this Samsara [rebirth]; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings, who, obstructed by ignorance, and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

[*Word of Buddha. Samsara*]

This, truly, is the Peace, this is the Highest, namely the end of all formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving: detachment, extinction-Nirvana...The extinction of greed, the extinction of anger, the extinction of delusion: this, indeed, is called Nirvana.

[*Word of Buddha. Nirvana*]

The word *Buddhism* comes from the root *budhi* which means “to awaken”. A Buddha is therefore one who has been awakened or enlightened to his true Self.

For many Hindus, the philosophy of the Buddha provided a refreshing sense of control over their future. Unfortunately, its focus on the Self rather than the needs of other people also led to social indifference. It was assumed that if something bad happened to another person it was because he or she had accumulated “bad” karma. No amount of human help would change that condition.

The essence of Buddhist teaching is found in the *Four Noble Truths*:

1. Life is full of suffering.
2. Suffering is the result of not achieving what we desire.
3. We can overcome suffering if we live in simple acceptance of how things are.
4. The path to overcoming suffering has eight behaviors that should be pursued on the middle path.

The eight behaviors of the fourth truth are:

1. Right understanding.  
Take joy in a simple approach to life.
2. Right thought/intention.  
Work with what is, and do not attempt to manipulate situations.
3. Right speech.  
Speak in a genuine way.
4. Right action.  
Avoid unnecessary complexity.
5. Right living.  
Find satisfaction in whatever work is given.
6. Right effort.  
Work within the flow of things without struggle.

7. Right mindfulness.  
Be aware of the body, feelings, mind, and hindering thoughts.
8. Right concentration.  
Use meditation to maintain focus.

Additional beliefs that guide Buddhists include:

- Buddha is not an incarnation of God.
- There is no explanation for either the origin or final state of existence.
- The ultimate reality found in Nirvana has no limitations, including the concept of good and evil.
- There is no sin against a judging deity, only bad karma, and therefore no need for a savior.
- Karma explains human suffering, inequality, fate, luck, predestination, and so on. The things we experience in the current life are the consequences of actions taken in a previous life.
- The goal of life is to obtain liberation from *Samsara*, (the perpetual cycles of existence).
- There is no heaven or hell, but there are six realms and an unlimited number of Buddha worlds.
- Liberation from Samsara is based solely on self-reliance, discipline and personal striving.
- Loving kindness and compassion are to be shown to all living things. One may never kill another person. Animal sacrifice is forbidden and vegetarianism encouraged.
- One should do good and be good, but must remain detached from the costs and benefits of doing so.
- There is no soul entity in Buddhism as there is in Hinduism.
- Buddhism emphasizes the use of *Vipassana* (insight) meditation when seeking enlightened truth. This does not depend on the assistance of any spirit or deity.

### **Literature**

The primary source for understanding the Four Noble Truths and the eight part path is the *Word of Buddha*, which was compiled

by his followers around 500 BCE. After the death of Gautama, the First Buddhist Council was convened at Rajagaha in 486 BCE. It was at this council that the *Tripitaka* or “Canon of the Buddhists” was adopted by both the Theravada and Mahayana schools. By the first century CE, there were at least 18 schools, each with their own version of the Tripitaka.

### **The Character & Nature of God**

Buddhism has no concept of a Supreme Being as does Hinduism. It does not deny the possibility; it just does not address the issue.

## ══════ **Taoism** ══════

### **Historical Context**

Like Confucianism, *Taoism* was originally more of a philosophy of living than a religion. Over time, its message and practice became mixed with the other Chinese religions including Buddhism and primitive mysticism. Exercise, meditation, self control, and other well-known techniques were supplemented with divination, alchemy, and searches for an elixir of life. As such, Taoism today is often practiced in ways that are quite different from its original form.

Tradition holds that Taoism was founded by Lao-Tzu (604-531 BCE), a contemporary of Confucius, although some believe it resulted from the collaborative effort of several philosophers. It became a formal religious faith in 440 CE when it was adopted as the Chinese state religion. With the end of the Ch’ing Dynasty in 1911, state support for Taoism ended, and it nearly disappeared during the subsequent communist purges and Cultural Revolution.

Taoism has contributed to western culture such practices as acupuncture, herbal medicine, meditation, and the martial arts.

### **Beliefs**

The *Tao* defies precise description.

The Chinese word “Tao” roughly translates as “Way”; for Taoists, it refers to a non-sentient, impersonal power that surrounds and flows through all things,

both living and non-living. The Tao regulates Natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It benevolently embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e., there would be no love without hate, no light without dark, no male without female).

[Western Reform Taoism Congregation.  
*Our Beliefs.*]

It is described in part 1 of the Tao Te Ching, which is the sacred book of Taoism:

The Tao that can be spoken is not the constant Tao  
The Name that can be named is not the constant Name  
The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth  
The named is the mother of myriad things  
Thus, constantly free of desire  
One observes its wonder  
Constantly filled with desire  
One observes its manifestations  
These two emerge similarly but differ in name  
The unity is the mystery  
Mystery of mysteries, the door to all wonders

Something in nature cannot be described easily to a person who has never experienced anything similar. Only after applying the senses of sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing to an object can you find labels that can give it an adequate description. The key to understanding the Tao is recognizing that it has to be experienced.

The following are additional elements of Taoist philosophy:

- Tao is the empowering and creative force of the universe that flows through all life.
- The objective of followers is to merge fully with the Tao. This is done through inner meditation and external observation, both of which enable a more self-reliant sense of conscience. People are

inherently good, and seek to continually improve on the *Three Jewels* of compassion, moderation, and humility.

- Life is best lived in harmony with the flow of nature, and should thus be allowed to take its natural course. This is the art of *wu wei*. Each person has been given *Ch'i* (the “breath of nature”) which connects him to all of creation.
- The many gods of the world are all manifestations of the Tao. There is no specific personality to whom one can pray. This applies as well to Shang Ti, China’s ancient heavenly sovereign.
- Time and the events of nature are all cyclical, and not linear as in western conception.
- There is no sin, judgment, or karma. Doing wrong is part of the learning process.
- If one lives in harmony with the Tao during this life, he will also be in harmony with the Tao after physical death. One does not need to be concerned with how nature handles the afterlife.
- Taoism makes no effort to explain the source or sustenance of the all-pervading energy of nature or creation itself. It sees everything as being inherently good and peaceful. It ignores the problem of evil.

### **Literature**

The classic Taoist literature is the *Tao Te Ching*, a name that means “scripture for the way of strength/virtue”. Its 81 chapters have been translated into English more often than any other Chinese document.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

Here are some excerpts from the *Tao Te Ching* which will give you an idea of how God, heaven, and things spiritual are viewed in the context of the Tao:

5  
Heaven and Earth are without bias  
And regard myriad things as straw dogs  
The space between Heaven and Earth  
Is it not like a bellows?

Empty, and yet never exhausted  
It moves, and produces more

16

Everything flourishes; each returns to its root  
Returning to the root is called tranquility  
Tranquility is called returning to one's nature  
Returning to one's nature is called constancy  
Knowing constancy is called clarity  
Not knowing constancy, one recklessly causes trouble  
Knowing the constant is acceptance  
Acceptance is impartiality  
Impartiality is sovereign  
Sovereign is Heaven  
Heaven is Tao  
Tao is eternal  
The self is no more, without danger

21

How do I know the form of all origins?  
By this:  
The comprehensiveness of supreme energy is its conformity to the Tao.  
The Tao considered as an entity is impalpable, indefinite. Indefinite, impalpable, within are conceptions. Impalpable, indefinite, within are shapes. Profound, obscure, within is the essence. This essence being supremely real, within is sincerity.  
From the beginning until now it has not changed, and thus it has watched all the essentials. How do I know it has been thus with all principles? By what has just been said.

25

There is something formlessly created  
Born before Heaven and Earth  
So silent! So ethereal!  
Independent and changeless

Circulating and ceaseless  
It can be regarded as the mother of the world  
I do not know its name  
Identifying it, I call it “Tao”  
Forced to describe it, I call it great  
Great means passing  
Passing means receding  
Receding means returning  
Therefore the Tao is great  
Heaven is great  
Earth is great  
The sovereign[Shang Ti] is also great  
There are four greats in the universe  
And the sovereign occupies one of them  
Humans follow the laws of Earth  
Earth follows the laws of Heaven  
Heaven follows the laws of Tao  
Tao follows the laws of nature

### ==== **Sikhism** ====

*Sikhism* is a relatively new religion that originated in India’s Punjab region. The word *Sikh* comes from the Sanskrit word meaning “student”, or “seeker of truth”. It preaches a message of devotion to God at all times, truthful living, and social justice and equality among all people.

#### **Historical Context**

The religion is based on the teachings of 10 teachers called *Gurus* who lived primarily in the Punjab state of India. The first of these was the Guru Nanak Dev (1469 – 1538 CE), and the last was the Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). The life of each Guru formed one link in a *Golden Chain* that demonstrates several of God’s divine attributes.

- Guru Nanak Dev      Humility
- Guru Angad Dev      Obedience
- Guru Amar Das      Equality

- Guru Ram Das      Service
- Guru Arjan Dev    Self-Sacrifice
- Guru Hargobind    Justice
- Guru Har Rai      Mercy
- Guru Harkrishan   Purity
- Guru Tegh Bahadur   Tranquility
- Guru Gobind Singh   Courage

The word “Guru” is derived by combining the root words *Gu*, which means darkness or ignorance, and *Ru*, which means light or knowledge. A Guru is one who guides a person through word and example from the darkness of ignorance to the light of the experience of God within themselves. Everyone needs a Guru if he is to reach this goal, and God himself supplies each devotee with an appropriate teacher.

Guru Nanak Dev lived during a time when India was suffering from caste, sectarian, and religious factionalism. The nation’s religious leaders had led the people into blindness and superstition. Guru spread the simple message that all people share a common spirit given by the one Creator of all things (*Ik Onkaar*). He taught that there are many paths to the one God who is all Truth (*SatNam*).

Guru Nanak Dev taught his followers to respect all people regardless of their birth status or religion. He taught them to say the words “*Sarbat Ka Bhala*” (“goodwill for everybody”) during their daily prayers. Both the ninth and tenth Gurus died fighting Mogul Emperors who were forcing Hindu Pundits to convert. They became martyrs for a religion that was not their own.

### **Literature**

The holy book of Sikhism is the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Anthology of the Masters) which contains the writings of the Gurus explaining the essence of God. The writings include the *Bani* (sacred compositions) of the first through fifth and ninth Gurus, and comparable sayings of Muslim and Hindu Saints that were included to show respect for the other faiths. The message in the scriptures is intended for all people. The *Granth* itself is considered to be the continuing living embodiment of the Gurus, and printed copies of the document

are treated with the utmost respect. It is proper to recite its contents with the head covered, clean hands, and no shoes.

The *Granth* is a book of divine revelation in the form of sacred music. It contains 5,894 hymns or holy verses known as *Shabads* which are arranged in 31 musical measures called *ragas*. The Gurus believed that reciting this devotional music to God while meditating on him allowed the true devotee to become one with God. The subject of *Guru Granth Sahib* is God's ultimate truth, and many of the hymns are expressions of the disciple's desire to become a "perfect individual" (*Gurmukh*). The *Granth* helps the devotee cultivate the qualities which are associated with God so he can become more like him.

*Guru Granth Sahib* is unusual because it contains first-person writings of the teachings of the Gurus. In contrast, the sayings of Buddha, Mohammad, Jesus, and most other founders of the great faiths were recorded by observers around them, or by persons transcribing from memorized oral tradition.

### **Beliefs**

Sikhs believe in one omnipotent God whose name is *Waheguru* meaning "The Almighty Enlightener". They share the following beliefs and principles:

- There is only one God who has infinite qualities and names, but no gender. This God is the same for all religions and is present within all things and all places.
- There are many paths to God. Salvation can be obtained by non-Sikhs as well.
- The laws of karma apply, but God's grace allows his devotees to be reconciled with him after death.
- God is to be both loved and held in awe.
- All people are equal sons and daughters of God.
- Meditate on God during the early morning hours before sunrise.
- Work hard and honestly. Never depend upon others.
- Share the fruit of one's labor with those in need.

- Be prepared to defend the rights of all people and creatures, even unto death if necessary.
- Uphold moral values.
- Maintain an optimistic perspective on life that includes compassion, truth, contentment, humility, and love.
- Lead a disciplined life that includes standards of dress, devotion, and proper action.
- Observe every day as equally holy.
- Overcome personal ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust.

In addition, Guru Nanak Dev taught the following specific core principles:

To worship an image, to make pilgrimage to a shrine, to remain in a desert, and yet have an impure mind, is all in vain; to be saved worship only the Truth.  
Concealing no feeling of enmity for any body, God is contained in every bosom.  
Forgiveness is love at its highest power.  
Where there is forgiveness there is God Himself.  
Do not wish evil for anyone.  
Do not speak harsh of anyone.  
Do not obstruct anyone's work.  
If a man speaks ill of you, forgive him.  
Practice physical, mental and spiritual endurance.  
Help the suffering even at the cost of your own life.

The Gurus taught that all people are equally loved creations of Waheguru.

One Almighty has created all human beings and they are equally loved by Almighty.

Recognize all human races as one.

Guru Nanak countered prevailing cultural practice by honoring women.

Born of women, nourished by women, wedded to women, why do they revile women? How can women be called inferior when they give birth to kings and prophets?

Guru Nanak also advocated for India's poor and oppressed.

There are low castes, lowliest of the low. I, Nanak, have my place with them; what have I to do with the high born? God's grace is there where the down-trodden are taken care of.

The last Guru Gobind Singh instituted the *Khalsa*, a class of devotees who would serve simultaneously as soldiers, scholars, and people of high moral character. They would practice the five virtues of sacrifice, cleanliness, honesty, charity, and courage. The Khalsa could fight only in defense, and only when all other peaceful methods had failed. The double-edged sword became a symbol of total commitment to the purposes of God. Khalsa must follow the Sikh code of discipline known as the *Rehat*, which has four prohibitions:

- Trimming or removing hair from the body.
- Using tobacco or intoxicants in any form.
- Eating meat which has been ritually purified.
- Committing adultery.

The Sikh way of life is practical and basic in both spiritual and earthly matters. There are few elaborate ritual activities individuals are expected to perform. The primary spiritual work is to meditate on God's names and attributes. The primary earthly work is to serve others. Sikhs see all persons as being equal in giving and receiving service. As a result, the Gurus endured persecution for their rejection of the caste system prevailing in India at the time.

Each follower of the faith is responsible for defeating his own pride, anger, greed, attachment, and lust. With the grace of God these are replaced with contentment, kindness, charity, and a positive attitude. It is in living out this grace that the Sikh obtains the right to be liberated into the paradise of God's love.

The emphasis on humbling oneself through service is nowhere more evident than during times of fellowship in the eating hall of the *Gurdwara* (temple). Followers take turns practicing generosity by offering food to others seated on the floor in a never-ending stream of gracious service.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

Guru Nanak summarized the essence of God in the *Mool Mantra* which begins many sections of the holy *Granth*. The Mool Mantra is composed of the following phrases:

|              |                                    |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Ik Onkaar    | There is only one God              |
| Sat Naam     | His Name is Truth                  |
| Karta        | He is the owner of every action    |
| Purakh       | He is the Creator                  |
| Nir Bhau     | He is without fear                 |
| Nir Vair     | He is without hate                 |
| Akaal Moorat | He is beyond time (Immortal)       |
| Ajooni       | He is beyond birth and death       |
| Saibhang     | He is self-existent                |
| Gur Parsaad  | He is realised by the Guru's grace |

Other excerpts from the *Granth* that describe the Sikh view of God's nature include the following.

Great is the Master, High is His Heavenly Home.  
Highest of the High, above all is His Name.  
Only one as Great and as High as God can know  
His Lofty and Exalted State.  
Only He Himself is that Great. He Himself knows  
Himself.

O Nanak, by His Glance of Grace, He bestows His Blessings.  
His Blessings are so abundant that there can be no written account of them.  
The Great Giver does not hold back anything.

[*Guru Granth Sahib*. Section 01 - Jup - Part 005]

Whatever has happened, has all come from You.  
You are All-knowing.  
Your limits cannot be known, O my Lord and Master; I am blind - what wisdom do I have?  
What should I say? While talking, I talk of seeing, but I cannot describe the indescribable.

[*Guru Granth Sahib*. Section 20 - Raag Bilaaval - Part 001]



## CHAPTER 4

# NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS



Like the Far East, the Near East has been the cradle of some of the world's most enduring faiths. These faiths were spread throughout the region by the politically and theologically-driven competition of its many empires. Each conquering army introduced or imposed its favored beliefs on the new subjects, and nearly every city in the Near East today still contains some remnant of their signs and symbols.

The Hebrew people established the first true *theocratic* (god-centered) *kingdom* in the land of ancient Canaan around 1,400 BCE. In subsequent centuries the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Muslims all in turn dominated parts of the region. The Christian Crusades recaptured portions of the Islamic Empire beginning in 1095, the Ottoman Turks took Jerusalem in 1516, and the British won control of much of the Near East in 1917. The ancient Hebrew nation of Israel, destroyed by the Romans, was restored by United Nations action in 1948.

The table below shows the distribution of the Near East's major religions. The relatively recent dominance of the region by Islam is reflected in its overwhelming prevalence there today.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trace their origins to the same patriarch named *Abraham*, who lived during the nineteenth or twentieth century BCE. Arab Muslims trace their lineage from his son *Ishmael*, and the Jews from his son *Isaac*.

The religions of the Near East are primarily *monotheistic*, meaning they believe in a single Creator God with a distinct nature. Jews call him *YHWH* (pronounced *yah-ha'-wah* or *yah'-way*), and Muslims call him *Allah*.

This chapter explores how the major faiths of the Near East view the character and nature of the Divine.

Prevalence of Near Eastern Religions by Country

|              | Iran | Iraq | Syria | Lebanon | Turkey | Israel | Egypt | Jordan | Saudi Arabia | Total |
|--------------|------|------|-------|---------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------------|-------|
| Population   | 68   | 23   | 16    | 3       | 67     | 5      | 68    | 7      | 22           | 279   |
| Judaism      | -    | -    | -     | -       | -      | 81     | -     | -      | -            | 4     |
| Islam        | 99   | 97   | 90    | 60      | 100    | 15     | 87    | 96     | 93           | 260   |
| Christianity | -    | 1    | 5     | 32      | -      | 2      | 13    | 3      | 5            | 12    |
| Druze        | -    | -    | 2     | 7       | -      | -      | -     | -      | -            | 1     |
| Zoroastrian  | -    | -    | -     | -       | -      | -      | -     | -      | -            | -     |
| Indigenous   | -    | -    | -     | -       | -      | -      | -     | -      | -            | -     |
| Non / Other  | 1    | 2    | 3     | -       | -      | 2      | -     | 1      | 2            | 2     |

Note: Shaded values are percentages. Other values are population in millions.

[Primary source: Operation World, Johnstone and Mandryk, Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001]

## **Judaism**

### **Historical Context**

*Judaism* is a blend of cultural expression, shared history, religious belief, and common identity spanning 4,000 years. Most Jews today see themselves more as part of a cultural group than as the stewards of a special relationship with their Creator. Nevertheless, it is the ancient and covenantal relationship of Jews to their God that serves as the foundation of their unique culture. It is through Judaism that the world received a well-documented set of commandments and stipulations that define what God desires from his believers. More than in any other historical faith, the Jewish prophets spoke to God, heard from God, and wrote down what he revealed for them. The Jewish story is one of alternately flowing in obedience to God and experiencing in his favor, and then ebbing in disobedience and experiencing his correction.

Jews trace their origin to the patriarch *Abraham*, who had a personal relationship with the Creator. In obedience he moved from Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Canaan (Israel), and there established the first Hebrew families. A famine drove these early generations of Hebrews into Egypt where they stayed 400 years. In 1447 BCE God used the oppression of Pharaoh Thutmose III to call his people out of Egypt. The people were led by the prophet *Moses* and his brother *Aaron*. It was to Moses that God revealed his sacred name *YHWH*. At Mount Sinai, God also revealed a new covenant and related set of laws for living that were documented in the *Torah*. These continue to guide Jewish law and living to this day. After 40 years in the desert, the Israelites finally returned to Canaan. Their kingdom reached its greatest power, wealth, and territory under Kings David and Solomon between 970 and 931 BCE.

The story of Israel is one of alternately honoring and then breaking covenant with YHWH. When they were faithful to YHWH and his laws they enjoyed peace and prosperity. When they worshiped other gods or broke the covenantal laws they were overrun by their enemies.

The Jewish nation was conquered several times, and on one occasion was held in exile by the Babylonian empire. In 70 CE the

Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple, ended the sacrificial system, and crushed the ensuing Jewish revolt. After this, the Jews were scattered throughout the known world. The region changed hands several times over the next two millennia until the original land of Canaan was again placed under Jewish control in 1948 as the modern nation of Israel. Unlike nearly every other people group facing such dispersion, the Jews managed to retain their cultural and religious identity, thus making it possible for their nation to arise again.

### **Literature**

The *Tanakh* is the Jewish Scripture. It is composed of three groups of books:

- *Torah* (Teaching):  
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- *Nevi'im* (Prophets):  
Joshua, Judges, Samuel I and II, Kings I and II, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi.
- *Ketuvim* (Writings):  
Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles I and II.

The *Talmud* is a compilation of stories, laws, and moral debates. Its material comes mainly from two sources:

- *Mishnah*:  
A series of laws derived from the Hebrew Scriptures that were compiled about 200 CE.
- *Gemara*: (one Babylonian and one Palestinian)  
Contains commentary from hundreds of Rabbis from 200 to 500 CE, explaining the Mishnah with additional material of a historical, religious, legal, and sociological nature.

The *Torah* contains the divine revelation of YHWH's law to Moses at Mount Sinai. It is unclear whether the *Torah* was written in full by Moses during his lifetime. Some believe that it was not until the time of Ezra, around 500 BCE, that his notes and oral tradition were compiled into the presently known document. Most Jews believe that YHWH continued to speak through his prophets until the time of Malachi, and that since then there has been no significant additional revelation. Some believe, however, that God continues today to provide prophetic insight at an individual level. This is referred to as the "Divine Voice" (*Bat Kol*) or "Divine Presence" (*Shekinah*).

### **Beliefs**

There have been many sects of Judaism over the centuries that were distinct in doctrine, culture, and geography. Today, the most common sects are the Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. The Orthodox holds to a literal interpretation of the *Torah* and continues to observe the law in its fullness. Reform (also known as Progressive or Liberal) encourages more individual expression of relationship with God through language, worship style, and prayer. Reform also allows that some human imperfection may have crept into the Talmud, thus allowing on-going prophetic revelation from God to continue. The Conservative takes a middle path between the two.

The Rabbi *Moshe ben Maimon* (Greek = Moses Maimonides) wrote a list of thirteen foundations of Jewish belief during the 12<sup>th</sup> century which are still embraced by Orthodox Judaism today. These are found in his Commentaries on the *Mishnah Sanhedrin*.

1. There is one God who is the creator of all that is.
2. God is fully united in one personality.
3. God does not have a physical form, and cannot be seen.
4. God existed before all else.
5. God alone is to be worshiped and served. We are to ascribe to Him greatness, to make known his greatness, and to fulfill his commandments.
6. There are authentic human prophets who are gifted to speak for God.

7. Moses was the greatest prophet. He heard from God directly and operated more effectively in prophecy than any other person.
8. The *Torah* was divinely given and contains no contributions from the mind of man.
9. The *Torah* cannot be modified or added to.
10. God knows all that we do.
11. God rewards those that are obedient to his law and punishes those that are not.
12. A Messiah will come who will be a more powerful man than any king.
13. Those who believe and follow these principles will be resurrected to a future life in the spiritual world to come.

Judaism generally accepts that YHWH probably revealed himself in some way to all people groups, and that he gave each a set of laws by which they were to live. There are traditionally 613 laws in the *Torah* to be followed by the Hebrew people, although some apply only to priests, temple service, or the land of Israel. Around half of the laws must still be followed today to be considered a faithful Jew.

God's law (written code) as revealed in the *Torah* is central to Judaism. It was never intended to be a burden. In fact, the legal system was designed to be in harmony both with the laws that govern physical creation, and with the spiritual laws that govern the Creator's heavenly realm. The purpose of human beings is to help perfect the Creator's world here and now. A person who is lawful will better fit into creation's scheme, thus enjoying an easier life. Interestingly, the *Torah* promises that obedience will lead to a good life in this world but has little to say about the next. Jews assume that learning to live well here prepares us adequately for the world to come.

Judaism is not specific about the afterlife, or what the future of this world is beyond the present age. It is understood that after physical death a person's soul goes to *Sheol*, the place of the dead, until the age is over and the saints are redeemed by YHWH to a new

existence in a perfect place called *olam haba* (future world). Those who violate God's law in this life are taken to *Gehinnom*, the place of torments.

In the future world there is no eating, drinking, propagation, business, jealousy, hatred or competition; but the righteous sit, with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the brilliance of the Shekhinah [God's Glory].

[*Berakhoth* 17a]

Orthodox Judaism also believes that a human *Messiah* will come at the end of this age to re-establish Jerusalem as the head of the nations in this world, reinstitute the sacrificial system in a restored temple, and bring a new age of peace. Reform Judaism tends to think more in terms of a "Messianic hope" for the same outcome that does not necessarily involve a specific person. In either case, it is unclear whether the result is a perfected order on earth, or a new spiritual world.

Judaism believes that unrepentant sin keeps a person from inheriting his place in the world to come, whatever form or forms that world takes. The Jew never knows whether he is being "good enough" to qualify for admission, so he is counseled to live his life as if his very next action could be the one that tips the scales. Judaism trusts that the grace and mercy (*rachamim*) of YHWH will be sufficient to bridge the divide between a holy Creator and weak, but repentant flesh.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

The god of Judaism is known as a personal god who reveals himself to his people regularly through visions, angelic visitations, the natural elements, and the inspiration of his *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit). He is also known as a jealous god who does not tolerate the worship other gods, and who desires that his people strictly obey the laws he sets before them. He has a distinct and knowable personality.

We learn much about the Creator's character from his Hebrew names. We will look at this topic in more detail in the second part of the book. In the beginning the Creator is known as *Elohim*, which is the general name for God. Later, he reveals himself as *YHWH* to them, a personal name that indicates his continual presence with his people. Even after man violates God's laws, he still remains *YHWH* to them. This is a sign of his on-going, unconditional love.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, The LORD is one!

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 6:4]

For I am The LORD your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, ' Do not fear, I will help you.'

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 41:13]

Much of what *YHWH* thinks about his creation is revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures through the history of the early nation, the experiences of its prophets, and the meditations of the Psalms. *YHWH* clearly desires that his people keep their side of the covenantal bargain by obeying his laws. In exchange he promises them safety and prosperity in their homeland.

Know therefore that The LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments...

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 7:9]

*YHWH* is a god that offers forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life with him.

The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 34:6-7]

...Is it not I, The LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 45:21-22]

YHWH does expect his believers to be honest about their faith, and to show it in the way they help others. They are to be doers of good deeds, not just rituals.

“Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 58:6-7]

## **Zoroastrianism**

### **Historical Context**

We introduce *Zoroastrianism* here because its views of God are a fascinating synthesis of Judaism and Hinduism. No one knows for

certain in what order these three faiths appeared, or how one may have influenced another. Zoroastrianism was dominant during the height of the Persian Empire, and this empire sat geographically between the other two faiths. Today, Zoroastrianism is a minor religion with less than one million followers.

Zoroastrianism is named for its founder *Zarathushtra* (Greek = “Zoroaster”), who brought a message of religious reform to the Persians sometime around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He was responding to the Aryan/Indo-Iranian religious practices of the day, which resembled those of the Vedic cultures in India. Little is known of his life.

Zoroaster was believed to be a special child from birth and was given a wise teacher to encourage his gifts. He dedicated himself to a religious life and spent seven years living and meditating in a cave. This resulted in his enlightenment to spiritual knowledge and a pure worship of the Creator, known as *Ahura Mazda*. At first Zoroaster’s message was rejected, but when he cured the Persian King Vishtaspa of an illness, the king converted to the new faith along with many in the land.

Zoroastrianism remained the dominant faith in Persia until its conquest by the Arab Muslims in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. After this, many of the followers fled to India where they were granted refuge in exchange for not evangelizing. They became known as *Parsees* and remain today a closed community.

### **Literature**

Zoroaster codified his teachings in the *Gathas*, a set of hymns that were included in a larger work called the *Avesta*. This was in turn supplemented with commentaries called the *Zend*. All of this material was collectively committed to writing during the Sassanid Dynasty (224-651 CE). It is likely that other, related documents were lost during the Greek conquest of Persia.

### **Beliefs**

Zoroastrianism believes in one god called *Ahura Mazda*. This god has a “good spirit” called *Spenta Mainyu* that is engaged in an on-going battle with an “evil spirit” called *Angra Mainyu*. Both

impact humanity, but in the end good will prevail over evil. It is assumed that because Ahura Mazda is holy he could not have created evil, the origins of which are unknown.

Humans communicate with Ahura Mazda through a number of intermediaries called *Bounteous Immortals* or *Amesha Spentas*. These sometimes are treated in the Gathas as abstract concepts, and sometimes as specific personalities.

Followers of Zoroastrianism perform rituals as part of their communion with Ahura Mazda. These rituals include prayer and the presentation of offerings before a sacred fire, leading outsiders to incorrectly label the practitioners “fire-worshippers”. Note the similarity with Hindu rituals as you read the passage below.

These good thoughts, good words, and good deeds,  
these Haomas, meat-offerings, and Zaothras, this  
Baresman spread with sanctity, this flesh, and the two,  
Haurvatat (who guards the water) and Ameretatat  
(who guards the plants and wood), even the flesh, the  
Haoma and Haoma-juice, the wood-billets, and their  
perfume, this sacred lordship and chieftainship, and  
the timely prayer with blessing, and the heard recital  
of the Gathas, and the well-said Mathras, these all we  
offer, and make known with celebrations (here).

[*Avesta Yasna. 4:1*]

All humans are believed to have free choice and to bear the consequences of those choices. A person who is judged to have lived out the creed of “*Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*” will join Ahura Mazda after death. Those who have not done so will go to a place of purging where they will remain until the evil in them is destroyed. They will then go through the “*ordeal of molten metal*” before joining Ahura Mazda and those others who were judged to be good. In this respect, there is no need for salvation from God as in the Hebrew tradition, and one does not enter a further series of rebirths as in Hinduism.

By Piety the man becomes Holy. Such person advances Right through his thinking, his words, his action, his Self. By Good Thought Mazda Ahura will give the Dominion. For this good Destiny I long.

[*Avesta Yasna*. 51:21]

Note that the name of God has been reversed in these translated texts and is rendered “Mazda Ahura”.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

The personality of Ahura Mazda is not described in the *Avesta Yasna* with any detail. Rather, he is treated similarly to Hinduism as a being of such grandeur that words are inadequate. We do know that he occupies the role of judge over our lives in the same way as does the Hebrew YHWH, and that he is active through his spirit Spenta Mainyu in the affairs of this world.

1. I will speak forth: hear now and hearken now, ye from near and ye from far that desire (instruction). Now observe this in your mind, all of you, for he is revealed. Never shall the false Teacher destroy the Second Life, the Liar, in perversion by his tongue into evil belief.
2. I will speak of the Spirits twain at the first beginning of the world, of whom the holier spoke thus to the enemy: “Neither thought, nor teachings, nor wills, nor beliefs, nor words, nor deeds, nor selves, nor souls of us twain agree”.
3. I will speak of that which Mazda Ahura, the all-knowing, revealed to me first in this (earthly) life. Those of you that put not in practice this word as I think and utter it, to them shall be woe at the end of life.
4. I will speak of what is best for the life. Through Asha I have come to know, O Mazda, who created it (the life), the father of active Good Thought:

but his daughter is the good-working Armaiti.  
The all-observant Ahura is not to be deceived.

5. I will speak of that which (he), the Holiest declared to me as the word that is best for mortals to obey; while he said: “they who for my sake render him obedience, shall all attain unto Welfare and Immortality by the actions of the Good Spirit Mazda Ahura.

[*Avesta Yasna. 45:1-5*]

3. And may these (Praises of the Offering) come forth, and appear for us with power and victorious assault, with health and healing, with progress, and with growth, with preparation and protection, with beneficence and sanctity, and abounding with gifts toward him who can understand; yea, let them appear (with free liberality to the enlightened), let them appear as Mazda, the most beneficent, has produced them, He the one who is victorious when He smites, and who helps the settlements advance, for the protection, and the guarding of the religious order of the settlements which are now being furthered, and of those which shall bring salvation to us, and for the protection of the entire creation of the holy (and the clean).

[*Avesta Yasna. 55:3*]

The benefit of living a life of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds is immortality in the presence of Mazda Ahura.

1. The action, the word, and the worship for which Thou, O Mazda, shalt bestow Immortality and Right, and Dominion of Welfare - through

multitudes of these, O Ahura, we would that thou shouldst give them.

2. And all the actions of the good spirit (Spenta Mainyu) and the holy man, whose soul follows the Right, do ye set with the thought (thereof) in thine outer court, O Mazda, when ye are adored with hymns of praise.

[*Avesta Yasna*. 34:1-2]

1. According as it is with the laws that belong to the present life, so shall the Judge act with most just deed towards the man of the Lie and the man of the Right, and him whose false things and good things balance (in equal measure).
2. Whoso worketh ill for the liar by word or thought or hands, or converts his dependent to the good — such men meet the will of Ahura Mazda to his satisfaction.
3. Whose is most good to the righteous man, be he noble or member of the community or the brotherhood, Ahura — or with diligence cares for the cattle, he shall be hereafter in the pasture of Right and Good Thought [Asha and Vohu Manah].
4. I who by worship would keep far from Thee, O Mazda, disobedience and Bad Thought, heresy from the nobles, and from the community the Lie, that is most near, and from the brotherhood the slanderers, and the worst herdsmen from the pastures of the cattle;
5. I who would invoke thy Obedience as the greatest of all at the Consummation, attaining long life, and the Dominion of Good Thought, and the straight ways into Right, wherein Mazda Ahura dwells.

[*Avesta Yasna*. 33:1-5]

## Christianity

### **Historical Context**

*Christianity* is named for its central figure, the *Christ*. *Kristos* or *Christos* is a Latin word meaning “anointed one”, and the closest translation available in the Roman world for the Hebrew title *Messiah* (discussed in the section on Judaism). Christians believe that the divine man *Jesus* was the Christ predicted by the Jewish prophets. He is believed to have been born in the fall of 4 BCE and to have been killed by the Roman authorities in 33 CE. He lived in Roman *Palestina*, which is now modern-day Israel. Jesus was a *Torah*-observant Jew who participated fully in the culture of his time. He described himself as the promised savior of the world, and in fact fulfilled many of the Messianic prophecies during his life. He is a well-documented historical figure, spoken of in the works of the first century historian Josephus.

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasures. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ.<sup>1</sup>

[Josephus. *Jewish Antiquities*. 18:63]

Jesus in Hebrew is *Yah’shua* or *Joshua*. This was the Aramaic name he used in everyday life and it conveys the nature of his mission on earth. It combines *Yah*, which is a short version of God’s sacred name YHWH, and *shua* which means “saves”. Jesus’ name therefore literally means “God Saves”.

During his three years of traveling ministry in Israel, Jesus was highly critical of the established Jewish priesthood and its emphasis on political power and financial gain. The priesthood in turn considered blasphemy his claim to be the Messiah and eventually convinced the Romans to crucify him.<sup>2</sup>

After his death, Jesus' followers were empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform many of same supernatural miracles as their master. These signs served as confirmation of their teachings as they went out in the world preaching the gospel. Thus, a new Jewish sect was formed called *The Way*. Eventually the gospel message began spreading to non-Jews (*gentiles*) as well, principally through the leadership of the Apostle Paul (1-67 CE). This early movement took care of its own needs, met in homes and in the Jewish Temple, and focused on close interpersonal relationships. The major doctrinal issue wrestled by these early apostles was how much of the Jewish legal lifestyle to require of non-Jewish followers.

The Apostle Peter traveled to Rome and established what came to be the *Roman Catholic* (universal) *Church*. At his martyrdom in 67 CE the leadership was passed to Linus, and then on to others in an unbroken chain to the present day. Christianity gradually found acceptance in the Roman Empire and was declared its official religion in 380 CE. The Catholic Church later broke into the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox Church and Western Church of Rome.

Christianity struggled with its theology through the first several centuries as various rival sects emerged. It was not until the First Council of Nicea in 325 CE that a clear doctrine was formalized, and shortly thereafter that the formal *Biblical Canon* (approved collection of scripture) was established. A controversial belief took root in the early Catholic Church which suggested that the Jews, having killed their Messiah Jesus, had forfeited their place as the covenant people of God. This led to the removal of authentic Jewish influence from the Christian gospel, and justified some terrible persecutions.

The most significant opposition to orthodox Christian doctrine came from *Gnosticism*, which the Apostle Paul spoke against in several of his letters. This merging of Christian and ancient pagan polytheism held that true salvation was not obtained through the grace of God, but rather through special knowledge (Greek = "*gnosis*"). Some researchers trace back to Gnostic roots such movements as the Knights Templar, Rosicrucian, and Freemasonry / Illuminati.

Responding to what he perceived to be abuses by the Catholic Church in the middle ages, the reformer Martin Luther published his landmark 95 theses in 1517. Luther's purpose was to reform

the church from within, but he ended up inspiring a new movement that was built upon by such men as John Calvin, John Knox, and Huldrych Zwingli. These *Protestants* de-emphasized the theology of works prevalent in the Catholic Church and reintroduced the simple message of salvation by faith in the Messiah. Most Christian denominations today are of this stream.

Additional branches of Christianity have emerged based on the belief that the All-Father continues to provide significant new revelation to the church through modern-day prophets. A prominent example is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (*Mormon*). Its prophet Joseph Smith is held to have received from God the translation of hidden tablets chronicling God's dealings with his people in North America a millennium ago. Since there is no formal process for adding new revelation to the existing Biblical Canon, such prophetic material remains outside mainstream use.

One of the most significant themes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century church has been the reintroduction of the Holy Spirit into Christian ministry. Manifestations of healings, prophecy, and tongues has become commonplace in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. As a result, these denominations have been growing quickly worldwide at the same time that the more traditional have languished.

### **Literature**

The primary Christian literature is the *Holy Bible* ("Holy Books"), which contains both the Hebrew *Tanakh* ("Old Testament"), and New Testament *Gospels* ("good news") along with a collection of apostolic letters. The Catholic version includes the books of the *Apocrypha* ("hidden things"). The core 66 documents known as the *Biblical Canon* was fixed in 397 CE at the Synod of Carthage.

The authenticity of the Tanakh has been established through favorable comparison of book fragments, the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and the Greek *Septuagint*, all dating from as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, numerous copies of the Greek New Testament books have been found and dated to within 40-60 years of their original composition.<sup>4</sup> All of these documents are highly consistent with the translations we have today.

As with all major faiths, the divinely-given sacred scriptures are supplemented by many human commentaries written over the centuries. Some of these are dedicated to interpretation of the scriptures exactly as they were compiled, and others purport to introduce new knowledge, revelation, or insight that guides contemporary application of established Biblical principles.

### **Beliefs**

Christians accept the Hebrew Scriptures as authentic and a guidepost for holy living. They agree with Jewish belief that a Messiah will come at the end of the age to establish a millennial kingdom of peace on earth. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, however, Christianity believes that Jesus was that prophesied Messiah, and that he has already visited earth to fulfill the Jewish sacrificial law. As we will see later, the ancient covenant given through Moses required that an innocent animal life had to be taken to redeem a person's sins. Jesus' willful death fulfilled this requirement so the animal sacrifice is no longer necessary. All who accept Jesus as their Messiah and are serious about his message of repentance receive the gift of life forever in paradise. They are also empowered by God's Holy Spirit to begin living holy lives while on earth.

But how could any man claim the authority to grant entry to paradise on behalf of Father God? Jesus spoke of himself as the *Son of Man*, and said that he was *em anu El* - the prophesied incarnation of "God with us" (*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 7:14).

I and the Father are one.

[*Holy Bible*. John 10:30]

This was as incredible to the people of the time as it sounds to us today, except that Jesus validated his spiritual authority by performing many supernatural miracles.

And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." And some of the

scribes said to themselves, “This fellow blasphemes.” And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk’? “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 9:1-8]

The Jews were skeptical when Jesus claimed the Messianic authority to forgive sin on God’s behalf. They expected the authentic Messiah to overthrow Roman rule and establish Jerusalem as the world’s spiritual center. Jesus was considered a false Messiah and a blasphemer because he was neither a political nor a military leader. He suggested instead that the Jews accept his claims based on the supernatural healings and creative miracles he performed. He also said that the ultimate proof would be his resurrection to life after three days in the grave. Eyewitnesses did report seeing Jesus alive for several weeks between the time of his physical death and his transition to the heavens.

To these [apostles] He [Jesus] also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

[*Holy Bible*. Acts 1:3]

The Holy Spirit (Hebrew = “*Ruach HaKodesh*”; Greek = “*Pneuma Hagios*”) has a prominent role in Christianity because Jesus promised to make him available to all his followers. Whereas the *Ruach* appeared only occasionally among the Hebrew people as

God sovereignly chose, today he is believed to be freely available to all those that have been baptized into Jesus' name. This grants Christians delegated spiritual authority to hear the will of the Father and then manifest his will in the earth in ways that bring him credit.

Debate continues today among Jesus' followers regarding his exact nature relative to the Father and Holy Spirit. The generally-accepted theology says that the Father (YHWH), Son (Jesus/Yah'shua), and Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) are all part of one *triune* (three part) *God-head*. It may be helpful to think of this in terms of water that can appear solid, liquid, and gaseous at the same time when divided in three parts and subject to different temperatures. Christians believe the Creator can manifest himself in creation wherever, whenever, and however he chooses.

Nearly all faiths encourage doing good works for the purpose of obtaining entry into paradise. Christianity is more exclusive in granting entry primarily to those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. However, this belief must also be evidenced by a holy lifestyle based on Jesus' example of loving and serving others.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

The god of the Christians is the same YHWH that the patriarch Abraham and his sons Isaac and Ishmael knew. YHWH was introduced in the section on Judaism. Christians are distinguished by their belief in Jesus as a human incarnation of God on earth. The disciples and Apostles who ministered after Jesus' resurrection were clear about his one-ness with YHWH.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name

of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[*Holy Bible*. Philippians 2:5-11]

There have been many self-proclaimed god-men over the generations, so we have to discern which, if any, is authentic. There is only one way of doing so. You must first know the character of God himself. If he does appear in human form on the earth it will be with the same holy personality. We can therefore compare what we know of God's nature to the behavior and teachings of those claiming to be his incarnation. Christians suggest the following traits as proof of Jesus' divine nature.

Jesus was a teacher. He reaffirmed the laws given through Moses, and taught important principles of God's kingdom using stories and metaphors.

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 5:17-19]

Jesus was loving and compassionate toward those who were weak, infirm, or poor in spirit. He healed everyone who came to him for help, and delivered them from evil spirits when they interfered.

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

[*Holy Bible*. Mark 1:40-42]

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 8:16]

Jesus was master over the physical elements of creation, but only demonstrated this ability as part of helping others.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the water-pots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the head-waiter." So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine...the head-waiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

[*Holy Bible*. John 2:7-10]

But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it

became calm. And He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?”

[*Holy Bible*. Luke 8:23-25]

Jesus is probably the most controversial figure in the faith discussion. On the one hand he taught with wisdom that confounded the teachers of his day. His miracles and those of his followers were indisputably genuine and supernatural. His life is documented history. On the other hand, it is difficult to accept on pure faith the notion of a divine god-man living among us who fulfilled a requirement for blood sacrifice that seems archaic. Most people resolve the issue by saying that he was just a man specially gifted by God to bring a message of peace.

The problem in Jesus’ case is that you cannot accept only a part of the package. Either he was certifiably crazy and worthy of being ignored, or he was truly the Messiah still to be followed today. You have to choose.

## Islam

### **Historical Context**

*Islam* is the world’s second largest religion. The name *al-islam* means “the peaceful submission”. The Arabic name given to the God of the Islamic patriarch Abraham is *Allah*. A follower of Islam is a *Muslim*, meaning one who is in peaceful submission to Allah.

*Muhammad* was the prophet of the Islamic faith. He lived primarily in Arabia between 570 and 632 CE. His first wife *Khadijah* was a wealthy woman who provided him with a comfortable existence from the time of their marriage in 595. Muhammad was illiterate, and depended on others to record both his revelations in the form of the *Qur’an*, and his experiences and teachings in the *Hadiths*. His mission in life was to present the message of *Allah* as the one true God.

The *Qur’an* is Allah’s divine revelation to Muhammad, given to him by the angel *Gabriel* over a period of 23 years. Muhammad

reported his first encounter with Gabriel as taking place in 610, when he was at the age of 40. He first sought to bring his message to the pagan and polytheistic Arabs of his hometown of Mecca, but was rejected there. In 623 he moved to Medina where he found support from the Arabs of that city. Under pressure from Muhammad's followers, the Jews of the region agreed to pay tribute both for protection, and to avoid service in the new Muslim army.

After a series of battles, Muhammad eventually conquered Mecca and established it as the center of Islamic worship. Today, every Muslim who is physically and financially able must perform a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his life. In 619 Muhammad was taken by Gabriel on a miraculous flight from Mecca to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. From there they ascended into heaven to be directly instructed by Allah. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is built on the site from which he is said to have ascended.

In 631 (the "year of delegations") the tribes of Arabia sent representatives to Mecca to submit to Allah and his messenger. Muhammad sent missionaries across the peninsula to call others to the new faith. He thus eventually unified the entire peninsula under his religious and governmental leadership, and succeeded in ending much of the historical tribal conflict. In this latter period, Muhammad also concluded treaties of mutual respect with both the Christians to the north and the Zoroastrians in the east. At the end of his life he returned to his home in Medina and died there in 632. Muhammad was a political moderate. He instructed his followers to respect the rights of women and minority peoples, honored his treaties, and supported widespread education.

In the hundred years after his death, a combination of economic and political opportunism prompted Muhammad's followers to bring much of North Africa and the Near East, including Spain, under the governance and religion of Allah. With some notable exceptions, Islam was generally a respecter of the existing faiths and left in place much of the religious infrastructure in the lands it occupied. Islam remains dominant today in most of the countries subdued during this time.

Two primary branches of Islam emerged based on differing views of Muhammad's rightful succession. The *Shia'a* are found primarily in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. The *Sunni* dominate elsewhere.

### **Literature**

The *Qur'an* is the compilation of revelations given by Allah to his prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It is a summary of all messages given to all prophets before him, from Adam to Jesus. Muhammad's revelation was the last from God and the first for all people on earth. Prior messages were always for specific people groups and times.

The contents of the *Qur'an* were written and memorized by a large number of Mohammad's companions as he recited them. After his death, and during the caliphate of Abu Bakr (632-634 CE), the *Qur'an* was compiled from the writings and memories of these companions. Copies of the authenticated version were then distributed throughout the Islamic Empire to ensure that recitations everywhere were accurate and consistent.

The *Qur'an* is prefaced with the *Exordium*, which Muslims use in prayer five times daily:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All the praises and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists). The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. The Only Owner (and the Only Ruling Judge) of the Day of Recompense (i.e. The Day of Resurrection). You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything). Guide us to the Straight Way. The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your Anger, nor of those who went astray.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 1:1-7]

The Hadiths are commentaries covering what Muhammad said, did, and approved in the actions of others. They help explain the application of Qur'anic principles.

Muslims believe that the Jewish *Torah* and Christian *Gospels* that we have today do not reflect the original revelation given to the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. They were written long

after the lives of each and corrupted over the years. In contrast, the *Qur'an* was written before the death of Muhammad who was able to verify its content. There is only one version and it exactly matches the original Arabic documents. Allah himself promised to preserve the integrity of the *Qur'an*, the production and preservation of which is considered one of Allah's great miracles

“Verily, We, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the *Qur'an*) and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)”.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 15:9]

### **Beliefs**

Islam is a monotheistic faith with one creating God whose name is *Allah*. The following are basic beliefs shared by all Muslims.

- Allah is One and the only god worthy of all worship.
- Allah needs nothing from anyone or anything in creation.
- Allah does not take the form of anything in creation. He can never be seen.
- Allah is perfectly just and fair.
- Allah sent prophets and messengers (eg., Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus), the last of which was Muhammad.
- The original Hebrew *Torah (Taurat)*, original Christian *Gospels (Injil)*, and *Qur'an* are all sacred documents.
- There are Angels and other spirits.
- All humans are born with a clean record that is impacted by good and bad choices throughout their lives. There will be a Last Day Judgment with a consequence of paradise or hell.
- Allah sees and knows everything

There are *five pillars* of action Allah expects of every Muslim:

- 1) Recite the confession of faith (*Shahada*) regularly; “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”.

- 2) Offer prayers (*As-Salah*) five times a day and only after being cleansed with water.
- 3) Give a portion of income as an offering (*zakat*) for the poor. Do other good deeds as able.
- 4) Fast (*siyaam*) during the daylight hours of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Muslim calendar).
- 5) Make a pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, at least once in a lifetime if physically and financially able.

One of the important principles of Islam is that each person must struggle (*jihad*) for righteousness, with the heart, the hand, and the tongue. The struggle with one's own heart ensures that one is fully submitted to Allah, and willing to be perfectly obedient to his calling. Upon this submission and obedience rests the work of the hands that a Muslim must do to obtain paradise on the Last Day. Muhammad made the work of Allah his life purpose after receiving his call. His tongue exhorted others through public addresses and private teaching. He was also directed by Allah to remove unrighteousness among the tribes of Arabia, and eventually subdued the entire nation. His actions became the example for all Muslims to follow both in sanctifying themselves, and in struggling on behalf of Allah to take Islam to the world.

Say (O Muhammad to mankind): "If you (really) love Allah, then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

[*Noble Qur'an*. 3:31]

Allah is represented in creation by his *Messengers* (angels) who provide revelation to select human prophets (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad). The prophets are responsible for guiding other

people to the truth of worshiping one god, and God validates their teachings with miraculous signs.

And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, “My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.” He (Allah) said: “Do you not believe?” He (Abraham) said: “Yes (I believe), but to be stronger in Faith.” He said: “Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill, and call them, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.”

[*Noble Qur’an. 2:260*]

And We revealed to Musa (Moses) (saying): “Throw your stick,” and behold! It swallowed up straight away all the falsehood which they showed. Thus truth was confirmed, and all that they did was made of no effect. So they were defeated there and returned disgraced. And the sorcerers fell down prostrate. They said: “We believe in the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists). “The Lord of Musa (Moses) and Harun (Aaron).”

[*Noble Qur’an.:117-122*]

(Remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection). “O Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Remember My Favour to you and to your mother when I supported you with Ruh-ul-Qudus (Gabriel) so that you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and when I taught you writing, Al-Hikmah (the power of understanding), the Taurat (*Torah*) and the Injil (*Gospel*); and when you made out of the clay, a figure like that of a bird, by My Permission, and you breathed into it, and it became

a bird by My Permission, and you healed those born blind, and the lepers by My Permission, and when you brought forth the dead by My Permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from you (when they resolved to kill you) as you came unto them with clear proofs, and the disbelievers among them said: “This is nothing but evident magic.”

[*Noble Qur’an*. 5:110]

As one of Allah’s authentic prophets, Muhammad was also given such miraculous signs, the most important of which is preservation of the *Qur’an* until the Last Day of judgment.

The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has been cleft asunder (the people of Makkah requested Prophet Muhammad to show them a miracle, so he showed them the splitting of the moon).

[*Noble Qur’an*. 54:1]

Muslims believe that a worldwide Islamic kingdom will one day be established under the leadership of the *al-Mahdi* (“Guided One”). The Sunnis believe this person will first appear in Medina, Saudi Arabia, and then lead from Damascus, Syria. The Shi’a believe he is *Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Ali*, the 12<sup>th</sup> and final Iranian Imam born in 869 CE, who was taken into hiding at the age of 5 years old and who will return before the Last Day. Both Sunnis and Shia’a expect he will be opposed by a Jewish “False Messiah”. They expect Jesus as the true Messiah to return to earth, defeat the False Messiah, and call for worship of the One God Allah. Islamic tradition does not elaborate on the nature of the Mahdi, True Messiah, or False Messiah.

### **The Character and Nature of God**

God is the ultimate Creator who exists outside the universe and time. He holds all authority and nothing happens apart from his will. His essential character is love toward humans and all his creatures.

Verily, He it is Who begins (punishment) and repeats (punishment in the Hereafter) (or originates the creation of everything, and then repeats it on the Day of Resurrection). And He is Oft-Forgiving, full of love (towards the pious who are real true believers of Islamic Monotheism), Owner of the Throne, the Glorious, (He is the) Doer of whatsoever He intends (or wills).

[*Noble Qur'an*. 85:13-16]

He has a form that cannot be comprehended by humans, and does not resemble anything that he spoke into being. As a result, Muslims do not accept that Jesus, Krishna, or any other person could have divinity as a part of his nature.

O people of the scripture (Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah and His Word, (“Be!” — and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Ruh) created by Him; so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not: “Three (trinity)!” Cease! (it is) better for you. For Allah is (the only) One Ilah (God), glory is to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 4:171]

God desires what is good for all of his creatures, and is abundantly merciful toward those that believe in him. Yet he is also perfectly just in punishing those that do not believe.

Verily, the Abrar (the pious believers of Islamic Monotheism) will be in Delight (Paradise); And verily, the Fujjar (the wicked, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners and evildoers) will be in the blazing fire (Hell), Therein they will enter, and taste its burning flame on the Day of Recompense, And they (Al-Fujjar) will not be absent therefrom.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 82:13-16]

Allah offers unbelievers his forgiveness if he sees them as being honestly repentant and doing good deeds.

Say: "O Ibadī (My slaves) [human beings] who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 39:53]

Allah offers his believers forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life in paradise. There is a saying in Islam; "Allah does not get tired of forgiving, as long as you don't get tired of repenting".

Verily, those who believe [in the Oneness of Allah, and in His Messenger (Muhammad) including all obligations ordered by Islam] and do righteous good deeds, they are the best of creatures. Their reward with their Lord is Adn (Eden) Paradise (Gardens of Eternity), underneath which rivers flow. They will abide therein forever, Allah will be pleased with them, and they with Him. That is for him who fears his Lord.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 98:7-8]

Because Allah neither resembles any part of his creation, nor needs anything from it, many Muslims believe that he does not have a personality as we humans would understand it. Yet he is described as a god that loves his believers and those that do his will.

Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Historians disagree whether the last sentence appeared in Josephus' original material.
- <sup>2</sup> Crucifixion probably originated in Persia, but was routinely practiced by the Romans. The accused person was fixed to a cross-beam with arms stretched to the sides and a nail through each wrist. This beam was mounted at the top of a post and the person's feet nailed through the arch to the post below. From this position the person could take air into the lungs, but not easily exhale. Eventually he died of asphyxiation. In Jesus' case, the torture experienced prior to the crucifixion probably contributed to heart failure as the pericardium filled with fluid.
- <sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, vol.1, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979.
- <sup>4</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

## CHAPTER 5

# ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY



We close our brief look at the many ways the world views the character and nature of God with an introduction to a variety of non-traditional forms of spirituality. These range from outright rejection of a creator, to manifestations of God as self, energy, and shared consciousness or super-consciousness. They are highly variable and lack any central spiritual authority. Most borrow heavily from primitive mystical traditions in which the natural world itself is considered divine. There is much less emphasis on the doctrinal view of God held by the primary faiths.

For many people the traditional god of the major religions just doesn't work. They wonder why they should pander to what they perceive to be a stern, paternalistic, narcissistic, and judging deity who is intolerant of many "sinful" things that are part of the human experience. They do not see God's followers being rewarded in this world for all the faithful hours, tearful prayer, and financial sacrifice. Where is the proof that there is a heaven or hell, and why would a loving god send his people off to get slaughtered in wars of conquest? Why would a forgiving god condemn those who choose not to worship him?

Some people have difficulty with God because his followers often do not demonstrate the behaviors that one expects to see of a holy people. Divorce rates are similar to those found in the secular world. Sexual abuse has been surprisingly prevalent among leaders. Tradition can make unwelcome those who choose to express themselves in a counter-cultural way.

For some, "God" is nothing more than a raw energy that permeates all creation at all times, and can be tapped into and utilized for our benefit. Properly used, it brings health and well-being, insight into

things unknown, and tools to change the course of reality itself. The techniques practiced as part of the alternative spirituality movements are designed to reconnect our inner human spirit with this natural power. Many see the world's gods as personifications of this energy.

The ultimate objective of this form of spirituality is to empower the individual to take responsibility for his own reality and change it as necessary. Unlike other faiths that yield control to an omnipotent god, these empower the follower to direct natural processes and supernatural personalities for their own and others' benefit. There is no need to petition a god for favor, or to wait in faith on the Creator's grace and timing. Rather, the universe is told what to manifest and when. This has particular appeal for persons who desire a sense of control over their lives, since they can influence nature rather than being at its mercy.

The alternative spiritualities generally accept the notion of karma in some form, that what you do to others returns back to you. The consequence of good or bad karma is reflected in the quality of this and any future life. There are a variety of beliefs regarding the after-life, some of which involve repeated reincarnations of the soul. In general, karma renders unnecessary any form of divine judgment that would require repentance. As a result, there is no need for a saving Messiah or any other form of god-given grace. Buddha, Jesus, and the other enlightened beings are understood to be highly evolved masters who were manifested primarily to show us better ways to live.

### **Atheism and Agnosticism**

*A-theos* in Greek means "not having a belief in gods". *A-gnosis* means "not having knowledge" of gods. Atheists often take a position of active opposition to religion. Agnostics believe that an opinion cannot be formed, because truth about God is inherently unknowable. By definition, neither has ever encountered a personal, living god.

There are a variety of reasons persons deny or ignore the existence of the Divine.

- God and his works are unseen and there is no scientific evidence of divine existence.

- Ancient religions served human purposes that are no longer relevant in today's era of science and benevolent government.
- The god of the major faiths is too judgmental to be the loving ideal we expect.
- Life is too full of evil for a loving God to be so silent.

Having rejected the existence of an Almighty spiritual personality, the atheist or agnostic needs a way to explain existence and purpose. The result is a great body of philosophical literature that ranges from the Greek Classics of *Socrates* and *Epicurus*, to the *metaphysical rebellion* of secular humanism, existentialism, nihilism, and socialism. Much of this philosophic thought explores the difficulty of life in this world and how best to live within it.

Know thyself.

[Inscription at Delphi. Quoted by Socrates]

Metaphysical rebellion...the movement by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation.

[Camus, Albert. *L'Homme Révolté*. 1951]

### ▬▬▬ **Neo-Paganism and Earth Religions** ▬▬▬

*Neo-Paganism* describes religions seeking to revive ancient pagan practices often associated with natural forces in the earth. Examples of such religions are *Wicca*, *Kemetism*, *Celtic*, *Ásatrú*, *Faery*, and *Druidism*. These can be further divided into those sects which attempt to *reconstruct* specific ancient rites, and those that synthesize ancient rites and individual preference. The latter are referred to as *syncretistic* or *eclectic*.

While some followers of the earth religions describe themselves as atheistic or agnostic, most view a masculine god and/or female goddess as a life force that interconnects all creation. They typically represent natural forces through five elemental powers or spirits:

- Ether = the Divine
- Earth = stability and physical endurance
- Fire = passion, courage and daring
- Water = emotions and intuition
- Air = intelligence and the arts

This is a different notion than the mainstream view of a single Creator who stands apart from what was created (*monotheism*). The neo-pagan may worship one god having multiple forms (*henotheism*), one god among many (*polytheism*), many gods equally, or a universal deity of everything (*pantheism*). The person may have one or more personal deities with which he or she works, while still recognizing the gods of other persons as being just as real. Each person is expected to come to terms with the reality that works best for him or her. There is no absolute truth that everyone is required to accept.

The individual practitioner seeks to transcend the physical realm and impose his or her will on creation, thus redirecting its energies to a desired purpose. This effort is enhanced with the help of the female goddess, male god, or other spirits representing the natural elements, ancestors, or others. The practitioner believes he is making changes in universal energy patterns that impact the fabric of reality itself. He does so through both *magical* (energetic/spiritual) and *mundane* (material/physical) work. He has to be cautious with this power because he is bound by a law of karma that promises a multiplied return of any blessings or curses he initiates.

*Wicca*, including modern-day *witchcraft* (also “*the Craft*”), is one of the larger Neo-Pagan movements. It is practiced in many different ways by its followers, but nearly all raise and direct natural energies, make use of magic techniques, and weave in ancient mythologies. *Wicca* is heavily oriented to matriarchal goddess worship and attracts many more women than men in the US, particularly among those offended by the patriarchal nature of the major world religions. The opposite appears to be true in Britain where men and the male god predominate.

There are many types of rituals. Among them:

- Worship
- Protection

- Healing
- Attraction
- Repulsion
- Dedication
- Journeying
- Divination
- Ritual Drama
- Rite of Passage
- Self-Development
- Karmic Acceleration

A typical ritual is composed of the following basic steps:

- Prepare the work area and altar
- Cleanse all participants
- Cast the sacred circle and activate other protections
- Invite the deities, elemental spirits, or ancestors required
- Build up energy with chanting, drumming, meditation, movement, etc.
- Establish a focus on the objective
- Perform the primary magic or ritual act
- Release the energy
- Give thanks and offerings to the deities and spirits
- Dissolve the circle and related protections
- Release the participants

Symbols are an important part of the Craft, and the most common is the *Pentagram*. The five points of the Pentagram represent the five elemental powers, and it is to these directions that energies are often directed in rituals. The circle around the star represents the Divine and is believed to bring the wearer wisdom and protection. Jewelry bearing this symbol is often worn as an amulet or talisman.

### =====**New Age**=====

Where Neo-Paganism generally depends on the cooperation and involvement of the gods and spirits of nature, the New Age movement generally denies the presence of any spiritual deity. It sees all

things as being part of a single universal energy that can be tapped and used through a wide variety of techniques.

The approaches to New Age practice are as varied as the practitioners themselves. Interests span astrology, alchemy, magic, meditation, channeling, psychic experience, and unresolved mysteries such as alien visits. Exploring any one of these can be a life-long endeavor. New Age practitioners create their own spiritual environment, borrowing ideas and techniques from many of the world's mystical and religious traditions. There is no standard scripture or codified theology. A person's spiritual reality is defined by his or her own experiences and interests.

The following is a representative list of common beliefs held by those in the New Age movement:

- Everything in the universe is spiritually connected and a part of the same cosmic energy. "God" and his various names are expressions of this energy.
- All persons have hidden abilities of spiritual significance that can be developed with practice. Psychic experiences connect a person with the shared intelligence of the unseen world. Properly trained, the mind has the ability to alter the physical laws of reality. We remain, however, subject to certain spiritual laws of cause and effect (eg., karma).
- All the world's belief systems have something to offer from a common core of truth. Historical spiritual leaders like the Buddha and Jesus have served as guides to this truth, but church dogma has added much that is unimportant.
- Spiritual beings are available to assist us on our path today. These may take the form of angels, elemental spirits, spirit guides, or aliens from other worlds.
- A race of highly intelligent beings, possibly from lost societies, was responsible for Stonehenge, Atlantis, the Great Pyramid, and the like. Science has not yet discovered their purpose and origins.
- Our purpose is to find wholeness in this life and beyond. This is expressed by loving everyone and everything. We learn to do so largely through our relationships. The afterlife is unknown, but

if we live in harmony with others and nature during this life, we will experience harmony in our next existence as well.

- Nothing is a coincidence, and everything has spiritual significance. Each person's experiences are divinely orchestrated to teach important lessons.
- Being in harmony with creation requires quieting our physical mind. Meditation, T'ai Chi, Yoga, and other spiritual practices from the Far East help make the connection. Western science has wrongly ignored such important fields as holistic health and parapsychology.

### ==== Higher Powers ====

Many people are inclined to develop their own spiritual belief system but reject the labels "neo-pagan", "new age", and the like. They select a *higher power* that allows them to look beyond themselves for encouragement and strength when dealing with everyday issues. Finding and connecting with one's higher power is a core principle of addiction recovery and inner healing.

We seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.

[12-Step Program, Step 11]

When a person first selects a higher power, it can take the form of anything they find useful. It can be based on a god found in the scriptures, an abstract deity having helpful traits, an impersonal universal energy, or some part of the inner man that offers a source of strength. The important thing is not what the higher power does, likes, or judges. Rather, it is the ability of the individual to release to that entity some of the responsibility for change, thereby making difficult or overwhelming change possible.

Developing a relationship of this type with God is helpful in the following ways:

- We need the help of a loving God to cope effectively with empty, lonely, and hopeless feelings.
- Admitting powerlessness over a compulsion reduces our tendency to become obsessive about gaining control over it.
- Initially we learn to recognize God's love and forgiveness through others. Later we can perceive it even when unseen.
- Surrendering our will to a higher power allows God to partner with us for our own benefit.
- God allows us to experience love, contentment, happiness, and dignity regardless of our circumstances.
- God forgives us even when we or others can't, or won't.
- God gives us the willingness, ability, and strategy to make amends for past hurts.
- God removes the behavioral shortcomings that get in the way of our healing.
- God tells us how to live a good life and then enables us to do what he says.
- The end result is a spiritual awakening in which we align our lives to God's will instead of manipulating situations based on what we think is best.

Initially, the purpose of finding one's higher power is to obtain the love and grace that God gives us to cope with difficult behaviors and situations. Over time, we learn how to hear God's wisdom for our lives during periods of meditation and prayer. It is at this point that many people discover that their helpful higher power is in fact a real personality. Deeply hurting people do not find God in elaborate theologies. They find him in the place of simple relationship.

## CHAPTER 6

# CHOOSING WHAT TO BELIEVE



It should be clear after reading this survey that there are many perspectives on God, and that they can be quite different. The chart below summarizes world views of the nature of God (on the left), and how we obtain a good life after this one (on the right). A great deal of additional variety can also be found within each of the major faiths listed. There is a direct relationship between whether a faith is oriented to a single Creator, and whether some special form of salvation from human lawlessness is required. The horizontal line in the middle of the chart indicates this division.

*Major Faiths*

|                                     |   |   |   |                              |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------------|
| No spirit realm                     | → | <i>Humanism</i>                             | ← | None needed                  |
| Universal energy<br>(gods optional) | → | <i>(Neo)Paganism<br/>New Age<br/>Taoism</i> | ← | None or karma                |
| Ambivalent gods                     | → | <i>Norse<br/>Shinto</i>                     | ← | Good deeds                   |
| Everything part<br>of single god    | → | <i>Hinduism<br/>Buddhism</i>                | ← | Karma                        |
| Individual<br>concepts of God       | → | <i>Baha'I<br/>Higher Powers</i>             | ← | Good deeds                   |
| Single Creator                      | → | <i>Judaism<br/>Islam</i>                    | ← | Law, Prophets,<br>good deeds |
| Single Creator                      | → | <i>First Nations<br/>Sikhism</i>            | ← | Grace,<br>good deeds         |
| Single Creator                      | → | <i>Christianity</i>                         | ← | Messiah,<br>good deeds       |

Perspectives on God

Perspectives on Salvation

The faiths below the line have doctrinal views of God as a single and distinct spiritual being. They hold that our choices in this life have permanent spiritual consequences. Human lawlessness automatically separates us from our Creator and keeps us from enjoying blessings that only he can provide. A combination of good deeds and faith in God or his Prophet/Messiah is required for a reconciling salvation.

Above the line we have examples of the wide variety of philosophies and faiths that deny a single, sovereign god. They range from denying the Divine to seeing it as some form of self-inclusive universal force. In some of these faiths one is free to conceive of the supernatural in any way desired. The quality of this or any subsequent life is determined by karma or some other accumulation of good and bad deeds. It is assumed that if we have learned how to live in peace in this life, then any subsequent existence will similarly work out.

It should be clear that all these faiths cannot be right. There are some glaring discrepancies. The Almighty is variously viewed as being non-existent, a personality outside creation, and so pervasive as to contain all of creation within himself. He is understood to be both ambivalent about us, and fully engaged in our daily activities. Some see our transcendence being dependent on our own self-enlightenment aided by karmic math. Others believe only God himself can redeem us from our errors. Some faiths believe spiritual knowledge is paramount while others find value in love.

If there is an ultimate God, then he would indeed have to be immense in attributes, power, and wisdom. He would likely be well beyond the capacity of our human minds to fully understand. Yet the differences listed above are stark opposites. Can anything be so seemingly inconsistent with itself?

These cannot all be aspects of one God; they are irreconcilable if a single truth exists.

### **The Bias of this Book**

Each of us must come to terms with the spiritual and make our own decision about what we believe. The remainder of this book will assume the existence of one knowable and personal Great Spirit

who sits outside all that was made. Without this assumption there is no point in further exploring such a divine personality.

The author will be the first to agree that some of the differences observed by the various faiths may be the result of such a god revealing himself in different ways to different people. It is also conceivable that other life spread throughout the universe sees divinity in ways that appear inconsistent with our own. But varied appearances are a different thing from ultimate reality. Either there is a real actor inside all the guises or there is not. If there is, then the supreme authority has a distinct character that *he* reveals in various ways that *we* must recognize.

Can the existence of such a god be indisputably proved one way or the other? Four millennia of theological and philosophic thought have been unsuccessful at convincing us all one way or the other. Nevertheless, the thoughts below provide one line of reasoning leading to such a belief.

### **No Spirit Realm**

Atheist and agnostic beliefs are focused primarily on life in this world and maximizing a person's enjoyment of it. There is no purpose or meaning to life other than to live it. Birth and death are natural processes with no particular spiritual significance. The human is not inherently a spiritual creature, and organic emotional responses explain our feelings toward life. To this person the realm of ghosts, angels, and spirits of all types is fictional or not provable. Science serves as the primary religion, and manifestations not explained by science today will undoubtedly find their explanation tomorrow.

Among the questions science has thus far been unable to resolve are issues of human behavior and existence.

- How did everything get its start from nothing, a notion that science considers impossible? And if it has no beginning, what sustains it in perpetuity?
- How did sentient intelligence develop? What is its purpose?
- What is the source of good and evil, and how are the boundaries set and maintained that keep one from overwhelming the other?

- Why is love so universally compelling, and what sustains its hope in all people?

Human beings have an inexplicable desire to achieve a purpose, pursue something of worth, connect with others through love, be at peace in nature, and believe in something bigger than themselves. There are unexplained phenomena such as intuition and miraculous healing. Although we may one day find a natural source for the emotional and para-psychological programming that so beautifully organizes creation and keeps it in balance, it is presently beyond scientific reach.

### **Universal Energy/Consciousness/Intelligence**

Spiritually-aware people accept there is something larger “out there” with which we are connected. Those in the universal energy / consciousness / intelligence movement see their gods primarily as useful personifications of a portion of that totality. They create their own reality from the various offerings on the cosmic buffet. Natural and divine law are one and the same. They do not follow any specific god with a sovereign personality.

Something universal and non-physical does exist. Practitioners of the *occult* (hidden/secret) arts who do not acknowledge God appear able to access unknown information, place curses on a person, defy gravity, and even effect change in the physical properties of objects. There are spiritual laws (or unseen spirit beings) that govern such things, and they appear to be accessible to us all.

Still, even the adepts cannot explain from whence such ability comes. And so far there is no substantial proof for such theories as Carl Jung’s *collective unconscious*, or Ken Keyes’ *Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon*.

“Enlightened” people are understood to have developed a connection with this cosmic intelligence that enables them to advance beyond the rest of us in knowledge and ability. Assuming this is so, it seems that such enlightenment either doesn’t change a person very much, or encourages such people to keep it hidden. Where are all the masters? One theory holds that they move quietly among us, revealing their gifts at just the right time to those who

need what they offer. Another theory suggests that at each stage of evolution we move on to other worlds in the same way that a school child graduates to another grade. If this latter theory is true, then judging by the behavior of many people during rush hour this world is just a few grades above Neanderthal.

Universal intelligence does provide answers to some of the questions we have posed. Good, evil, and fairness are explained by karma, which we have seen to be a mathematical sum of good and bad deeds that accumulate across one or more lifetimes. Net negative karma promises a person a more difficult future life and more remedial work towards enlightenment. Net positive karma accelerates a person's journey to nirvana. This notion has appeal to us for several reasons. It allows nature to be perfectly fair, there is no ultimate judge for us to offend, we will all eventually learn the lessons we require, and thus none of us can "fail".

Yet while such a mechanism for determining reward and punishment is possible, the question still remains as to its source and our purpose within that source. How did it spring into being without something to define it, implement it, and sustain it? Who decided that future events should depend on things that happened in the past? How did the boundaries get set between good and bad? Could this have come about if creation were left to chance?

There is likewise no explanation for the origin or purpose of human love, which prefers others over the self. Studies of social psychology (based for example on the *Tragedy of the Commons*, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, or *Stanford Prison Experiment*) have found that humans tend to do what is best for themselves at the expense of others. Love cannot be a survival trait resulting from Darwinian evolution. Success rarely goes to the group that graciously gives up its land to another having greater comparative economic advantage; it goes to those who have figured out how to wield the biggest club.

For those who desire control in their lives, a benign or uninterested universal force is more appealing than a sovereign god. Western, materially-oriented people often resent others telling them what to do. We chafe at judgment, rules, and restraints on our behavior, things that many associate negatively with God. We rationalize that because we are "good" to others, supernaturally-imposed

rules are unnecessary for us. Unfortunately, it is also easy to over-rationalize. The more self-absorbed we become, the more liberties we begin to take at the expense of others — often without realizing it. Suddenly a “civilized” society burns the library of Alexandria.

### **Ambivalent Gods**

Some ancient faiths such as Shinto and that of the Norse saw the spirit realm as operating similarly to our natural world. It was filled with gods involved in their own business affairs. This perspective holds that there is no one dominant creative/sustaining personality. Rather there are many, each with authority over various things or places and organized into some sort of celestial government. Such a belief forms the basis for many earth religions as well.

Typical of these belief systems is the projection of human behavior and emotion onto the gods. The Norse tradition in particular assumes that they battle and debate among themselves and are rather uninterested in our corner of creation. Elaborate ritual, sacrifice, and prayer are required to gain their attention and assistance. Humans are evaluated by these gods based on a variation of the karmic theme, generally after one lifetime.

The introduction of creative, emotional, and active divine personalities provides a potential solution to questions of good, evil, and judgment. The works of men are evaluated in a heavenly courtroom against some established standard. It leaves unanswered, however, the purpose of the human existence which seems of little interest to the gods themselves. It presumes that the gods have somehow cooperated in the creation of the universe and that amid all their activity they have been able to administer it more effectively than we have been able to manage our own affairs on earth.

That being said, there may well be an unseen spirit realm that exists between humans and any ultimate Creator. It is easy to imagine ancient peoples interacting with these spiritual personalities without realizing there might be a greater God.

### **Everything Part of Single God**

Hinduism and Buddhism recognize a single ultimate god called the *Brahman* that can take many forms. The Brahman includes

everything within it, including all of creation. The human purpose is to rediscover through enlightenment our place in this totality. Good karma accelerates our progress toward nirvana by making available to us better teachers, greater wisdom, and comforts that allow time for meditation.

Doing good or bad deeds affects our own karma, but not our relationship to the *Brahman*. If a cruel man does something unkind to a good man, then the cruel man will suffer karmic consequences in a later life. The good man presumably deserved the unkindness because he accumulated bad karma in a prior life. At some point accumulated good karma and enlightened introspection gain the victory. The *Brahman* neither helps nor hurts. It is just there, and we all eventually merge back into our part of it.

This again raises the question of purpose. If we are already a part of the *Brahman*, what value is there in being reconciled to it? Why go through the experiences of a difficult world at all, unless we learn something here that will be of value later to a universe that already has all wisdom within it?

### **Individual Concepts of God**

We saw in the section on Alternative Spirituality that many people personify the unseen spiritual realm in their own customized way, creating or recognizing gods that control things of importance to them. This enables them to release to the universe things with which they need help, or to obtain affirmation they cannot get from other people. It also allows people to harmonize from a variety of sources a composite spirituality that includes those features that feel right while excluding those that do not.

Inviting something bigger into our lives is an important first step in the spiritual journey. It enables a person to open up to the unseen and allows it to begin operating in their lives. This is to be encouraged, but it is important to recognize the exercise for what it is. Choosing only those parts of faith that make us feel good allows us to ignore the challenging parts that can potentially encourage our greatest growth and maturity. The danger of customizing your own god is that you will end the journey too soon.

### **Single Sovereign God**

This brings us to the single creator God of the monotheistic faiths, who has a distinct character and sits outside his creation. He is generally believed to be *omnipotent* (all-powerful), *omniscient* (all-knowing), and *omnipresent* (everywhere in time and place). This Great Spirit wrote the natural laws that govern the daily function of the universe, established the boundaries within which humans can make their choices, and put in place a timeline for us to follow. Ultimately all things are attributed to his will.

This All-Father has a nature too lofty for full human understanding, and is perceived differently even among the monotheistic faiths. Christianity believes that YHWH takes the simultaneous form of the creator Father, incarnate Son, and Holy Spirit. Islam and Judaism both reject the notion that Allah or YHWH would ever stoop to becoming human. None of us will ever know all the ways, times, and places that God has manifested his presence. So for now, we must be content to honor him in his basic role as the creator and sustainer of all things, and to give him permission to do as he sovereignly chooses. This can potentially include revealing himself to different people in various ways.

The monotheistic faiths believe that God contains within him all that is needed to be either good or evil, and has deposited this within us as well. For his part, he has chosen to manifest only that which is perfectly loving and good. Likewise, we also have a choice about what we manifest. Willful rebellion against holiness produces evil. Fortunately, nothing created is the equal of its creator, and thus no amount of evil can ever overwhelm the power of God's goodness. The monotheistic scriptures indicate that one day evil will be removed from our midst, and God will grant continued life to those that have freely chosen to be holy.

God also uniquely wired human beings for deep emotional attachments that we call *love*. Love is quite different from "goodness" which describes a behavior. The scriptures tell us that God in his role of divine parent loves everything he created, and that he placed this spark within us as well. He gets great joy from his children choosing freely to love him back. This is the monotheistic understanding of our purpose. For our part, receiving love from God and other people

is as important to our emotional well-being as food is to our physical. Studies repeatedly show that unloved children have a much higher chance of manifesting anti-social behavior later in life.

The monotheistic faiths are also distinguished one from another by the question of the afterlife. All agree that there is a desirable outcome to be actively pursued, but they differ on the mechanism by which one is judged worthy of that outcome. Sikhs do good deeds. Jews keep God's law. Islam requires following the teachings of Muhammad. Christianity requires faith in Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. All agree that God desires that we live lives of generosity and love.

The Near Eastern monotheistic faiths see a deep chasm between a holy personal God and sinful man that is impossible to cross through our own effort. We have to trust that a perfectly fair God will extend a bridge of mercy and grace to those that make an honest effort to do what is right. Unfortunately, none of us knows exactly what the standard is for honest effort, so we never really know how we rank against God's admission criteria.

We have looked at some of the reasons to believe in a single creator-god. We close by considering the objections raised by people who choose another path.

- (1) There is nothing to prove the existence of God. Explaining the unseen attributes of the universe by way of an unseen God that is outside that universe simply moves the problem out one more layer.

The fact that we cannot perceive God with our worldly senses does not prove that he does not exist. If he does not, then all the faiths that claim divine encounters have been wrong from primitive to modern times and from one end of the earth to the other.

The universe does appear to have unseen natural laws that are benign, indiscriminate, and unchanging which govern its functions apart from godly intervention. These laws allow the universe to remain in a steady state and to self-correct imbalances. When we choose to live counter to this design,

it exacts a form of karmic “punishment” on us by trying to reverse poor choices. If you try to dig a dry hole below sea level, then you will forever be pumping against gravity’s tendency to pull water to low places.

While these rules may allow some ongoing level of evolution and change to occur, they do not create a fundamentally new paradigm along the way. Within our physical universe, an object in motion has its direction changed only when influenced by an outside force like gravity. In the same way, changes that alter the fixed rules of the universe imply action by an external creative personality.

It is certainly possible to conceive of the universe as having a special corner of creative consciousness that includes the attributes of God. But then, we have just described God.

- (2) The scriptures portray a sovereign and authoritative God who mandates compliance with his laws. This seems intolerant, narcissistic, and judgmental.

People often feel this way because they project onto God their worldview of human authority. Persons having a negative experience with parents, bosses, or the legal system often develop a negative view of authority in all its forms. It is difficult to see the Creator as a loving father when our human parental relationships have provided such a poor example.

We will explore this notion in more detail later, but the Almighty is understood to be a perfectly holy parent in ways that humans are not. He does not make the mistakes we do when encouraging his children toward spiritual maturity. He teaches and disciplines perfectly, loves unconditionally (even in the midst of correction), and makes perfect choices on our behalf which we often do not understand until much later. A stern, narcissistic, and judgmental God violates what the world’s faiths believe about his holiness.

No divine rulebook would be necessary if we were all perfectly loving toward God and each other. That was creation's original design. Because we are not, God gave us a set of criteria by which we could evaluate our own behavior. We make our own free choice about what parts of good and evil we manifest. That choice also dictates how close we can get to God in this life and the next.

Submission to spiritual authority might have a very different meaning for us if it allowed our lives to become perfectly joyous and peaceful. Imagine if evil, pain, death, and suffering did not exist, and fulfilling Maslow's hierarchy of needs was as easy as plucking fruit from any nearby tree. We cannot make choices about God based on our experiences with flawed human love and authority.

Does this prove that God is loving and not judgmental? No. The best we can do is look at the universe around us, take human influence out of it, and ask if what remains reflects a Creator who is loving or intolerant. What does your spirit say when you sit by the seashore, walk in the woods, or watch the sky?

### **Choices**

So where does this leave you? Overwhelmed by the options? Disgusted by so much spiritual nonsense? Encouraged to have finally seen the choices clearly? People have found many rocks to turn over in 6,000 years of searching out who God is.

If the lack of certainty is troubling to you, that is understandable. The western industrialized nations are full of Greek thinkers who like defined answers. In much of the rest of the world, however, uncertainty is perfectly acceptable. It is alright not to worry about things we have not yet figured out because life is about the experience, not the destination. William Barrett helpfully wrote:

The distinction...arises from the difference between doing and knowing. The Hebrew is concerned with practice, the Greek with knowledge. Right conduct

is the ultimate concern of the Hebrew, right thinking that of the Greek. Duty and strictness of conscience are the paramount things in life for the Hebrew; for the Greek, the spontaneous and luminous play of the intelligence. The Hebrew thus extols the moral virtues as the substance and meaning of life; the Greek subordinates them to the intellectual virtues...the contrast is between practice and theory, between the moral man and the theoretical or intellectual man.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to making choices about your beliefs, there is a point at which intellectual proofs end and spiritual inspiration takes over. At the end of the day God is spirit, and one that is well beyond human understanding or description. Try to sense his presence and wisdom with your intuition. Reread the scriptures of the different faiths and consider what feels right. Above all, don't rush the process and don't try to wrap your head (or heart) around it all at once. We are talking about a lifelong journey, and learning to hear from your spirit requires much time in quiet reflection.

Decisions about faith are also made more difficult because an element of truth can be found in nearly all religions. Hindus and Buddhists find peace in meditative detachment. Muslims are faithful and pious. Jews understand covenant. Native Americans have sharp spiritual perception. Christians have been some of history's greatest mercy-givers. The Baha'i make a point of being tolerant. Nearly all religions say that we humans in some way reflect our creator and need to make the search for God and his truth a way of life. We need to trust in God's goodness toward us, and make love our foundational approach to life. Take away the theology and doctrine, and spiritual maturity can be found all over. Yet we have now shown that behind these basic truths many of the gods are very different.

Perhaps we can find truth borne out in the promises of the faiths. Are there Buddhists among us who have experienced enlightenment and are showing its fruits during this life? Are Spirit-filled Christians speaking in angelic languages, healing the sick, and raising the dead? Are Wiccans changing the world for the better by redirecting

the energies of the universe? Where is the power being manifested that is spoken of in the scriptures?

Perception can also play a role. Islam is one of the fastest-growing faiths in free societies partly because its followers are visibly devout in their faith. Islam is highly structured, and requires adherence to ritual. Christians and Buddhists by contrast are freed from such ritual so it can be harder to tell if they are really living out their faith. On the other hand, “still waters can run deep”. Deeply spiritual people are often quietly humble and don’t advertise their faith. A holy book cannot be judged by its cover.

This is as far as we will go on the topic of comparative spirituality. Many volumes more comprehensive than this have been dedicated to such study. The essence of the question is not the specific details of each faith. You are not shopping for the best brand. Rather, you are looking for truth based on what you perceive to be the true character and nature of God himself.

The character Pi Patel observed the following as he offered alternative explanations for his life.

So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can’t prove the question either way, which story [of my life] do you prefer? ...And so it goes with God.<sup>2</sup>

The story we have chosen to explore more fully in the remainder of this book assumes that there is one supreme and knowable God. He exists outside creation, but is connected with your spirit. He is not for you to define, but rather to discover. Your choice about your faith depends on you discerning who or what God is, and what kind of relationship he expects to have with you. The trappings of religion and all else follow from that.

Notes:

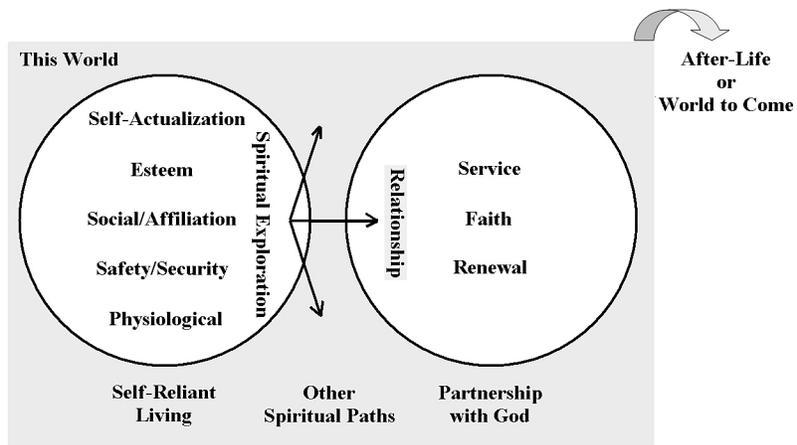
<sup>1</sup> Barrett, William. *Irrational Man*. 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. 2001. Harcourt Books. Orlando, FL pp. 398-399



# PART 2

## GETTING TO KNOW GOD





## CHAPTER 7

# THE NAMES OF GOD



If we can agree that there is a sovereign deity who takes an interest in us and what we are doing, then it makes sense to learn a bit about him. How active is he in this earthly realm? Does God control good and evil? How are we supposed to relate to things unseen? What happens after this life ends? How do we get on God's good side, and what is the reward for doing so? What are the consequences for ignoring the whole thing? The next several chapters address these and other questions.

Our study will rely on the monotheistic (single-god) scriptures of Judaism (Tanakh), Christianity (New Testament), and Islam (*Qur'an*). These contain extensive first-person statements given by God to his followers. None of the world's other scriptures are so rich with self-description and divine revelation. The Tanakh contains stories and spiritual principles that are shared by all three of the faiths, and forms the part of the *Holy Bible* known as the Old Testament. The Christian New Testament documents the life of Jesus and the beliefs of his followers. The *Qur'an* contains the revelation of Allah given to his prophet Muhammad. Each faith has substantial additional commentary that has been added by others over the years, but for our purposes the essential nature of God is made sufficiently clear in the primary writings.

The texts of all three faiths are considered reliable. Researchers have found to be highly consistent copies of the documents recovered from various locations and time periods. This suggests that they have common origins. The translations we have today can also be traced with good accuracy to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic writing.

We now continue our spiritual journey by looking into the subject of *relationship* with this Creator-God. There are many examples in the sacred scriptures of his dealings with people in various times and places. It is therefore reasonable to assume that an unchanging God would deal in similar ways with us today. The more we understand these dealings between God and man, the better we can tune our own spiritual ear to the things that he would say or do in a given situation. We will then find communication with God much easier.

Our focus will be on God's personality and character. *Personality* is the basic part of us that changes little over our lifetime. It is described with adjectives like "gregarious", "cerebral", and "confident". These are good predictors of what we will enjoy doing, and the ways in which we will go about our activities. For example, "outgoing" people generally enjoy sales, while more "reserved" personalities are drawn to knowledge work.

*Character* describes our morals and ethics, and how we respond to circumstances. These change as we mature over time. We use words like "trustworthy", "diligent", "resilient", and "giving". String a few personality and character adjectives together and we get a good idea of what a person is like, and whether we would be comfortable being around them.

In the same way, God reveals himself in scripture to have opinions, emotions, and specific character attributes. For example, we find God described as "loving", "fair", and "sovereign". He is "slow to anger" and frequently described as a "shepherd". The Creator is never seen as a "liar", a "cheat", or "lazy". As with a person, such words help us build a mental image of what the Almighty would be like if we were to encounter him.

It is therefore appropriate that we begin our more detailed look at the Almighty with a survey of his names, which were revealed to describe his personality and character.

In the ancient Near East, a single name could be used to identify an individual, cultural group, ethnic group, or political nation (eg., "Israel"). It described personal attributes, indicated ownership, memorialized past events, or represented a future promise. When a person asked another's name, he was not asking how the person

should be addressed. Rather, he was asking “Who are you; what are you like; what have you done”?

Many indigenous people today have at least two full names; one legal, and one that describes the person’s characteristics or personality. This latter name is often known only to the bearer and the one who gave it. A person’s name is a distinct part of him, and misusing the name is considered the same as wounding the person.

A name can indicate scope of direct authority. Military personnel are addressed by rank with words like “Ensign”, “Captain”, and “General”. A name can also convey delegated authority. A nation’s ambassador by himself has no power. Yet when he makes a statement on behalf of his nation he carries the full authority of that nation. Likewise, a king’s trusted representative was often granted use of the king’s *signet ring*, which was used to emboss the king’s symbol on official correspondence.

A person in authority expects his representative to use his name only in ways that he himself would do. It is for this reason that God warns us in one of the *Ten Commandments* never to claim delegated authority that we have not been given.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God  
in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished  
who takes His name in vain.

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 20:7]

The Hebrew Tanakh, Muslim *Qur’an*, and Christian New Testament each reveal numerous names for God that describe the richness of his character and nature. Many names are considered sacred because they were used by the Creator to describe himself. Despite the differences in doctrine that exist among these faiths, it is interesting to note how similar are their names for God.

The lists of names that follow may seem long. They were gathered over thousands of years as God progressively revealed more and more of himself to us. Collectively they portray him in surprising detail. Take time to meditate on them, and to imagine what kind of spiritual sovereign they describe. Ask yourself which names

feel right and which are hard to accept. Then think about why you are reacting the way you are. Are you enthralled with his splendor, intimidated by his holiness, or disgusted at his arrogance? If you are like most people, you will discover some interesting things about yourself as you consider God's names.

**I Am (Judaism)**

*I Am* is the God of the Hebrew people. This is the primary, public name God told Moses to use when talking with others about God. "I Am" declares the Creator's absolute being as the source of everything. He is ever present in both time and place, since he sits outside both.

"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM; and He said, thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you... this is My eternal name, and this is how I am to be recalled for all generations'."

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 3:14-15]

**YHWH = LORD**

God also has the private, personal name *YHWH* which is related to the name "I Am".

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD [YHWH]; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but {by} My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 6:2-3]

This name is written in the Hebrew using the anglicized characters YHWH, and is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be". It is sometimes referred to as the "Tetragrammaton", meaning the "The Four Letters". The pronunciation of YHWH is not certain, but two acceptable versions are *yah-ha'-wah* and *yah'-way*. In the scriptures

it is occasionally shortened to *Yah*. Modern English renders YHWH as “LORD” (capitalized), and sometimes as “Jehovah”. It is found this way some 7,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

YHWH is frequently combined with other words to create additional, compound names that describe attributes of God or his activity in a given circumstance. Several of the better known are listed below.

|                       |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <i>YHWH Elohim</i>    | LORD God               |
| <i>YHWH Yireh</i>     | LORD Who Sees/Provides |
| <i>YHWH Nissi</i>     | LORD My Banner         |
| <i>YHWH M'kadesh</i>  | LORD Who Sanctifies    |
| <i>YHWH Shalom</i>    | LORD of Peace          |
| <i>YHWH Tz'vaot</i>   | LORD of Hosts          |
| <i>YHWH O'saynu</i>   | LORD Our Maker         |
| <i>YHWH Makeh</i>     | LORD Our Smiter        |
| <i>YHWH Rophe</i>     | LORD Who Heals         |
| <i>YHWH Tz'dkaynu</i> | LORD Our Righteousness |

The name YHWH is considered so holy that the Jews stopped using it altogether by 200 CE for fear of unintentionally offending their God. If a Jew today wants to call on God in a very personal and special way, and does not want to use one of God's more general descriptive names, then he will use “Adonai” (Lord - lowercase) or “HaShem” (the Name).

**YHWH Elohim = LORD God**

Elohim is the general Hebrew word for the Almighty Creator God. The special name YHWH combined with Elohim describes the one true Creator that is known by us in a personal way.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 2:4]

**YHWH Yireh** = Lord Will Provide

Abraham is the patriarch of all three major monotheistic religions. God planned to build great nations of Hebrew and Arab people through Abraham's descendents and wanted to ensure that the family line would begin from a place of high integrity. So he put Abraham to the ultimate test of obedience by asking him to kill as an offering his only son by his wife Sarai. At the moment of sacrifice, God stopped Abraham's hand and substituted a ram. The name YHWH Yireh describes the God that will find or provide, exactly what we need, right when we need it.

Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided."

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 22:14]

It is hard to understand how the God who commands us to love could ever ask a person to sacrifice another, particularly a father his own child. This must have been a horrible experience for Abraham, who was forced to choose perfect obedience to God over the most precious things in his life. This story appears in scripture to illustrate important spiritual principles. First, it pointedly shows God's love of obedience. Second, Abraham trusted God to keep his promises regarding Isaac despite all natural appearances. Third, God ultimately did not allow Isaac to die, consistent with his hatred of murder and love of life.

**YHWH Nissi** = Lord is My Banner

The name YHWH Nissi was used when the Israelites battled Amalek's army. Moses held up his rod symbolizing that YHWH was the covering for his people during the battle. The Hebrew word *nes* generally describes an assembly point for communication of important information.

Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men

for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”... So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed... Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner...”

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 17:8-16]

**YHWH M’Kadesh** = Lord who Sanctifies you (makes you holy)  
The attribute of YHWH that most describes Him is holiness.

...thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.

[*Holy Bible*. Leviticus 11:45]

...Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 6:3]

... the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

[*Holy Bible*. Ezekiel 39:7]

The name YHWH M’Kadesh, is derived from the Hebrew word “*kadosh*” meaning holy. In the scriptures YHWH often calls himself simply “Kadosh”, which is translated as ‘The Holy One’. God alone makes unclean people holy, just by his very presence among them.

I the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy.

[*Holy Bible*. Leviticus 21:8]

And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.

[*Holy Bible. Ezekiel 37:28*]

**YHWH Shalom** = Lord of Peace

The verb Shalom is translated “peace” but has a broader meaning of wholeness or harmony. It is generally used to convey the fulfillment one finds in the presence of God.

Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace.

[*Holy Bible. Judges 6:24*]

**YHWH Tz’vaot** = Lord of Hosts

Tz’vaot is Hebrew for “Armies”. This name envisions God as the commander of a heavenly host of angels arrayed in military order. It appears primarily in the books of the Hebrew prophets and the Psalms. Sometimes “Adonai” is added, making the title “Lord YHWH of Hosts”.

A variant of this name is “Elohay-Maarchot”, which means “God of the armies”. “Maarchot” comes from the same root as the word “to arrange”. In military terms this becomes “to array” or “to rank” an army.

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.”

[*Holy Bible. 1 Samuel 17:45*]

**YHWH O’saynu / Hoseenu** = Lord our Maker

This name appears only once in the Hebrew Scriptures, declaring that we are the handiwork of YHWH in his role as Creator.

Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel  
before the LORD our Maker.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 95:6]

**YHWH Makeh** = Lord our Smiter

A covenant is a double-edged sword that specifies blessings and curses, both of which a perfectly holy and reliable God must enforce according to our choices. This name appears in the scripture below in which the prophet Isaiah warns of God's impending judgment against Israel's rebellion.

Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and  
spend My anger against you; judge you according  
to your ways and bring on you all your abomina-  
tions. My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I  
will repay you according to your ways, while your  
abominations are in your midst; then you will know  
that I, the LORD, do the smiting.

[*Holy Bible*. Ezekiel 7:8-9]

God's nature is one of love and the scripture says he desires that everyone in his creation be found righteous at the Last Day judgment. One way he encourages this is to correct our behavior while we are still on the Earth and have time to make better choices. We get a picture of this from agriculture, in which fruit trees must be periodically pruned to maximize their health and yield.

My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD  
Or loathe His reproof, For whom the LORD loves  
He reproves, Even as a father {corrects} the son in  
whom he delights.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 3:11-12]

### **YHWH Rophe**

God describes himself as the healer of all physical ailments. As creator, he has the ability to restore lost limbs and recreate diseased organs. These are not miracles found in the natural order of things. (Re)creation requires divine intervention.

And He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.”

[*Holy Bible.* Exodus 15:26]

Healing is also used in the scriptures to describe God’s forgiveness of sin and iniquity. One of the ways he shows us his grace is by counting us righteous even though we do not deserve it. God sometimes proves his willingness or ability to forgive sin by manifesting physical healing as a confirming sign.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, {So that} your youth is renewed like the eagle.

[*Holy Bible.* Psalms 103:2-5]

### **YHWH Tz’dkaynu = Lord Our Righteousness**

God uses this name for Himself twice, once in reference to the future Messiah, and again in reference to Jerusalem (the seat of the Messiah’s future kingdom).

“Behold, {the} days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;

And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. “In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He [Messiah] will be called, ‘The LORD our righteousness.’”

[*Holy Bible. Jeremiah 23:5-6*]

‘In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. ‘In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is {the name} by which she [Jerusalem] will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.’

[*Holy Bible. Jeremiah 33:15-16*]

### **Elohim**

“Elohim” (or *Elohay*) is the first name for God found in the *Torah*, and it also appears frequently in other parts of the Old Testament. *Elohim* comes from the Hebrew root meaning “exceeding greatness”, “strength”, or “power”, and has the unusual characteristic of being plural in form. It describes one god with one personality, but multiple distinct forms. Two of his forms are “Father” (*abinu*) and “Holy Spirit” (*Ruach HaKodesh*).

In the beginning God [Elohim] created the Heaven and the earth.

[*Holy Bible. Genesis 1:1*]

As with the name *YHWH*, *Elohim* is often combined with other words to describe specific characteristics of God.

|                      |                      |                     |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Elohay Elohim</i> | God of Gods          | (Deuteronomy 10:17) |
| <i>Elohay Kedem</i>  | God of the Beginning | (Deuteronomy 33:27) |

*Finding the True God*

---

|                        |                     |                                   |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Elohim Kedoshim</i> | Holy God            | (Leviticus 19:2,<br>Joshua 24:19) |
| <i>Elohay Selichot</i> | God of Forgiveness  | (Nehemiah 9:17)                   |
| <i>Elohay Yishi</i>    | God of My Salvation | (Psalms 18:47, 25:5)              |
| <i>Elohay Mauzi</i>    | God of My Strength  | (Psalms 43:2)                     |
| <i>Elohay Tehilati</i> | God of My Praise    | (Psalms 109:1)                    |
| <i>Elohay Mishpat</i>  | God of Justice      | (Isaiah 30:18)                    |
| <i>Elohim Chaiyim</i>  | Living God          | (Jeremiah 10:10)                  |
| <i>Elohay Mikarov</i>  | God Who Is Near     | (Jeremiah 23:23)                  |
| <i>Elohay Marom</i>    | God of Heights      | (Micah 6:6)                       |

**El**

“El” is the simple form of *Elohim*.

|                      |                         |                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>El Elyon</i>      | The Most High God       | (Genesis 14:18)     |
| <i>El Shaddai</i>    | The All Sufficient One  | (Genesis 17:1)      |
| <i>El Roi</i>        | The One Who Sees        | (Genesis 16:14)     |
| <i>El Olam</i>       | The God of Eternity     | (Genesis 21:33)     |
| <i>El HaNe’eman</i>  | The Faithful God        | (Deuteronomy 7:9)   |
| <i>El HaGadol</i>    | The Great God           | (Deuteronomy 10:17) |
| <i>El De’ot</i>      | The God of Knowledge    | (1 Samuel 2:3)      |
| <i>El Yisrael</i>    | The God of Israel       | (Psalms 68:36)      |
| <i>El Emet -</i>     | The God of Truth        | (Psalms 31:6)       |
| <i>El HaShamayim</i> | The God of The Heavens  | (Psalms 136:26)     |
| <i>El HaKadosh</i>   | The Holy God            | (Isaiah 5:16)       |
| <i>Immanu El</i>     | God With Us             | (Isaiah 7:14)       |
| <i>El Yeshuati</i>   | The God of My Salvation | (Isaiah 12:2)       |
| <i>El Echad</i>      | The One God             | (Malachi 2:10)      |

**Elah**

“Elah” is an Aramaic form of *Elohim* that is found in the Hebrew books of Ezra and Daniel.

|                                      |                         |             |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Elah Yisrael</i>                  | God of Israel           | (Ezra 5:1)  |
| <i>Elah Sh’maya</i><br><i>V’Arah</i> | God of Heaven and Earth | (Ezra 5:11) |

*Elah Yerush'lem* God of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:19)  
*Elah Sh'maya* God of Heaven (Ezra 7:23)

==== **Allah (Islam)** ====

The Hebrew language belongs to the same family of Semitic languages as Arabic and Aramaic, so the word roots are often similar. The word for “God” in Aramaic is “El”, and in Arabic it is “Allah”. The word Allah cannot be made plural or given gender, which is consistent with the Islamic concept of God. Allah means literally “The One who deserves all worship”. This is the basic monotheistic message of Islam. Use of these names pre-dated Prophet Muhammad by thousands of years.

And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah,  
so call on Him by them...

[*Noble Qur'an*. 7:180]

Traditionally Allah has 99 names, but the list of 99 varies somewhat depending on its source. It is difficult to translate Arabic words into modern English, and the descriptions below are somewhat inadequate. It is generally accepted by Muslims that the names can only be fully understood in their native language.

Allah

The One True God

Ar-Rahmaan

The Compassionate; The Beneficent; The One who has plenty of mercy for both the believers and the blasphemers in this world.

Ar-Raheem

The Merciful; The One who has plenty of mercy for the believers.

Al-Malik

The King; The Sovereign Lord; The One displaying complete and perfect Dominion.

Al-Quddoos

The Holy; The One who is pure from any imperfection.

As-Salaam

The Source of Peace.

Al-Mu'min

Guardian of Faith; The One who witnessed for Himself that no one is God but Him; The One who witnesses for His believers that they are truthful in their belief that no one is God but Him; The One who witnesses the sayings and deeds of His creatures.

Al-Muhaimin

The Protector.

Al-<sup>^</sup>Azeez

The Mighty; The Strong; The Defeater who has never been defeated.

Al-Jabbaar

The Compeller; The One who ensures nothing happens in His Dominion that He has not willed.

Al-Mutakabbir

The Majestic; The One who does not resemble his creatures and has none of their attributes.

Al-Khaaliq

The Creator; The One who brings everything from non-existence to existence.

Al-Bari'

The Evolver; The Maker; The One who can change that which has been created.

Al-Musawwir

The Fashioner; The One who forms His creatures in different images.

Al-Ghaffaar

The Great Forgiver; The One who repeatedly forgives the sins of the believers.

Al-Qahhaar

The Subduer; The Dominant; The One who has perfect Power over everything.

Al-Wahhaab

The Bestower; The One who is Generous in giving plenty without any return. He is everything beneficial.

Al-Razzaaq

The Sustainer; The Provider.

Al-Fattaah

The Opener; The Revealer; The One who reveals things to His believers.

Al-<sup>^</sup>Aleem

The All-knowing.

Al-Qaabid

The Constrictor; The Withholder; The One who in wisdom restricts sustenance.

Al-Baasit

The Expander; The Enlarger; The One who expands sustenance with His Generosity and Mercy.

Al-Khaafid

The Abaser; The One who lowers whomever He wills.

Ar-Raafi<sup>^</sup>

The Exalter, The One who raises up whomever He wills.

Al-Mu<sup>^</sup>iz

The Honorer; The One who gives esteem to whomever He wills.

Al-Muthil

The Dishonorer; The Humiliator; The One who degrades whomever He wills so there is no one to esteem Him.

As-Samee<sup>^</sup>

The All-Hearing; The One who hears all things.

Al-Baseer

The All-Seeing; The One who sees all things.

Al-Hakam

The Judge; The ruler whose judgment is His word.

Al-<sup>^</sup>Adl

The Just; The One who is entitled to do what He wills.

Al-Lateef

The Subtle One; The Gracious; The One who is kind to His believers and blesses them.

Al-Khabeer

The Aware; The One who knows the truth about all things.

Al-Haleem

The Forebearing; The Clement; The One who delays deserved punishment so He might yet forgive the sinner.

Al-<sup>^</sup>Azeem

The Great One; The Mighty; The One deserving exaltation and glory.

Al-Ghafoor

The All-Forgiving.

Ash-Shakoor

The Grateful; The Appreciative; The One who gives much reward for a little obedience.

Al-<sup>^</sup>Aliyy

The Most High; The Sublime.

Al-Kabeer

The One who is greatest.

Al-Hafeez

The Preserver; The One who protects whatever and whomever He wills.

Al-Muqet

The Maintainer; The Guardian; The Feeder; The Sustainer.

Al-Haseeb

The Reckoner; The One who brings recompense.

Aj-Jaleel

The Sublime One; The Beneficent; The One who has greatness of power and glory of status.

Al-Kareem

The Generous One; The Bountiful; The Gracious.

Ar-Raqeeb

The Watcher; The One with all Knowledge.

Al-Mujeeb

The Responder; The Harkener; The One who answers and rescues the person who calls upon Him.

Al-Wasi<sup>^</sup>

The Vast; The All-Embracing.

Al-Hakeem

The Wise; The Judge of Judges; The One who is correct in all things.

Al-Wadood

The Loving; The One who loves and is loved by His believers.

Al-Majeed

The Most Glorious One; The One with perfect power, high status, compassion, generosity, and kindness.

Al-Ba<sup>^</sup>ith

The Resurrector; The One who raises up His believers after death for reward and/or punishment.

Ash-Shaheed

The Witness; The One who knows all things.

Al-Haqq

The Truth; The True; The One who truly exists.

Al-Wakeel

The Trustee; The One who gives satisfaction and can be relied upon.

Al-Qawiyy

The Strongest; The One with complete power.

Al-Mateen

The Firm One; The One with ultimate and untiring power.

Al-Waliyy

The Protecting Friend; The Supporter.

Al-Hameed

The Praiseworthy; The One who deserves to be praised.

Al-Muhsee

The Counter; The Reckoner; The One who tracks all things.

Al-Mubdi'

The Originator; The One who created the human being.

Al-Mu<sup>^</sup>eed

The Reproducer; The One who brings back living things after death.

Al-Muhyi

The Restorer; The Giver of Life; The One who gives human life. The One who raises up souls on the resurrection day. The One who illuminates the heart with the light of knowledge.

Al-Mumeet

The Destroyer; The Creator of Death; The One who kills.

Al-Hayy

The Alive; The One with a life having no soul, flesh or blood.

Al-Qayyoom

The Self-Subsisting; The One who does not end.

Al-Waajid

The Perceiver; The Finder; The One who has great riches.

Al-Waahid

The Unique; The One.

Al-Ahad

The One.

As-Samad

The Eternal; The Independent; The One without a partner.

Al-Qadir

The Able; The Capable; The One who can be relied upon for one's needs.

Al-Muqtadir

The Powerful; The Dominant; The One with perfect power from whom nothing is withheld.

Al-Muqaddim

The Expediter; The Promoter; The One who puts things in the correct place. He accelerates what He wills.

Al-Mu'akh-khir

The Delayer; the Retarder; The One who puts things in the correct place. He delays what He wills.

Al-'Awwal

The First; The One whose existence is without a beginning.

Al-'Akhir

The Last; The One whose existence is without an end.

Az-Zaahir

The Manifest; His existence is made obvious by proofs.

Al-Baatin

The Hidden; The One who exists without a specific place, having nothing above or beneath Him. His existence cannot be proven.

Al-Walee

The Governor; The One who owns things and manages them.

Al-Muta^ali

The Most Exalted.

Al-Barr

The Source of All Goodness; The Righteous; The One who is kind to His creatures and calls out those He wills by His support, protection, and special mercy.

At-Tawwaab

The Acceptor of Repentance; The Relenting; The One who grants to, and accepts repentance from, whomever He wills.

Al-Muntaqim

The Avenger; The One who victoriously prevails over His enemies and punishes (or destroys) them for their sins.

Al-^Afuww

The Pardoner The Forgiver; The One having great forgiveness.

Ar-Ra'uf

The Compassionate; The One who shows mercy to whomever He wills among His creatures.

Malik Al-Mulk

The Eternal Owner of Sovereignty; The One who controls the dominion and gives dominion to whomever He wills.

Thul-Jalali wal-Ikram

The Lord of majesty and bounty; The One who deserves to be exalted and not denied.

Al-Muqsit

The Equitable; The One who is just in His judgment.

Aj-Jaami<sup>^</sup>

The Gatherer; The One who gathers living things on the Day of Judgment.

Al-Ghaniyy

The Self-Sufficient; The One who does not need creation.

Al-Mughni

The Enricher; The One who satisfies the needs of living things.

Al-Maani<sup>^</sup>

The Preventer; The Withholder.

Ad-Daarr

The Distresser; The One who harms whomever He wills.

An-Nafi<sup>^</sup>

The Propitious; The One who benefits whomever He wills.

An-Noor

The Light; The One who illuminates the way.

Al-Haadi

The Guide; The One who guides the believers; The One who guides living beings to what is beneficial for them and protects them from what is harmful.

Al-Badi<sup>^</sup>

The Incomparable; The One who created and formed everything without any prior example.

Al-Baaqi

The Everlasting; The One whose existence is forever.

Al-Waarith

The Supreme Inheritor; The Heir.

Ar-Rasheed

The One who guides to the right path.

As-Saboor

The Patient; The One who does not quickly punish the sinners.

^ Arabic letter *ain*

‘ Arabic letter *hamza*

[Adapted from Jannah.Org. *The 99 attributes of Allah.*  
([www.jannah.org/articles/names.html](http://www.jannah.org/articles/names.html))]

==== **Yah’shua / Jesus (Christianity)** ====

Jews, Muslims, and Christians all believe that a special prophet will be sent by God at the end of this age to establish a kingdom of peace. Christians believe this person to be Jesus, who appeared on earth to reconcile sinful people and their holy God. Jesus is a Latin name that is translated *Yah’shua* in Hebrew, *Iesous in Greek*, and *Ise* in Arabic. Jesus is believed by Christians to be the *Christ*. Christ is the Latin form of the Hebrew *Machiach* which means “Messiah” or “Anointed One”.

Jesus had many other titles as well, and each describes an aspect of his divine nature. The list below comes from the Christian New Testament. Christians also ascribe to Jesus names from the Hebrew Scriptures that describe the Messiah.

|                         |                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Immanuel, “God with us” | Matthew 1:23, from<br>Isaiah 7:14  |
| Beloved Son             | Matthew 3:17                       |
| Rabbi, “Teacher”        | Matthew 23:8                       |
| Son of God              | Matthew 26:63                      |
| King of the Jews        | Matthew 27:37                      |
| Son of Man              | Matthew 26:64, from<br>Daniel 7:13 |
| Chief Cornerstone       | Mark 12:10                         |

*Finding the True God*

---

|                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| King of Israel                   | Mark 15:32                           |
| Son of the Most High             | Luke 1:32                            |
| Horn of Salvation                | Luke 1:69                            |
| The Expected One                 | Luke 7:19                            |
| Master, “Commander”              | Luke 8:24                            |
| The Chosen One                   | Luke 9:35                            |
| Living One                       | Luke 24:5                            |
| Only Begotten God                | John 1:18                            |
| Prophet                          | John 1:25, from<br>Deuteronomy 18:15 |
| Lamb of God                      | John 1:36                            |
| Messiah                          | John 1:41                            |
| The Bridegroom                   | John 3:29                            |
| Savior of the World              | John 4:42                            |
| The Bread of Life                | John 6:35                            |
| Light of the World               | John 8:12                            |
| Door                             | John 10:7                            |
| Good Shepherd                    | John 10:11                           |
| Resurrection                     | John 11:25                           |
| The Way, the Truth, and the Life | John 14:6                            |
| True Vine                        | John 15:1                            |
| Holy and Righteous One           | Acts 3:14                            |
| Prince of Life                   | Acts 3:15                            |
| Judge of the Living and the Dead | Acts 10:42                           |
| Lord                             | Romans 10:9                          |
| LORD (YHWH)                      | Romans 10:13, from<br>Joel 2:32      |
| Deliverer                        | Romans 11:26                         |
| Power and Wisdom of God          | 1 Corinthians 1:24                   |
| Passover                         | 1 Corinthians 5:7                    |
| Last Adam                        | 1 Corinthians 15:45                  |
| Abraham’s Seed                   | Galatians 3:16                       |
| Image of the Invisible God       | Colossians 1:15                      |
| Firstborn of All Creation        | Colossians 1:15                      |
| Head of the Church               | Colossians 1:18                      |
| God’s Mystery                    | Colossians 2:2                       |
| Mediator Between God and Men     | 1 Timothy 2:5                        |

*Finding the True God*

---

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Living God                       | 1 Timothy 4:10   |
| Savior of All Men                | 1 Timothy 4:10   |
| Great High Priest                | Hebrews 4:14     |
| Author and Perfecter of Faith    | Hebrews 12:2     |
| Chief Shepherd                   | 1 Peter 5:4      |
| Word of Life                     | 1 John 1:1       |
| Advocate with the Father         | 1 John 2:1       |
| Righteous                        | 1 John 2:1       |
| Only Begotten Son                | 1 John 4:9       |
| Faithful Witness                 | Revelation 1:5   |
| Firstborn From the Dead          | Revelation 1:5   |
| Ruler of the Kings of the Earth  | Revelation 1:5   |
| Beginning of the Creation of God | Revelation 3:14  |
| Lion of Judah                    | Revelation 5:5   |
| The Lamb                         | Revelation 5:8   |
| Faithful and True                | Revelation 19:11 |
| King of Kings and Lord of Lords  | Revelation 19:16 |
| First and the Last               | Revelation 22:13 |
| Root and Offspring of David      | Revelation 22:16 |
| Bright Morning Star              | Revelation 22:16 |

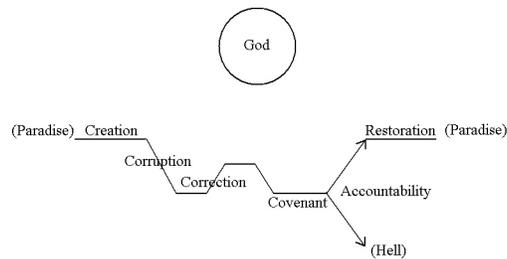


## CHAPTER 8

# GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO MAN



We now turn to the subject of how God has dealt with human beings in the broad sweep of our history with him. This will give us a good idea of his eternal plan for creation and how he deals with us as its stewards. The diagram below summarizes this epic relationship.



God is outside of both creation and time. Time is shown here as moving from left to right. Our universe was intended to be a paradise of beauty and good order filled with creatures that have freely chosen to reflect their creator's love. It began that way and will again be so in the future. Unfortunately, free choice led many to rebel against God and his plan. This introduced evil to the world and *corrupted* its original design. A great chasm now separates sinful people from their holy creator.

God has dealt with this rebellion in a variety of ways, one of which is divine *correction*, or punishment. Another is his invitation to enter into a *covenant* in which he promises to bless our obedience. Our choices are important because we will each be held *accountable* for our relationship with the All-Father. Those that have chosen his path will be given a place close to him in the restored creation of the

future. Those who reject or ignore God in this lifetime will spend their future in a place separated from him.

The next several chapters address each of the major events of this timeline as revealed in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

### ==== **Creation** ====

All faiths have their *creation stories*, but most offer us little detail. Consider the following from the Hindu tradition.

Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation? The Gods are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being? He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, Whose eye controls this world in highest Heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.

[*Rig-Veda*. Book 10 — Hymn CXXIX — Creation.  
Stanzas 6-7]

The Hebrew Scriptures contain one of the clearest and most detailed accounts of the creation story. The *Torah's* book of Genesis says that mankind was explicitly created, along with the rest of our natural world and the physical processes needed to sustain its on-going operation. This was accomplished by a personality outside creation that is larger and more powerful than all of creation itself.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 1:1-2]

The Hebrew word used for “god” in these passages is *Elohim*, which is plural. It suggests that the one God can take multiple forms, including Creator and Spirit.

God then created earth’s atmosphere with clouds that dropped rain over the surface of a planet covered with oceans. The ancient peoples could not discern the relative distances of clouds or stars, so it all became to them the “heavens”. An “expanse” separated ground from sky. God was understood to reside above the heavens.

Then God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters”. God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 1:6-8]

Finally the Creator brings forth sea life, plants, and land animals. He was pleased with the result.

And God saw that it was good.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 25]

As the Creator looked out over the vastness of his universe with its billions of galaxies, countless stars, and planets of all sizes and types, his gaze rested upon the small but beautiful blue world we call earth. This planet now held abundant life of rich variety and perfect order. It was a wonderful garden, but its beauty was not being properly enjoyed. God decided to place a piece of himself in the midst of it, so he created human beings.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and

over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

[*Holy Bible. Genesis 1:26-28*]

We learn several things from these passages:

First, human beings were made in the image of God, meaning that we contain (in a limited way) the very attributes of the All-Father himself. This includes his ability to create and destroy, love and hate, be jealous and forgiving, and so on. Every emotion and ability that was created into man must already be possible in God. One of these very important attributes, as we shall soon see, is freedom of choice.

Second, human beings were given dominion over this world. By dominion we mean that the Creator delegated the on-going operation of his creation to us, trusting that we would honor Him by being good caretakers.

Third, God put one of his physical processes into operation by enabling man and the other living things to multiply and fill his newly created Earth. Relative to the geological timeline of the universe, it is only recently that we fulfilled this mandate from the Creator.

Fourth, God blessed man. The purpose of the mandate to multiply was to bring proper order to creation. God gave man the wisdom and authority to ensure that nature continued to operate as it was designed. As long as things were in proper order, nature would provide all that man needed to live in a blessed way. *Blessing* here refers to all the goodness that God intended in creation.

An important attribute of the original, perfect world was its lack of suffering. There was no killing since all creatures were apparently herbivores.

And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 1:29-30]

Finally, the creation story wraps up with a wonderful statement by the creator.

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 1:31]

Notice that everything in the universe became *very good* only after human beings had been placed on the scene. The Creator loved the universe in its original, ordered form, and he considered the addition of men and women to be his crowning achievement. There was nothing left to improve upon, so on the seventh day (*Sabbath*) he rested. Interestingly, the Creator also programmed us to require rest one day in the week. Rest is so important for our quality of life that it became one of God’s major laws of living.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 2:3]

There is another subtle transition between the first two chapters of Genesis. At first God is the impersonal and awesome Creator named *Elohim*. But when he creates man, he becomes *El Shaddai* or *Adonai*,

(the LORD God). These are the Creator's familiar names, introduced here to show his desire for a close relationship with man.

There are, of course many other creation stories. For the most part, while they differ in details, they reflect the same purpose and principles. Consider this account from the Muslim *Qur'an*. Note that Allah refers to himself in the plural as well.

Indeed, your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days, and then He rose over (Istawa) the Throne (really in a manner that suits His Majesty). He brings the night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars subjected to His Command. Surely, His is the creation and commandment. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of the Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)!

[*Noble Qur'an*. 7:54]

And indeed, We created man from dried (sounding) clay of altered mud. And the jinn, We created aforetime from the smokeless flame of fire. And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: "I am going to create a man (Adam) from dried (sounding) clay of altered mud. "So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves unto him."

[*Noble Qur'an*. 15:26-29]

The Lakota Sioux believe that the Great Spirit gave man the following instructions at the time of Creation. They reveal a Creator who asks us to love and honor everything just as he does.

- Take care of Mother Earth and the other colors of man.
- Respect this Mother Earth and creation.
- Honor all life, and support that honor.

- Be grateful from the heart for all life. It is through life that there is survival. Thank the Creator at all times for all life.
- Love, and express that love.
- Be humble. Humility is the gift of wisdom and understanding.
- Be kind with one's self and with others.
- Share feelings and personal concerns and commitments.
- Be honest with one's self and with others. Be responsible for these sacred instructions and share them with other nations.

[Miller, J. *Sacred Instructions Given by the Creator to Native People at the Time of Creation*. 1998. Mercer Online]

The smoke rising from the sacred pipe is Tunkashila's breath, the living breath of the great Grandfather Wakan Tanka. The White Buffalo Woman showed the people the right way to pray, the right words and the right gestures. She taught them how to sing the pipefilling song and how to lift the pipe up to the sky, toward Grandfather, and down toward Grandmother Earth, to Unci, and then to the four directions of the universe. "With this holy pipe," she said, "you will walk like a living prayer. With your feet resting upon the earth and the pipestem reaching into the sky, your body forms a living bridge between the Sacred Beneath and the Sacred Above. Wakan Tanka smiles upon us, because now we are as one: earth, sky, all living things, the two legged, the fourlegged, the winged ones, the trees, the grasses. Together with the people, they are all related, one family. The pipe holds them all together."

[Miller, J. *The White Buffalo Woman*. 1998. Mercer Online]

As he created the various parts of our universe, God also put in place physical laws to govern its continued operation. These ensured that each part would interact harmoniously with the others. Human beings were also given rules for living to ensure that we cared for our physical environment. As long as we chose to obey these rules the world would provide everything needed to live well.

**Insight**

It can be hard for people to believe creation stories because their literal interpretation sounds mythological when compared with modern scientific theory. Consider the creation timeline given in the *Holy Bible*. The story begins with six days of creative work, of which the sixth and final day is dedicated to planting humanity in the so-called *Garden of Eden*. The Irish archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656 CE) calculated from genealogies given in the Hebrew *Torah* that the six days of creation must have taken place in 4,004 BCE. Most Biblical scholars agree this is a reasonable conclusion if the scriptures are read literally. Yet the physical evidence certainly seems to indicate a much longer time horizon.

Years Before Present

|     |          |   |
|-----|----------|---|
| 14  | billion  | Oldest parts of the universe form.                    |
| 4   | billion  | Earth forms.  |
| 570 | million  | Sea life appears (Paleozoic Era)                      |
| 245 | million  | Dinosaurs appear (Triassic)                           |
| 65  | million  | Dinosaurs disappear in a global calamity (Cretaceous) |
| 2   | million  | Homo Erectus appears in Africa                        |
| 60  | thousand | Homo Sapiens appears in Africa (modern man)           |
| 15  | thousand | Homo Sapiens reaches North America                    |
| 9   | thousand | Oldest agricultural cities                            |

Genesis was written by the Hebrew prophet Moses around 1,400 BCE. It is doubtful that he could be certain of any history prior to the life of Abraham, and surely he knew nothing of the dinosaurs. His

world was bounded by ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, so it is not surprising that the events of Genesis are centered there. The purpose of his creation account was not to document the full details of God's effort, but rather to convey important principles of God's dealings with man. He wanted us to understand that the Creator took great joy in bringing forth life and beauty, and that we owed him praise for that work. Moses wrote his account based on the "tribal knowledge" of his people, and as we have mentioned before, the eastern and western mindsets differ in their desire for reliable detail. A parable was often better at conveying a message than a detailed history.

Yet this primitive knowledge may have reflected more of an understanding than we give Moses credit for having. Perhaps his timeline was not as far off as we think. There are two ways to interpret the Hebrew word "created" as used in Genesis. It can mean either a first-time startup, or the restoration of something that pre-existed before becoming "formless and void". Could a re-creation have occurred in the timeframe estimated by Bishop Ussher?

The fingerprints of earth's history tell us that our planet has gone through several cycles of explosive biological growth and decay. It has been subject to asteroid impacts, glacial advances and retreats, earth crust displacement, volcanism, and plate tectonics. Some events were global in magnitude while others were more regional. Consider the impact of each major ice age. Ice sheets buried large portions of the northern hemisphere, and the subsequent glacial melt inundated coastlines worldwide as sea levels rose several hundred feet. It is not difficult to imagine life having to periodically start over in various places.

Perhaps there was a global or regional disaster that affected the Near East during the past 6,000 to 12,000 years that was severe enough to resemble a re-creation. Whatever the source of Moses' inspiration in the *Torah*, the importance of the creation story for indigenous peoples around the world was its testimony to an ultimate Creator. We should likewise not let controversial interpretations of the text distract us from its central message.

### ==== **Corruption** ====

At the time of creation God also spoke into being an elaborate spirit world. Angels and other Heavenly beings are mentioned

frequently in the *Torah* and other scriptures. All were, like man, designed to bless God with their love and obedience.

You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, The  
heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and  
everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And  
You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships  
You.

[*Holy Bible*. Nehemiah 9:6]

Like man, angels were given free choice. Somewhere along the line a leading angel decided to rebel against the Creator and compete for his authority over creation, whereupon he was forever cursed. This rebel (known variously as “*Satan*”, “*Devil*”, “*Serpent*”, “*Dragon*”, “*Lucifer*”, and “*Accuser*”) most likely was accompanied by other Heavenly personalities who together aligned themselves against God’s authority. The first rebellion had taken place, and God’s creation has been corrupted ever since.

“How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the  
morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down  
to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!  
“But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And  
I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses  
of the north. ‘I will ascend above the heights of the  
clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’  
“Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, To  
the recesses of the pit.”

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 14:12-15]

“You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I  
placed you [there]. You were on the holy mountain  
of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.  
“You were blameless in your ways From the day you

were created Until unrighteousness was found in you.  
“By the abundance of your trade You were internally  
filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I  
have cast you as profane From the mountain of God.  
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From  
the midst of the stones of fire.”

[*Holy Bible*. Ezekiel 28:14-16]

The *Qur'an* contains a similar story of rebellion. It says that angels were made to serve human beings, and that at least one rebelled against this command.

And surely, We created you (your father Adam) and then gave you shape (the noble shape of a human being); then We told the angels, “Prostrate yourselves to Adam”, and they prostrated themselves, except Iblis (Satan), he refused to be of those who prostrated themselves. (Allah) said: “What prevented you (O Iblis) that you did not prostrate yourself, when I commanded you?” Iblis said: “I am better than him (Adam), You created me from fire, and him You created from Clay.” (Allah) said: “(O Iblis) get down from this (paradise), it is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out, for you are of those humiliated and disgraced.”

[*Noble Qur'an*. 7:11-13]

There is no way to know for sure how Satan planned to carve his own kingdom out of God's creation, but we can safely assume that he did not directly challenge the Creator to a duel. That would have ended his rebellion on the spot for all time. More likely, Satan planned to pursue parts of the creation in which God had already delegated authority to other created beings. If these delegates could also be enticed to rebel against God, then they would lose God's authority over that part of creation. The danger posed there to Satan would be neutralized.

At this point it is important to understand the concept of law. We noted earlier that when creation was put in place we were given a set of rules for living in harmony with the natural laws that govern the ongoing operation of the universe. These physical properties and spiritual rules cannot be changed so long as creation itself remains unchanged. Satan and all spirits must abide by them as well.

The most important rule of law is that the Creator expects all beings with free choice to choose to honor and worship Him as their one and only god. Giving honor to any other being, worshiping creation itself, or exalting oneself above God violates this requirement. All created beings were also made to love and serve each other.

“Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, [and] to keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 10:12-13]

If a person chose to use his authority to exalt himself, or to take advantage of others under his authority, this would be counted by the Creator as lawlessness and rebellion. Satan’s kingdom extends anywhere there is rebellion. When people exalt anyone or anything other than the Creator, Satan has won territory away from God. But how to lead God’s perfectly created man astray?

Satan would need to trick man into committing an act that would radically break one of God’s most important laws.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree

which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'  
“ The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 3:1-5]

This passage from the *Torah* closely follows the creation account, and shows how Satan deceived our ancestors into breaking the Creator's law. Man thought that by “die” God meant a physical death. Satan knew the death was not physical, but a spiritual separation from God and resulting loss of man's place of authority in his perfect creation. Satan truthfully told the woman that she would not die physically, and the woman did not ask God for a clarification. She trusted the serpent more than her Creator, thereby exalting Satan.

Lawlessness does not go on very long without the Creator noticing that something is amiss.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom You gave [to be] with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 3:8-13]

To heap failing on failing, man and woman both pass off the responsibility for making bad choices onto another. “The Devil made me do it” does not pass muster before God. We are all accountable for our own actions.

This passage also shows us something of the wonder of God’s original creation. The Creator Himself walked among the trees of the garden and conversed face-to-face with man. This is the type of relationship God wants with all his created beings. He loves them all and desperately wants them to know him as a father. He relishes being with his children, and is thrilled to give them good gifts. God enjoys receiving our honor, appreciation, and love.

The consequence of willfully breaking the Creator’s law was profound.

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. “Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 3:14-19]

One of the amazing revelations of this passage is illustrated by the continued use of God's familiar name "LORD God" even after he discovers and punishes the rebellion of man. His nature and heart for his Creation never changes, even after man turns his back and chooses Satan's way of lawlessness. Also note that God does not curse the people; the heaviest punishment falls on Satan. Nevertheless, man does lose access to the garden in the sense that the world will no longer be the peaceful and abundantly providing place that it first was.

The notion of cursing the ground is important in understanding the Creator's ways. The ground is the ultimate source of supply for all creatures. It has a spiritual "personality" of its own that can make habitation comfortable or not. There are numerous references in the *Torah* to the ground being defiled or cursed, and the consequences that result for those that live there.

'They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. 'Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as {it is} this day.'

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 29:26-28]

Fortunately, the Creator is always prepared to reverse the defilement of the land if the people there will turn back to him in repentance. One of the better known Hebrew Scriptures speaks to this healing:

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people; and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways,

then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

[*Holy Bible. 2 Chronicles 7:13-14*]

The Creator had a second reason for ending the Edenic design. Man could now obtain knowledge without getting it directly from God. As long as man's knowledge was limited to what was good, man would do only good things. When man would ask for wisdom, God would provide it. But by eating of the fruit of the forbidden *Tree of Knowledge*, man could now understand evil and the advantages he could gain for himself at the expense of others. The more knowledge man accumulated, the more god-like he could become, and the further he would stray from the Creator. Therefore, since man had chosen the path of knowledge, God cut him off from living forever by denying him access to the *Tree of Life*. This limited what a person could learn during a lifetime, and the resulting damage he could inflict.

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all {the} living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

[*Holy Bible. Genesis 3:20-24*]

### **Insight**

Much of this story from the *Torah* is probably symbolic, but each symbol of the parable speaks to an important principle of our

relationship with our Creator. The Garden of Eden speaks to God's beautiful handiwork, and how perfectly we were meant to be a part of it. The trees of the garden are symbols of both knowledge and immortality, only one of which human beings could be allowed to possess. The serpent is a symbol of evil, as personified in the rebellious Satan.

It is interesting that the world's scriptures refer extensively to evil spirits, but make little attempt to convince us they are real. This appears to be because indigenous people were familiar with the spiritual realm, and the writers did not feel they needed to explain the obvious. This should not, however, be a reason for us in the post-modern world to reject its reality. Demons (evil spirits or fallen angels) remain dangerous today and continue to block and hinder God's purposes in the earth. They are not a metaphor, although they are sometimes spoken of in symbolic language. They are real, created personalities with far greater abilities than our own.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it".

[*Holy Bible. Job 1:6-7*]

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

[*Holy Bible. 1 Peter 5:8*]

Demons, like humans, cannot create something from nothing. They are also constrained by their own natural law, and by their own predisposition to behave in certain ways. Some of these behaviors have been documented by individuals accomplished in the art of deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

- Demons can inhabit people, animals, physical objects, and territories. (Possession)
- Demons can trouble people from the outside, generally by suggesting negative thoughts. (Demonization)
- Demons gain access based on a legal right granted through sin or bad covenant. It may have originated in the current or a prior generation. Remove the sin or establish a new covenant and the demon will lose its right to remain.
- Humans determine what earthly influence is exerted by God or Satan. Prayer and blood have significance for both.
- Demons respond to the authority of God's name if the person is a trusted emissary of God.
- Demons will often try to negotiate the trade of one person for another when challenged in deliverance.

Those who love God and follow in his ways have much less risk of demonic interference. Those who actively reject God step dangerously close to Satan's kingdom of lawlessness.

Over the millennia we have become much less dependent on our Creator for wisdom, daily provision, healing, and protection. We rely on our knowledge and technologies to do what creation originally did for us. And because we consult books rather than God, we no longer find Him taking an afternoon stroll with us through the garden. We have also tried to control the spirit world on our own terms through witchcraft, divination, and other mystical practices. Ah, the price of self-reliance. Every parent knows the pain of watching a child grow up into independence and rebellion as they begin making their way in the world, and making mistakes that our years of experience could have avoided. How God must cry over what was lost.

==== **Correction** ====

As we continue our journey through the *Torah*, we discover just how awful man becomes.

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim [giants] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore {children} to them. Those were the mighty men who {were} of old, men of renown. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 6:1-7]

God recognizes that man’s heart is now continually corrupt, and he begins to despair. To make matters worse, it appears that other beings in creation are getting into the act of evil. The *sons of God* (usually assumed to be angels) cross an important boundary and begin to take wives from among the *daughters of men* (human women). Their unusually powerful offspring are referred to as *Nephilim*.

The reference to 120 years appears to be a timeline until God deals with the problem of man’s corruption by flooding the earth. The *flood story* can be found in the literature of indigenous peoples around the world, including Genesis chapters 6 to 8, the Akkadian Gilgamesh epic, the Atrahasis epic, Native American oral tradition, and so on.

The *Torah’s* rendition of the flood story reveals more of God’s eternal heart for his creation, regardless of how frustrated he has

become. The passage below follows God's decision to wipe life from the Earth.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD...  
Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time;  
Noah walked with God.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 6:8-9]

The Creator, even in the mode of a destroyer, has mercy on the man *Noah* and on other honorable people like him. Noah is given the 120 years to prepare for the deluge so he can preserve his family and some of the earth's wildlife. We are left to wonder what warning was given the rest of earth's inhabitants. God consistently forewarns people before releasing judgment to allow them a period of repentance. It would appear from the Genesis account that not many took the Creator's warning seriously, choosing instead to continue in their corrupt ways.

The text suggests that the flood was global. It must have been significant because we are told that the waters covered the mountaintops after raining 40 days, which in the language of the *Torah* means "a lot". When the flood finally subsides, we see Noah giving thanks for God's mercy.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease."

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 8:20-22]

Even in the midst of his anger and frustration over the loss of much of his perfect creation, God finds joy in the simple obedience of a man that honors Him. It moves him make a covenant with man to never bring destruction of this type again.

God gives creation a new start through Noah and the other people and animals that survive the flood. We see again this repeating cycle of life ending in a calamity and then being brought forth again in a re-creation. In fact, the instructions given to the survivors below sound very similar to those given to the “first man” Adam. There are, however, some differences.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. “The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as [I gave] the green plant. “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, (that is,) its blood. “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from (every) man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. “As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 9:1-7]

First, man is no longer a vegetarian; every animal can now be used as a source of food.

Second, animals become fearful of man who is now free to kill. No longer is the lion a pet — it now becomes an adversary.

Third, although blood is recorded as being spilled at the hand of man almost from the beginning (see Genesis 4:10-11), God now reveals more of its significance. Blood represents the life in a person,

and a man's life is sacred because he is made in the likeness of the Creator. Shedding blood demands an account. This is significant in all *Torah*-based faiths.

Fourth, something has changed in the spiritual realm because the *sons of God* can no longer intermarry with the *daughters of men*, and there are no more giants on the Earth. A new dividing line has been placed between spiritual and human beings.

Although creation gets a new start, the heart of man remains corrupted by his relationship with Satan. Each new generation continues to choose independence from God. The Creator next intervenes in the affairs of men as they are building a tower that will enable them to touch the heavens. The *Torah* calls this edifice the *Tower of Babel* (which may have been the ziggurat of ancient Babylon).

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn {them} thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top {will reach} into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth;

and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 11:1-9]

This story tells us that humans had not spread throughout the earth to populate it as originally commanded by God. The earth was a wild place and man had decided to cluster in comfort rather than subdue it. City-building also gave our ancestors confidence that they could do anything apart from the Creator. Pride arose again and man was exalting himself over God.

The people had no excuse for not knowing the Creator's will for them. They spoke the same language and knew the same God. As a result the Almighty acted again to remind them of their error.

### **Insight**

We know that the flood story is found in the historical traditions of people worldwide, although there is no reliable explanation or evidence for this sudden global inundation. We also know that more people survived than just Noah and his sons because those sons later found women to marry. Noah's family may or may not have been literal, but they represented people of the time who believed God and were subsequently rewarded for that belief.

In the case of ancient Babylon, we know there was a thriving early civilization between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and that the downstream area of modern Iraq was a fertile agricultural flood plain. The biblical patriarch Abraham and his family lived in this region before leaving for the land of Canaan. It is very possible that they were among the peoples that God scattered.

The Babel story was probably applicable to many early city-based civilizations. For example, the Indus Valley region with all its cities was located along the ancient Sarasvati River which, like southern Mesopotamia, was a fertile plain subject to periodic flooding. This river appears to have dried up or changed course between 2,500 and 2,000 BCE, resulting in the displacement of that civilization throughout what is today India and Pakistan.

Moses wrote the Biblical stories of the flood and Babel primarily to teach the Hebrews under his care that God will not forever tolerate rebellion against him, his commandments, and his fatherly love. He will always provide warning ahead of time, and can be counted on to periodically re-establish his sovereign right to be Lord over all creation.

“And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, saying, ‘ Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.’ “Yet you have not listened to Me,” declares the LORD, “in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.”

[*Holy Bible*. Jeremiah 25:4-7]

### **Covenant**

Left to their own devices, humans are good at bad behavior. Fortunately, God is honorable and not capricious, and always provides man with guidelines for living a holy life. If we follow these laws, then the Creator does not have to become the Destroyer to preserve his creative plan. The laws that God publishes demonstrate both his continued love for his creation and his earnest desire that we will *allow Him to bless us*.

Of all the aspects of the Creator and his relationship to us, I find the covenantal nature of God most amazing. Despite being the Almighty One, able at a moment to wipe away any part of creation that gets out of line, he has decided to deal with us based on the right he gave us to make our own choices — good or bad — and the delegated authority we were given over creation. He has never

taken away that delegated authority, even though many of us over the generations have repeatedly handed it to Satan.

God's laws always are given in the form of a covenant, which is a two-way agreement that binds all participating parties. They are structured in this way: "If you follow this law, then I will bless you in this way, but if you break this law, then I will be forced to curse you in that way". Of course, it is difficult to imagine holding the Creator accountable for breaking his side of any bargain; He is, after all, sovereign, and we are powerless in comparison. But history shows that he always keeps his terms perfectly. Here are some examples of the covenants given to men that are recorded in the *Torah*.

#### Noahic

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth."

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 9:8-11]

#### Abrahamic

"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. " I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 17:7-8]

Sinaitic

‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.’

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 19:5-6]

Land Grant

“I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines [Mediterranean], and from the wilderness to the River [Euphrates]; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. “You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. “They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for [if] you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 23:31-33]

These covenants are increasingly specific. God promised Noah that he would allow man to fully populate the Earth, and he has done so. He promised Abraham that his descendants would occupy all the land from the Sinai to the Euphrates. Abraham’s son Ishmael became the father of the Arab people, and his son Isaac became the father of the Hebrew people. Between the collective descendents of these two brothers this land grant has been fulfilled. (Jews and Muslims today each claim that this land grant was later exclusively confirmed through their respective lineage and denied to the other.) God’s covenantal promises have always been fulfilled and are only man’s to lose.

You may ask if the Israelites were specially chosen to receive God’s covenants. What about the other people groups they bordered, and nations on continents of which the writers of the *Torah* were

unaware? Did they not have the same benefit of hearing from the Creator? It is difficult to be certain since source material detailing ancient covenants is scant at best. We have already looked at examples from the Native Americans who knew their Creator and believe they received covenantal promises as well. Our study of the character of the All-Father suggests that he loves all his children regardless of where they live or the color of their skin. The Christian apostle Paul, a Jewish Pharisee who lived in the first century CE, affirms universal revelation in one of his letters.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 1:18-21]

The Sinaitic covenant contained the many rules and regulations that comprise the Hebrew law given through Moses, along with the associated lists of blessings and curses that could be expected. We will look at a number of its requirements in a later chapter. What is so amazing about the *Torah* is its revelation of the continuous, deep desire God has that people would obey his law. He wants them to be holy so he can bless their lives abundantly.

I call Heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the

Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 30:19-20]

### **Insight**

While it is easy to view the laws of the Sinaitic covenant as an onerous list of dos and don'ts, they were not established to take away the Hebrews' joy. Rather, they were given to help the people live harmoniously within their natural environment. Obeying the prohibitions helped them avoid, for example, famine (from Sabbath planting), internal strife (from theft), damage to the natural environment (from cross-breeding), the transmission of sexual diseases (from adultery), and Trichinosis (from eating pork).

God loves his creation, and his laws of living are easy to keep because they reflect how creation works. Obedience allows us to fit into it like a well cut puzzle piece. If everyone were to take his proper place, then things would become perfectly loving and holy. Unfortunately, many people (and apparently some angels) do not stick to their part very well. Yet just because we humans make bad choices doesn't mean God's plan isn't good.

Consider the perspective of a young child that is completely dependent on his parents for breakfast, and thinks they are terribly unfair for prohibiting his exploration of a hot stovetop. The laws of nature say warm oats come from a hot burner and so do serious injuries. The laws of living say our existence in this world will be much more pleasant if we don't explore things that will hurt us. Violating the laws of living often reap their own consequences from the laws of nature apart from any godly intervention. A loving God expresses his love for us by preferring that we not learn our lessons from second degree burns.

The Creator hates evil, and he hates cursing any part of his creation because that means Satan's rebellion and lawlessness has won. Nevertheless, a perfectly holy God has *no choice* about holding

himself to his own covenant and enforcing his laws perfectly. There can be no exceptions, or he would not be perfectly holy. The Creator of all is not like us, having some mixture of truth and error, good and evil, perfection, and mistake. He is all-powerful, contains all wisdom, and holds Himself to perfect accountability for righteousness and love. It is not perfect love to allow one part of his creation to take advantage of another part. Everything was designed to work together in symphonic precision.

This is the ultimate message of covenant. The Creator loved us enough to bind himself to blessing us if we would do the things he asks. Ultimately that is summed up as loving God and other human beings as best we can. We show our love of nature by taking care of it. We love others by honoring them before ourselves. We love God by obeying his laws, thereby honoring him as our true parent.

Of course that is not easy for any of us to do all the time. Humans are notoriously bad at self-control, not very powerful by angelic standards, hampered by Satan and other fallen angels, distracted by our high-tech world, and hard of hearing when the quiet voice of the Spirit speaks to us. With all that against us, it is amazing any of us can even begin to keep our side of the covenant. And this is why the All-Father rejoices so much when we do. The person who presses into hearing with spiritual ears will establish a living relationship with God and give his Creator joy beyond belief. This is the big payoff for the loving parent. In the end, it will amaze even the angels that we come through for God and validate his divine design.

...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church [his followers] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places [hosts of heaven].

[*Holy Bible*. Ephesians 3:10]

### ==== **Accountability** =====

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all believe that there will be a Last Day judgment at which both angels and men will be called to account for the choices made during their lifetimes. Those who

love God and earnestly try to follow in his ways will be separated from those who have chosen their own path. The faithful will go on to enjoy a new life in the presence of their Creator, perhaps on a re-created earth. The unfaithful will be abandoned to a different fate apart from God, wherever that may be. The criteria will be a judgment of the heart, measured in love and obedience to God's will.

The major monotheistic religions are not alone in this belief. Most indigenous peoples also expected heavenly rewards or punishments based on a person's deeds in this life. Even the Far Eastern religions believe that the invisible forces of nature will judge a person's accumulated karma. In every culture there is a sense of what is "good" and "bad" and a scale of justice that tips one into paradise or not.

It is a frightening thing to face the prospect of being evaluated by the Almighty. None of us can begin to approach his perfect holiness, and we all fall far short regardless of what measure is used. The protestant Christian reformer Martin Luther was terrified by the image of the Last Day Messiah (believed by Christians to be Jesus at his second coming) riding out of heaven to take authority over the world and reap the harvest of unrighteousness. The gentle *Lamb of God* becomes on this day the powerful *Lion of Judah*.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has

a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”.

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 19:11-16]

I heard a preacher once ask, “When the heavenly king comes to claim his earthly throne, do you want to be in the ranks of those following him, or standing in front of his oncoming charger among those who rejected God?” Metaphorical or not, it is a stark question.

The following scriptures provide us with a visual picture of this great end time event.

But YHWH abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, and He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 9:7-8]

“I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took [His] seat; His vesture [was] like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne [was] ablaze with flames, Its wheels [were] a burning fire. “A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.”

[*Holy Bible*. Daniel 7:9-10]

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book

was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 20:11-15]

The fact is, no person, regardless of how much good karma he has accumulated, can hope to pass a test based on perfect holiness. We find it difficult enough to measure up against the Sinaiic and Noahide laws, much less the standard of perfect love and honor. If God is serious about what he says, then all of us are doomed unless he extends to us a special grace to attain the unattainable. And that is exactly where most of the world's religions leave us; we remain uncertain about the future of our Spirit once our bodily time on Earth is finished.

### **Insight**

A perfectly holy (and therefore perfectly just) God must understand how one-sided this fatalistic scenario of uncertainty appears to us. That is why the true measure of our standing before the judge of the Last Day will have more to do with our heart for the All-Father than with obedience to a myriad of laws or a karmic mathematical formula. The decisive criteria will be how we return to him the love and honor he has already shown us, not the absolute score we get on a test.

There is no denying that scripture does talk about an actual place of destruction to which people are sent whose names are not found in God's *Book of Life*. We will explore this issue more fully in a later chapter since the monotheistic scriptures conflict on this point. Jewish and Zoroastrian tradition suggest there is a place of refine-

ment sinful people go after death until they are ready to join their brethren who went before them to paradise. Christian and Islamic texts suggest there is an eternal gulf between the places of holiness and lawlessness. Another view relates our closeness to God in this life to our access to love and joy in the next. If we keep God at a distance now he will remain at a distance then. We need to remember that divine revelation in all the sacred writings passed through ancient human minds and were communicated using concepts and language oriented to the people of that culture and period. It is hard to know what to take literally or metaphorically.

Nevertheless, all the scriptures that describe a sovereign Creator agree that he is perfectly, immutably fair. None of us is separated from him without knowing what we are choosing and the associated costs and benefits of that choice. Those to whom he has revealed much will be expected to make better decisions. Those that have very little understanding of him will receive his abundant mercy.

Mercy is not an automatic gift, however. God wants us to get to the point where we recognize that we cannot measure up through our own efforts so we will freely choose to follow his plan. Like the angry child that stomps off seeking freedom and finds himself lost, we suddenly realize that perhaps father does know best. Our resulting cry for help is a sweet sound to a parent. A truly loving, personal, and holy God wants to help us pass our test and is proud of us when we do.

It is doubtful that a Creator would take pleasure in watching a part of his beloved creation writhe forever in the pain of an eternal fire. He already has absolute power to create and destroy, and wielding that power does not bring satisfaction. And it certainly seems likely that any being with such power is above the human need for revenge. After all, how angry would you get because an ant bruises its head against your foot?

A father experiences his greatest joy when those he lovingly created freely choose to love him back. Wherever his lost children end up, one gets the sense from the scriptures that he cries over their separation from him.

The mechanism of judgment and salvation is a different matter from God's feelings about it.

==== **Restoration** ====

In the end, God will not allow his creation to be defiled forever, and it was never his hope or expectation that we would fail the test. He has provided help along the way that guides us toward righteousness so we can be counted among his faithful children on the Last Day.

The first and most visible of these helps is *creation* itself. It continues to testify to every generation of the wondrous hand of God. The natural environment is beautifully ordered and offers an immense range of smells, colors, and sounds that appeal to our senses. Something in all of us stirs when we watch the sun set among glowing mountains. The Christian scriptures say that nature itself is waiting for the day when evil will disappear and right order will be restored among its human caretakers.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 8:19-22]

The second help is the spirit that God placed within each of us at our individual creation. This is the part of a human that is not of this world, and remains connected to God's realm. It is through this spirit in us that God communicates with us and helps us work out our reconciliation with him.

The third is God's *law*. The law of living was given not so much to mandate our behavior, but as a way of revealing what bad behavior looks like. This would allow us to recognize and avoid it, not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit also of society, the environment, and creation as a whole.

Fourth, *prophets* have been sent in the form of individuals gifted to hear God speak his revelation to the rest of mankind. Examples of men accepted among their people as prophets are Elijah (Hebrew), Muhammad (Islam), and the Guru Nanak (Sikh). Many people through history have claimed to reveal spiritual insight. It is important to discern whom to trust.

Fifth, some of the world's faiths believe that God himself has once or many times incarnated as a *divine human*, whose job was to teach, direct, or make restitution for us. Examples of persons claimed to be such manifestations include Krishna (Hindu) and Jesus (Christian).

It is up to us to take advantage of this helping hand extended by the Creator and do our best to live a righteous life. Knowing this is our heart, God can then grant us the standard of holiness we need to gain access to the next life.

According to the Biblical book of the *Revelation*, our present age ends with a great apocalyptic battle between the forces of God, including the True Messiah, and those of Satan, including a *False Messiah* or *Anti-Christ*. At its conclusion, Satan will be chained, holiness will prevail, and the True Messiah will take the seat of authority in the earthly realm. (In the Muslim version the *al-Mahdi* will first unify the world under Islam before the Messiah comes to assist in Satan's defeat.) The Messiah's reign will last for a new *Messianic Age* of at least 1,000 years, after which Satan will again briefly be allowed to deceive those persons who still have a heart for rebellion. Finally, all those persons throughout time who willingly chose separation from God will be permanently granted that choice.

At the end of the Messianic Age, our world will again be cleansed of all unrighteousness.

But by His word the present heavens and earth are  
being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment  
and destruction of ungodly men.

[*Holy Bible. 2 Peter 3:7*]

There will then be created (or restored) a new earth with a *New Jerusalem* serving as the capital of the world.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 21:1-5]

This new world will be similar to the original Edenic creation, which it must be for a holy God to again walk the earth. What a beautiful place is promised for those who follow him!

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the

earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As  
the waters cover the sea.

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 11:6-9]

**Insight**

The predictions of the future contained in the Christian Book of the *Revelation* are not found in the scriptures of any other major faith. Other scriptures promise a life in paradise to come, but give no specifics on what that might be like. Therefore, the *Revelation* contains some useful insights.

We see clearly the notion that the earth is going through periods of destruction and renewal. We noted this earlier in the discussion of the Creation. Most indigenous peoples believed that there was an unending cycle to the universe, and that they would in one form or another be born again onto the earth. The Amerindian Maya calendar identified five epochs on the earth, each separated by a great catastrophe. The fifth and final epoch began in 3,114 BCE and will conclude at the winter solstice in 2,012 CE.<sup>3</sup>

The cycles described in the *Holy Bible* show us a repeating pattern not just of physical earth changes, but also of spiritual cleansing.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Garden of Eden  | Man is in close relationship with God, rebels, and then must start a new life apart from creation's perfection.                          |
| Great Flood     | Man rebels again, and only Noah and others found righteous are saved from a disaster.  |
| Messianic Age   | Man rebels again in our present age which will close with an apocalypse. The righteous will join the Messiah in a new Messianic Kingdom. |
| Renewal by Fire | Man rebels again during the age to come and the present earth will pass away in favor of another.  |

Each of these periods of time begins with man in a state of close relationship with his Creator, and ends with the loss of those that have chosen rebellion and sin.<sup>4</sup> The writers of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures could see backward in time to Eden, and forward to the

end of the future Messianic Age. Yet there is no telling how many ages came before or will continue in the future.

It is also unclear whether a given person appears on the earth once or several times, and to what spiritual place he goes when not in a physical body. Although the *Holy Bible* rejects the notion of reincarnation leading to self-enlightenment, it does hint at continuing lifetimes based on God's grace. The *Holy Bible* gives the impression that the New Jerusalem will be a physical place with buildings, trees, and rivers.

The pattern shown here suggests that wherever people go after this life we will continue to have free choice to remain obedient and in fellowship with our God, or to rebel against his laws of living and pursue our own path. We will not be spending eternity floating on clouds, playing harps, and modeling the latest fashion in white. We will be actively engaged in creation, doing the things there that God gifted us to perform as part of his grand plan. For those that choose to walk the Creator's path, the life to come is promised to be abundantly better than this one.

Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Kraft and DeBord. *The Rules of Engagement*. 2000. Wagner Publications. Colorado Springs, CO.
- <sup>2</sup> "Sea" in the *Holy Bible* generally refers to the Red Sea, Salt (Dead) Sea, or Great (Mediterranean) Sea, depending on context.
- <sup>3</sup> Coe, Michael. *Breaking the Maya Code*. 1992. Thames and Hudson, London. p.275.
- <sup>4</sup> Larkin, Clarence. *Dispensational Truth*. 1918.

## CHAPTER 9

# THE WAYS OF GOD



**A**re you beginning to get a sense of what the Creator-God is like? We have now learned a great deal about his personality, his relationship to humans over time, and the importance he places on covenant. We have seen how God's laws of living help us in a world ordered by the laws of nature. This survey has considered the grand sweep of existence through which our world is passing, from the creation of paradise to its restoration.

God is proud of what was made and expects his creation to thrive. For this to be, evil, selfishness, and human rebellion must be removed. God's part is to give us grace that bridges the gap between human lawlessness and godly holiness. Our part is to cross this bridge by walking in his ways. This is how we honor our Creator parent and how he can best pour out his love through us.

In this chapter, we explore additional subjects that reveal more of God and his ways. These include fatherly love, holy judgment, attaining a good afterlife, and whether certain people groups were uniquely gifted with divine revelation. We also consider prayer, which is the means we have been given for communicating directly with the Divine.

### ■■■■■ The God of Fatherly Love ■■■■■

The Norse referred to God by the name All-Father as their way of describing his creative responsibility for everything. We now look at God as *Father* with an emphasis on personal relationship. This image evokes a parent who is head of a large family of children, some of whom are gentle and obedient, while others are restless and rebellious. He loves each one, although he may not like their behavior on a given day. Many of God's characteristics revealed

in scripture fit this description, and both the Hebrew Tanakh and Christian New Testament frequently refer to YHWH in this way.<sup>1</sup>

So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, “Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever.”

[*Holy Bible*. 1 Chronicles 29:10]

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.’”

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 6:9]

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”<sup>2</sup>

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 8:14-15]

Calling God a father captures the essence of how he relates to humanity. The term embodies the very parental characteristics our own children would hope to see in us. The following is a list of fatherly attributes. As you consider each, imagine how they would be manifested by a perfect parent.

### **Source of Love**

God’s most important personality characteristic is love. It colors all his behavior. It is the characteristic he wants most in us as we relate both to him and to each other. The wonderful thing about being in a loving relationship with another is the way it awakens or enhances the love that is naturally in us.

...The earth is full of the loving-kindness of the LORD.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 33:5]

Nevertheless...the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.

[*Holy Bible*, Deuteronomy 23:5]

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know [understand] us, because it did not know [understand] Him.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 John 3:1]

We discovered earlier that our world has been corrupted by rebellion and evil. It is no longer the holy and perfect paradise originally intended for us. As a result, the Biblical writers saw a big difference between the fatherly love that comes from God, and love as the world understands it.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 John 2:15-17]

We know we have been reconciled with the All-Father when his love is operating in and through us. When we cross over the chasm

of separation and enter into his holiness, then we need have no fear of his judgment.

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear [of judgment] in love; but perfect love casts out fear [of judgment], because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears [judgment] is not perfected in love.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 John 4:16-18]

### **Comforter**

It is a father's heart to provide comfort to his children when they are troubled or hurting.

“I, even I, am He who comforts you.”

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 51:12]

“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem.”

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 66:13]

### **Provider**

A father provides for the *needs* of those over whom he has authority, although this does not mean that he gives them all they *want*.

Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 22:14]

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 6:31-33]

### **Creator**

The All-Father is the creator of the universe, and the one that gives to each of us a soul and spirit. The scriptures say that he fore-knew each of us at the creation and made each of us in a special way to uniquely fit that design.

But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 64:8]

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 4:11]

### **Protector**

A parent diligently watches over and protects a child to keep it from injury. As we see in the first verse below, the *Holy Bible* also refers to God as a faithful shepherd who watches over his flock. Our protector is always on watch and never caught by surprise.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 23:4]

My help {comes} from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night. The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 121:2-8]

### **Teacher**

A parent is the most influential person in a child's life. This person serves as a role model who heavily influences the child's moral and ethical values. The child's preparation to participate in society depends to a great extent on parental guidance. God in his role as Father is our teacher as well, always instructing and correcting in love. It is not love to allow children to learn rebellion and lawlessness. This is why our Creator-Father allows unpleasant things to discipline us, despite his role of Protector.

Make me know Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 25:4]

My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD  
Or loathe His reproof, For whom the LORD loves

He reproves, Even as a father {corrects} the son in whom he delights.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 3:11-12]

### **Sovereign**

A child's parent is the ultimate authority in a youngster's life. God is our perfect parental authority who knows just when to encourage and when to correct. He sits enthroned above all creation and can impose his will whenever needed. Yet it is his father's heart to use that authority in gentle ways that bring joy to his children. It is nothing less than amazing to think of such immense power and authority as a loving "papa".

Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned {above} the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

[*Holy Bible*. 2 Kings 19:15]

He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days and then rose over (Istawa) the Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty). He knows what goes into the earth and what comes forth from it, and what descends from the heaven and what ascends thereto. And He is with you (by His Knowledge) wheresoever you may be. And Allah is the All-Seer of what you do.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 57:4]

God's relationship with the prophet Abraham illustrates how a perfect father deals with his children. The story of Abraham's life is found in the *Torah*, in Genesis chapters 11 to 25. Abraham knew the Creator-God at an early age and was called by this sovereign

to move from his ancient family homeland in Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan. Here God made several covenantal agreements with him to provide abundantly for his needs, create through him the Hebrew and Arab nations, and protect his family. He instructed Abraham regarding patience and faith, and demonstrated through the friction between his sons Ishmael and Isaac that imperfect obedience has serious consequences. Abraham was called a “friend” of God, comforted by him, and reconciled to the All-Father because of his faith.

Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He [God] reckoned it to him as righteousness.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 15:6]

God is all we can conceive of in a perfect father. He is self-sacrificing, self-sharing, and abundantly giving of his love and grace. This may be difficult to imagine if you have not enjoyed a loving relationship with your parent. Many of us have not. But God is not like our parents. He does not make bad or naïve choices. He does not make mistakes and does not misunderstand us. He is perfectly fair and wants the very best for us, beginning with knowing him intimately. No human, good or bad, can be compared to God’s infinite wisdom and love.

There is no question that the All-Father does allow bad things to befall people that believe in him and are trying to be obedient to his ways. It is hard to understand his silence in the midst of trouble. Sometimes, the only comfort we have is in knowing that other children of God have also gone through hard times. These times can often only be understood from the vantage point of the future. Abraham never lived to see the full promise given to him regarding his children. Just the same, he believed in what was unseen, trusted in God as an abundantly loving father, and was given great honor as a result.

### ▬▬▬ **The God of Holy Judgment** ▬▬▬

Some of the most difficult scripture to be found in the holy writings are those in which God appears to exhort his people to conquer

others. Two prominent examples are YHWH's call through Moses for the conquest of Canaan, and Allah's call through Muhammad for Jihad in Arabia. Consider the following from the *Torah*:

“Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. “Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. “But {rather,} you are to tear down their altars and smash their {sacred} pillars and cut down their Asherim — for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God— otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons {also} to play the harlot with their gods.”

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 34:11-16]

God commands the Hebrews to take possession of the land promised to the patriarch Abraham. God simultaneously takes the opportunity to clear the land of its present inhabitants who worship other gods. The result of this command is borne out in all the subsequent warfare described in Joshua, Judges, the Kings, and the Chronicles. Ultimately, Israel did fully possess the land - but at a significant cost!

Now consider the following sura from the *Qur'an* given to Muhammad as he was establishing monotheism in polytheistic Arabia:

Let those (believers) who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter fight in the Cause of Allah, and

whoso fights in the Cause of Allah, and is killed or gets victory, We shall bestow on him a great reward.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 4:74]

Again we see the theme of conquering or subjecting people that do not submit to the worship of Allah alone. Warfare is justified for the followers of Muhammad because *Al-Fitnah* (worshiping other gods) is worse. Muhammad is echoing the words of Abraham's "jealous god".

The Almighty appears to be impartial when enforcing his laws and covenants, particularly against nations. When they are faithful, the nations enjoy his protection and provision. When they are not, God turns away and even allows others to come against them. YHWH fought for the Hebrews when their nation was first established, but over time they began to turn away from him and lost his favor.

The table below lists the kings of Judah along with a subjective measure of their faithfulness to God. It also indicates the level of favor that each enjoyed. The Hebrew kingdom was unified under Kings David and Solomon, and subsequently split into *Israel* in the North and *Judah* in the south. Judah contained Jerusalem and remained faithful for a longer time.

| King of Judah | Reign (BCE) | Faithfulness | Consequence  |
|---------------|-------------|--------------|--|
| Saul          | 1020-1000   | Unfaithful   | Chaotic start to the kingdom.  |
| David         | 1000-960    | Faithful     | Unified kingdom established.   |
| Solomon       | 960-930     | Faithful     | Great favor in all regards.  |
| Rehoboam      | 930-913     | Unfaithful   | Solomon's kingdom split into Israel and Judah. Judah plundered by Egypt. |

*Finding the True God*

|             |         |            |  |
|-------------|---------|------------|--|
| Abijah      | 913-910 | Partial    | Favor in battle.   |
| Asa         | 910-869 | Partial    | Favor in battle.   |
| Jehoshaphat | 872-848 | Partial    | Favor in battle.   |
| Jehoram     | 848-841 | Unfaithful | Disfavor in battle.  |
| Ahaziah     | 841-841 | Unfaithful | Disfavor in battle.  |
| Athaliah    | 841-835 | Unfaithful | Assassinated.  |
| Joash       | 835-796 | Partial    | Jerusalem plundered by Aram. Assassinated.                   |
| Amaziah     | 796-767 | Partial    | Favor and disfavor in battle. Jerusalem plundered by Israel. |
| Uzziah      | 792-740 | Partial    | Stricken with leprosy.                                       |
| Jotham      | 750-735 | Partial    | Favor in battle.   |
| Ahaz        | 735-715 | Unfaithful | Disfavor in battle.  |
| Hezekiah    | 715-686 | Faithful   | General favor, except in battle against Assyria.             |
| Manasseh    | 697-642 | Unfaithful | Disfavor in battle.  |
| Amon        | 642-640 | Unfaithful | Assassinated. YHWH promises to destroy Jerusalem.            |
| Josiah      | 640-609 | Faithful   | Killed in battle with Neco of Egypt.                         |
| Jehoahaz    | 609     | Unfaithful | Imprisoned when Jerusalem plundered by Neco of Egypt.        |

*Finding the True God*

---

|            |         |            |  |
|------------|---------|------------|--|
| Jehoiakim  | 609-598 | Unfaithful | Judah conquered by Babylon. Jehoiakim exiled to Babylon. |
| Jehoiachin | 598-597 | Unfaithful | Jehoiachin exiled to Babylon.                            |
| Zedekiah   | 597-586 | Unfaithful | Jerusalem destroyed by Babylon.                          |

Overall, the time following Solomon's reign was one of decline for the Hebrew nation. Throughout this long-term slide toward judgment, the YHWH of love continued to warn and exhort the nation's leaders through the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. Unfortunately the balance of national behavior remained unfaithful and both Judah and Israel were destroyed.

On a broader scale, numerous empires dominated the Near East over the years. Those overrunning Jerusalem included the Egyptian (prior to the Hebrew kings), Assyrian (701-612 BCE), Babylonian (612-539), Persian (538-333), Greek (333-63), Roman & Byzantine (63 BCE-638 CE), Arab Umayyad & Abbasid & Fatimid (638-945), Saljuq Turk (1038-1183), European Crusader (1099-1244), Egyptian Ayyubid & Mameluk (1187-1517), Ottoman Turk (1516-1917), and British (1918-1947). Of course, this is but a small picture of a much larger world having many other empires in conflict with one other.

Whose side or sides was the Creator on throughout all this? Was he acting in the capacity of love or judgment? What about the faithful innocents slaughtered by the warring titans? And what are we to make of the expansion of Islam in 700-900 CE, or the Christian Crusades of 1100-1300 CE? Both were undertaken with the supposed approval and direction of God.

Now dear reader, it may be a disappointment, but there is no way to know for certain the answer in any given case. Sometimes a nation has to fight to preserve itself, and evidently it sometimes must also fulfill mandates given to it by God. The difficulty is in discerning those times when a national undertaking was truly called for by the Almighty, and when it was simply the result of human lust for power. And it is here that we find a key in understanding God.

Kings, politicians, generals, Popes, and Caliphs throughout history were all human and subject to the same fleshly weaknesses we all experience in some form or another. Most administered their empires and fought their battles with human objectives and purpose in mind. Few are the leaders that willingly gave up their territory or resources to another out of benevolence. Most sought to maximize the influence of their nations, often to their personal benefit. Most likely, the Divine did not show up very often with explicit instructions to assault another kingdom.

In the case of the *Islamic Empire*, the Arabs first ventured outside Arabia as raiding parties seeking booty. After winning a decisive victory over an opposing Byzantine force, the Arab army felt encouraged to began a rapid expansion west across Africa to Spain, north to Anatolia, and east to the border with India. This was a violent period certainly, but most historians agree that the Arabs were often welcomed by populations angry with their prior rulers. Those who were conquered appear to have been initially treated well, and existing administrative and religious structures were preserved so long as taxes and tribute were paid. To its credit, the Arab Abbasid Empire in particular was the source of much architectural and scientific innovation, and a faithful preserver of knowledge that was being lost in the collapse of the Roman Empire. It is also true that conversions to Islam were enforced in some areas, particularly in later years.

The Christian *Crusades* were initiated by the Popes of Europe for two primary reasons. These were to assist the Eastern Church in Constantinople against the Moslem Seljuk Turks, and to return the holy land to Christian control. Raising an army in Western Europe was straightforward since many of the new converts to the Christian faith were barbarian and Nordic peoples who already brought with them a warrior tradition. The Crusaders were ruthless, yet only partially successful in their objectives since all of the Near East ultimately fell back to Islam by 1291, and Constantinople itself was captured in 1453. The period of the Crusades represented a significant departure from prior church views of armed conflict, proceeding as they did under the cry "*Deus vult*" or "God wills it". The Crusades also created a blemish on Christianity that will never be forgotten among those people groups that endured its wrath.

A common factor in both Islamic expansion and the Crusades was the poor understanding so many of the participants had of the religion for which they were fighting. Most people saw religion as an extension of the state, and expected it to provide for them as if it were a governmental agency. When the state went to war, it essentially became a religious movement as well, with the faithful doing as they were instructed in the name of God. We need to remember that few Christians of the time had direct access to the scriptures, which were read in Latin and interpreted by the priests of the Catholic Church. Many Arabs at the birth of their empire were not literate at all.

The holy wars of history reveal much fleshly ambition mixed with a legitimate dose of pious intent. The question we must continue to ask is whether the voice of the Creator was sought, discerned, and obeyed before the armies were let loose. An important principle of the faith-filled walk is hearing from God before acting, and then doing strictly in obedience. If the Father has truly spoken his will, then he can be counted on to enable or enforce his word. If he has not spoken, then we are acting out of our own presumption.

The Hebrew Scriptures provide many examples of YHWH's supernatural intervention during the conquest of Canaan, including the appearance of angelic forces, the manifestation of confusion in enemy ranks, and the gift of unnatural strength given to the Hebrew fighting men. If YHWH wants something to happen, he enables his servants to accomplish the task. By this measure, most of the disastrous wars of history do not feel like godly endeavors, and contain few testimonials of decisive supernatural manifestation. Rather, they look like political and economic forays fought by ambitious human beings. On one thing most of the world's faiths agree. When we depend on our own efforts and fail to wait on the Creator for wisdom, we are telling him to remain uninvolved. He respectfully honors our request and leaves us to our own folly. It is likely that God simply wasn't present at a national level in most conflicts of the ages. That being said, he was probably very present to those individuals on the battlefield who earnestly sought him.

As the history of Judah's kings illustrates, God is not hasty in judgment. He initially calls gently to us by his Spirit in the hope of getting our attention. If we are unresponsive, he will often arrange

events to give us a further wakeup call. Everyone gets a fair shot at hearing from their Creator. But at some point God will turn his back on those that consistently reject him. We see in the scriptures a variety of instances in which the All-Father gives people loving signs and repeated chances before acting in judgment against their lawlessness.

One such example can be found in the story of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. For 400 years the people had lived in the northern delta of the country and gradually settled into a status of slavery. Moses was commanded by God to demand that Pharaoh grant their release. God authenticated his message with 10 signs known as the *plagues*. After each of the first five plagues, Pharaoh rejected God's message out of his own pride. After that, God himself hardened Pharaoh's heart so the plagues would continue to escalate in severity, ultimately becoming a sign to everyone that the God of the Hebrews was enthroned over the false gods of Egypt.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you {as} God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. "You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst." So Moses and Aaron did {it;} as the LORD commanded them, thus they did.

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 7:1-6]

We have noted before that YHWH desires that we follow no gods but him. Each of the 10 plagues was designed to show the Egyptians

*Finding the True God*

---

that their gods were false deities and powerless to help them. The table below summarizes the plagues alongside a list of Egyptian gods and practices that may have been targeted by YHWH.

| Plague                   | Egyptian God  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Bloody water & dead fish | Hapi - god of the Nile waters                         |
| Frogs                    | Heqt – toad goddess of procreative protection         |
| Lice or Gnats            | Priestly authority                                    |
| Flies or beetles         | Kheper – god of rebirth (symbolized by scarab beetle) |
| Diseased livestock       | Apis – bull god                                       |
| Boils                    | Imhotep – god of medicine                             |
| Thunder and hail         | Nut – goddess of the sky                              |
| Locusts                  | Min – god of harvest                                  |
| Darkness                 | Horus – god of light                                  |
| Death of firstborn       | Pharaoh as incarnation of Amon-Ra                     |

After the Hebrews left Egypt, the Creator gave them a covenant that promised both blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. One finds in the Sinaiic Law both a loving and a holy judging Sovereign. When God commanded the Hebrews to forcibly take Canaan, it was because God had tired of pagan lawlessness defiling the land. We see the same principle operating as that which was responsible for casting the first people out of the Edenic garden.

But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, {neither} the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the

land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.

[*Holy Bible*. Leviticus 18:26-28]

God gave Canaan to the Hebrews so he could fulfill his promise to Abraham. It was not because they were righteous people. In fact, they had frustrated him repeatedly, and the nation's rebellion would ultimately result in the loss of its land both in 586 BCE and 70 CE. After this second dispersion, Israel did not get her land back again until May 14, 1948.

“It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but {it is} because of the wickedness of these nations (that) the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. “Know, then, (it is) not because of your righteousness (that) the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 9:5-6]

The All-Father is patient and merciful. He does not bring judgment on any of his children until they have utterly rejected him and his law. He gives us the reasonable time we need to make the right decisions. When God told Abraham what he was going to do in Canaan, he also told him that those lawless people were still to be given four more generations before the time clock on repentance was up. What patience!

As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth

generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

[*Holy Bible.* Genesis 15:15-16]

Here then are some principles we can use when thinking about the Creator's dealings with the nations. Don't gloss over them quickly if you really want to understand how God operates. Each has profound implications.

- God is consistent and unchanging across time, geography, and circumstance.
- God's directives of love primarily provide guidance for individual salvation, not national administration.
- God reveals himself to all people groups.
- God gives all of us the opportunity to freely choose holiness or disobedience, and he will not violate that free choice.
- God does not predestine our choice, but He does foreknow what we will choose and works our choice into his greater purpose.
- Those that choose holiness obtain God's covenant protection and provision.
- Those that reject holiness and exhaust God's patience are cursed, displaced, or destroyed.
- God cannot make exceptions when enforcing his holy law. He must judge righteously or he could not be counted upon to be completely holy.
- Unrighteousness must be removed from the midst of covenant people so it does not have a corrupting influence.
- National favor is based on the choices made both by the leader and those under the leader's authority.
- God shows up in his chosen way and timing whenever he is earnestly invited.
- God does nothing unless he first reveals his plans to his prophets.
- God allows both the sun and rain to fall on both the evil and the good. Some things affect everybody.

In essence, the Creator operates on the basis of covenant. He wants us to look to him for all that we need, including provision and protection. He promises to provide these things in *his own way and timing* if we will just patiently wait for it in faith and take care of our daily affairs in a God-honoring way. If we impulsively take the situation upon ourselves and out of God's hands, then we are being unfaithful and he will abandon us to our own efforts. This applies at the individual and national level. Unfortunately, much of what man tries to accomplish is full of fleshly ego and pride — things that do not guarantee the best outcome.

These basic principles for nations apply in similar fashion to individuals, so there is a wonderful promise here for you as well. God wants to enter into a covenant with you. He does not want to judge you, and graciously promises you time to come into a right place with Him.

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 34:6-8]

■■■■■ **The God of All People** ■■■■■

A core premise of this book is that the Creator has revealed himself in some way to all people groups across time and geography. All of them had knowledge of a Creator whom they should honor, and an understanding of good and evil behavior. This premise is clearly stated in the sacred scriptures we have been using.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 19:1-4]

For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 2:11-16]

As we discovered in our survey in part 1, the Creator was known in some form by most primitive peoples, but the transmission of this knowledge was largely lost over time when conveyed in oral form. Even when it was written, man added his own interpretation to the pure revelation of God. He also codified things that were religious or cultural. As the priestly classes of each faith accumulated their rituals, regalia, and doctrinal commentaries, they entrenched both their own mysticism and the uniqueness of their practices.

Many faiths believe that they have some special knowledge or Sovereign selection, and that their adherents will enjoy benefits not available to those outside the group. We do not have to look far for

statements of exclusivity. The following examples are from the three monotheistic faiths we have been studying most closely — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

You [Hebrews] only have I chosen among all the families of the earth...

[*Holy Bible*. Amos 3:2]

And there is salvation in no one else [Jesus]; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

[*Holy Bible*. Acts 4:12]

There is no god except God [Allah], and Muhammad is the Messenger of God [Allah].

[Shahada — Confession of Faith]

We discovered previously that there do appear to be some significant differences in how the faiths of the world view God, and that they cannot always be reconciled. This is true as well even among the three major monotheistic faiths that all describe a divine sovereign Creator. Yet behind all these perspectives does stand a divine personality that is undoubtedly bigger than any given faith has been able to describe. If so, it is a Creator that wants all people to know and turn to him. That does not make all faith perspectives true, but it should caution us not to be overly doctrinal.

Many know God as a simple Great Mystery, and call on him daily to forgive their lawlessness and help them to live better lives. They come to him in simplicity as humble, obedient children seeking to hear the voice of their Father telling them how much they are loved, and what he desires. Their faith is made real by allowing God to do deeds of love through them to others. And they keep knocking at the door to deepen the relationship. They trust God to do whatever is needed to ensure reconciliation in paradise. Those that can accept

the Creator in other forms also honor the work of the Holy Spirit and the Messiah.

Reread that last paragraph again; these are the building blocks of relationship that God cares most about. They are things that people everywhere, in any language, with any level of education can understand and do.

Interestingly, even when our conception of God is similar, and our theology close enough to be compatible, we still find ways to be exclusive. Here are some classic examples:

- The scriptures can only be properly understood in their original language.
- Water baptism for the remission of sin only has meaning for an adult.
- God prefers the great hymns of the faith to high-tempo rock-and-roll.

Each of these has their well-meaning proponents. Yet the Creator of the universe is not likely to have a preference as long as:

- We can discover his voice through the scriptures.
- We are serious about wanting to be forgiven for our lawless ways.
- We honor him with creative arts like dance and music.

If the All-Father made a point of revealing something of himself to every people group on the planet, then it stands to reason that he also allowed each of them to develop an appropriate cultural approach to honoring him. He gave us a wide variety of instruments, songs, and dances to be used for celebration and worship. It is doubtful he cares whether we blow the shofar, conch, silver trumpet, or didgeridoo; his focus is on our heart.

The Native American people have always worshiped their Creator. They honor him with the drum, regalia, dance, and an incense of burning sweet grass and cedar. It is no accident that the word or name “Yah” appears so often in their chants; they know the Great Spirit and his love for them. How God’s heart must hurt when

a church or synagogue will not accept their worship because they consider it “pagan” or “syncretistic”.

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 150:3]

It is true, for example, that the native drum does not appear in the “approved” list of “Biblical” instruments. Nevertheless, a simpler reading of these verses suggests that the Almighty wants everything that has breath, *and everything that makes noise*, to praise him to the heavens. Who cares that the praise is in Lakota and not Hebrew? Or that the pipe ceremony honors God’s creation in the Four Directions? As long as the honor is being given to the Great Mystery, then Praise him!

There is one truth, but it is packaged in many ways so every person can receive and understand it.

Each people group reveals some unique aspect of the Creator. It is our joy and challenge to find what God has given to each so that we might more completely enjoy his infinite variety. God chose the Jews as his vehicle for communicating a written covenant on righteous living. The Christian Jesus and Moslem Muhammad both stand upon that foundation, and most of western industrialized society is still ordered by the major commandments.

I know we’re your chosen people, but couldn’t you choose someone else once in awhile?

[Tevya - Fiddler on the Roof]

The All-Father chose to reveal his covenants and Messiah through the Jews, and they remain important to him. We know this for several reasons. First, the Hebrews survived 4,000 years to the present day as a distinct culture with an unbroken hope in YHWH and the Messiah. This remains true despite having no homeland or government for most of the past 2,000 years. Second, no other nation has documented the number and magnitude of publicly-witnessed divine interventions on their behalf. Third, the ancient Hebrew Scriptures themselves are the most widely-circulated spiritual documents in existence today. They tell us more about the nature of a covenantal God than any others anywhere. If there was no truth in them, then they would long ago have been relegated to the dustbin of history. YHWH is the God of all people. We have a responsibility to honor the Jews for their special status – just as we honor all people groups under God.

From the standpoint of the gospel [of Jesus as the Messiah] they [Jews] are enemies for your sake [opposed to public teaching of the gospel], but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 11:28-29]

### ■■■■ **Salvation and the Afterlife** ■■■■

Humans through the ages have wondered about a life after this one. Most of the world's faiths speak of an active spirit realm of which we will in some way become a part after our brief time on earth. However, they have widely differing views of what it might be like and what is required to achieve it.

Many primitive peoples believed (some still do) that the spirits of the ancestors remain in the area where they lived to provide continuing help to their descendents. Those alive take care of meeting the needs of those who have gone before. Nothing is known of the ancestor's afterlife, but it apparently remains engaged with this world.

Hinduism and related Far Eastern religions believe that we can escape a miserable earthly existence by generating enough good karma to become enlightened to our place in the ethereal “All”. We are not told anything of the state of nirvana.

In contrast, the three major monotheistic faiths of the Near East (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have quite a lot to say about the afterlife. They believe that there is a pleasant place known as *heaven* or *paradise* that “good” people go, and an alternative place called *hell* for those that have “sinned”. They assume that some form of evaluation before a righteous God is a part of the process of transitioning from this life to the next. It is therefore important that we do the things approved of God and avoid those that offend him. The Almighty cannot be bribed, extorted, or fooled with slight-of-hand as part of this evaluation.

God grants *salvation* to those individuals whom he has forgiven of their sins and reconciled back to himself. They have been given assurance of their entrance to paradise. In this chapter we explore the criteria for salvation and what is known about life in the world to come.

### **Judaism**

Traditional Judaism believes that a person after dying goes to *Sheol*, the place of the dead, where people are divided into two groups based on their deeds during life. Those counted as righteous occupy *Olam Haba* (the world to come), also known as *Gan Eden* (paradise). It is less certain what happens to those that have rejected God. Some believe that sinners spend time in *gehinnom* for purification, after which they too can ascend to Gan Eden. Others believe that rejecting YHWH in this world creates a separation that continues into the next.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike look to Abraham as the patriarch of their faiths, and as a role model for godly living. All agree that he was a “friend” of YHWH and is today in paradise. Yet Abraham was never instructed in the detailed laws given to Moses at Mount Sinai many generations later. Like Noah before him, he simply honored the Creator of the universe daily and strove to live in a good way. He was obedient when God gave him specific revelation,

and followed the promptings of his conscience in other daily affairs. The three major monotheistic faiths agree that Abraham's faith, trust, and holy obedience were sufficient for his salvation and entry into heaven.

But apparently not many people were inclined to live in this way. So YHWH provided the Hebrew people (and possibly other people groups as well) with an explicit set of covenantal laws of living that showed them how to live as his friends. This Siniatic law (named for its delivery on Mount Sinai) required that we follow some basic rules and honor other people by treating them well. Doing so would honor YHWH, who will himself judge our actions when we die. The law is comprehensive. There are over 600 instructions in the *Torah*, in addition to the Ten Commandments listed below.

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol, {or} any likeness {of} what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth {generations} of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.
4. Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; {in it} you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your

female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

5. Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 5:7-21]

All the laws in the *Torah* find their source in a few simple principles. By keeping these in mind, one would naturally do many of the things required in the law.

“Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, {and} to keep the LORD's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

[*Holy Bible*. Deuteronomy 10:12-13]

The Hebrew prophets affirmed these laws in later centuries as the criteria for entry into the world to come.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 24:3-5, NAS]

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

[*Holy Bible*. Micah 6:8]

Thus has the LORD of hosts said, ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’

[*Holy Bible*. Zechariah 7:9-10]

In contrast, non-Jewish *gentiles* are expected to follow the seven *Noahide Laws*, traditionally given to the patriarch Noah after the great flood. They are found in commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures. It is understood that in doing so a non-Jew also gains entry into the world to come.

Seven commandments were the sons of Noah commanded: (1) concerning adjudication, [justice and social order] (2) and concerning idolatry, [worshiping other gods] (3) and concerning blasphemy, [unclean speech] (4) and concerning sexual

immorality, [adultery and incest] (5) and concerning bloodshed, [murder of any human being] (6) and concerning robbery, (7) and concerning a limb torn from a living animal [cruelty to creation].

[*Talmud Sanh.* 56a]

The promise of access to paradise was not given for the Hebrews alone. It is good news that God wants shared with the whole world.

This obligation, to teach all the peoples of the earth about the Laws of Noah, is incumbent upon every individual in every era.

[*Mishnah Torah.* Law of Kings 8:10]

As we have discovered already, God is perfectly holy, will not compromise on that standard, and expects us to be holy as well. If we are willfully sinful or *lawless* (exhibiting anti-*Torah* behavior) then we cannot come close to him and will therefore suffer a spiritual death. From God's perspective, our spiritual death is a terrible thing because it means a portion of his creation is forever separated from him.

It is clear that human beings do not keep laws perfectly. We all have some level of sinfulness about us for which we need forgiveness. The Almighty in his wisdom decided that a person's spiritual death could only be redeemed by substituting a sinless life. In the Siniatic Law YHWH commanded the Hebrew priests to periodically take two unblemished ("sinless") male goats and appoint one as a *scapegoat* and the other as a sin offering. The priest would symbolically place the sins of the Hebrew nation on the scapegoat and send it away into the wilderness. He would then kill the remaining "sinless" goat and sprinkle its blood on the altar of the temple or tabernacle.

It may seem a bit counter-intuitive that the goat bearing sin would be released while the sinless goat is killed. Breaking God's law separates a person from him permanently. This is illustrated by sending the sin goat away from the fellowship of the people. Blood

symbolizes life. The blood of the sinless goat represents God's grace that forgives us from sin and keeps us spiritually alive. Our continuing sinfulness must be continually cleansed by God's sacrificial grace.

In the same way that the priests killed the unblemished goat on behalf of the nation, individuals also had to provide an innocent animal as a sin offering for themselves. They then had to slit its throat. This ritual made them aware of how painful our spiritual death is to God, and how valuable is our forgiveness.

Sacrifice in some form has always been a part of every faith. The person gives up something he or she values, whether wealth (sacrificial lamb), comfort (abstinence from food), time (ritual dance or prayer), or some other commodity, to demonstrate to God how serious the person is about a request being made. It can be a request for assistance in this life, salvation in the next life, favor for another person, or any other felt need.

Animal sacrifice ended in Israel in 70 CE when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Many Jews expect that at the end of this age a new temple (or portable *tabernacle*) will be built so the sacrifices can be restored.

“For thus says the LORD, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.’”

[*Holy Bible*. Jeremiah 33:17-18]

In the meantime, the Jewish people strive to honor YHWH by doing good deeds and keeping other parts of the law.

Attaining paradise requires holiness. Unfortunately, no matter how “good” a person is, or how beneficial the person's lifetime works, one cannot get close to the holy standard of paradise. We will all fail the test. No one can love that perfectly. As a result, most people are never quite sure of their standing before God on the scales

of justice, nor of its precise sensitivity to sin. If the scale is slightly tilted toward sinfulness, does that cast the person into gehinnom?

At the end of the day, God is looking for an honest and devoted heart, and we are looking to him for his merciful forgiveness. We accept in faith YHWH's promise that he is in some way willing and able through his grace to grant the forgiveness and salvation we need.

### **Christianity**

Christians generally accept the teachings of Judaism regarding the existence of a heaven and hell. They also believe that the Jewish man Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the Jewish prophets. He claimed to be God in human form and authenticated this claim by performing many wonderful, supernatural miracles.

Jesus had two primary purposes on earth. First, he wanted to refocus humanity on God's message of love, and steer it away from doctrinaire legalism. He wanted people to repent of their lawlessness and live holy lives according to the major commandments given through Moses. This was his most basic message of salvation.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 22:36-40]

Second, Jesus came to fulfill the blessing promised to all people by YHWH through the patriarch Abraham.

In your [Abraham's] seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 22:18]

In the original Hebrew, this particular use of the word “seed” (offspring) is singular, and is understood to point to the Messiah. The blessing takes the form of an offer of forgiveness of human sin, reconciliation with the All-Father, and entry into heaven. Confessing Jesus as the Messiah through whom these things are offered makes him a person’s personal savior. Christians believe that salvation requires this confession of faith.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

[*Holy Bible*. John 3:16-18]

...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 10:9-11, NKJ]

By what mechanism would the Messiah accomplish this salvation?

Jewish law required that innocent animal blood be substituted for the sins of the people, but Christians believe that this was never intended to be a permanent ritual. Instead, the same Creator who gave this law would himself provide a permanent sinless substitution in the same way that he provided a Ram in place of Abraham’s son. He would manifest among us as a human, live a demonstrably holy life, take the world’s offenses against God on his own shoulders (in the

process enduring the ultimate displeasure of the All-Father despite his own righteousness), and then allow his blood to be sacrificed. Christians believe that Jesus thereby fulfilled the prophetic role of both scapegoat and sin offering, and in the process became the bridge of reconciliation between humanity and its perfectly holy God.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

[*Holy Bible*. John 14:6]

According to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

[*Holy Bible*. Hebrews 9:22]

The permanent separation that existed between humanity and God was buried along with Jesus. As a sign of his permanent defeat of spiritual death, Jesus returned to physical life and walked among hundreds of witnesses for several more weeks before finally ascending alive into the clouds. This reconciliation reaches back in time to the first humans and forward in time to the end of the age.

Jesus’ sacrifice made it *possible* for everyone to be reconciled with the Creator. This reconciliation does not, however, become real for any one of us unless we *individually* cross Jesus’ bridge of grace through the act of repentance. Forgiveness for sin and fellowship with God is freely given when we admit we cannot stand without condemnation in front of the Holy Judge. Repentance means being honest about, and sorry for, all the ways we have fallen short of perfect love and holiness. It means being earnest about not making the same mistakes again and following the examples for living given to us by Jesus.

The Christian New Testament scriptures draw a distinction between those commandments that are eternal and binding, and those that were specific to the Hebrews. Knowing exactly where to draw the line for non-Jews (*gentiles*) has been an issue of discussion

for centuries, but Jesus himself emphasized that the Creator Father desires love more than legalism from, and among, all his children. He taught his followers to pray with simple repentance, humility, and honor.

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 6:9-13]

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[*Holy Bible*. Luke 18:10-14]

The Christian scriptures are unique in claiming that Jesus bridged the gulf of unrighteousness that existed between man and God. They are also unique in saying that all things were created through Jesus, and that all beings with free will are to be judged through him at the Last Day.

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

[*Holy Bible. Colossians 1:15-16*]

“And He ordered us [followers of Jesus] to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One [Jesus] who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”

[*Holy Bible. Acts 10:42*]

There is a common misconception that Jesus made the Jewish Siniatic Law obsolete. This view holds that faith in God and his Messiah are the only requirement for salvation, and that the grace of God will carry us to paradise regardless of our other life choices. This is not the case. Jesus himself was a *Torah*-observant Jew who went to the temple and participated in the Jewish rituals all his life. He taught that although the need for animal sacrifice has ended, we are still expected to love and honor God by keeping those commandments that remain applicable to our time and culture as best we are able. His taught that he had come to *fulfill* the law in all the ways foreseen by the Hebrew prophets. Many such prophesies were indeed fulfilled during his first visit. Christians believe the rest will be fulfilled at the Last Day when he returns again to defeat the Anti-Christ and establish the kingdom of God on the earth.

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,

not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 5:17-18]

A Christian is one who has chosen to follow Jesus, and therefore has three parts to his faith walk. First is belief in YHWH as the single Creator God. Second is the outworking of that faith through our behavior toward God and our neighbors. A faith not backed up by fruitful behavior is not an honest faith. Third is the work we do here to spread the good news of God's kingdom. Jesus gave the following "great commission" to his followers.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 28:18-20]

God as Father loves his children so much that he put a plan in place to save them from loss. He sent Jesus as the bridge of grace between sin and holiness for any that desire to become a part of his family. To ensure others hear about this family, God also sent his Holy Spirit to empower persons engaged in the great commission. These followers of Jesus would confirm their gospel message with the same miraculous signs Jesus used in his day. The Christian sees each personality of the three-part triune God as participating in this ultimate plan.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

[*Holy Bible*. 2 Corinthians 13:14]

All followers of Jesus are expected to participate in some form of kingdom work, and a special reward apart from salvation awaits those that do.

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 20:6]

### **Islam**

Good Muslims go to paradise. Getting there requires that a person confess faith in Allah as the one God, believe in Mohammad as God's last messenger, keep the major commandments given in the *Qur'an*, and do good works in this world. Everyone can come directly to Allah to ask forgiveness, help, and guidance.

They believe in Allah and the Last Day; they enjoy Al-Maruf (Islamic Monotheism, and following Prophet Muhammad) and forbid Al-Munkar (polytheism, disbelief and opposing Prophet Muhammad); and they hasten in (all) good works; and they are among the righteous.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 3:114]

Those who spend (in Allah's Cause) in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves Al-Muhsinun (the good-doers).

[*Noble Qur'an*. 3:134]

O you who believe! Believe in Allah, and His Messenger (Muhammad), and the Book (the *Qur'an*) which He has sent down to His Messenger, and the Scripture which He sent down to those before (him);

and whosoever disbelieves in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, then indeed he has strayed far away.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 4:136]

Muslims do not experience death as harsh, painful, or scary. For believers in Allah it is easy and painless. The human soul moves on to “life in Bar-zakh” while awaiting the Last Day judgment. From there believers can see the paradise that awaits them and they are filled with joyous anticipation.

(It will be said to the pious – believers of Islamic Monotheism): “O (you) the one in (complete) rest and satisfaction! “Come back to your Lord, — well-pleased (yourself) and well-pleasing (unto Him)! “Enter you then among My (honoured) slaves [human beings], “And enter you My Paradise!”

[*Noble Qur'an*. 89:27-30]

Non-believers are destined for hell (*jahannam*). An eternity of torment begins for them at the time of death.

And if you could see when the angels take away the souls of those who disbelieve (at death); they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): “Taste the punishment of the blazing Fire. “This is because of that which your hands had forwarded. And verily, Allah is not unjust to his slaves [human beings].”

[*Noble Qur'an*. 8:50-51]

On the Last Day, every person will be individually evaluated by Allah based solely on his belief and deeds. Nothing he had in life will be present to influence Allah’s judgment.

And truly, you have come unto Us alone (without wealth, companions, or anything else) as We created you the first time. You have left behind you all that which We had bestowed on you. We see not with you your intercessors whom you claimed to be partners with Allah. Now all relations between you and them have been cut off, and all that you used to claim has vanished from you.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 6:94]

Allah is perfectly fair. He will only hold accountable those that have had an opportunity to make a decision about their faith. This means children that have reached the age of puberty, those that are mentally fit, and those that have heard the essence of the message of Islam. Those who have not had such an opportunity will automatically enter paradise.

The human is born in a neutral state that is neither good nor evil. Islam has no concept of original sin. Adam and Eve repented of their rebellion against Allah and were forgiven. Likewise, each person is responsible for his or her own actions and will be judged accordingly. Allah graciously sends his messengers to warn us of our sin while we still have time to repent.

Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his ownself. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear another's burden. And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning).

[*Noble Qur'an*. 17:15]

The *Qur'an* provides a more detailed picture of life in the world to come than does any other source. It divides the dead into three groups after the Last Day of Judgment. Those called the *foremost* will be granted the highest position near Allah. Those on the *right*

*hand* will be rewarded with paradise. Those on the *left hand* will be sent to hell.

And those foremost (in Islamic Faith of Monotheism and in performing righteous deeds in the life of this world on the very first call to embrace Islam) will be foremost (in Paradise). These will be the Nearest (to Allah). In the Gardens of Delight (Paradise). A multitude of those (foremost) will be from the first generations (who embraced Islam). And a few of those (foremost) will be from the later generations. (They will be) on thrones woven with gold and precious stones. Reclining thereon, face to face. Immortal boys will go around them (serving), with cups, and jugs, and a glass of flowing wine, Wherefrom they will get neither any aching of the head nor any intoxication. And with fruit that they may choose. And with the flesh of fowls that they desire. And (there will be) Hur (fair females) with wide lovely eyes (as wives for Al-Muttaqun — the pious). Like unto preserved pearls. A reward for what they used to do. No Laghw (dirty, false, evil vain talk) will they hear therein, nor any sinful speech (like backbiting). But only the saying of: Salam! Salam! (greetings with peace)!

And those on the Right Hand — how (fortunate) will be those on the Right Hand? (They will be) among thornless lote trees, And among Talh (banana trees) with fruits piled one above another, And in shade long-extended, And by water flowing constantly, And fruit in plenty, Whose supply is not cut off (by change of season) nor are they out of reach. And on couches or thrones, raised high. Verily, We have created them (maidens) of special creation. And made them virgins. Loving (their husbands only), (and) of equal age. For those on the Right Hand. A multitude of those (on the Right Hand) will be from the first

generation (who embraced Islam). And a multitude of those (on the Right Hand) will be from the later generations.

And those on the Left Hand — how (unfortunate) will be those on the Left Hand? In fierce hot wind and boiling water, And shadow of black smoke, (That shadow) neither cool nor (even) pleasant...

[*Noble Qur'an*. 56:10-44]

Muslim tradition sees paradise as a place where a person approved by Allah has everything he could ever need or want. He will be served continuously by other beings created for the purpose. Allah wants his believers to enjoy the best reward forever.

### **Universal Truths**

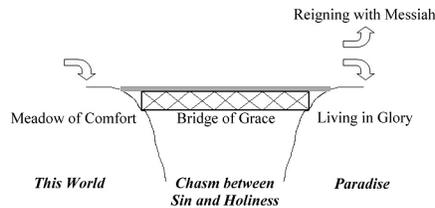
The hope of a better life to come leads us to make important choices not only about what we believe, but also about what we will do with that belief. Unfortunately, there is no consensus on how we get from this life to a better one to come. Even among the monotheistic faiths we find irreconcilable differences. Judaism requires obedience to the Jewish law recorded in the *Torah*, Christianity requires confession of Jesus as personal savior, and Islam requires acceptance of Muhammad's revelation as superseding all others.

Therefore, finding the ultimate truth once again requires stepping away from religion and considering the perspective of the God we have now come to know. This is the perfectly loving father who is absolutely fair with all of his children. How would this father help his children transition from this life on earth to a new life in his presence? How would he embrace the child that desires to be with him and to do the things that please him? What would he do about the rebellious child that wants nothing to do with parental authority?

The diagram below identifies our major choices if we assume there is a core truth behind each of the monotheistic scriptures. It is something of a synthesis, and does not adhere fully to any of the faiths. It is presented here to provoke your thinking about what you believe.

## Finding the True God

---



The first choice is to ignore the Divine. Many people have little interest in the afterlife. They find this world sufficiently comfortable that they would rather not do anything unduly spiritual that might upset the apple cart. They don't want to chance any god taking away their financial resources or freedom to do what they want. Some may be spiritually aware, but prefer having the spirit realm serve them. They would rather not follow a sovereign God with different priorities. These people see the afterlife as taking care of itself. They may also believe that there is nothing at all following our time on earth, in which case it is even more important to live life to the fullest while here. "One shot is all you got." The meadow of familiar comfort is a good place to be.

The second choice is to enter into a relationship with the unseen All-Father who desires fellowship with his children, both in this world and any to come. God's part is to show us how to be holy and stand in his presence. God's children in turn express love for their All-Father by honoring both the basic commandments given in the scriptures, and those that come through the prompting of their conscience. They do this not because they want an eternal insurance policy, but because they earnestly want to please the Almighty lawgiver. God then draws them into his glory (*shekinah*), some of which can be experienced in this life, but most of which is found in the place we call paradise. All faiths without exception agree that paradise is a much better place than we can ever experience in the meadows of this world.

It is no simple matter, however, to become holy people. We have seen that there is a deep chasm that separates humans in this world from the perfect holiness of heaven. None of us can ever be righteous enough to traverse it on our own. It is God himself, out of his

abundant love for us that provides the *bridge of grace* we cross to gain relationship with him.

Most faiths are unsure what form this bridge of grace takes. They generally understand it as mercy being extended to those who truly love their Creator and are sorry for rebelling against his ways. Christians and many Jews believe that the Messiah provides this bridge. Fortunately, a loving father does not require his children to fully understand his means of grace; they become righteous in his sight just by following his holy path. It is the heart of a father to embrace any of his children that come to him in love.

There is a third choice we can make regarding a life to come. This is to actively participate in bringing others into the All-Father's family. Interestingly, there are few faiths that emphasize such work. Christian followers of Jesus as Messiah are believed to have special spiritual authority as kingdom ambassadors to help others cross the chasm and find reconciliation with their maker. They are empowered to confirm the gospel message by the same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus. Kingdom workers are promised that this authority will continue in the world to come as they reign with the Messiah.

One of the biggest challenges people face accepting God's gift of forgiving grace is their sense that they have already been too rebellious to be worthy of the offer. We humans cannot believe that God would be that forgiving because many of us see ourselves as already heavily tilted toward sin on God's scale of justice. Yet grace by definition takes no stock of quantity. It gives all of us the right to stand in God's holy presence in paradise if we are willing to change our ways and follow him. This is the amazing part about grace; that God is both willing and able to reconcile us back to himself no matter how unworthy we might feel.

We will see many people in the afterlife that we might not expect to encounter apart from this grace. We will also be joined both with those who have passed on before us, and with those who will follow. The Native Americans close many of their prayers with the saying, "All my relations". This signifies that their prayers are not for them alone, but also for the ancestors and descendants to whom they are connected.

The All-Father remains after centuries of debate a Great Mystery. We are instructed to seek him, and told that if we do so he will be

found. The various scriptures help us by revealing aspects of his character and tuning us to hear the things he would say if he walked into the room. They also give us practical guidance on how to live in ways that honor him with love, holiness, and humility. Salvation from sin and entry into paradise do not depend on mastery of complex theologies and doctrines. They are based on a simple, loving relationship of honor and obedience. Don't worry; the All-Father is big enough to show you what he wants for you to be counted as a member of his wonderful family.

Just remember...it is not enough to be a good person.

We can never be good enough on our own to meet a holy standard. True goodness comes as the *result* of allowing the Creator to work through and change us, meaning a relationship with him must come *first*. Honoring the Creator during our lives here is the most important thing we do, and the thing that makes it possible to cross his bridge of grace. Make sure nothing comes between you and this most important personal relationship.

### ==== Prayer =====

If you are new to this notion of having a relationship with the unseen God and allowing his Spirit to speak to yours, then it may be helpful to spend a minute on the subject of prayer. It is novel for many people that the Creator actually *answers*.

Prayer is nothing more than a two-way conversation with God's Spirit. It is unusual only in that spirit speaks to Spirit, and it is the thoughts of your heart, more than the words of your mouth, that God hears. And it is also in your spirit that you hear what God has to say to you.

Prayer is practiced in one form or another in nearly all religions. Sometimes it is packaged with rituals and mantras, but at its most basic level prayer is simple conversation. There is no fancy language or book learning needed, and God doesn't care how you are dressed or where you are located. He just wants you to draw him close.

Communication with the Creator can take a variety of forms:

- Resting quietly in his presence
- Praising him for the great works of his creation

- Requesting him to grant wisdom, revelation, or understanding
- Asking him to help you or others
- Commanding something to happen based on having received delegated authority from God
- Thanking him for answering your prayers
- Allowing the Spirit of God to speak through you back to God (“*tongues*” and “*spiritual groaning*”)

Praying effectively requires slowing down your mind and physical senses so you can focus on and hear the quiet voice of your spirit. Many techniques for doing so have been adopted by the various religions. They include:

- Relaxing in a favorite, peaceful place
- Reciting a mantra (eg., the sacred syllable ‘Om’)
- Reciting ritual sayings (eg., prayer beads)
- Dancing
- Bowing, kneeling, or prostrating in a position of humility
- Fasting from food, drink, or both, to slow down the physical body
- Using a sweat-lodge to force deep prayer

Some traditions make use of hallucinogens to enhance creative perception. This is not recommended because they alter the body’s chemistry and interfere with its proper function and energy balance. They may stimulate the creative side of the organic brain, but do nothing for opening better dialogue with a spiritual God.

Whatever technique(s) work best for you, the intent is to enter into a place of quiet peace in which you can pay attention to the impressions of your spirit. Spend at least as much time listening to God as you spend talking at him. His Spirit may speak to you by visions, feelings, or just a “knowing”. Some people hear voices or see apparitions, but these are rare and caution must be exercised to ensure that it is God speaking and not something else. What works for you will be different than for someone else.

Here is a good approach for praying over something specific:

1. Clarify in your mind what you need or desire. Check the scriptures to be sure it is consistent with what God would approve.
2. Verbalize your request to God.
3. Wait for God to affirm that your request is aligned with his will and timing. This may be a matter of seconds or weeks. There is a sense of peace that comes when God gives assurance that he will work things out. If confirming peace does not come after a reasonable time, then start over by asking God for better clarity of what he wants in the situation.
4. Sometimes God will ask you to do something as part of seeing your prayer answered. Listen for what action to take and when.
5. Thank God in faith that what you have asked is (or will be) accomplished

Things can happen quickly when you pray in this way. Ask the All-Father for his will, wait until he tells you what to do and when, and then do exactly as he says in perfect obedience. If it is already accomplished in God's mind, its manifestation is often immediate in the natural. The key is working with God according to his will rather than doing what you want independently.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven;  
whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in  
Heaven and whatever you loose on earth will have  
been loosed in Heaven.

[*Holy Bible. Matthew 16:19*]

When you place your hope in God and not in your own ability, you allow the Creator of the universe to work. There is no greater guru, no stronger army, no bigger bank account, and no gentler helper.

Belief in God's willingness and ability to act also appears to play an important role in the spiritual realm. Faith magnifies the power of prayer.

Abram believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness.

[*Holy Bible*. Genesis 15:6]

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

[*Holy Bible*. Hebrews 11:1-2]

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[*Holy Bible*. James 1:6-8]

To some degree, intentional prayer also seems to work apart from God. New Age teaching suggests that you can create a new reality for yourself by focusing consistently on the thing *you* want. This is not the same as praying for *God's* will to be done in a situation. You must make a choice. Either you are an obedient child of the Creator, or you are going to take things into your own hands and ask him to keep his distance. Whatever you choose, he is still there, still aware of what you are doing, and still in control of the blessings and consequences.

You may wonder whether a person who follows these guidelines and pursues a godly life will always have his or her prayers answered. The answer is no. While God-fearing, faith-filled people do often see answers to prayer, they are not guaranteed.

To understand why, put yourself for a moment in God's shoes. When we make a request we are asking him to intervene and change a situation. There are a variety of reasons he might want to do so. If we are aligned with those reasons, it is more likely that his hand will be moved to act.

- He wants to reveal himself to people who do not know him.
- He wants us to learn the fruits of spiritual living. (ie., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control)
- He blesses righteous behavior.
- He punishes unrighteous behavior.
- He gives gifts to people just to say “I love you”.
- He fulfills his side of covenantal agreements.
- He partners with us in taking care of his creation.

If we are not aligned with his will, then it is less likely that he will grant a request. Consider prayers for wealth. God does not shower his believers with money so they can spend it on themselves. There is a prayer in the Hebrew Scriptures that tells us why he does not make us all independently wealthy. It also explains why he does not want us to be destitute.

...Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny {You} and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 30:8-9]

When God does provide someone with substantial financial resources, he usually intends for it to be passed on to those having greater need.

You have probably heard the expression, “it is more blessed to give than to receive”. God blesses those that bless others. Whatever you give away will eventually be returned in greater abundance so you can keep on giving. This is not only true of money. It is also true of love, time, and wisdom. When we give these away we build fruitful relationships that bring joy back to us. When we make it a habit to pray for other people, God not only answers those prayers, he increases the spiritual authority of the one doing the praying so

they see even more prayers fulfilled in the future. It is like a muscle that gets stronger with each use.

God also seems to appreciate persistence. This is not meant to imply that he is hard of hearing. It may just be that he wants to know how important the request is to us.

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; And give Him no rest until He establishes And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

[*Holy Bible*. Isaiah 62:6-7]

Another important factor in seeing prayers answered is righteous living. Those who stay close to God's heart are used by him as conduits for his work and are granted his delegated spiritual authority.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

[*Holy Bible*. James 5:16]

Finally, we must bear in mind that the All-Father we have been getting to know is still sovereign. He has the right to do as he pleases based on his greater understanding of creation's design, his plans for our future life, and parts of his personality we have yet to understand. We have to give him such permission. No one sees every prayer answered. Perhaps that is because God wants to be sure we never see him as a push-button vending machine. Perhaps he wants someone else to experience their prayer being answered instead. We must give God permission to be the sovereign that he is.

It is our job to pray. It is God's job to decide what to do with those prayers.

That being said, people with a heart truly devoted to God and his agenda experience a rich communication with the Divine. Effective prayer that moves God's hand can alter circumstances for entire nations. There is nothing you can do in the natural that is as powerful.

Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> The Muslim *Qur'an* does not refer to Allah as a "father" although many of the attributes are believed to apply.
- <sup>2</sup> "Abba" is a word from the Aramaic language that is best translated "daddy" or "papa".

## CHAPTER 10

# PRINCIPLES AND ATTRIBUTES



**W**e have finished exploring the nature, personality, and character of God. You have been introduced to the Great Mystery, and it is now your decision and responsibility to walk the road of relationship that leads to divine partnership.

For the purposes of our spiritual exploration, we made the assumption that there was a single, sovereign, creator deity. This was because we had no other way to explain important aspects of our universe like love and creation from nothing. Our next step was to learn something about this divine personality, and we chose to focus on the God of the patriarch Abraham. His legacy includes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are the religions collectively followed by most people of faith today. If there is an ultimate Creator-God, then the scriptures of these faiths give us a good idea of what he is like. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that this Great Spirit remains far beyond our human understanding.

This is a good time to pause and reflect. Here are some of the more important things we have discovered.

### **Nature and Character of God**

- God is consistent and unchanging across time, geography, and circumstance.
- He requires nothing from his creation to exist.
- He is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere in time and place).
- He can simultaneously take multiple forms (eg., All-Father, Holy Spirit).
- He has a personality that can be known, and he experiences emotion.

- His character can best be described as a loving father.
- He contains within him all possible good and evil, but has chosen to manifest only what is perfectly holy, loving, and fair.
- He must judge righteously when enforcing his laws or he would not be perfectly holy, loving, and fair.

### **God's Involvement with Creation**

- God is outside creation and time, and spoke both into existence.
- He put in place laws of nature that maintain order in the universe. These laws sustain things already there, but do not create something from nothing. Doing so requires divine intervention.
- Sun and rain fall on both the evil and the good. Some things affect everyone.
- God created humans with personalities and emotions that have similarities to his own. Humans are capable of both good and evil, and are free to manifest either.

### **Laws and Justice**

- The Creator revealed himself to all people groups, and all of them know from laws or conscience how to live well.
- God gave humans laws of living that reflect the universe's laws of nature. Violation of some of these laws will lead to natural consequences. Violation of other laws invites divine correction.
- Humans are all free to choose obedience or disobedience. God will not violate or predestine our choices, but he does foreknow them and works them into his greater purpose.
- People who choose holiness obtain God's covenant protection and provision. Those that reject holiness and exhaust God's patience are punished or permanently separated from him.
- Human rebellion against God and his laws has created a separation between sinful humanity and its holy Creator. It also resulted in the cursing of the land, which no longer serves as a paradise.
- Despite our rebellion, God still desires reconciliation with us. He has provided a bridge of grace over the divide. It is our personal choice to cross it, and the All-Father accepts all who do so.

**Partnership with God**

- Humanity's purpose is to; 1) return the All-Father's parental love, 2) be his emissary of love to the earth and all his other children, and 3) ultimately participate with him in reigning over the entire created universe.
- Humans choose their spiritual destination. They can 1) remain in the meadow of this world's self-sufficiency, 2) become an obedient follower of God with the promise of paradise in his presence, or 3) partner with God fully to help others obtain reconciliation with him.
- Those who partner with God are granted a measure of delegated spiritual authority as the Creator's ambassadors. Those who follow Jesus are empowered by the same Holy Spirit that enabled his ministry.
- The joy of living a God-centered life is not just for the world to come. It is also to be experienced in this world.
- Our most powerful activity is prayer. It can move the Creator to change situations that are beyond human ability.

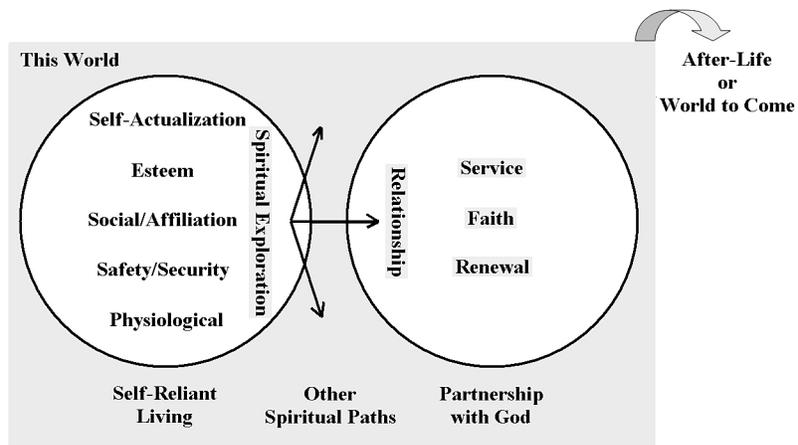
It is nothing less than amazing that we can know so much about an unseen sovereign that sits outside our universe. Not every faith agrees with everything on this list, and even the monotheistic faiths disagree among themselves. Religious doctrine is not important here. We are talking about a God whose truth is much higher than our understanding. Drop a few things off the list and you still have a good idea of the essential character and nature of the Creator-Father-God.

You now know enough to begin talking with the Almighty about the partnership he wants with you. You know what he likes and what to call him. You also know enough to begin discerning whether your thoughts and actions would please him. Perhaps most importantly, he has shown himself willing to be known. He wants a deeper relationship with you. Are you willing?



# PART 3

## THE JOURNEY





## CHAPTER 11

# TAKING THE JOURNEY



Part 2 of this book introduced us in detail to the almighty deity in which most of the world today professes belief. In all likelihood, the ancient peoples of all lands knew this same Creator-God, and gave him many names and traditions reflecting the diversity of their cultures and experiences with nature. Unfortunately, such knowledge gained before the Bronze Age is largely lost to us now. We are dependent on generations of prophets that have since enlarged on the original beliefs by adding additional theology and ritual, not all of it consistent, and some of it quite exclusive. Yet, if there is one ultimate Creator, then he must be the same for everyone. We have focused on the All-Father of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims because this personality is so well documented by these faiths.

Thus far we have explored the various spiritual alternatives and considered what kind of leap we might want to make into the spiritual realm. We glimpsed a living God that wants a personal relationship with us, and have learned something of his character and nature. We gave thought to the arguments for and against this God, and considered what the scriptures have to say about him. We learned enough to have a sense of what he might say in a prayerful conversation with us.

We have also looked at some of the spiritual laws that lead to blessings and curses. Having done so, it may still seem unfair that a creator you can't even see should have the power to bring you into an existence you didn't request, and then ask you to live in ways you had no hand in designing. That is understandable. Most children feel the same way at one time or another toward their parents. As children mature, however, they discover the wisdom they did not know, and end up eventually imparting it to their own children. It is the

same in our spiritual journey. The more we search out the ways of our Creator and willingly “play his game”, the more we realize that it can lead to a wonderful relationship full of adventure, discovery, and peace during this life.

The final part of this book looks at applying what we have learned *about* God to taking a journey *with* him. It begins with the basic decisions about what you believe and progresses through the choices and experiences you are likely to encounter on the path of partnership. As you get into the journey a bit, you should start to feel a sense of peace and fulfillment, confident that you are living just as God desires, and eager to participate in his great and ultimate plan. A wonderful warning here; the further you go, the more likely this new relationship will change how you relate to other people and what you consider important in this life.

As with all change, gaining something new almost always means letting go of something old.

We will be taking a well-worn path that people of faith often follow. The basic principles apply to all religions, although there are elements of the journey that will vary depending on which corridor you enter. As with all things in life, each of us experiences this journey in different ways, but the following sections will present some general guideposts.

- *Explore* the faiths in which you have an interest.
- Develop a *relationship* with God, and make a commitment to participate in his world.
- Undertake a holy *renewal*. Prepare to be spiritually useful.
- Expect to face tests of *faith* and to battle for victory.
- Let God use you in his *service*. Discover the spiritual gifts with which he has empowered you.
- Begin living a life of endless *partnership* and servant leadership.

As you read on, please don’t be intimidated. We are talking about a lifelong journey. Some take their first spiritual steps early in life and some later. It is never too late to start, and there is nothing you have done in this lifetime that is too big for God to heal or forgive — provided you are serious about wanting to be his friend. The

best news is that you are not walking this path alone. The Creator desires that every one of his children live abundantly, and is infinitely capable of ensuring our success. It is your responsibility to embrace his help and allow him to mold you. The richness of this journey depends entirely on a willingness to be taken by faith to a place never before visited. It really is an amazing ride.

### ==== **Spiritual Exploration** ====

The following note was sent to me by an agnostic who was in the exploratory stage of his spiritual journey:

You might remember when I was ranting on about God and stuff. As I noted in the message several times, it surprised me how much emotion appeared as I wrote. Hours later I was still angry with no signs of letting up. I know myself well enough to recognize when things are “not of me” and wondered if I should try out the God Authority thing. I simply said in the car driving home something along the lines of “I command in the name of the Highest God any negative spirit beings to leave me and be gone”. The emotions disappeared. I still had the same thoughts, but without the odd emotion. Thought you’d like hearing that little story.

There is much out there that we cannot perceive with our physical senses, but that does not make it unreal. As the old saying goes;

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience;  
we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

It can be hard for the human brain to come to terms with this reality, however, and even harder to sort out what spiritual path to take this side of eternity. That’s what the exploration stage of the spiritual journey is all about.

Part 1 of the book was designed to give you an overview of how the world’s faiths view the Almighty. You can use it as a

high-level roadmap to identify things you want to explore further. There are plenty of detours and day trips from which to choose. For the spontaneous or experiential personality type, this will be a lot of fun. “Hey honey, what say we visit that temple across town this weekend?” Treat it as you would a visit to an ethnic grocery store. No matter what your background, there is much to experience that you have never tasted.

For the goal-oriented personality, this can also be the most frustrating stage of the spiritual journey, and it is right here at the beginning that he or she may stall out. There is simply too much to analyze for a good decision to be made, the results don’t come quickly enough for our get-it-done-yesterday culture, and the return on investment is unknown. If you are one of these, it may take some god-sized dynamite to get you moving in the spiritual direction. God has a way of exploding into everyone’s life from time to time, and it is much better to start building up those spiritual muscles before they are needed. And really, process can be fun.

This book provides information and ideas to help you, but it is no substitute for getting a real experience of the various faiths. After all, theology always follows from experience just as scientific theory follows from observation. The writers of the sacred scriptures all had encounters with the supernatural. They were no different from us. So get exploring. This chapter suggests some ways that people get started.

### **Read the sacred texts**

It is usually best to begin by reading a sampling of the world’s sacred scriptures. These will tell you a great deal about how each faith sees God and how we are to relate to him. When you find particularly helpful passages that you want to study in more detail, make use of Internet web sites that offer multiple translations of verses from the *Holy Bible*, *Qur’an*, and other documents. The structures of many ancient languages convey thoughts more than they do discrete words, and they can be difficult to fully grasp outside the original tongue.

It will never be possible to read even a fraction of the world’s spiritual literature, but don’t think you need to. Sample a bite of each

and see how it settles inside of you. If your spirit is left with restless indigestion, abandon that part of the buffet and move on to another.

Understanding the sacred writings of any single major faith alone is a life-long investment. Most of us will never have the opportunity to study them as much as we would like, and we often find ourselves digging lots of shallow holes rather than deeply in one place. It is easy to take things out of context or miss important principles if we focus narrowly on a few scriptures without seeing the broad context in which they appear. Students of religious writings look for the “full counsel of God” when searching out what he is saying about a subject. They consider the context of the times, the culture of the society, and the personal agenda of the writer. No scripture stands alone. Each new revelation assumes an understanding of those that came before and lays groundwork for more to come.

You will derive two benefits from your reading. First, you will gain a good sense of those things worthy of investing extra time, and those things that do not merit further study. Second, you will get a sense of the spiritual elements that are common among belief systems, as well as those that differ.

Your focus should be on getting to know the supernatural personalities recognized by each faith. These gods presumably defined the faith in the first place. Get to know the author and you will better understand his book.

- How is God described?
- Does his personality change from place to place or across time?
- How does he relate to us? Is he personal or distant? Does he see you as an acquaintance, friend, or dearly loved family member?
- What does he want from us in this life or the afterlife? What does he reward or punish? Is he clear about it?
- Does he distinguish between good and evil, or love and hate?
- What is his track record in keeping promises? Can you trust him?
- What must we do to get his attention generally, and his help in times of trouble?

Use the principles of religious belief that were suggested in the first part of this book when considering the spiritual literature.

Appreciate the rhythmic writing of the Vedas and the songs of the Psalmists. There is an artistic richness in these works that is easily overlooked. Just as magnificent buildings were erected to honor the gods of the various faiths, so too is the literature a work of divine beauty.

**Seek out godly people**

Visit a mosque, synagogue, church, or temple. There are several reasons for this suggestion. First, it is a place to learn about aspects of a faith and its doctrine that you will not find readily accessible in the sacred texts. Second, you will get a sense of whether people follow that faith out of personal choice or as a part of community culture. Third, supernatural manifestations sometimes occur in group meetings, bearing powerful witness to the presence of God.

Get to know some believers over coffee and conversation. God knows each of us individually, and reveals himself in different ways. I love to hear the testimonies of people from various faiths as they talk about their journey and the various ways God shows up in their lives. Don't hesitate to ask them questions, since most people love to tell their tale.

- How did you arrive at your faith? What is the story of your spiritual journey?
- Does the doctrine give you peace and assurance about life in this world? What about after this life?
- What have you seen or experienced of God?
- How has your faith changed you?

Look for a living faith that people internalize and make a real part of their everyday lives. Pay attention when people want to tell you what has made them healthy and joyful. Look for God in the hearts of people who want to serve others before themselves.

There should never be anything intimidating about visiting a place of worship or attending a prayer meeting the first time. Be clear with your host that you want to quietly observe and they will be happy to let you sit unobtrusively out of the way. No one will judge you for not singing, reciting the correct liturgy, or kneeling properly.

Even seasoned spiritual leaders observe quietly and respectfully when they are in a new spiritual setting.

The first time I visited a Sikh temple (*Gurdwara*), I was amazed at the kindness shown a visitor. After removing my shoes, washing up, and donning a head-covering, I was admitted to the main meeting hall where readings, prayers, and singing ushered the participant into a place of meditative contemplation. There was no rush to do anything. It was just an opportunity to be around others seeking God's grace. From the friends I found there came a richer understanding of the culture, history, and doctrine that makes up Sikhism. Whether a Christian service, Muslim prayer time, or native sweat-lodge, each will expose you to how people see God and his grace.

A word of caution is appropriate here. Some faiths and cultures are more ecstatic than others. As you explore new corners of man's spiritual world, do not follow the path of emotion when seeking truth or understanding. Most faiths that believe in a knowable God agree that he honors a person's heart over mind and emotions. Ecstatic activity is not always authentic evidence of the presence of the Great Spirit, although he does sometimes show up in unusual ways.

**Ask God to show you truth**

Above all, ask God to set up the circumstances each day that will allow you to encounter his truth. It is my experience that God loves to answer that request and will put events and people in your path that will be of help.

I love those who love me; And those who diligently  
seek me will find me.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 8:17]

If you have been exposed to the mind of God through reading the sacred scriptures, then you will begin to see his fingerprints on your day. It will also draw you closer to the things that are on the All-Father's heart.

Pay attention if you have particularly vivid or symbolic dreams. It is in Alpha and Theta sleep that your mind is quiet enough to

allow your spirit to speak clearly, but awake enough to pay attention to what it is saying. For years I have kept a pad of paper by my bed to capture insights that come in the night. It may be helpful to look into dream interpretation, but I have found that the symbols that appear in your dreams will have unique meaning for you, and likely will not be interpreted the same way by others.

Get away into creation and sit on a mountain or by the ocean alone for a few days. Don't allow anything electronic to trespass on this time. Let the Spirit speak to you through the voice of nature. Solitude and quiet are wonderful for improving your spiritual hearing. The ultimate revelations of truth will come to you directly from the Great Revealer if you are willing to be still and listen.

### ==== **Relationship** ====

My wife and I know a woman who discovered in an interesting way that she had a true relationship with God. She had long struggled with hurts in her life and nurtured them with food, as so many of us do. Her physical state began deteriorating along with her hope in life until she one day realized that she was trying to eat herself to death. From that place of despair she cried out to an unknown God for help, and was surprised to hear a loving voice in her spirit say, "Make good choices". People just know when God has spoken. It is an unmistakable feeling, and this gave her the conviction to start making important lifestyle changes. She began to lose weight and feel better about herself.

One day she went out to lunch with a group of friends who decided to go to a restaurant serving barbequed food. This woman struggled to find something on the menu that would be a healthy choice and could find nothing. Finally she selected the best option she could find, a BBQ chicken sandwich laden with all the sauces and trimmings. Not wanting to

cause a scene with the waiter, she figured she would discretely scrape off the extras. Lunch arrived a short while later, each dish bearing the usual complement of fats and calories. As the waiter set a chicken sandwich down in front of her, this woman was overcome. Alone among all the sandwiches, hers had only a simple piece of meat and a bun. She could not believe that the Creator of the universe would show such compassion over so small a thing.

Contemplating a personal relationship with the Supreme Being that created the universe is, frankly, a little intimidating. Yet, if you can accept the thesis that there is a knowable Creator-God revealed in the oral traditions of many indigenous peoples and the writings of the Hebrews, then you can have confidence in knowing much about who he is and what he wants. You have assurance that if you reach out to him, he will meet you wherever you are.

Forming a relationship with the Creator is much easier when we understand that he has the attributes of a loving Father because many of us can relate to that picture. Place yourself in the role of a parent caring for a newborn infant. Although the child can eat, it is utterly incapable of providing its own nourishment. Our relationship with the Creator is similar. Without him feeding us we dry up spiritually. The parent experiences overwhelming love for the infant, as God does for those he creates. The parent watches carefully over the infant to ensure it stays away from danger. Likewise, our Creator Father is on watch, and willing to step in and help when we cry out. The infant knows next to nothing of the life experiences or wisdom of its parent. It only knows where to find love.

We cannot hope to become successful spiritual beings in the afterlife to come if we have not allowed God to mature our spirit while in this one.

As parents, we often choose not to immediately gratify a child's desire so as to teach trust, obedience, patience, and right motive. God may also choose not to immediately answer our prayers so we learn the same spiritual disciplines. The Creator wants a relationship

with us based on the same things we desire from our children: love, honor, attention, and obedience.

Our lives are not all about us, and God is not a heavenly automated teller machine. We were created to bring pleasure to the Divine Father according to his eternal plan for having a family that has freely chosen his parenting. Loving and honoring the Father means doing the things he asks of us. In return, he promises to bless our lives in this world and the next.

Having a relationship with God is similar to having a loving relationship with another person. It is a thing of the heart. As every married couple knows, relationships need care and feeding, mutual respect, and sacrifices that prefer the other person. Most of us need to mature a bit before we really learn how to put the other person's needs first, and it is the same in our dealings with God. We need to put aside our fear of losing control, of being manipulated, or of being relegated to a life of godly servitude. Spiritual maturity understands that it is when we are able to freely bless God without expecting anything in return that he often gives us our greatest gifts.

Among the many promises God gave to the Hebrews were health, long life, joy, many children, freedom from want, and protection from their enemies. The greatest blessing, however, was his commitment to remain in their very midst. We see this during their desert wanderings when the Glory of the Lord settled on the Tabernacle, gave them a cloud covering on hot days, and guided their travels with fire at night. Throughout the scriptures, whenever God's presence appeared among the people they experienced blessing and goodness. These promises were conditional, however. When God's covenantal people turned away from him, his presence departed and the people experienced hardship. This is true for all of us individually as well.

You may wonder why a god that wants a personal relationship with us doesn't make Himself as obvious today as he supposedly did to the Hebrews back then.

If you are so real and present then let's talk right  
now mano-y-mano.  
And while you're at it, let's see you perform a few  
miracles!

Be careful what you wish for! Putting aside for a moment divine human incarnations such as Jesus or Krishna, God has no choice but to communicate with us *spirit-y-spirit*. This is because lawlessness (us) cannot co-exist in the same place with perfect holiness (him). If you had a face-to-face encounter with God in this earthly realm, you would be blown clean out of your unholy flesh. None of us comes close to having enlightened holiness.

But He [YHWH] said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

[*Holy Bible*. Exodus 33:20]

God speaks through our spirit in a quiet, gentlemanly way. It is not that he is silent. It is that we cannot hear very well. His voice is clear enough when we learn to recognize it. If we cannot or will not pay attention, then God will sometimes use a megaphone in the form of rearranging things so we experience a little desperation. He does this to teach us to reach beyond ourselves and our natural world.

Let’s say you have begun studying the scriptures and have read a bit about God’s nature and attributes. Now you would like to see if God will begin revealing himself to you. Here are some principles for establishing a spiritual relationship with your Creator.

### **It all starts with prayer**

We use the word prayer to describe two-way communication between God and humans. It is a form of meditation in which we are being intentional about connecting with God. Sometimes it is active, as when we are formulating requests or presenting offerings of praise. It is passive when we are listening for impressions God is making on our mind and spirit. We explored some of the techniques for prayer earlier.

Communication is central to any relationship, and this is no different with the Divine. It just seems a bit harder because we cannot see God’s facial expressions or hear his words with our physical senses. Be assured that he hears us, however. In fact, the scriptures say that he knows our thoughts before we speak them. As

for our part, we have to trust he has heard us and learn to listen for his answers in a different way. God speaks through our human spirit, which we usually sense as a “knowing” inside us. He may also speak through our conscience or intuition. We get a “sixth sense” about something, the origin of which is often unclear.

Hearing God’s voice requires that we quiet our mind. The spirit and mind are two completely different things, neither one of which is located in any specific physical organ. Our mind guides our activities and includes our thoughts, emotions, identity, and sense of self. The spirit is our telegraph line to the invisible spirit realm, and the root of our true nature. I suspect that our minds transcend physical death along with our spirit, but I cannot prove that. People who have had near-death experiences sometimes return with vivid detail about events occurring while they were clinically “dead”, including encounters with a bright and loving light, and sensations of movement. They are clearly aware of their surroundings, experience emotional responses, and retain the experience in their memory. Some do so while their physical brain is registering no electrical activity whatsoever.

God will tell you if your request is contrary to his best plan for you. Asking for money may not be consistent with building the kind of character you will need in eternity. Asking God to punish another person would not be as well received as pleading that the person become more loving. Listen for God’s voice in your spirit as you pray. One of the principles followed by very prayerful people is to spend at least as much time listening *to* God as you spend talking *at* him. Knowing in advance that God approves of what you are asking gives you greater faith for your request.

You can go one step further and pose the question, “What do you want me to do?” This will open the door to a whole new level of relationship. Admittedly this is hard because you have now put God’s will for your life above your own. You have taken the place of a servant. Why do this? We do it because God is an immeasurably better master than you or me. The quality of your life will be dramatically improved serving a perfect master instead of your imperfect self.

Choosing what is good for you spiritually over the things you desire in the natural is known to Buddhists as “detachment”, and

to Christians as “dying to self”. It is Confucius’ solution to the problem of frustration when reality falls short of expectation. When our expectation is spiritual rather than natural then natural events cannot frustrate us. We are no longer battling our way up the same ladder as everyone else. We have begun to climb a different ladder to a higher place, one on which there is no competition.

It is in this place of detachment and peace that our mind is quieted and we can most clearly hear God’s spiritual voice. It is in this place that God’s message can arrive like a clear trumpet call on a still night, without filter or background noise. There is no doubting you have a relationship with God when you start perceiving him speaking to you.

### **Learn to discern**

One of the reasons we have focused so heavily on the character and nature of God is to help you recognize his voice. There are other voices out there because the spirit world is a busy place.

Nearly all faiths recognize the existence of both good and evil personalities. The monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all assume that the benevolent spirits are those that have made a choice to serve the Creator’s purposes. The evil spirits are those that have decided to rebel against such authority and to make themselves into gods. There appears to be a tug of war between good and evil not just on earth, but in the spirit realm as well. They are competing both for our allegiance and for the territory we are stewarding on behalf of the Creator.

I personally believe in the reality of the spirit world because I have had encounters with spiritual beings. One morning while lying half awake, I mentally asked God how to pray about an issue. A voice spoke into my left ear the single word, “Don’t!” It was grating and metallic with an edge to it, but there was no mistaking that it was a distinct voice. You can imagine how surprised I was, especially after opening my eyes and looking around to find no one there. My first response was to think, “But Lord, you tell us to pray about everything.” In that instant I had a *knowing* in my spirit that said without a voice, “that wasn’t me”. A few days later, again while lying in bed, another voice spoke audibly in the same ear. This one was sweet and

musical, and said a single lyrical word I did not recognize. Again I had a *knowing* in my spirit, this time saying “Now you know the sound of my kingdom”.

Usually you will not hear an audible voice. Those were the only two times I ever have. God generally speaks through the *knower* of your human spirit. Other spirit beings cannot imitate this communication. They can give other manifestations and can even play games with your mind, but they cannot speak as God alone can speak through your spirit.

You will know a spiritual message is authentic if it meets the following criteria:

- It *feels right* and leaves you peaceful and hopeful.
- It gives you a message that is entirely consistent with God’s nature and his law.
- It encourages you to do things that honor God and other people. It will never encourage hurting another.

This is where discernment (insight and evaluation) enters in.

A married man said to me once that he was sure that God had told him to get a divorce and marry another woman whom he had been seeing for some time. It sounded as though he was quite enthusiastic and confident about having received this divine advice. I told him that while I honor prophetic insight, we would need to check it against God’s written law. After all, if the character of the All-Father does not change over time, the ancient scriptures should be in complete agreement with current revelation. I don’t recall him being very excited about that idea.

I happen to use the Hebrew *Torah* as my guide to spiritual law, and it does say there that having relations with another woman while still married carries some heavy negative consequences. As well, by dishonoring his current wife, his actions violate the basic law of love that underpins nearly every world faith. I encouraged the gentleman to go back to God and ask for confirmation that he had heard his divine advice correctly. Whether what he heard was simple lust or the whispered prodding of a demon doesn’t matter. He needed to

apply some spiritual discernment if he wanted to avoid offending the Almighty.

At different points on your journey, spiritual restlessness within you will rise up or settle down. Use that feeling as an umpire of truth. Do what “feels right”, but don’t confuse this with doing what “feels good”. One is spiritual, the other fleshly, and your journey needs to be a spiritual one since in a few short years your flesh will no longer matter.

Rationalization can also play a role in obscuring spiritual insight. We tend to see the things we want or expect. It is easy to reason our way to a truth that is convenient for us, but God may want something very different. We have to make a conscious effort to put our judgments aside and wait for his opinion. Your head may want to say “yes”, but if you have that nagging feeling inside that it is not right, go with the “no”.

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 10:16]

### **Ask God for his Ruach**

So far we have spoken of the mind and spirit that are central to every person. We have also spoken of the Sovereign Creator God and other good and evil spiritual personalities that are generally beyond our physical perception. There is another, important personality revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures who also makes a big entrance in the Christian *Holy Bible*. This is the *Holy Spirit*, who is also known as the *Holy Ghost*, *Spirit of God*, *Ruach HaKodesh* (Hebrew), and *Pneuma* (Greek).

Whereas the spirit in a person is the gateway for supernatural connection, the Holy Spirit is the one that empowers a person with supernatural abilities. Consider the following from the Hebrew Scriptures:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. “I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all {kinds of} craftsmanship.”

*[Holy Bible. Exodus 31:1-5]*

And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him. He took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened; The oracle of him who hears the words of God, Who sees the vision of the Almighty, Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered...”

*[Holy Bible. Numbers 24:2-4]*

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

*[Holy Bible. Deuteronomy 34:9]*

When he [Samson] came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

*[Holy Bible. Judges 15:14]*

We see here spirit-enabled gifts of craftsmanship, prophecy (oracles), wisdom and authority, and physical strength.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Holy Spirit usually appears in or on a person for a relatively short period of time. In rare cases, visitations were more permanent, as in the case of King David.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 Samuel 16]

Jesus brought a message of repentance and reconciliation with God, and that message was authenticated by supernatural signs of healing, feeding multitudes, raising the dead, calming the natural elements, and prophecy. Christians believe that he was permanently empowered by the same Holy Spirit given to King David, and that we have access to this same Holy Spirit today. Pentecost is the celebration of the day God's Spirit became permanently available to all persons who desire such a relationship.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from Heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

[*Holy Bible*. Acts 2:1-4]

During Pentecost the Holy Spirit manifested its presence by enabling a group of people to speak in human languages (*tongues*) they had never learned. People have also been known to speak in

spiritual tongues that have no origin in human linguistics. In this latter case it is the Holy Spirit praying through a person back to the Creator in one of his own heavenly languages. Interpretation of one person's spiritual tongue is sometimes given to another person by the same Holy Spirit.

A well-known passage from the Hebrew Scriptures predicts a day when God sovereignly pours out his Spirit on all of us. My suspicion is that God's Spirit calls on every generation, and that this explains the spiritual restlessness we feel at various times.

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

[*Holy Bible*. Joel 2:28-29]

It is clear then that the Holy Spirit is an enabler of works and giver of wisdom that supercharges the spirit within you. If you are seeking to know God at a deeper level, asking for his Holy Spirit to come upon you would be a great way to start. The Holy Spirit is your best partner in your spiritual journey, and the one who can lead you into all truth. In fact, he is referred to in the monotheistic scriptures by many names descriptive of his purpose:

- Spirit of God
- Spirit of Love
- Spirit of Judgment
- Spirit of Burning
- Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding
- Spirit of Counsel and Might
- Spirit of Knowledge and of the Respect of the Lord
- Spirit of Justice
- Spirit of Truth
- Spirit of Grace and Supplication

- Spirit of Holiness
- Spirit of Gentleness
- Spirit of Faith
- Spirit of Glory
- Spirit of Power
- Spirit of Prophecy
- Spirit of a Sound Mind

I have seen the Holy Spirit do amazing things in unusual settings. In between prayer rounds in a Native American sweat-lodge ceremony one of the elders pointed to a first-time visitor and said “This man has something to do. Trust him”. The visitor had planned to remain silent, but on hearing such permission granted him said, “I believe I am to pray for the sick man here”. When the visitor touched the man and began praying, it was as if the entire circle was plugged into an electrical outlet. At the conclusion of the ceremony the sick man gave his healing stone to the visitor. This was an example of the spiritual gifts of prophecy and healing both operating in proper order.

Receiving something from God is often referred to as a *baptism*. The best known is *water baptism*, which in its various forms is symbolic of washing away the old sinful flesh and receiving from God a clean spiritual life. People around the world and in many faiths immerse themselves in rivers and oceans as a statement of their desire to be clean before God. This is sometimes also called the *baptism of repentance*.

The Christian scriptures say that when Jesus returned to heaven after his death he made available a *baptism of the Holy Spirit* to any of his followers that asked. In this case we receive the Holy Spirit as a help to become the kind of person desired by God and modeled by Jesus. The proof that we have received this baptism is our improved character (fruits of the spirit). Some followers of Jesus also receive a separate *baptism of fire*. This is a special empowerment to perform supernatural signs which validate the evangelistic message about God. Such gifts include prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues unknown to the speaker, and even raising the dead back to life. People with these gifts are said to carry special *spiritual authority*.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic wings of evangelical Christianity in particular experience such baptisms around the world today.

“As for me, I [John the Baptist] baptize you with water for repentance, but He [Jesus] who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 3:11]

Finally, don't try to force God's hand. He is happy to grant spiritual gifts and revelation of himself when he is good and ready, and when he knows that you are good and ready as well. He is the master potter and it takes time to mold something beautiful out of simple clay. Nevertheless, be persistent about asking. God is faithful to answer and often does so in surprising ways that we do not expect.

### **Find a spiritual mentor**

The spiritual journey will have its difficult and frustrating times, and there are many pathways to explore. It will be much easier to discover your God if you have a mentor to guide you who has wrestled through the same questions you face. It should be someone who has lived enough of life, experienced enough pain, and waited through enough long periods of uncertainty for wisdom and spiritual maturity to take root. You need this person to explore with you your thoughts and decisions about spiritual matters, and how they should impact your earthly actions.

You may have noticed in how many settings the wise and experienced take on a responsibility for mentoring those coming after them. It is built into social structures everywhere, including businesses cultivating future leaders, craft guilds apprenticing new artisans, patriarchs passing on family traditions, and so on. There are not very many circumstances in which you can completely “break the mold” and create a new paradigm shift all by yourself. It is hard to “win” as a lone wolf in this world since living peacefully in the same sandbox with others requires cooperation, and getting help requires helping

others. All of the great faiths multiplied their following through the principles of discipleship and mentoring. Each master would teach his followers how to teach the generation after them. Without this principle, a faith could not outlive its founder.

Many sects of the Far Eastern faiths believe that every person needs a guru. They believe that when we are prepared to be good students God sends the perfect teacher. They also believe that it is helpful to learn from the lives of those people that are incarnations (avatars) of God himself. Here is a partial list of individuals just from the Indian subcontinent who have over the years declared themselves to be such incarnations:

- Chaitanya (1486-1534) Avatar of Krishna
- Ayya Vaikundar (1809-1851) Avatar of Narayana
- Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) Avatar of Rama and Krishna in one body
- Shirdi Sai Baba (18??-1918) Avatar of Dattatreya
- Sathya Sai Baba (1929-present) Avatar of Shiva, Shakti and Krishna
- Mother Meera (1960-present) Avatar of Adipara-Shakti
- Narayani Amma (1976-present) Avatar of Narayani

It is difficult in fast-paced western culture to take a time-out for anything. Nevertheless, consider submitting yourself to a season of spiritual development that includes doing the things that a more spiritually mature person thinks will be helpful for you. During this time, make your relationship with God your first priority. Teachers are there to guide you and keep you from getting lost in a spiritual rabbit warren. Seek out this guidance. Ask the All-Father for it. There is someone out there God has prepared to help you along.

Be humble. You have no idea what you do not yet know. Speaking for myself, the closer I get to God the more I realize how limited my faculties really are, and how utterly incapable I am of putting the Creator of everything into a box of any size. Those that do not know God seem to have an easy time describing exactly what he requires

and precisely what he will say. The more I study, pray, and witness miracles, the bigger and more amazing God becomes.

I have had the benefit of several mentors at different stages of my journey, each of which encouraged my walk in different ways. I think that is how God works with his earnest children. As soon as you master one thing and start to get comfortable, he moves you on to another and challenges you again. Mentors are an important part of understanding what is happening to you on the journey.

### **Affiliate with others who share your beliefs**

We have mentioned how meeting people of faith in various settings will help you discover more about how the world sees the Creator. We have also noted that mentors can help guide you on the path to spiritual maturity. There is another way in which people help you in developing your relationship with God. It is called fellowship.

Human beings prefer doing things they see others doing. Call it herd instinct, groupthink, or something else. The fact is we gain confidence if we see others doing things in the same way. Just observe investor behavior in the equity markets. If a stock is going up fast we jump in to “catch the wave”, often riding momentum regardless of the underlying fundamentals. If the stock subsequently crashes, then we take solace in the fact that “everyone else made the same mistake”.

It is no different in spiritual pursuits because human beings are wired for community. Faith strengthens faith. Our pursuit of things spiritual is reinforced if others are taking the same journey. It is good for a small group to share ideas, exchange stories, and hold one another accountable for staying on the path. When one is discouraged, another can be an encourager. The next week they may find that their roles have switched. But together they press on experiencing more as a group than any one member would possibly do alone.

It is for this same reason that larger groups affiliate around a church or temple. They gather periodically with others to fellowship, study, worship, and serve together. There are many denominations and sects from which to choose. Such affiliation is a strong predictor of whether a person sticks with the spiritual disciplines.

Now, you may be one of those good people that would rather pursue God apart from church. You've done that and it didn't work out. God is certainly found at the beach and in your car, so why is a weekly temple meeting important to your journey? The answer in short is that lone wolves get spiritually devoured. You need to surround yourself with other people who are learning and experiencing alongside you. You may not need a formal congregational setting, but make sure you are part of a fellowship somewhere.

**Practice believing that God is real**

An important part of making any change is living as if the change were already complete. Now is the time to begin walking through each day in the knowledge that you were created by a God that loves you and wants you to know him. As the old saying goes, it is much better to live your life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than to live as if there is no God and die to find out there is.

Being childlike before God is an important spiritual principle. A young child needs its parent, wants to be with him or her all the time, and constantly seeks the parent's attention and approval. It is no different for the All-Father. He wants us to talk with him, celebrate our relationship with him, and let him lead us where we need to go.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 18:1-4, NKJ]

If you allow it, God will open doors for you to experience the spiritual. Go with the flow as long as things feel safe and peaceful. Move on if things feel oppressive, exploitive, or dangerous. Not

every spiritual experience will come from God. The true God loves his children and wants them to experience peace.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

[*Holy Bible*. Psalms 23:1-2]

Expect special things to happen, and insights to begin appearing in unexpected places. Look for God wherever you go – you’ll begin seeing evidence of his gentle Holy Spirit working in people and circumstances all around you. People of faith often experience wonderful serendipity and coincidence. Trust your inner voice to guide you. Give thanks to your Creator when good things happen, and look for his lessons in less desirable outcomes.

Consider giving little love gifts to God. Every religion believes that the Creator appreciates our offering a piece of ourselves on his behalf. This is not because he needs our gifts; it is because he loves relationship and gift-giving is part of relationship. This does not have to take the form of elaborate sacrificial rituals or long recitations of liturgy. When we offer our time, prayers, money, and skills it is out of appreciation for the relationship God has with us. To a parent, there are no rituals required for a child to draw close. The child is not required to genuflect three times before crawling into dad’s lap for protection and warmth. But a parent’s heart is touched when a child presents a hand-made birthday card or a collection of flowers specially selected from the lot out back. The All-Father also appreciates our gifts of love, and enjoys giving us gifts as well. If we are not experiencing enough of God’s love, it might be good to offer him a bit more of our own.

### **Renewal**

So now you and the Creator have begun a two-way dialogue. Your relationship with the Divine is becoming more fruitful and you are on your way to a most exciting journey. More than anything else, God wants relationship with his children and is thrilled to receive

their attention. For many people, it is enough to honor God's greatness and to rest in the knowledge of his approval.

For many others, however, God's Spirit begins to inspire a hunger to look beyond the self. We begin wondering about the rest of creation and what part we might play in its improvement. We want to become useful to God, and trusted enough to be given assignments for bettering the world. We read of all the miracles in the scriptures and begin wishing we would see them in our lives. When you make a decision to grow into spiritual *service*, you really grab the attention of the Creator of the universe. The most powerful, omnipotent, and omniscient entity of all is suddenly hanging on your every prayer!

For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

[*Holy Bible. 2 Chronicles 16:9*]

If you are serious about wanting to partner with God in his great plan for creation, then you will now enter a season of healing, training, and overcoming the bad habits you have picked up over time. If you allow it, God will begin doing a work in you that will utterly change who you are. You will drop the baggage of bitterness, disappointment, and sorrow. The world will seem a brighter place, you will see the good rather than the bad in things, and your personal relationships will be transformed.

If your life has been a mess, this is the time to wipe it clean and start over. God has always been willing to put the past behind and see us in a new way. It is a heart issue. When our heart is pure, God sees the rest of us that way as well. Of course, there will be some hard work along the way, and you should not expect an overnight change — although I have seen it happen! You may have to let go of old hurts that have begun to define who you are. The paradox of holding onto things that have victimized you is your continued bondage to the violation. It is better to let it go, no matter how unfair it seems. This is where God is so good at stepping in to help. His

Spirit will guide you and bring peace, and God will put in your path other people who can offer earthly help.

You will also have the joy of having spiritually initiated assignments put in your path. You may become more aware of other people who need a comforting word or kind gesture. You might see a book that your *knower* says would be good for you to read. Perhaps you have settled into a church/synagogue/temple/mosque that offers opportunities for volunteerism. Whatever it is, embrace the opportunity to start reaching out in love and touching others. Love is the currency of heaven and it is out of the place of compassion that the supernatural gifts manifest most often.

The most important and powerful assignment is prayer for others. Prayer moves the hand of God to action, and there is no more potent force in the universe. As you pray with compassion for someone (in person or from a distance), challenge God to show himself strong on behalf of that person's need. Expect his intervention and thank him in advance in faith for accomplishing the task.

Here then are some principles for living right, obtaining God's favor, and making yourself useful to him.

### **Get Tight with God**

Entering God's service and participating as a member of his team first requires settling the issue of reconciliation with him. Remember what we said about lawless flesh standing in the presence of a holy God? Each of the faiths has different criteria for salvation and a different hope for the afterlife. However you choose to make this real in your life, remember that to serve the Creator as his friend means first being his friend.

The God we have been exploring is always willing to meet us wherever we are in life. It is up to us to draw close to him. There are many ways to do this, and it just depends on how you individually like to get spiritually connected. For many of us, performing spiritual disciplines like fasting and reciting liturgical prayers helps to keep us in a holy mindset. For others it is allowing God's love for the world to pour out through them in unselfish acts of service. Yet others are thrilled to just praise and thank him throughout the day. The one thing we all need to do on this journey, however, is to learn

as much as we can about God and his ways from the sacred scriptures. It helps us keep our focus on him daily.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

[*Holy Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*]

The other part of being God's friend is to live in the holy way he wants you to live. If we have committed to the way of holiness, then we have chosen the ultimate power team, captained by the Supreme Being of the universe. This means, however, that we have also chosen to enter into a covenant with God to obey his laws in exchange for his blessings. The same list of basic commandments given in the Hebrew *Torah* is shared by the other major monotheistic faiths. They reflect eternal principles that allow creation to operate as it was designed. We would not know what disobedience was if we did not have a standard of holy law against which to compare our behavior.

God's holiness vastly exceeds our own. The most holy human being is still a long way from perfection. As an illustration, fill two clear glasses with water and put them side by side. They represent perfectly clean holiness; ours and God's. Now put a few drops of food coloring in one of the glasses and stir it in. You have added just a tiny percentage of sin and rebellion. Now how does our holiness compare with that of God? What would it look like if each day we made one selfish decision for every loving one? What if we went an entire day without chatting once with God and honoring the relationship?

The point, dear reader, is that no amount of prayer, almsgiving, or burnt sacrifices can begin to close the gap. Can you imagine a perfectly holy God setting a threshold of 10% holiness so at least a few of us can get into heaven? And if life tossed us some bad turns early on and we got a slow start, would he make an exception and lower the threshold to 8% because we tried hard? Can you imagine

the throne room of heaven in all its grandeur filled with folks that are 90% dirty?

This for me is the point where the law of karma breaks down. None of us can ever be righteous enough to come before a perfectly holy All-Father, and none can ever be good enough to keep from violating his spiritual laws. We can never begin to approach a standard of goodness or enlightenment that would tip the karmic scales sufficiently in our favor. I have had to bow before my Creator and admit that I have broken his laws and am utterly unholy. I have no hope whatever of deserving heaven unless he is willing to help me. A well-worn Native American prayer is:

Great Spirit, I am a pitiful human being. Help me keep my hands clean so I will not have to stand before you in shame.

The good news is that our Creator understands this, and does not hold it against us so long as we are willing to do our part. He has put in place a bridge of grace that allows any of us to be counted righteous enough to cross the chasm of separation. He has done the hard work offering us reconciliation. It is up to us to take advantage of his grace by showing God we are serious about living as his people.

I discovered relationship with my Creator when I felt true sorrow for the many ways I constantly disappoint him. It became real to me when I understood the honor God really wants from me, and when I could grasp the two-way covenant he was offering. God's laws were helpful at first to know what behaviors God considered holy and unholy. Some really surprised me. I used them as a checklist for getting rid of willful sin. As I matured spiritually, I began to increasingly trust God to show me daily what he wanted. I committed to do what he asked and change what he willed.

The best part is that by being obedient, I can now hold God accountable for getting me into Heaven. It is no longer my own effort that does it.

That being said, I have accepted a two-way covenant in which he tells me which laws to follow, which assignments to undertake, where to live, how to spend my money, and how to pray. You cannot

have it both ways. Either God is in charge of getting you into heaven, or he is not, and you don't. The fact that he would even care enough to take on a pitiful case like me is testimony to his unimaginable love and grace.

What then of Muhammad, Buddha, the Gurus and other human personalities who each proclaim centrality in their faiths for attaining God's favor? Can you find salvation in God apart from his Prophet or Messiah? This is a choice you must make about what you believe, but I hope we can agree that any authentic representative of the Creator will live and teach in ways that are completely consistent with his character and the revelation given in the scriptures you have come to know. If so, then feel free to follow their teachings. Just remember that any prophet or avatar from God is given to us as a result of his grace. The focus should always remain on the All-Father, even as we honor his messenger(s).

### **Follow the rules**

We have just concluded that being a good, law-abiding person still leaves you a long way from God's standard of holiness. It is only by his grace that we have a hope for entry to heaven. So what is the importance of focusing on God's laws at all? Here are a couple of thoughts.

First, this is about the heart. Doing what the Creator asks of us is an outward sign of our choice to align with his holy will for us and for his creation. It is a demonstration of our childlike love for our parent. We do it because we want to please him, not because he is grading us on a heavenly entrance exam. As a parent, we do not expect perfect obedience from a young child; we want love. And later, when the child is older, we want obedience that results from that love, not from fear of consequences. God looks at us in the same way, except that his love for us is deeper, his patience greater, and his correction more merciful than we humans can ever imagine. The Creator wants to extend to you the grace and mercy you need to overcome the holiness barrier. He also wants to see a heart that desires righteousness.

Second, every people group was given some form of guidance by the Creator regarding how to live. Cultures everywhere have a set

of rules that regulate the orderly function of society. They generally evolved over time as societies discovered what worked and what did not, but I suspect that there are common spiritual roots that go back further than human government. We have seen that many of the Laws of Living were given to help us exist well with the Laws of Nature that regulate our universe. Part of the purpose of the Creator's law is to ensure that we can live in harmony with his creation.

Following the rules is not for God's benefit; it is for ours.

It is notable that most of the human founders of the great faiths kept closely to the laws and traditions of their societies. Gautama Buddha disagreed with the Hindu Brahmanic priests. Martin Luther publicly posted his objections to the excesses of the Catholic Church. Jesus railed against the abuses of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Confucius tried to change the behavior of the political and spiritual leadership in China. Yet each operated "inside the system", honored the spiritual laws passed down to them, and faithfully practiced the traditions into which they were born. They never wanted to destroy the very things they were trying to improve.

Confucius sacrificed to the dead, as if they were present. He sacrificed to the spirits, as if the spirits were present. The Master said, "I consider my not being present at the sacrifice, as if I did not sacrifice."....The Master said, "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray."

*[Analects of Confucius]*

So if obedience to divine law is important, how do you decide which rules to follow? The Jewish *Torah* alone has over 600 stipulations. How could one person ever master them all? The fact is that we can't, and the Creator knows this. In the case of the tribes of Israel, each was given responsibility for some portion of God's commandments. No one group had to perform them all. Likewise, there are some commands we are all expected to follow, (starting with the Big 10), and others that we probably need not, such as sacrificing animals. God's Spirit will put on your heart those things

God wants from you. Your conscience will witness to what is right and not. Trust the All-Father to make it clear, and pair up with a more mature spiritual mentor who can help guide you.

God could have created a race of automatons if he wanted people to perform rituals all day long. Instead he created us to love him freely, and gave us free choice for that purpose. If he is in fact a loving parent that wants the best for his children, then he desires that every one of them will choose to honor and love him back. If he wants us to be successful in our journey, then he will help us gain the required insights and make the right decisions. He will make available everything we need to be successful if we will just take advantage of the offer.

This is not to say that rituals are a bad thing. More often than not, we begin our journey by performing the traditional activities of our chosen faith such as praying with a Rosary, singing or chanting liturgies, and reading books recommended by our spiritual mentors. We learn the laws God gave us and practice obeying them as a life-style choice. We must internalize spiritual disciplines if we are to grow from a solid base.

As our journey progresses we serve more, pray more, and start to directly get more individual assignments from God. We may leave behind some of our traditions and begin expressing honor to the Creator in different ways that are more meaningful to us – and to him. This will be heresy for some I know, but I do not think God cares what technique we use to communicate with him. His issue is that we have a real relationship. I believe that is the root of our entrance criteria for heaven, and the greatest predictor of the rewards we will experience when we get there. God will use the foundation of relationship to show you what he wants from you in this life.

### **Go to the spiritual hospital**

We have suggested that God's inherent character is loving and desirous that his children would turn to him as their parent. Nevertheless, it may feel as though your life circumstances could not have been brought about by a loving God. Perhaps you were abused as a child, bankrupted, beaten down by a church, or suffer from a debilitating disease. Maybe you lost a close friend or family

member in a fluke accident and are still angry at God for letting it happen. I understand. I've been through it. I have yelled at God, pleaded with God, and struggled with his seasons of silence. Life has a way of heaping stuff on some people. The simple fact is that we are not living in the Creator's Garden of Eden anymore. We are living in a world that the *Torah* says was turned over long ago to God's adversary and all of us are reaping the consequences.

God doesn't want us to live in pain. He wants us to overcome it.

Developing an overcoming character is part of maturing spiritually. It means bringing your life into alignment with how God wants you to live regardless of life's circumstances. Character is not learned from a book. It accumulates with the bumps and bruises of life. I don't think God engineers loss and pain in our lives, but I do know that he allows things to happen as part of teaching us important lessons that build character. I also think that the deeper our human lives are wounded, the greater our potential for spiritual growth. But we have to choose to be *overcomers* and not *victims*. The orientation of your mindset is the greatest predictor of whether you will emerge victorious.

Spiritual healing is about dealing with the issues in your life that block spiritual maturity. The most important lesson God wants you to learn is how to love others deeply. Only in loss do you come to appreciate what is truly important. He will teach you detachment from things that get in the way of pure love, such as pride, power, and money. And he will ask you to release the hurts and offenses you have experienced from other people. Character building is hard work, but the payoff is freedom from bondage to the things that have stolen your joy and peace.

Naturally this is more easily said than done. Human beings can be incredibly tenacious, and will hold onto things long after they should have let go. God understands that because he created us. His way of dealing with things to which we are too attached is often to take them away. We finally let go when there is nothing left to hold on to.

One of the great contributions made by Gautama Buddha is his clear teaching on detachment. He surmised that the reason people are unhappy is that their reality falls short of their expectations. They

have not accomplished enough or accumulated enough to meet some self-imposed standard. If you can learn not to get invested in these things as measures of success or worth, then you will not experience disappointment. You can be at peace with who you are regardless of the hand you are dealt.

I believe that this process of letting go of the hurts, pride, love of money, or power that define us is the hardest part of the faith walk. We submerge ourselves in the baptism of God, but hold our wallet above the water. We try to tell God he can have all of us, except the thing we idolize. When Muhammad, Moses, and Jesus talked about idolatry, they were not just talking about bowing down to carved figurines. They were talking about anything that we hold onto more dearly than our relationship with our Creator.

God deals with love of money by requiring tithing and almsgiving. When we give the first-fruits of our efforts to others who are more needful than ourselves, we learn both the joy of giving, and detachment from wealth as this world sees it. It also teaches us that we have to plant in faith if we expect to reap God's blessings. I do not agree with "prosperity theologies" that guarantee we will receive financial abundance if we give sacrificially to the church. It is my experience that the blessing God gives us for freely giving of our energy, time, obedience, and money is not necessarily material at all. More likely it is spiritual maturity and authority as well as the fulfillment that comes from blessing others. These are the things that will be of most value in the world to come.

God deals with pride by humbling us, and often does so by disempowering us where we most feel secure. I will guarantee you that coming into honest relationship with God will drive you to your knees in humility. Hopefully the very experience of spiritual connection with the Almighty will give you the humility you need. If not, God will lovingly get you there in other ways. You may know the story of the king of the Babylonian Empire who was struck by God with mental illness for being too proud. He was removed from his throne and lived for a time in the wilds until his mind was once again cleared. On being restored to his position he prayed:

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

[*Holy Bible*. Daniel 4:37]

This was the king of the greatest empire on earth bowing before the king of heaven! It is an extreme example but illustrates the Creator’s dislike for human pride. Pride is exaltation of the self. We are worshiping ourselves above the very Creator who gave us the talents, looks, finances, wisdom, or “luck” we are exalting. It is another form of idolatry that separates us from him. It is fatherly love for God to remove from our lives every block and hindrance that keeps us from spiritual maturity.

The fear of [respect for] the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

[*Holy Bible*. Proverbs 9:10]

God often deals with our hurts by bringing us people who can help us heal. The human spirit is easily wounded by human cruelty and it often takes human love, coupled with godly grace, to cover that hurt. It helps to think of the offenses we have suffered in terms of the ways we have offended our Creator. When we knowingly choose to rebel against his wishes, or ignore him altogether, we are acting like an unfaithful lover or a rebellious child. I believe God actually hurts when we do so. The amazing thing is that many of the world’s scriptures attest to his willingness to forgive and accept us back into his fellowship. That should give us pause to think about similarly forgiving those who have offended us, and releasing what we think of as unfair to the dustbin of history.

The Creator’s parental love will flow through us most perfectly when we are focused outside ourselves and not on our own issues. God is willing and faithful to work these changes in you, but you

must be willing to place yourself under the great physician's knife. When the surgical cuts heal, you are healthier than ever before.

**Live by the Spirit**

The Christian Apostle Paul provides for us a list of behaviors that indicate whether we are allowing God to work freely in our lives. They are divided into behaviors that originate in our sinful flesh, and behaviors that are inspired by God's Spirit.

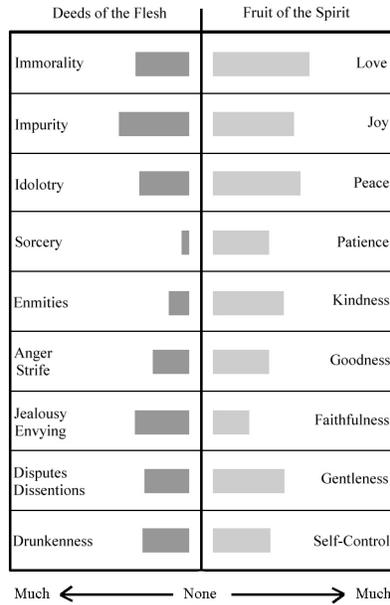
But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

[*Holy Bible*. Galatians 5:18-26]

I call the chart below the *Galatians 5 Fruit-O-Meter*. The upper scale measures how we are doing on Spirit-led behaviors, and the lower scale on fleshly behaviors. There is no particular relationship between the left and right columns, and for simplicity some of the items listed in the scripture have been consolidated.

## Finding the True God

---



What is your score today?

If you keep at it and battle through, you will one day realize that you have become worthy of being called God’s servant. There is a freedom and sense of victory when you have cleaned out the things that are ungodly and *know* that you have become useful. You will begin to hear God’s voice more clearly and have peace and confidence. You will also be on the journey to serving the Creator as a trusted ambassador. It is worth the effort.

### ==== **Faith** ====

Most of the world’s major religions agree that faith and love are the currencies of heaven. Without faith you cannot believe in a Supreme Creator or any life beyond this one. You cannot ask heaven for help if you don’t believe it exists. Without love you cannot connect fully with a God whose character and nature we have shown to have the heart of a parent.

The world’s sacred documents speak of the testing of our faith and love. We will discover in the next section that we are useful to the Creator, and that he has plans for us to fulfill. The level of

responsibility and spiritual authority that he can entrust to us depends at least in part on how we respond to this occasional testing.

God wants his people to believe in him, and to further believe that he is willing and able to fulfill his promises. This is a challenge for us today since there is a real difference between the western rational mindset with its “show me” attitude, and the experiential indigenous mindset of the ancient people for whom these words were originally written. For the latter, faith in the supernatural was easier because they had no explanation for much of what happened in their natural environment. They assumed their environment was controlled by spirit forces larger than themselves.

The tests of faith given to the ancient people whose stories appear in the scriptures can seem extreme. Two good examples from the Hebrew Scriptures are found in the lives of the patriarch Abraham, who was asked to sacrifice his son, and the rancher Job, who lost everything in a bet between God and Satan.

Then Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? “Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. “But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.” Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

[*Holy Bible*. Job 1:9-12]

Such stories of testing are to be found in many of the world’s sacred scriptures.

And what you suffered (of the disaster) on the day  
(of the battle of Uhud when) the two armies met, was

by the leave of Allah in order that He might test the believers.

[*Noble Qur'an*. 3:166]

Most people today wonder if they would have the courage to face a serious test of their faith. It is an important personal question, but fortunately, most of us are not destined to become scriptural case studies. Still, we can expect to have our faith and obedience stretched during challenging seasons of loss or hurt when God seems silent and distant. It can feel that he abandons us at the very hour of our deepest need. But he never does. Just at the moment when all seems lost he shows himself to be our greatest advocate. We then find ourselves embarrassed that we ever doubted him. Trials establish our faith in God, our obedience to his leading, and our love for other people. Hanging on to holiness during such times marks us as trusted members of the Creator's family who are worthy of carrying greater spiritual responsibility.

It is worth noting that God does not ask you to be faithful without first demonstrating to you that he is so. He fulfilled his promise to give the elderly Abraham a son before he put Abraham's faith to the test. If you are entering true partnership with God, then you can expect him to fulfill his scriptures in your life. We have already pointed out that these tests are not the determinant of whether you have a life beyond this one. That is a function of your relationship with the Creator. Rather, it determines how far God can trust you to join him in his great plans for creation.

Tests of faith are about hanging onto God's promises when things are difficult. In contrast, overcoming *temptation* is about not doing the things that we know violate God's will. We read in the scriptures that the All-Father never tempts his children to do wrong. That comes from within our own soul and mind. Nevertheless, God definitely notices how we respond to temptation, and forewarns us that unless we take a solid stand for holiness, fleshly desire grows quickly into sinful violations of God's law that can have eternal consequences. Resisting temptation takes personal strength, and the willingness to make the effort derives from having faith in God's

promised blessings for doing so. Otherwise, why do it? It is much easier to just surrender and do what “feels good”.

We have just said that the Creator does not tempt us to break his rules, yet he does not always stop evil spirits from whispering such suggestions. The good news is that Satan can not *force* you or anyone to make a poor choice. The scriptures tell us that humans have the same free choice that was granted to the Devil. All he can do is tempt and accuse. It is our decision whether to give in or resist. The choice we make then impacts our relationship with the Creator. If we choose the way of holiness, the very heavens erupt in cheering and we attract blessing to our lives. If we choose to give in to temptation and violate God’s laws, then the Devil gains additional access to us, and we bring curses upon ourselves.

If you choose holiness and lawfulness, the Devil has much less access to you.

Satan’s primary interest in you is keeping you out of a relationship with your Creator. Anything he can do to create separation helps his cause, since he gets to be king wherever God is not. The best thing you can do when you feel oppressed is to declare that you are God’s child and claim his parental authority and blessings over your life.

This leaves us with several possibilities for explaining why bad things happen to people who are trying to faithfully walk God’s path. It could be 1) a test of persevering faith, 2) temptation suggesting we take an unholy way out, 3) a reaping of bad choices we sowed in some prior season, 4) a warning from God, or 5) normal life. Here are a few points to ponder.

- Some events are big enough to impact both good and evil people together. For example, consider the Indonesian Tsunami of 2004. Sometimes it rains on both the just and the unjust.
- The rebellion of a few can affect the welfare of many, but the Creator often shields the innocents. Consider for example the 2001 attack on the New York World Trade Center, and how many more casualties there could have been.
- When people in relationship with God make bad choices, God will send events to warn, humble, or correct them, but his purposes are always hopeful that we would return to the holy path.

- When people who are not in relationship with God make bad choices, they open themselves up to curses from the Devil, who makes it his business to mess as much as possible with God's creation. God can intervene if he wants to, but generally does not do so unless he is invited.

Sometimes bad stuff happens and there is no obvious explanation for it. This is when it is hardest to be a faith-filled, holy person. There is no response other than to accept that God allowed it and tighten the relationship so as to hear his voice even more clearly. The key is not letting your faith in a personal God be shaken into believing he is arbitrary or aloof in his dealings with you. He is not. He loves you as your loving parent, and sometimes daddy just knows best. He sees time, space, and events with a perspective we cannot. Trusting him is where the fight of faith is most difficult.

Bad stuff also forms in us a foundation of character that makes us much nicer people to be around. It produces changes in us that cannot come forth in any other way. Deep hurts produce a tender gentleness in people if they can release any associated bitterness. People become less judgmental, better listeners, more empathetic, and oriented to truth and honor. You see the fruit of that change in the way people respond to the next round of hardship.

If God is trying to teach us something, the best strategy is to embrace the message and make the changes He wants as soon as possible. Some years ago I was afflicted for several days with internal pain. As it became increasingly debilitating, I both made an appointment with a doctor and began asking the Lord if there was something He wanted me to hear. God's Spirit directed me almost immediately to some scripture which corrected an error I had embraced. I asked forgiveness for the error, thanked God for his teaching, and asked Him to lift the affliction. The pain was gone by the next morning and never returned. My doctor never had a chance.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, "What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads. "The real problem is not why some humble, pious, believing people suffer, but why some do not."

The Christian Apostle Paul wrote;

“...we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 5:3-5]

It is easiest to know the ways of God from the scriptures written about him, and they can be a great comfort in times of uncertainty. Even when it seems he is far away, unaware of our difficulties, and heedless of our prayers, we can still read of his eternal parental love for all his created children. There are many stories of persons who stood on faith and found it rewarded. Here are a few from the Hebrew Scriptures:

- Noah was obedient in building a boat for rains that could not be imagined when he began.
- Abraham followed God’s lead to a new homeland that was promised to his descendents.
- Moses led hundreds of thousands of Israelites out of Egypt and into a desert that could not support them.
- Joshua, Gideon, Saul, David, and other leaders faced down adversaries that were much more powerful.
- Daniel, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and other prophets spoke of the future to political leaders.

Regardless of appearances, make every attempt to remain in that place of faithful relationship with the Creator. Honor him in all you do. Look to him and his Holy Spirit for wisdom when unsure. If understanding is delayed, press in even more and pray through until you hear from him. God wants us listening to him as much as we talk to him. Once we feel that he has affirmed a direction for us, we can take action on the faith in our spirit.

It is easy to feel that holiness is not worth the effort when the world is crashing in on you and God seems nowhere to be found. As hard as it is, this is the time to look for the good in things, count the blessings you do have, and call on God to show himself strong on your behalf. Calling on him is an act of faith. Declaring his word from the scriptures is an act of faith. The prayers of the faithful are powerful.

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

[*Holy Bible*. James 5:16]

Holiness requires obedience to God's laws. If there is an area of hurt or lawlessness in your life which is resisting holiness, look for a mentor or other persons of faith who can help you work through it. When your faith is weak, then lean on others to strengthen it. Avoid things and people that tempt you away from the Creator's ways.

One of the great side benefits of standing strong in faith is that holiness gives you a cloak of protection against evil. The closer you remain to the Creator, the closer he will stand by you – even when you can't see it. The good news is that life and the things of the natural world happen in cycles, and nothing is forever. Every trial has a season, and every season moves on. Tie a knot and hang onto the rope until you are again on solid ground.

Finally, look at earthly situations from a heavenly perspective. Imagine yourself in the role of the Creator whose primary goal is to help his children find their way to relationship and holiness. Bad things often bring forth goodness after the fact. Look for the greater redemptive purpose behind events of this world.

==== **Service** ====

A friend's teenage daughter was not doing well. She had been dabbling with drugs, living occasionally with a boyfriend, and failing at school. She had little hope or vision for the future, and was not interested

in hearing advice from her parents or anyone else. She was physically emaciated and slowly dying from the poison in her body. One night her father called us in a frantic state. She had gone missing and no one knew where she was. He suspected she had binged on drugs or alcohol and ended up in a bad place. Naturally everyone was thinking worst-case scenarios. The police had been alerted, but as of nightfall there was no sign of her.

There was nothing to do in the natural, so we turned to prayer. My wife and I entered the throne room of the Almighty to petition his help. It took a long time. The prayer was forceful and sometimes emotional. God told us to grab hold of her spirit and forcibly drag it back into his presence. There was resistance — not from God, but from other things that held the daughter in bondage. Those who pray deeply for others know what it is to physically feel a burden and fight for victory. You keep praying, petitioning, and commanding until the thing you are asking for is granted. Eventually a peace came on us and the battle was over. There was nothing left to do, so we went to sleep.

Her father called again during the following morning. She had indeed faced a difficult night. The details are not important, but somewhere in the darkness she made the decision to start over. She turned herself in to the authorities in the morning, and voluntarily entered in-patient treatment. Today, several years later, she is healthy, a happily married mother, and spiritually whole. God had once again gone up to bat and hit a home run on behalf of his earthly ambassadors.

Thus far the spiritual journey has been about preparation. You have discovered God, established an on-going relationship with him, allowed him to change you for the better, and learned to operate in the supernatural realm. These are all parts of the maturing process that makes you useful and trusted. Our spiritual maturity in this life never ends. There is no finish line as we seek to internalize the love of our Creator. Do not think there is some high bar you need to hurdle before God can call you his friend. You are useful to him and loved by him no matter where you are in your journey. Nevertheless, with maturity come both greater responsibility and more challenging spiritual assignments.

God made you for a purpose. It was not to amuse him by seeing if you could survive in a cruel and heartless world, only to die and decompose after a few short years. Humans were told to enjoy the earth and care for it in peace. You were given gifts and abilities to help you with this responsibility, including creativity, love, and intellect. God's plan for creation has not yet been fulfilled, but the sacred scriptures of the world clearly point to a time in the future when it will be so.

We love, because He first loved us.

[*Holy Bible*. 1 John 4:19]

Our job as God's partners is to bring his love and care to this world, here and now, wherever we are in life. He will occasionally give us specific assignments, but in other seasons we are to be full-time encouragers of other people. This means giving of ourselves in whatever way we can, whether in physical labor, financial help, or emotional support. Service to God and other people is the highest spiritual calling. Believe it or not, you were wired to be a servant. There is something deep within every human being that glows after helping someone else.

As the Creator's ambassadors, we represent God wherever we go. The scriptures refer often to the "kingdom" of God, including not only geographic lands, but also the souls of people, the socio-economic systems created by people, and other domains in which

God can be honored or not. As we have found, ownership of the earthly realm is disputed. God's kingdom only reigns where we have chosen to follow him. The places we carry the spirit of God enjoy peace and blessing, even in the midst of chaos. Wherever people choose to follow their own self-interest or other gods, creation does not function properly. Where territory has been ceded there is death, theft, and destruction.

Offensively taking ungodly territory back for the Creator is a principal theme in the monotheistic faiths. Fortunately, this does not require engaging in physical violence. Instead we are called to take the kingdom back through love, prayer, and a testimony of God's faithfulness. God has plans for such conquest, and wants us to partner with him and with his angelic servants in carrying them out.

When God created you, he did so knowing the time and place in creation that you would appear. He knew how to best care for his kingdom and assigned a part of that task to you. He made sure that your talents and spiritual gifts would be sufficient for the challenge. Once given, your gifts and purpose are not taken away.

... for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

[*Holy Bible*. Romans 11:29]

You can draw confidence and strength from this promise. It puts you on the high ground in this world, with the power to bring peace to times and places of chaos. Exerting political or managerial control over a person is nowhere as powerful as having a direct line to their spirit. People will do what they are told by others in authority. People are utterly transformed when they discover they have a relationship with their Creator.

### **Identify your callings and gifts**

Every person was created with a purpose in mind, and with all the talents and gifts necessary to fulfill that calling. You are no different. Think about yourself for a moment, and list the different ways you get joy out of helping other people. Perhaps you like teaching, or playing with kids. Maybe you are a caregiver in the

healthcare industry. You may be drawn to the arts, wood-crafting, or metalworking. Whatever your talents or industry, God can use them to bless others.

We also have *spiritual gifts* that complement our natural talents. These are things that allow us to influence the spirit in another person and draw them to God's grace and message. Remember, the highest calling of service is to help others navigate the bridge of grace we have already crossed to God's glory. Here are a few spiritual gifts listed in the *Holy Bible*.

- Administration Plan and execute projects to achieve goals
- Apostle Provide leadership and guidance to multiple churches
- Deliverance Remove demons from a person
- Discerning of Spirits Determine the source of spiritual influences
- Evangelism Lead people to God
- Exhortation Encourage and comfort others
- Faith Unusual confidence in God's power and will
- Giving Joyful and abundant financial giving
- Healing Restoration of health not possible in the natural
- Helps Assist others to operate successfully in their gifting
- Hospitality Provision of food and lodging to guests
- Intercession Persistent and victorious prayer
- Knowledge Collect, analyze and apply information to help others
- Mercy Empathy leading to helpful assistance
- Miracles Change the normal behavior of nature
- Missionary Function in a cross-cultural setting

- Poverty                      Live without distractions to fully focus on God
- Prophecy                    Perceive and communicate God's will for a situation
- Shepherd                    Assume responsibility for the well-being of a group of believers
- Teaching                    Communicate information that enhances others' understanding
- Tongues                     Communicate in a language the speaker has never learned
- Wisdom                     Insight on how knowledge can be applied to a situation

Most of us will not have just one calling or gifting; they often come and go as we serve throughout life. At times we may find ourselves using several at once. God gave each person a unique combination of natural and spiritual gifts that work best when added to those he gave others. He designed his kingdom so we would have to work together to accomplish things. The Creator is not big on superstars who think they can do it all.

It is for this reason that the supernatural gifts only seem to operate in those special situations when God wants them to be used. They do not work if we turn them into a circus act. It is those people who are deeply committed to God's ways of humble holiness who carry the greatest spiritual authority and supernatural gifting. They are unrecognizable in a crowd. For you or I to be trusted with such gifts is a real honor. Being called to use them depends on our character, which must show love, compassion, humility, and an attitude of servant-hood. Miraculous signs are there to convince people that God exists. People in God's service must never forget that it is his kingdom being built, not our own.

Many will shake their heads as they read the prior paragraph. Why work so hard and live so humbly just to give someone else the glory? Justice is an important thing in many cultures, and credit should go where credit is due. In a big company we make personal sacrifices for our boss because making him look good hopefully floats our boat as well. It is enlightened self-interest at work. The person who gives

up so much of what the world thinks is fun should at least get some recognition. Right? Well, I agree that if you look at it that way with the eyes of this world, it does seem like foolishness. That has always been the case with doing God's work. So there must be some good reason people still choose the path of selfless service.

The answer is that they are not climbing the same ladder. Their goal and destination are different. They see something on the horizon that has not yet caught our attention, and they want a part of it. The vision is of something much greater than what we are seeing in front of us. As we have discussed in this book, God has a kingdom that transcends this world that is much richer, bigger, and more joyful than this one. The proverbial flock of birds in the spiritual bush is infinitely more desirable than the one in our natural hand.

### **Perform the greatest service**

What is the greatest service you can perform in partnership with the Chief Executive of all creation? Whatever he tells you to do. Just be sure to soak it in prayer. I have heard it said, and believe it to be true, that it takes at least 10 minutes of prayer to prepare for 1 minute of God-empowered service. God's partners need to be very sure about what they are hearing from him. It takes time and reflection to test impressions in your spirit and discern whether they are truly from God or an over-eager psyche. Hearing from God is especially difficult if there is emotion involved.

Men in particular assume that human effort is required to solve any problem. When we do go to prayer about an issue we tend to ask what we should do about a situation. Sometimes, the All-Father would like to handle things himself, or through someone else you may not know. Often he only wants you to pray for his chosen outcome. As we just saw, you can feel the weight of a prayer burden when it is upon you. It takes discipline to remain in that place of focused prayer until it lifts.

One of the challenges of serving is knowing when to let go of one assignment from God so you can take on another. This requires being able to hear his voice in your spirit. Whenever you are aligned with God's will you will have peace, confidence, and a sense of divine fulfillment. When things are not quite aligned in the spiritual,

you will get a restlessness or uneasiness. Let this be an indication to you of when things are changing and it is time to let go.

**Consider the example of Jesus**

Mention Buddha, Zoroaster, or the Guru Nanak at a dinner party and you may start a fashionable conversation. Mention the name of Jesus and you will cause a ruckus. Why? It is because the name of Jesus has unusual spiritual power. He is the only character in human history chronicled to have done numerous significant miracles during his lifetime, and then to have publicly reappeared alive after being executed and buried. As a holy man, he carried spiritual authority delegated by the All-Father, and the supernatural power of God's Spirit, which he promised to make permanently available to all his followers. He claimed to be the Messiah expected by the Jewish prophets, and the one through whom God built his bridge of grace that makes salvation possible.

Jesus' life was a model of servant leadership. He taught people about the kingdom of God even as he met their immediate needs. He fed them, healed them, encouraged them, and drew them to himself by making each one feel special. He understood that a student cannot learn from even the best teacher on an empty stomach. He told his followers to love and serve others as he had done.

This is the heart of God. He loves everyone in his creation and needs those who know him to shine the light of illumination on those that do not. There have been many people in history who have been selfless servants, but none that appears to have carried anything like the confirming spiritual authority of Jesus. He walked closely with the Creator, and as a result God's Spirit could work effectively through him. He prayed a great deal in solitude, sought to do only the things God told him in advance to do, faithfully kept the prescribed laws given through Moses, and was by all accounts very disciplined with few if any faults. It would be difficult at best for any of us to emulate the holiness of his life. He exemplifies the qualities God calls for in his laws of living.

Jesus said that he did nothing supernatural out of his own power as a human. He had wisdom to know in advance what God was willing to do, and only released this power when it was pre-approved. It was

no surprise then that so many of his healings were instantaneous. He referred to this dynamic as having the “keys to the kingdom”. This remains a central point in our own relationship with God. We need to ask the All-Father for his will in every situation.

Whether or not you understand or believe the mystery of Jesus’ nature and ministry, he does give us a real-world example to follow. If you choose to serve in close partnership with the Creator, Jesus shows us the kind of life to which God entrusts his delegated spiritual authority for changing the world. He is worthy of your consideration.

## CHAPTER 12

# PARTNERSHIP



Several years ago I took an interest in the history of a community whose first inhabitants were indigenous Native Americans. There were none living in the area any longer, but spiritual people leave a spiritual “deposit” in the land. The early European settlers in the area had good relationships with their First Nations neighbors for half a century, so I knew that this deposit was a good one, and one that could potentially be reopened to the spiritual benefit of the present community.

After leaving this with God for some months, I had a vivid dream one night in which I stood drumming at the old native site and saw spirits released out of the ground. There were many good ones along with one large angry one. None of my trusted First Nations friends knew what to do with the dream, but they did agree that it was given to me for a reason.

Several more months went by before I felt I had release from the Creator to go to the site with a small group. We drummed and honored God there, just as I had been shown to do in the dream. We asked him to reopen the well of blessing for the benefit of the community, and to remember the good covenant that he had originally made with the people in that place.

In the next ten days, a light plane crashed off the end of the local airport and another made an emergency landing on a road just around the bend from the old native site. Nothing like it had ever happened there before, and certainly not within the same two weeks. The story made the national news. To top it off, a truck lost its brakes and careened into a restaurant just down the road from where the second plane landed. Events in the natural reflect activity in the heavens, and we had clearly unleashed something spiritual into the air over that community that had to be corrected. This called for intensive prayer.

A few days later the understanding and authority was given. The team went back to the community, staked out a boundary around it, and declared that God alone would be the covering spirit in the area. We commanded every territorial spirit that did not submit to God to leave, and backed it up with the authority of Jesus' name. Evil spirits always obeyed Jesus when he walked the earth, and there has been no disastrous news out of the community since.

This sort of spiritual work rarely gets done the same way twice, so we are always dependent on the Creator's Spirit of Revelation to give us his methods and timing. He is always faithful to do so when we are willing partners with him in establishing his kingdom on earth.

Miracles happen to God's people, and they happen because of God's people. Partnership with the All-Father conveys blessing, and it grants spiritual authority. The great paradox of the unseen is that it is much more powerful than the visible.

As the Native Americans say, "for tonight I have spoken". My spiritual journey began by wrestling cosmic consciousness to the ground so it would serve me. I ended up serving the Creator of the

cosmos. I find myself a deeply loved participant on the grand stage of the All-Father's purpose.

Hopefully this vision of the journey leaves you enthusiastic and not apprehensive. You may get a little winded climbing to the summit, but the view from the top is incredible. God is much bigger than you. He knows your strengths and your weaknesses. He is after all your Creator, and you are one of his masterpieces. He is infinitely capable of helping you fulfill every spiritual purpose for which you were made. God will do the heavy lifting with the strong and gentle arms of a loving father.

Once you have become a friend of your God and begun serving in ways that build up his kingdom, you will have embarked on a life of walking in true partnership with the Creator of the universe. This is where you want to be. There is a confidence and certainty that attends such a position, and getting there will have brought out the best in you. You will be hearing from God's Spirit and sensing when things are right or wrong. You will begin to interpret things around you in a spiritual way that transcends science.

There will be numerous surprises along the way. My journey has included divine healings, hearing the voice of an angel, and knowing things I have never learned. You will have encounters with people who need what you can give, and who will be able to provide just what you need. "Coincidences" will happen with regularity. Every day will offer something new.

Lao-Tzu advised us to "flow like water" through the journey of life. Don't go where the channel has not been cut or resist the momentum of the flow. If you are doing as the Creator desires, you will flow into opportunities, encounters, and adventures as he carries you along. Be willing to change as the journey requires; just be sure you are following God's voice and not another.

The more experience you gain with God in different settings, the more you will realize just how big and creative he is, and how hard it is to lock him in a box that was revealed to specific people in specific places millennia ago. God's elemental nature, character, and laws for creation do not change. But the application of those things to particular circumstances must be discerned.

God is at once unchanging and always revealing aspects of himself in new ways.

Islamic sects, Christian denominations, and Hindu schools appear in such variety because the founders of each had different spiritual experiences. It is likely that you too will encounter God in ways that your pastor/imam/rabbi/priest has not. That does not make your experience wrong, but be sure to test it against what you know of the character and nature of the Creator. Humans are easily deceived by the unseen spiritual realm.

God is big, and his tent is big, but there is still one ultimate truth.

Stick close to the eternal gospel of love for your Creator and other people. Lasting relationships are built on love, and God wants your relationship with him to go on forever. He has already built a bridge of grace that spans the chasm of sin. It is your job to cross that bridge by choosing to live a life of holiness.

Your spiritual journey will be much richer if you surround yourself with mentors and other travel companions on the path. If you choose to gather with others in a spiritual meeting place, then so much the better. The world's religions are man's effort to organize what is known about God into a form that can be passed from person to person. Enjoy the traditions and rituals of your chosen faith. Remember, however, that the purpose of symbols and liturgies is simply to point you back to God. Keep focused on the basics of who God is and your personal relationship with him. Your calling is unique. Don't allow anyone to steal it away. Use discernment when accepting another person's spiritual guidance or leadership.

This journey will require much of you. You will have to accept changes to who you are, and allow God to take charge. You will have to invest in the relationship with prayer time and learn to have God's heart for blessing others. God will take some things away that you value, and replace them with others of more value to him. You will have to honor other people above yourself, beginning with the Creator. Certainly he is worthy of your respect.

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

[*Holy Bible*. Revelation 4:11]

Partnership with God means walking in his holy presence all day. This will make you a better person, and one who is full of character. The Holy Spirit is the Creator’s gift to help you walk this path. Your spirit will gradually become more attuned to his, and this will reveal to you where truth about him is to be found.

You have reached a level of spiritual maturity when God is no longer talking to you very much about you. He refocuses you on others who need help crossing that chasm into his realm. One day you will wake up and realize that you have become the mentor, teacher, or guru to whom others look. You have become the lifeline for a hurting soul, and the provider for the hungry. Perhaps your prayers will affect the spiritual climate over entire nations. God has made you an extension of himself in the earth, with the promise of eternal partnership in the world to come. This is where your fulfillment is found in ways that Maslow never imagined. A single person can make a few ripples in the pond. Partnering with the Creator can fill an ocean.

We have looked in this book specifically at the personality, character, and nature of the Creator because the starting point of the spiritual journey is relationship. The more you know God’s personality, the better you can hear his voice and discern his will. Hopefully you now have some additional tools that will be helpful on your path. Most of all, I hope you are encouraged to deepen your relationship with the All-Father. It is your responsibility to be willing, and it is his to meet you in that place of willingness. It is never too late to start. You are God’s beloved child, and he is faithful to lead you to your promised land. Enjoy the most exciting journey possible.

His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will

*Finding the True God*

---

make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

[*Holy Bible*. Matthew 25:21, NKJ]



For further commentary related to the subject of this book, or to  
contact its author, please visit:

[www.findingthetruegod.com](http://www.findingthetruegod.com)



# INDEX



- Abraham (Patriarch)..... 79, 81, 98,  
101, 103-106, 138, 140, 166, 181,  
183-184, 186, 200, 203-206, 213,  
221-222, 227-228, 247, 289-290,  
293
- Afterlife..... 33, 69, 84, 112, 116,  
220-221, 238-239, 261, 278
- Ahura Mazda (Angra Mainyu, Spenta  
Mainyu).....88-90, 92
- Allah.....79, 101-110, 126, 135,  
147, 164, 169, 203, 205-206, 217,  
233-237, 246, 290
- Alternative Spirituality..... 111-112
- Ancestors.....27, 33, 40-41,  
43-45, 48-50, 115, 220, 239
- Atheist & Agnostic..... 112-113, 121
- Avatar..... 24, 55, 273
- Baptism (Water, Spirit, Fire).....218,  
271-272
- Bible (see Holy Bible)
- Border Sacrifice ..... 41
- Brahman (Brahma, Shiva,  
Vishnu).....54-55, 58, 60, 62,  
124-125
- Brahmans ..... 54
- Bridge of grace.....229, 232,  
239-240, 248, 280, 301, 306
- Buddha (Gautama,  
Siddhartha).....23-24, 51, 55,  
63-67, 73, 112, 116, 281-282, 284
- Buddhism .....40, 43, 46, 51-52,  
54, 63-67, 124
- Character (of God defined) ..... 136
- Christianity.....25, 79, 93-98,  
126-127, 209, 227, 237, 272
- Covenants (Abrahamic, Noahic,  
Sinaitic).....183-185
- Creation Story .....34, 44-45,  
160, 163-167
- Crusades (Christian).....79, 208-210
- Discernment .....266-267
- Enlightenment (Nirvana) ..... 22, 55,  
60, 63-64, 66, 120, 122-123, 125,  
221
- False Messiah & Anti-Christ..... 97,  
107, 193, 231
- Father (aspects of a parent) ..... 98,  
172, 197-204, 237-239, 246,  
261-262
- Fellowship..... 196, 229, 232, 238,  
274, 286
- Flood Story.....44, 177-179, 181,  
183, 195
- Four Noble Truths .....65-66
- Fruit-O-Meter.....287-288
- Garden of Eden ..... 166, 174-175, 195
- Guru ..... 72, 273
- Heaven, Paradise (described)..... 221,  
234, 236-240
- Hell (described)..... 221, 234
- Higher Power ..... 117-118
- Hinduism..... 25, 52, 54-63, 66-67, 87,  
124, 221
- Holiness, Obedience,  
Submission.....101, 105, 140-141,  
186, 214, 248, 279, 282, 290-291,  
294
- Holy Bible (Gospels, Letters) ..... 95,  
103-104, 135, 166, 195-196, 267,  
298
- Holy Man (Shaman)..... 33, 50

*Finding the True God*

---

- Holy Spirit  
(Ruach HaKodesh).....85, 94-98,  
126, 145, 232, 239, 249, 267,  
269-272, 276,
- Indigenous Peoples  
(First Nations).....22-23, 25,  
33-34, 137, 175, 177, 188, 195,  
289
- Islam..... 79, 101-110, 126-127,  
131, 147, 193, 209, 233-237
- Islamic Empire ..... 79, 103, 209
- Jesus / Yah'shua .....93-101, 98,  
107-108, 110, 112, 127, 155, 188,  
193, 219, 227-233, 237, 239, 249,  
269, 271-272, 282, 285, 301-302,  
304
- Jihad ..... 105, 205
- Judaism .....79, 81-87, 96, 126,  
221-227, 237
- Kamimomishi (Path of the gods)..... 44
- Karma.....60-66, 73, 112, 114,  
120, 123, 125, 188, 190, 221, 280
- Kings of Judah .....206-208
- Krishna .....55, 58, 108, 273
- Lao-Tzu.....67
- Last Day judgment..... 104, 107,  
143, 187, 234-235
- Little People (Fairy, Kontombili,  
Menehune, Naga)..... 27
- Mahdi ..... 107, 193
- Maslow, Abraham ..... xvi-xvii
- Meditation .....30-31, 54, 57, 62,  
66-68, 116-118, 263
- Mentoring.....272-273
- Messiah (Christ)..... 84-85, 93-98,  
101, 107, 112, 127, 144, 155-156,  
188, 193, 195, 220, 227-228, 231,  
239, 301
- Messianic Age.....193, 195-196
- Metaphysical Rebellion ..... 25, 113
- Mool Mantra ..... 76
- Muhammad ..... 101-107, 127,  
147, 193, 205-206, 219, 233, 237,  
285
- Neo-Paganism ..... 113-115
- New Age..... 115-117, 243
- Noahide Laws ..... 190, 224
- Noble Qur'an .....101, 103-104,  
107, 135, 137, 169, 233, 235, 256
- Norse Sagas..... 35
- Occult (Astrology, Divination,  
Necromancy, Witchcraft) ..... 22,  
27-29, 43-44, 50, 67, 114-116,  
122, 176
- Om.....31, 60, 62-63,241
- Oracle Bone Pictographs.....43-44
- Personality (of God defined)..... 136
- Plagues (Egypt).....211-212
- Prayer ..... 27, 38, 40, 46, 72, 83,  
89, 103, 105, 118, 124, 176, 226,  
239-246, 249, 259, 261, 263-265,  
276-280, 294, 297-298, 300,  
306-307
- Principles of God's dealings with  
nations.....214-215
- Principles of God's dealings with  
people..... 249
- Prophecy (Revelation) .....22-24,  
30, 38, 95, 269, 271, 299, 73, 83,  
95-96, 101, 103, 105, 135, 191,  
193, 195, 216, 237, 241, 272
- Prophet ..... 23-24, 55, 81-84, 93,  
95, 101, 103-105, 107, 120, 155-  
156, 193, 208, 214, 224, 227, 231,  
253, 281, 293, 301
- Qur'an (see Noble Qur'an)
- Reincarnation (Rebirth) ..... 46, 55,  
58, 60, 64, 89, 112, 196, 212
- Religion..... xiv-xv, 21-25,  
40, 44, 51-55, 63-64, 67, 71-73,  
79-80, 88, 94, 101-102, 112-114,  
124, 130-131, 140, 188, 190, 210,  
221, 237, 240-241, 247, 254, 276,  
288, 306
- Salvation .....73, 89, 94-95,  
119-120, 191, 214, 220-222, 226-  
228, 231, 233, 240, 278, 281, 301

*Finding the True God*

---

Satan (Accuser, Devil, Dragon, Iblis,  
Lucifer, Serpent) .....168-173,  
175-176, 180, 183, 186-187, 193,  
289, 291-292

Self ..... 58-60, 65, 111,  
123, 265, 286

Shang-Ti..... 40-41, 43-44, 51, 69, 71

Sheol ..... 84, 221

Shinto .....45-46, 124

Sikhism .....54, 71-77, 259

Sacrifice..... 22, 27, 29, 39, 41,  
43, 49, 57, 63, 66, 75, 96, 101,  
124, 140, 205, 226, 229, 231, 262,  
279, 282, 289

Spirits (Amadhlozi, Angels,  
Demons, Ghosts, Jinn)  
(see also Ancestors) ..... 27,  
43-46, 48-50, 57, 99, 100, 104-  
105, 113-116, 121, 142, 164, 167-  
170, 175-177, 186-187, 220, 234,  
265, 291, 298, 303-304

Spiritual Gifts.....254, 269,  
271-272, 278, 297-299

Sweat-Lodge Ceremony.....40, 241,  
259, 271

Tanakh (Torah, Navi'im,  
Ketuvim) .....81-84, 95, 135, 198

Tao (Way).....67-71

Taoism..... 40, 43, 51-52, 67-69

Ten Commandments ..... 137, 222

Three Jewels..... 69

Tongues .....95, 241, 269-271, 299

Tower of Babel.....180-182

Unkulunkulu (Uthlanga) .....48-50

Urim & Thummim ..... 30

Vedic Literature (Vedas) .....54-55,  
57, 63, 258

Visualization .....30-32

Waheguru (Ik Onkaar) .....73-74

YHWH (I Am, Elohim)..... 79, 81,  
83-87, 90, 93, 98, 126, 138-145,  
156, 198, 205-208, 210-212, 220-  
222, 225-227, 232, 263

Zoroastrianism .....87-92





