Faith beyond belief

by Kevin Commons
Faith Beyond Belief: A theoretical background

Preface

My earliest memories include a hazy awareness of spiritual matters. I was baptised by the Church of England but my family were not really church goers. In my teens I chose to look into religion and was attracted to Anglo-Catholicism not just for the beauty of the liturgy but also for the fellowship of the youth club. However, as I got older I became increasingly puzzled by broad questions about the meaning of life.

During my career in further education colleges I took a master’s degree in education and studied moral educational theory, which deeply challenged my thinking. I followed where this took me in spite of my previous conditioning and felt much more confident in questioning existing norms, including the authority and doctrines of the Church. This opening up on an intellectual level was also felt on a more spiritual level. As I became less attached to dogma I felt a great sense of freedom. The concept of a separate Transcendent Being, controlling everything, metamorphosed into the idea of Immanent Being, a Power or Force without which the physical Universe could not exist but which was present in me, and all things. The step to formally becoming a Buddhist was inevitable.

During my 40s I moved from working directly in colleges to supporting a range of post 16 learning organisations, initially as a local government advisor/inspector and then later as a free-lance consultant, having taken early retirement at the age of 51. As a self employed person I had time to fit in sessional chaplaincy work in the prison service. Although the role involved meeting the faith needs of registered Buddhists I was challenged by one co-ordinating chaplain to develop a meditation course that would be open to prisoners of any faith background. I ran one such course but was not really happy with it and sought help in developing it further.

Help came from a fellow Buddhist when we decided that the local Zen group we both attended should make a contribution to local interfaith activity. What started as an opportunity to road test a multi-faith meditation course became a whole series of 10 to 12 week evening courses which my colleague, Ian Grayling, and I, have helped to run for the Faith Awareness Committee of Christians Aware. From 2010 to 2014 the topics were mindfulness, morality, wisdom, mysticism and spirituality, to prepare for which we drew on a variety of psychological authorities and spiritual writers in presenting a faith neutral background to the various courses.

In October 2013 I had the great privilege of being part of the team running one of the monthly Introductory Retreats at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. During the weekend I posed the rhetorical question “What brings you to Zen training?” and offered one observation that I had heard from a monk many years ago. This is that, although individuals may have many different reasons, they would all fall into one of two categories, namely:

a) Life has become so difficult or painful that I must do something about it, or
b) I am determined to find an answer to the question “What is the meaning of life?”
These and other experiences over the last twenty years have brought me into contact with a large number of people who are engaged in this search for either of the above reasons. Indeed at the time of writing I was working with two inmates of the same prison who between them exemplified both of those categories. However, I am aware that not all deep inward searchers will be drawn to Buddhism. The challenge for all faiths is to be aware of people who have realised their need to look inwards and to be able to support them in an open way. Since such searchers are those who are questioning established beliefs this will be a big challenge to some religions, and their ministers, especially those that are committed to dogmatic interpretations of the meaning of life. The purpose of this book is, therefore, an attempt to open up the whole debate about how to support those that are searching within for an answer to life’s most fundamental question.

Kevin Commons
November 2014

1. This is an organisation that seeks to help Christians understand other religions, with a view to promoting spiritual dialogue and social harmony.
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Chapter 1 Background

“I never discuss politics or religion!” Over the years I have heard many people make this assertion. It seems to me to be based on the expectation that either topic will automatically lead to heated exchanges. There is a lot of evidence to support this view from ‘fallings out’ at a personal level between individuals to wars between nations, and all stages in between, since many such conflicts have their origin, at least in part, in religious or political questions. This is not surprising in the political domain as the struggle for power and control over others is a central element. However, such disputes, at least in theory, should be less likely to be found in religion since it deals with commodities such as compassion, love and wisdom, which ought to lead to harmony. Unfortunately, religion, in its organised manifestations can become so easily entwined with politics that it is often used to serve political, or even military, ends. This raises the question of what religion is really about. The Jesuit priest, William Johnston (1978), makes a helpful contribution to this debate by drawing a distinction between ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ when he says:

“In religious experience it is possible to distinguish between a superstructure which I shall call belief and an infrastructure which I shall call faith. The superstructure is the outer word, the outer revelation, the word spoken in history and conditioned by culture. The infrastructure, on the other hand, is the interior word, the word spoken to the heart, the inner revelation.”

It is the superstructure that most people have in mind when they engage in discussions about religion. Even the most sincere explorations by people of different faiths seem to focus on the exoteric (external teaching and beliefs) rather than the esoteric (deep personal experience and understanding). This is not surprising since most people, as we will see later, do not progress beyond the formal ‘religious package tour’ offered by their faith tradition, especially when it is the one into which they have been born.

One common element of all religions is teaching, however, this is a term that is variously understood, even in the world of education and training. The theories that underpin the teaching process can be broadly classified into three schools. First there is the Cultural Transmission School, which is primarily concerned with measurable outcomes. Followers of this ideology will adopt a functionalist approach to teaching and learning. They will decide which outcomes and behaviours are required and express them as learning objectives that are easily assessable to verify that the necessary learning has taken place. Teaching methods rely heavily on modelling and the use of rewards and punishment to ensure that the desired response is ‘conditioned’. Although the above description is something of a parody, modified versions of this approach abound and can be very effective but they also leave a lot to be desired educationally.

At the other extreme is the Romantic School, which stresses the importance of allowing (encouraging) the “inner good” of individuals to emerge. This approach, by contrast, seems to place little emphasis on the value of existing knowledge, often lacks structure and also leaves much to be desired.

The Progressive School lies between these two extremes. It argues that individual development occurs as a result of the individual impacting with his or her
environment. It is based on the theory of cognitive development, which involves a change of mental structure as individuals are exposed to situations or problems that stretch their ability to find satisfactory solutions for them. Jean Piaget (1896–1980) a Swiss psychologist who studied under C. G. Jung and Eugen Bleuler in Zürich, produced a very helpful schema for categorising cognitive development.

He argued that cognitive development proceeds in four genetically determined stages that always follow the same sequential order. This involves an initial sensory motor stage, which is mostly to do with the children developing an awareness of themselves and their immediate environment as well as their early physical development. After this come, three different levels of operational thinking, underpinned by logical structures (or stages) at approximately the ages indicated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characterised by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensory-motor</td>
<td>Differentiates self from objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Birth-2 yrs)</td>
<td>Self as agent of action (acts intentionally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieves object permanence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-operational</td>
<td>Language (represent objects by images and words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2-7 years)</td>
<td>Egocentric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple classification (single feature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete operational</td>
<td>Thinks logically about objects and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7-11 years)</td>
<td>Conservation of number, mass and weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classification by several features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal operational</td>
<td>Thinks logically about concepts/ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11 years and up)</td>
<td>Test hypotheses systematically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerned with hypotheticals (future, ideology)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thinking of children at the pre-operational stage is greatly restricted to a consideration of what they actually see, which clearly restricts their judgement. Concrete operational thinking involves the ability to vary two or more relationships simultaneously in a compensatory fashion. Notions such as reversibility and conservation are required during this stage but are only applied to concrete (i.e. physical) things. At the formal operational stage the mental system enlarges so that the actual (concrete) is just one example of the possible. Thinking is more abstract and propositional logic emerges. The further people develop in formal operations the greater will be their ability to deal with, and resolve, problems of increasing complexity and abstraction.

Unfortunately, much of the teaching practised in the context of religion falls into the Cultural Transmission School. This is largely concerned with passing on the accepted beliefs and practices, much of which is prescribed in the scriptures or the ‘holy book’ of the religion concerned. Acceptance of these teachings without question is often a feature of this approach, with those that do take up differing positions being labelled as ‘heretics’, or worse still, in some cases subjected to more punitive strictures.

Religious teaching can encompass a wide variety of topics and it is often flavoured by the prevailing cultural norms of the time and place. Two of the most popular areas for religious teaching are ‘morality’ and ‘spiritual practice’. The following table attempts to point to the possible outcomes of a teaching regime that adopts the Cultural Transmission School compared with one that follows the Progressive School.
Table 1 Potential outcomes of the Cultural Transmission School and the Progressive School compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultural Transmission School</th>
<th>Progressive School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▲ The ‘self’ is transcended in a universal recognition of the oneness of all beings and phenomena ▲</td>
<td>▲ Other ways of ‘knowing’ that are beyond thinking and feeling emerge ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▲ Other ways of ‘knowing’ that are beyond thinking and feeling emerge ▲</td>
<td>▲ Different ways of understanding are harmonised ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▲ Here the focus is on looking within, which include spiritual reflection and contemplative practice ▲</td>
<td>▲ Here the teaching poses questions to develop understanding as well as actual knowledge ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▲ Here the focus is on looking within, which include spiritual reflection and contemplative practice ▲</td>
<td>▲ Situations are approached with the question “What is good to do here?” ▲</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual Practice</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Morality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Transmission School</td>
<td>▼ Here the focus is outward looking, involving corporate devotion and emphasising the importance of fellowship. ▼</td>
<td>▼ Here the focus is on providing answers, which can be welcomed as it is a way of satisfying the human desire for certainty. ▼</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In its worst manifestations this represents an example of ‘indoctrination’.</td>
<td>It can, however, lead to a legalistic approach to judging situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This can result in human beings seeing themselves as separate from those who do not accept their position and can lead to …..</td>
<td>This can result in bigotry and can lead to …..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let us now look at the development of moral judgement in more detail.
Chapter 2 Morality

Developmental psychology argues that change occurs in individuals as they interact with their environment. The sub-school of cognitive development involves a change of mental structure as individuals are exposed to a situation, or problem, that stretches their ability to find a satisfactory solution. This process generates ‘cognitive conflict’ which individuals seek to resolve in order to restore their equilibrium. Having reached an understanding of the problem and worked out a strategy for its solution, individuals are able to apply the insight gained when similar problems arise, even if the content of the situation is different. This reinforces the new logical structure that has been acquired, or is in the process of acquisition.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) built on Piaget’s work and used cognitive developmental theory as a background to his own research into how people form judgements in the moral domain. His work is particularly helpful for teachers interested in using moral dilemmas, which can be devised to deal with any aspect of life, including work and social interaction as well as religion. Kohlberg’s research led him to identify six stages of development that fall within three broad levels of moral reasoning. These are summarised in the following table:

Table 2 Kohlberg’s stages of moral judgement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Pre-conventional Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1 | Obedience and punishment orientation *(How can I avoid punishment?)*  
Right is blind obedience to rules and authority, avoiding punishment and not doing physical harm. |
| 2 | Self-interest orientation *(What's in it for me?)*  
Right is serving one’s own or other’s needs and making fair deals in terms of concrete exchange. |
| **The Conventional Level** |
| 3 | Interpersonal accord and conformity *(Social norms or the good boy/good girl attitude)*  
Right is playing a good (nice) role, being concerned about other people and their feelings, keeping loyalty and trust with partners and being motivated to follow rules and expectations. |
| 4 | Authority and social-order maintaining orientation *(Law and order morality)*  
Right is doing one’s duty in society, upholding the social order and welfare of society or the group. |
| **Post-conventional** |
| 5 | Social contract orientation  
Right is upholding the basic rights, values and legal contracts of a society, even when they conflict with the concrete rules and laws of the group. |
| 6 | Universal ethical principles *(Principled conscience)*  
Right is being guided by universal self-chosen ethical principles which all humanity should follow. The principles are justice, equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. |
Kohlberg’s theory was underpinned by the following empirical assertions:

1. There are clearly defined stages
2. The stages are sequential and in an invariant order
3. There is a statistical tendency for stages to be related to age.
4. People tend to prefer to make judgements at their highest level of attainment.
5. There is a correspondence between cognitive development and development of moral judgement.
6. The existence of formal operational thinking is a necessary but not sufficient pre-condition for the higher moral stages.
7. Individuals can “role-play” the stages below their level, but not above.
8. Individuals have no comprehension or arguments that are two stages above their level.
9. People’s thinking can be pushed up by one stage at a time.

It is interesting to apply Kohlberg’s theory of moral development to the formal statements of moral and ethical imperatives of different religions. For simplicity the Judeo/Christian commandments will be compared with the Buddhist precepts.

The Ten Commandments are a set of principles relating to ethics and worship that play a fundamental role in Judaism and Christianity. They appear twice in the Hebrew Bible, in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. The version summarised below comes from the book of Exodus, and were said to have been given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai in the form of two stone tablets. Modern scholarship suggests that they may have been influenced by Hittite and Mesopotamian laws and treaties, but opinion is divided over exactly when they were written and by whom.

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me
2. Thou shalt not worship any graven image
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. Honour thy father and thy mother
6. Thou shalt not kill
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery
8. Thou shalt not steal
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, nor his wife, nor servants or other possessions.

The first four are clearly rules relating to religious observance and the remaining six cover social and interpersonal behaviour that is widely accepted around the world. Comparing them with the precepts found in Buddhism, which emanate from a very different religious culture, reveals interesting similarities and differences. The following version is one form of the Five Precepts observed by all the main Buddhist traditions.

1. Refrain From Killing
2. Refrain from Stealing
3. Refrain from Lying, Slandering, Gossiping and Spreading Rumours
4. Refrain from Sexual Misconduct
5. Refrain from Taking Intoxicants

Later Buddhism added a further group of precepts to form the Ten Great Precepts observed by followers of the Mahayana schools of Buddhism. They are:

1. Do not kill
2. Do not steal
3. Do not covet
4. Do not say that which is not true
5. Do not sell the wine of delusion
6. Do not speak against others
7. Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others
8. Do not be mean in giving either Dharma or wealth
9. Do not be angry
10. Do not defame the Three Treasures

In the Mahayana version ‘not coveting’ includes prohibition on inappropriate sexual behaviour as well as lusting after the goods and chattels of others. Only the last one has a specific religious connotation, whereas numbers 5 to 9 point to inappropriate personal mind sets, with the focus being on keeping the mind clear, as indicated by the reference to selling the wine of delusion, which includes any behaviour that might cloud your own mind or cause the mind of others to be clouded.

However, although both sets of instructions can be taken as total prohibitions on particular actions, for many Buddhists the precepts represent a way of looking into your own behaviour, helping you to make wise choices in the various situations that arise in your daily life. Many Christians and Jews would see the Ten Commandments in the same light, but there is a stronger sense that they represent a set of rules given by and external authority, God, that must be obeyed. As such they sit well within Kohlberg’s pre-conventional and conventional levels of judgement.

Kohlberg used the famous Heinz’s Dilemma as a tool in his empirical research into moral judgement. The range of responses by a large number of people drawn from different backgrounds and age enabled him to formulate his six stages. Here is the text of Heinz’s dilemma:

In Europe a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that the druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost to make. He paid 200 Euros for the radium and charged 2000 Euros for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman’s husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about 1000 Euros, which is half of the cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said:

“No, I discovered the drug and I am going to make money from it.”
So Heinz got desperate and began to think about breaking into the man’s store to steal the drug for his wife.

Having presented the dilemma, Kohlberg and his researchers would ask the following kinds of question:

1. What is the moral dilemma facing Heinz?
2. What should he do? Should he go ahead and steal the drug? Why, why not?
3. Would it make any difference if Heinz was not related to the dying woman?

The following table hypothesises how someone who is trying to keep the Ten Commandments might respond to the dilemma.

**Table 3 Possible responses to the Ten Commandments through Kholberg’s stages of moral development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Pre-conventional Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1 | **Obedience and punishment orientation** *(How can I avoid punishment?)*  
   If I don’t observe the eighth commandment God will punish me. |
| 2 | **Self-interest orientation** *(What’s in it for me?)*  
   If I do observe the eighth commandment God will reward me in the next life. |
| **The Conventional Level** | |
| 3 | **Interpersonal accord and conformity** *(Social norms or the good boy/good girl attitude)*  
   I don’t want to upset the owner of the drug but I also have a concern for my wife, so this is a real dilemma. Which is the stronger, my concerns about what God, the druggist or society might think of me; or the expectations of my wife and what she might think of me? The answer to this question will govern my action. |
| 4 | **Authority and social-order maintaining orientation** *(Law and order morality)*  
   If I steal the drug I will be breaking God’s rules and so might contribute the breakdown of social order. On the other hand I did promise to love and honour my wife and anyway the druggist himself is probably breaking God’s commandment not to covet, though in this case he is coveting wealth. But do two wrongs make a right? It’s hard to decide. |
| **Post-conventional** | |
| 5 | **Social contract orientation**  
   My wife has the right to the most appropriate treatment that is available. I have tried to negotiate a fair bargain, which would preserve the druggist’s right to reasonable payment for his product. As he won’t compromise I am justified in stealing the drug in this instance. |
| 6 | **Universal ethical principles** *(Principled conscience)*  
   The right to life and considerations of the quality of life override considerations of property in this case. Natural justice demands that my wife should have the treatment, so if other options are not available I am justified in stealing the drug. |
As can be seen from the above table, a strictly legalistic interpretation of the Commandments becomes more difficult as individuals progress through Kohlberg’s stages. This is because they take into account a wider range of factors than simply the imperatives of an external authority. The principled thinking involved in the higher stages, especially stage 6, lead people to make decisions and take actions that might lead to personal and unpleasant consequences for themselves.

A Buddhist, in trying to keep the precepts, would face the same problems. The higher the stage of moral judgement the harder it would be to keep the letter of the precept about not stealing. However, the precepts are seen more as guides to behaviour, rather than rules to be followed without question, and it is accepted that sometimes a precept has to be broken for a higher good to be achieved. This does not mean that there will be no unpleasant consequences of such actions but, just like the Christian in the same situation, this possibility has to be accepted.

The six stage theory takes formal operational thinking applied to the moral domain to its ultimate conclusion. However, before his untimely death, Kohlberg became aware that his theory could not answer the question “Why be moral?” Consequently, he suggested that there may be a seventh stage, which addressed “Transcendental Morality” (or Morality of Cosmic Orientation), which might link religion and spirituality with moral reasoning. However, the difficulties he encountered in obtaining the empirical evidence for stage six led him to regard a possible stage seven as speculation. This does suggest that Kohlberg had some intuitive awareness of this possibility even though he could not establish the kind of logical proof that would satisfy his fellow academics. So, is there more to “knowing” than just “reasoning”? 
Chapter 3 Stages of Faith

The connection between morality and the spiritual development aspect of religion was explored in the late twentieth century by Dr. James W. Fowler, (born 1940). He was the director of both the Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics in the USA until he retired in 2005. He is also a minister in the United Methodist Church. In his book “Stages of Faith” (1981) he sought to apply the work of Piaget and Kohlberg to chart cognitive, affective and behavioural elements of religious development at different life stages. The following table sets out Fowler’s Stages of Faith and includes notes on the process of transition between them.

Table 4 – Fowler’s Stages of Faith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 0 – &quot;Primal or Undifferentiated&quot; faith</th>
<th>This is characterized by an early learning of the safety of their environment (i.e. warm, safe and secure vs. hurt, neglect and abuse). If consistent nurture is experienced, one will develop a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine. Conversely, negative experiences will cause one to develop distrust with the universe and the divine.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth to 2 years.</td>
<td>Transition to the next stage begins with integration of thought and language, which facilitates the use of symbols in speech and play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Externally focused stages (1 to 3)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intuitive-Projective Faith</td>
<td>Follows the beliefs of the parents. Imaginative fantasising about angels/religious figures unrestrained by logical thought. Transition to the next stage comes with the emergence of concrete operational thinking which drives the child's growing concern to know how things are and to clarify the bases of distinctions between what is ‘real’ and what only ‘seems to be’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerges from around age 3 to 7.</td>
<td>The stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging their community gives order and meaning to the fantasising of the previous stage. However, this involves a literal rather than symbolic response to stories and beliefs and a view of the world based on reciprocal fairness and an immanent justice based on reciprocity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. Mythic-Literal Faith                     | The implicit clash or contradictions in stories comes about with the emergence of formal operational thinking makes reflection both possible and necessary. It produces disillusionment with previous teachers and their teachings and leads to conflict between authoritative stories, such as Creationism versus Evolution, which must be faced. There is also a lessening of ego-centrism as mutual interpersonal perspective taking emerges, creating the need for a more personal relationship with the unifying power of the ultimate environment. |
| Emerges during pre-adolescent school years  |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

| 3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith             | A number of spheres demand attention: family, school or work, peers, street society and media, and perhaps                                                                                                                                 |
| Emerges from                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
adolescence or early adulthood

religion. The role of faith is to synthesize values, beliefs and information to provide a more or less consistent ideology in which differences of outlook with others are experienced as differences in "kind" of person. Authority is located with traditional authority figures (if perceived as personally worthy) or in the consensus of a valued, face-to-face group.

### Transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4

Fowler’s research suggests that most people stay at stage 3, however, transition may be precipitated by factors such as serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, to policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable. Such occurrences can lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how "relative" they are to one's particular group or background. Frequently the experience of "leaving home"—emotionally or physically, or both—precipitates the kind of examination of self, background, and life guiding values that gives rise to stage transition at this point.

The movement from Stage 3 to Stage 4 is particularly critical for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway the person must face certain unavoidable tensions: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfilment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus a struggle with the possibility of an absolute.

### Internally focused stages (4 to 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>4. Individuative-Reflective Faith</strong></th>
<th>Emerges during adulthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involves an interruption to reliance on external sources of authority and a relocation of authority from within the self emerges. Individuals are no longer defined by the groups to which they belong but instead, they choose beliefs, values, and relationships important to their self-fulfilment. Typically symbols are translated into conceptual meanings. This often involves &quot;demythologizing&quot; so little attention is likely to be paid to unconscious factors influencing personal judgment and behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disillusionment with one's compromises and recognition that life is more complex than the logic of clear distinctions at Stage 4 can lead to restlessness. Such people find themselves attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices such as elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one has created. Stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previously held faith position and may stimulate the search for a more multi-levelled approach to life truth.
| 5. Conjunctive Faith | May develop around the middle of life | Individuals still rely on their own views but move from self preoccupation or from dependence on fixed truths to acceptance of others’ points of view. There is an opening to the voices of one's "deeper self" including a critical recognition of one's social unconscious. This includes the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like. This can lead to increased tolerance and greater consideration for serving others.

Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience. It generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of those who are "other." Ready for closeness to that which is different and threatening to self and outlook (including new depths of experience in spirituality and religious revelation), this stage's commitment to justice is freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation.

Individuals at stage 5 can appreciate symbols, myths and rituals (their own and others) because they have been grasped, in some measure, by the depth of the reality to which they refer. They also see the divisions of the human family vividly because these have been apprehended by the possibility (and imperative) of an inclusive “community of being”. But this stage remains divided. It lives and acts between an untransformed world and a transforming vision and loyalties. In a few cases this division yields to the call of the radical actualization that is called Stage 6.

| 6. Universalising Faith | This is very rare but may develop in later adulthood | The rare persons at this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. Their community is universal in extent. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal, and thereby valuable apart from any utilitarian considerations. Life is both loved and held to loosely. Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition.

Fowler’s work represents a modern approach to the study of faith and its development in individuals that can be traced back to the Enlightenment, the philosophical movement of the eighteenth century that stressed the importance of human reasoning and 'scientific' thinking rather than blind faith. In the religious context this approach encourages individuals to think through major spiritual questions for themselves rather than simply follow the dictates of the church or other external authority and so contributes to the development of Fowler’s higher stages. |
In the first three of Fowler’s stages individuals, in one way or another, are dependent on some authority outside themselves for their spiritual beliefs. However, the nature of the external authority may change over time. Young children, during the first stage of faith (intuitive-projective), follow the beliefs of their parents. They tend to imagine or fantasize about angels or other religious figures in stories as if they were characters in fairy tales. In the second stage of faith (mythical-literal), children tend to respond to religious stories and rituals literally, rather than symbolically. As individuals move through adolescence to young adulthood, their beliefs continue to be based on an authority focused outside themselves. In this third stage of faith (synthetic-conventional), individuals tend to have conformist acceptance of the beliefs inculcated by the religious authority they have accepted with little self-reflection or examination of them. Fowler (1981) suggests that most people remain at this level.

Those individuals who move to the fourth stage of faith (individuative-reflective) begin a radical shift from dependence on others’ spiritual beliefs to development of their own understanding. This is a stage of independence, as Fowler (1981) says, "For a genuine move to stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority ... There must be ... a relocation of authority within the self" (p. 179). Individuals are no longer defined by the groups to which they belong. Instead, they choose beliefs, values, and relationships important to their self-fulfilment.

In the fifth stage of faith (conjunctive), persons still rely on their own views but move from self preoccupation with or the need for fixed truths to a consideration and acceptance of others’ points of view. They tend to be more tolerant and begin to consider serving others with no expectation of personal benefit or reward. Individuals who move to the sixth and last stage of faith (universalizing) are rare. As older adults, they search for universal values, such as unconditional love and justice. Self-preservation becomes irrelevant. Fowler suggests that Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi were examples of people at this level of spiritual development (1981). Thus the last two stages are marked by a growing recognition of the interdependence of all phenomena.

It is relatively easy to see the process of cognitive development unfolding in both the moral and faith domains as presented by Kohlberg and Fowler (see Appendix 1 which matches Fowler’s stages of faith descriptions with Kohlberg’s stages of moral development). It might, of course, be possible for people to think their way towards an understanding of the interdependence of all phenomena. However, both authorities point to something else in the process of the development at the higher stages that is beyond the mere application of rational thought. As has already been mentioned, Kohlberg developed a concern that there might be a seventh stage, addressing “Transcendental Morality”, which could take morality beyond reasoning into the domain of religious experience. Similarly, Fowler recognised that, by stage 5 individuals are able to appreciate symbols, myths and rituals (their own and others) because they have been grasped, in some measure, by the depth of the reality to which they refer. If their reservations are well founded, then what is this ‘knowing’ that is beyond rational thought?
Chapter 4 Spiritual Intelligence and other ways of ‘knowing’

Fowler’s work suggests that faith development is a personal pilgrimage or spiritual journey in which the apparent certainties of conventional religion need to be worked through and left behind in pursuit of a deeper truth. He sees the need for new experiences and new ways of knowing for this truly mature, or adult, way of ‘faithing’ to emerge. Whilst stage 4 may represent the culmination of cognitive based rational thinking some people come to realise that their spiritual life is more complex than Stage 4's logic of clear distinctions. Since the so called ‘Enlightenment’ of the eighteenth century the development of the ability to reason has been at the centre of western culture in general and education in particular. However, as various schools of psychology emerged during the twentieth century the pre-eminence of logical thinking in human intelligence, as represented by the concept of intelligence quotient (IQ), has been challenged.

Howard Gardner viewed intelligence as 'the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting' (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). He questions the notion that intelligence is a single entity and can be measured simply via IQ tests. He has also challenged the cognitive development work of Piaget suggesting that at any one time a child may be at very different stages in, for example, number development and spatial/visual maturation, because there are at least seven domains of intelligence. He suggests that knowledge at any one particular developmental stage does not hang together as a structured whole. His initial list of seven intelligences is as follows:

1. **Linguistic intelligence**
   This involves being sensitive to both spoken and written language and to use them to achieve certain goals; to be express oneself rhetorically or poetically; and use language as a means for remembering information.

2. **Logical-mathematical intelligence**
   This involves the capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically. It includes the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically.

3. **Musical intelligence**
   This involves skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. It includes the capacity to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms.

4. **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence**
   This entails the ability to use one's whole body or parts thereof to solve problems associated with the coordination of bodily movements.

5. **Spatial intelligence**
   This involves the potential to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas.

6. **Interpersonal intelligence**
   This involves capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people. It enables people to work effectively with others and so is valuable by a wide range of vocational roles.

7. **Intrapersonal intelligence**
   This concerns the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations and using this awareness to help regulate our lives.
Gardner claimed that the seven intelligences rarely operate independently but rather work in concert as people develop their skills or solve the various problems facing them in daily life. Essentially he claims that multiple intelligences provide a full account of human cognition and that all human beings possess this basic set of intelligences although each individual will have a unique blend of them.

However, there has been a lot of debate concerning whether Gardner’s original list of seven intelligences is complete. Since he proposes that the seven intelligences are *amoral*, as they can be used constructively or destructively, he saw no need to add moral intelligence to the list. Similarly, he was not persuaded to including spiritual intelligence as a separate category. However, in 2000 Zohar and Marshall promoted the concept of spiritual intelligence (SQ), which they saw as the intelligence used:

“to address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful than another.”

In the 1990s Daniel Goleman demonstrated the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) so it is possible to see Gardner’s seven intelligences as variations of the basic IQ, EQ, and SQ and their associated neural arrangements. Zohar and Marshall argue that although we are born with a limited number of neurones and lose many of them during life we have the ability to increase the capacity of the brain by growing new neural connections throughout our lives by the active use of our neural systems. They suggest that there are three kinds of thinking, linked to three kinds of intelligence:

**Table 5 The three kinds of intelligence described by Zohar and Marshall**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Type of thinking</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Serial thinking is rational, logical, rule bound. It uses neural tracts and circuits in linear (serial) fashion to break down situations into their simplest logical parts and predicts the causal relationships that will emerge.</td>
<td>For solving problems where the rules of engagement are well established and don’t change.</td>
<td>Accuracy, Precision, Reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQ</td>
<td>Associative thinking is habit bound, pattern-recognising emotive. It uses neural networks by trial and error to form associations between phenomena and remembers patterns.</td>
<td>For dealing with situations that do not have existing rules or ones that engage our feelings or emotions.</td>
<td>Learning by doing, Handles nuance &amp; ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ</td>
<td>Unitive thinking is creative, insightful, rule-making, rule-breaking. It uses 40 Mhz neural oscillations across the entire brain to create wholes out of the myriad data acquired through the senses.</td>
<td>To reframe and transform previous thinking</td>
<td>Provides insight, Transforms understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Traditionally psychology has recognised only the first two kinds of thinking and has demonstrated that their effectiveness is increased by interaction between them. These two aspects of thinking are sufficient where situations are stable and generally well known. They are not good in highly dynamic situations because they have no reference points outside the experience of the individual. In such situations there is increased need for the more intuitive and creative aspects of thinking associated with SQ, which enables people to discriminate; to have a moral sense; an ability to temper rules with understanding and compassion and the ability to see when understanding and compassion have their limits.

“We use SQ to wrestle with questions of good and evil and to envision unrealised possibilities – to dream, to aspire, to raise ourselves out of the mud.” (page 5)

They assert further that since it operates from the centre of the brain it not only integrates all our intelligences but also has the potential to transform data arising from the other two processes.

“It facilitates dialogue between reason and emotion, between mind and body. It provides a fulcrum for growth and transformation. It provides the self with an active, unifying, meaning-giving centre.” (page 7)

This resonates with what Fowler reported as part of the process of transformation between his faith stages 4 and 5, summarised in Table 4. He describes the sense of disillusion or restlessness and the ‘anarchic and disturbing inner voices’ emanating from past, images and energies that can come from a deeper self. At this point “stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from one's own or other traditions may insist on breaking in upon the neatness of the previously held faith position and may stimulate the search for a more multi-levelled approach to life truth”.

So Zohar and Marshall would argue that it is the working of SQ that enables symbols, for example, to begin to be interpreted more holistically. Take the cross for example. This is regarded by Christians as sacred because it was the vehicle on which, historically, Jesus was crucified. But suppose this were not an historical fact? Would the symbol of the cross be redundant and the whole of Christian teaching be null-and-void? For Christians at stages 1 to 3 the answer must surely be ‘yes’. Yet many people see the cross as symbolising the “I” crossed out. Such a meaning would still survive. Furthermore, in Celtic Christianity the cross has a circle included in it, thus:

For some Christians this represents both Immanence and Transcendence. That the God, who extends beyond the human world, can simultaneously be indwelling in that world. This is a paradox which can be taken further by the symbol of the hot cross bun. Conventional Christians might be somewhat annoyed that hot cross buns are
available in the supermarkets all the year round and not just on Good Friday, when they serve as a reminder of the crucifixion.

However, those who like them might welcome this recent trend, especially if they see them as manifestation of a much deeper teaching, as follows:

The overall shape of a hot cross bun is a circle, which can symbolise the Oneness of both the “manifest” and “un-manifest” aspects of creation. Another way of putting this is to say: “All is one: and all is different”! The vertical member represents our direct personal connectedness to the Godhead (all is one) whereas the horizontal member represents the manifestation of the Divine as all compounded matter throughout the universe (all is different). The point of intersection of the vertical and the horizontal is the present moment; the Eternal now. In this form the arms of the cross do not go beyond the circle, and so the symbol paints a non-dualistic picture of the paradox of Transcendence and Immanence!

The “manifest” and “un-manifest” aspects of creation are also represented by the well known Taoist ying/yang symbol:

Many in the West see this as the union of the opposites, up/down, good/bad, male/female etc. However, the symbol can also have the deeper meaning alluded to above. Here the light represents the “manifest”, phenomena that can be seen and analysed etc. The dark represents the “un-manifest”, the hidden, which cannot be seen or analysed. But the whole symbol represents the unity of all creation and so there is light in the darkness and darkness in the light.
These symbols can, of course, be explored by the rational mind, however, it is unlikely that the deep truth lying behind them can be grasped solely by rational thought; it has to be seen directly. It is likely that some kind of deep personal experience is required. Alister Hardy, who set up the Religious Experience Research Unit in 1969 (see Appendix 2), and his colleagues provide many accounts of individuals’ personal religious experience, such as the following example quoted by Edward Robinson:

“I was sitting at my desk, looking at the road outside, when I suddenly ‘saw’ the world as if it had always been there. There was no gap, no barrier; all was inextricably bound, continuing, one great Being. But I can’t put it into words, the extreme simplicity of what I saw – the plainness and the reality.” (Edward Robinson 1978)

Hardy, and other writers, suggests that over half the population have had some kind of spiritual or religious experience of this kind at least once in their lives. In it they are aware of a presence or power that seems to be different from their everyday self. These experiences vary from meaningful coincidences to a sense of ‘oneness with all things’ or of ‘divine love’. Robinson (1978) suggests that such experiences do actually enhance self-awareness:

“There is no doubt that much experience that on other grounds we would call religious does result in a heightening of this self awareness that one might call purely human. Jung with his concept of ‘individuation’ and Maslow with his ‘self-actualisation’ have described states of mind which at least border on the religious. Both writers have been criticised by their more systematic colleagues for going beyond the limits of what can be experimentally established. Each is perhaps an example of how a whole hearted search for the truth will, I should say must, lead a man to cross traditional boundaries, and in doing so offend professional conventions.”(p.19)

This will apply to the ‘traditional boundaries’ of formal religion as well as those of academic thinking and research, which is generally based on the scientific method. This process requires evidence to be carefully gathered and analysed and the relevant logical conclusions to be asserted by a dispassionate observer. However, for direct experience, the subject, who has the experience, is clearly not outside of that experience. On the other hand, the researchers, who are trying to be independent and dispassionate, do not have the experience themselves. They rely on the words of the subjects but these cannot express the fullness of the experience. So by applying the rules of the scientific method they cannot fully capture what the experience means.

Robinson’s work sits well with Fowler’s ideas to some extent. However, many of the case studies report such personal experiences occurring early in life and so are not reliant on a particular level of cognitive development. Indeed they may have no correlation at all with Fowler’s stages. Although many subjects have a sense of not being able to put their experience into words those with formal operational thinking in place may be able to offer a more sophisticated linguistic description; though the inability to fully encapsulate the experience in words applies to all. On the other hand it is likely that many such mystical experiences, especially those of the young, get lost or forgotten during the normal process of socialisation. This suggests that
the process of faith development is not just the continued refining of cognitive and affective development. Indeed, Robinson (1978) asserts that religious experience leads to a paradoxical ‘simplicity-out-of-complexity’ and emphasises “the connection between that ‘life in the infinite nature of the Whole’ and the very nature of childhood.”

“What I have in mind is the recovery of a kind of wholeness of vision that is the natural characteristic of every child, one that along with the growth of other faculties, need never be lost – ‘never discarded but ….incorporated in the whole pattern of living.’ A recovery, in fact, of simplicity.” (p. 24)

Maybe Fowler’s Stage 0 (Primal Faith) is the underlying condition shared by all beings, which, in the case of human beings, gets covered over by the process of socialisation and cognitive development. Thus Fowler’s stages could be seen as a circle, or spiral, in which the Universalising Stage 6 represents the point at which this underlying condition, primal faith, is recognised at last, as suggested in the following diagram.

0: Primal Faith

6: Universalizing Faith
5: Conjunctive Faith
4: Individuative-Reflective Faith
3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith
2: Mythic-Literal Faith
1: Intuitive-Projective Faith

However, for most of us the conditioning of our education system and the impact of western consumerism means that this re-awakening to Primal Faith may not happen, or if it does it will be later in life, as Fowler suggests. It is not, however, clear from Fowler’s work how this direct seeing occurs, so the really interesting question is:

What is it that stimulates going beyond the rationality of stage 4?
Chapter 5 Contemplation as an enabler in faith development

A common thread in the case studies assembled by the Religious Experience Unit is the “openness to the moment” just as it is. This may be what Astley means when he asserts that people at Fowler’s stage 5 recognise that reason needs to be supplemented by other ways of knowing reality, especially intuition (See Appendix 3). Often people that have such experiences do not know what to do with them or where to take them. Those with a background in religion may well seek help from their local clergy, not all of whom are equipped to deal with the stories presented. In the best case they may be offered spiritual counselling and in the worst even subjected to exorcism! The practice of ‘just being’ can be disturbing to the western rational mind that wants to explain everything through conventional religious thinking even this means utilising irrational dogmas or doctrines.

This view underpins the work of Stanislav and Christina Grof (1990), whose research into post rational states, which they call ‘non-ordinary states of consciousness’ rather than the more popular ‘altered states of consciousness’, has led them to coin the term ‘holotropic’ by which they mean ‘moving to wholeness’. They see ‘holotropic states’ as being capable of producing a radical personal transformation or spiritual opening, which they call ‘spiritual emergence’. However, because we have lost the ‘wholeness of vision’ that Robinson talked about, spiritual emergence often manifests itself in behaviour that the Grofs call ‘spiritual emergency’, which for many people may indeed result in the need for therapy. Unfortunately, the health service and medical world in general tends to see the behaviours associated with spiritual emergency as mental disorders and often attempts to treat them with drugs that are more designed to address problems of psychosis.

The Grofs offer an interesting list of the possible triggers of spiritual emergency, which include:

1. Shamanic crisis
2. Awakening of Kundalini
3. Awakening of unitive consciousness (Maslow’s peak experiences)
4. Psychological renewal through return to the centre
5. Crisis of psychic opening
6. Past-life experiences
7. Communication with spirit guides & channelling
8. Near death experiences
9. Close encounters with UFOs and alien abduction experiences
10. Possession states

They suggest a range of spiritual emergency counselling techniques that need to be carefully chosen depending on the particular trigger involved. They also include alcoholism and drug addiction as possible triggers but insist that a process of detoxification needs to be followed before the underlying cause of the spiritual crisis can be addressed through therapy.

Fowler does not go into a lot of detail about spiritual practices that might assist the process of “Going on Beyond” the rationality of his stage 4. For the Grofs, and other exponents of transpersonal psychology, the answer is likely to be found in the many
contemplative practices that are available. Here the experience of meditation as practised in eastern religious traditions may be of help. Meditation, especially when it is practised with the support of a faith tradition that offers meaningful support, can be part of a process that enables spiritual emergence to occur naturally. Such support might help prevent the emergence from becoming an emergency, or if it does it can provide further support to help ground the person having the experience. There are many different meditation practices available, so to explore the possibility of spiritual emergence further, Shikantaza, the form of meditation practised in Soto Zen Buddhism, will be used here as an example.

In his article “The Truth of Being” (1996, 2012) Zen Master Haryo Young provides a useful connection between Robinson’s wish to recover that “wholeness of vision,” present in every child, and Fowler’s stage development paradigm. Young points out:

“that most religions have, to varying degrees, elevated the experience of their founder to a level seemingly beyond the reach of most people.”

Furthermore,

“deep religious Truth can become unreachable not because we see it beyond our ability to experience, but because we become satisfied with a conceptual understanding of such Truth; or we cling to a partial experience of the Real as if it were the whole. Both of these positions, unless gone beyond, prevent us from ‘knowing’ fully that which lies beyond the individual mind.”

He argues that the existence of this Truth is a great challenge, that when seen:

“….exerts an inner pressure which, in time, will become painful if unrelieved. If we try to relieve the pressure by distracting our attention with other things, or by covering it up with rationalizations, it is a great pity, for every person is capable of experiencing That which puts to rest the yearnings within us which prompt the great questions of life.”

He goes on to describe what he calls a ‘road of Truth’, which has four stages and:

“….may be likened to a literal road which travels through four countries. When one is firmly established in one of these four stages its full character is most clearly realized, just as the undiluted uniqueness of a country is most readily experienced when in that country’s heartland. The borders between these stages, however, like the borders of countries, share qualities of where one has been as well as where one is going. These four stages could be called (1) ignorant non-duality, (2) duality, (3) illuminated duality and (4) illuminated non-duality.”

The rest of the article, which is summarised in Appendix 4, describes these four stages and the process of transition between them. Table 6 sets them out, in brief note form, against the headlines of Fowler’s six stage model.

Table 6 Haryo Young’s four stages in the path to discovering the Truth of Being set out, in brief note form, against the headlines of Fowler’s six Stage model.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James Fowler</th>
<th>Haryo Young</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(0) Primal Faith</strong></td>
<td>(1) Ignorant non-duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is not so much a stage as a ‘pre-stage.’</td>
<td>Human beings are born in this state. This original non-dualistic, or elemental, mind is unknown to us, having no conscious meaning since meaning itself has no meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1) Intuitive Projective Faith</strong></td>
<td>(2) Duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of authority is parents and family), average ages 3-7 years.</td>
<td>The transition between ignorant non-duality and duality is not a conscious choice but is the almost inevitable effect of powerful factors within our human make-up mixed with the effects of our experience and behaviour. Without an appreciation of these subtle developments religious practice can be observed only on a shallow a level. It can become inflexible and tradition-bound and lose sight of its original purpose, thus failing to address the deepest needs of the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2) Mythic-Literal Faith</strong></td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of authority is teachers, customs traditions, books), average ages 7-11, corresponds to moral judgements based on instrumentalism.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith</strong></td>
<td>(3) Illuminated duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of authority is conventionally or consensually sanctioned authorities, average ages 12 to adulthood.</td>
<td>Serene reflection meditation can help us to rise above the opposites, especially when faced with acting contrary to our naturally conditioned inclinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(4) Individuative-Reflective Faith</strong></td>
<td>(4) Illuminated non-duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of authority is personal experience of oneself or peers and/or, ideological consensus, average ages 18 to adulthood.</td>
<td>Actualization of the Truth is not something we understand in a conventional sense, but instead is something that we enter into and become. For it to become the unimpeded Living Truth, we must go beyond our understanding of it and actualize it in daily life. When we let go of our understanding we will not lose it. The letting go is what makes its appearance possible. This, Our True Home, is everywhere. It is the Truth of Being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(5) Conjunctive or Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith</strong></td>
<td>(5) [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The locus of authority is fully internalized, - minimum age about 30 years.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(6) Universalizing Faith</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The matter of authority is now contained within a relationship of un-mediated participation in the ultimate conditions of existence, a loyalty to being, age minimum about 40.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Haryo Young’s approach suggests that we start life in a natural state of non-duality, which is then lost as we become conditioned into ‘so-called’ normal life, or duality. This process is the focus of Fowler’s first 4 stages. Young points out how we
become aware of duality and then describes how we can start the process of transcending it. This description of transcendence probably represents what Fowler envisaged at stage 5, and the return to a state of non-duality could be the focus he had in mind at stage 6. In any case the process resonates well with Robinson’s concern for going beyond the limits of rationality to a state of ‘just being’. Such an approach is, perhaps, less well accepted in the West. However, there is a pointer to the practice of ‘just being’ in the traditional Abrahamic faiths, which are otherwise so imbued with western ways of thinking, in the following verse from the psalms:

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46, verse 10)

It may be this injunction that has led several well known Christians, including a lot of Jesuit priests, to train in Zen monasteries in Japan and subsequently write about their experiences. Appendix 5 includes a story about an experience of the Jesuit priest William Johnston and a list of other books on Zen written by various Christian clerics.

So what is Zen training? In Soto Zen, as Young points out, the practice of ‘just sitting’ in stillness (shikantaza) involves letting go of active thinking, to simply be in the present moment. It is a practice that builds on the intellectual “looking within” required by Fowler’s stage 4 but goes beyond this by the letting go attachment to both emotional experience and thinking. It points to another way of knowing, or rather the state ‘unknowing’.

The problem for all spiritual teachers is how to pass on their teaching without setting up new inflexible religious conventions and dogmas. Even if their teaching is an expression of their own deep spiritual insight, they are usually forced into using words when expressing it formally. The aim for all Zen trainees is not to engage in metaphysical discussion but instead to take the stillness developed in formal meditation into the ordinary concerns of daily life so that they can respond openly and with compassion to the situations that present themselves.

However, this approach is not restricted to Buddhists and, down the centuries, people from all the world faiths have developed their own similar approaches to exploring the deepest spiritual questions. As Anne Bancroft (1979) points out:

“The practice of stilling the mind is to enable all those thoughts and emotions which constantly crowd in on our consciousness to subside. Meditation is not a conscious attempt to affirm or deny anything, but an honest effort to prepare ourselves to know the Truth, in whatever form it may appear. To practise being still, being open to the moment as it is, may lead to a special kind of knowing which appears suddenly by itself. This is the direct awareness of True Wisdom which is called in:

Christianity – Union with God
Hinduism - Moksha
Buddhism - Enlightenment

Here are some texts drawn from Christianity and Hinduism which illustrate the point:
“...whenever you feel your mind engaged, not with any physical or spiritual matter, but solely with God as he is ... then you can be said to be above yourself, and beneath God.

..... for though in a manner of speaking you and God could be said at this time not to be two spiritually but to be one – so that you or whoever it is that perfectly contemplates may, because of this unity, truthfully be called ‘a God’ as the Bible says – you are nonetheless beneath God ... it is only by his wholly undeserved mercy that you are made a god by grace, inseparably united to him in spirit, here and hereafter in the bliss of heaven, world without end!”

(“The Cloud of Unknowing” – Chapter 67)

“52 When a man dwells in the solitude of silence, and meditation and contemplation are ever with him; when too much food does not disturb his health, and his thoughts and words and body are in peace; when freedom from passion is his constant will;

53 And his selfishness and violence and pride are gone; when lust and anger and greediness are no more, and he is free from the thought ‘this is mine’; then this man has risen on the mountain of the Highest; he is worthy to be one with Brahman, with God.

54 He is one with Brahman, with God, and beyond grief and desire his soul is in peace. His love is one for all creation, and he has supreme love for me.”

(“The Bhagavad Gita” – Chapter 18)

The essence of the various practices is a direct looking within to see into the Truth. Most of the world’s faith traditions include people who undertake such practices. They form the bedrock of what is often referred to as mysticism or the mystical paths within the different religions. Such an approach does not require acceptance of dogmas or doctrines but trust in a practice of seeing directly into the Truth of Being. Some of the mystical traditions and practices will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 6  Mysticism

The online version of the Oxford Dictionaries defines the noun “mysticism as a:

“belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the
spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect, may be
attained through contemplation and self-surrender.”

This definition is compatible with the work of Dana Zohar and Ian Marshall (2000),
who refer to communal religious activities and individual experiences that have led
psychologists to identify an area in the temporal lobes of the brain, which they call the
‘God spot’. This region is open to stimulus that can lead to one of two types of
personal religious experience, which they classify as either numinous or mystical.

Numinous experiences involve a supernatural presence, such as (for Christians) Jesus
or Mary, advising them of some particular path to follow in life. In the mystical
experience respondents report feelings of profound meaning, deep insight, a sense of
well being, euphoria, or even an overarching sense of the unity in all things. This
type of experience seldom has specific religious content but many studies link it to an
increased capacity for creativity. Often people reporting mystical experiences talk
about the positive aspects of the experience and the transformative effect upon their
lives. On the other hand Zohar and Marshall suggest that numinous experiences
correlate more highly with madness. This is probably an indication of what Christina
and Stanislav Grof call ’spiritual emergency’ since their list of triggers include
experiences that are more probably numinous rather than mystical as defined above.
However, they agree with Zohar and Marshall that in these cases people find it
difficult to integrate their experience into their lives in a positive way and offer a
range of therapies to help achieve this.

Gellman, Jerome, in his article entitled ”Mysticism” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of
Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition), indicates that the term comes from a Greek word
meaning “to conceal” and so referred to “secret” religious rituals in the Hellenistic
world and hidden interpretations of scripture in early Christianity. He suggests that it
was only later used to denote a kind of “mystical theology” that included direct
experience of the divine.

“Typically, mystics, theistic or not, see their mystical experience as part of a
larger undertaking aimed at human transformation.”

However, many of the elements that underpin mystical manifestations in the
relatively modern western European world from the ancient Greeks onwards are
identifiable in what is known about older primitive civilisations. Several Native
American groups, for example, refer to a “power” that pervades the natural world and
manifests itself in individual things, such as rocks, trees, animals and human beings.
As such it is linked with shamanistic practices that have been discovered around the
world, giving them the power, for example, to heal or find game, or bring rain.

The “natural mysticism” of Indigenous Australian peoples is also concerned with:
“the ordinary, every-day, abiding experience of the sacred and interconnected unity of all beings with the earth, cosmos and ultimate reality. One is not separate from this reality: in fact, there is no one—not for that matter no Other—separate or separable from creation and the natural world.” (Hendriks J. & Hall G)

Unfortunately, many of the experiences reported by twentieth century indigenous people from wherever in the world are likely to have been affected by contact with European civilisation. However, 40,000 years of cultural life and memory cannot be completely obliterated. Indeed, the modern western concerns about global warming and other green issues express many of the values and attitudes of these ancient indigenous civilizations in trying to prevent humanity from totally losing its way and destroying the world it inhabits.

“There can be no cosmotheandric vision without this deep sense of our oneness with all reality. Such a vision does not return to the past in a nostalgic way; nor does it deny the importance of this type of natural or cosmic mysticism for reconnecting us with the earth in profound and vital relationship.” (Hendriks J. & Hall G)

This reconnection with the earth is a central feature of Taoism, which is more mystically oriented than Confucianism, the other of the two main ancient Chinese systems of thought. Taoism focuses on intuitive wisdom, rather than rational knowledge, pointing out the limitations and the relativity of the world of rational thinking. It is primarily a way of liberation from this world especially from the strict rules of convention associated with social etiquette and moral standards that are often reflected in Confucianism.

Taoists sages saw reasoning as part of the artificial world of man and were more interested in observing nature in order to discern the characteristics of the Tao. Their careful observation of nature and the application of intuition led them to deep insights which Fritjof Capra (1976, chapter 8) argues have been confirmed by modern scientific theories. One of these was the realization that transformation and change are essential features of nature, the importance of which is shown in the following quote from the Chuang-tzu:

“In the transformation and growth of all things, every bud and feature has its proper form. In this we have their gradual maturing and decay, the constant flow of transformation and change.”

However, mystics generally regard their personal experiences as ‘ineffable’, which naturally creates a problem. Consequently, some mystics avoid speech and keep silent about what was revealed in the experience, which was the course of action favoured by the Buddha immediately after his experience under the bodhi tree. However, he was prevailed upon to speak about his insights, as have all mystics that we know about. So it may be that when mystics talk about the ‘indescribability’ of their experience they are referring to the difficulty of describing it literally, rather than doing so by the use of metaphor, analogy, and symbols.
The Chinese *yin/yang* symbol, for example proclaims its meaning eloquently and, rather surprisingly, whilst Lao Tzu and his followers were developing the Taoist world view, the essential features of it were being propounded by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus. As Capra points out:

“He shared with Lao Tzu not only the emphasis on continuous change, which he expressed in his famous saying "Everything flows," but also the notion that all changes are cyclic. He compared the world order to "an ever-living fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures," an image which is indeed very similar to the Chinese idea of the Tao manifesting itself in the cyclic interplay of yin and yang.”

However, not all mystics share this view since some of them focus on ‘gaining an experience of the supernatural’ rather than fully understanding the natural unity of all things. This may represent a significant difference between Taoism and Indian mysticism.

Kenneth Shouler and Susai Anthony (2009) suggest that the main goal of traditional Hindu mysticism is to obtain greater knowledge of God and unite the soul with Him through an unmediated and intuitive union that transcends ordinary understanding. This mystical phenomenon is found in all major religions, however, the early Hinduism of the Rig Veda and the Upanishads did not satisfy both head and heart, so there was a need for something else — both knowledge of God and a way to commune with God. Since asceticism came close to fulfilling this aspiration, it was through the ascetics, rather than the orthodox sacrificial priests, that these new teachings developed and spread. Most of these concerned the mental and spiritual exercises of meditation. However, the original motive of Indian asceticism was the acquisition of magical power rather than spiritual insight for its own sake. However, some ascetics took to a life of hardship for truly spiritual motives driven by the search for a deeper truth. It seems that as these mystical exercises developed, the practitioners’ psychic faculties were enhanced, which led to spiritual insights that no words could express.

Whilst such experience is similar to that of the Western saints and mystics, Indian mysticism is unique in its techniques for inducing ecstasy and in the complex metaphysical systems surrounding interpretations of such experience. Indian mysticism also shares with western revealed religions the belief that one attains mystical insight by divine intervention. This is, however, not a view shared by Buddhists who do not recognize a Supreme Being as such. Similarly, whilst it is clearly observable that individuals exist, there is no idea of a continuing self, or *atman*, as a component of such beings. These teachings lead many people think that Buddhism is more of a philosophy than a religion. As Jon Nelson points out, this is an erroneous assumption, since:

“It must be remembered that mysticism is at the heart of all religious systems, including Buddhism. Mystical insights, it is claimed, can only be attained by direct, divine intervention, or else by inward contemplation; logic and reason are not part of the process.”
Nelson also suggests that where divine intervention is seen as the driving factor, as in the 'revealed religions' characteristic of the West, the insight elicited tends to be viewed as dogmatic since who would question the divine. However, where the 'revelation' is arrived at by contemplation alone, and one perceives it intuitively then an open system is more likely to develop. Buddhist mysticism is clearly in the latter category. Nonetheless, whether revelation is given by divine ordinance or arrives through intuitive contemplation it is by its nature not based on normal rational thought processes and so mystics of all traditions are likely to agree that the highest level of consciousness is that which is perceived through the mystical process.

It is this special kind of seeing that the Mahayana Buddhists call *prajna*, or wisdom, that penetrates the very nature of existence and leads to insight into reality, as it is, and as such is not achievable by reason alone. Through *prajna*, intuitively arrived at, *anatman* (or non-self) is seen, enabling practitioners to let go their ego and so realise their oneness with "ultimate reality."

It is by now clear that the experiences of individuals, within different religions, that are labelled with the title of ‘mystic’ do not arrive at the same truth, or at least the same expression of it. This is even the case if we focus on Mysticism within the Abrahamic traditions, which share so much in terms of basic beliefs and scripture. Here in particular, the most profound ruptures are not between the traditions but cross over into the different forms of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim mystical experience.

In his article “Are You a Christian Mystic?” Ian Morgan Cron points out that there will be a wide range of responses to the term Christian Mystic amongst different Christian groups.

“Some correlate it with New Age spirituality; others associate it with creepy psychic phenomena that have little to do with “normal” Christian life; others, however, will speak reverently about a transcendent experience of God that occurred in their past that made them wonder if for only one brief and beautiful moment they themselves were mystics.”

Cron believes that a Christian mystic is:

“….is someone who has a lived experience of Jesus in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. They have experienced Jesus, and through contemplative prayer and meditation, continue to encounter Jesus in such a way that they gain a new perceptive appreciation for the urgent immediacy of God in all things.”

Whilst recognising that the so-called ‘God-encounters’ associated with Christians such as St Francis or St Teresa of Avila are major events, Cron suggests that many people have similar ‘unmediated encounters with God’ that are so delicate and subtle that many of them are not aware of their mystical content. He goes on to present a number of questions that people could ask themselves explore about incidents that they have experienced. If people can say ‘yes’ in response to these questions, such as the following examples, then they may be “everyday mystics”:
• Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the sense that everything in your life is a gift?
• Have you ever been given the gift “seeing the inner splendor” of something in creation?
• Have you ever been stopped in your tracks by the sound of wind moving through a stand of trees or by the sight of a markless snowfield illuminated by moonlight?

Many of the people that feature in the case studies collected by Alister Hardy’s Religious Experience Research Centre describe experiences that would provide a resounding ‘yes’ to such questions.

In an article on Christian mysticism posted on the Wild Things of God web-site in 2002 by an unknown author mysticism is described as the direct experience of God, which:

“…is a kind of knowing, which goes beyond intellectual understanding. It is not a matter of "belief." It is marked by love and joy, but it is not "emotional experience."

The author asserts that true mysticism is not really about "mystical experiences," which come and go, but more to do with the lasting experience of God that lead to the transformation of the believer into union with God. It means:

• that while we honour the Scriptures, we want to know God directly, not just through Scripture.
• while we respect our heritage of teachings about God, we want to know God directly, not through doctrines and teachings.
• while we gather in communal worship, we want to know God directly, not just through the Church.

He (or she) suggests that those who believe that Bible alone is the source of human knowledge about God will find this approach challenging. S/he asserts that the Bible was written by mystics, “listening to God speaking his Word in their hearts”. S/he also points out that it may not be possible for you to read it directly,

“…without the conceptions of your language, time, culture, and personal history? Are you sure you wouldn't understand it very differently if you were reading it, say, in third-century Damascus?

The religion we call "Christianity" changes, but God is eternal. Mystical faith wants to know this unchanging God to whom Christianity leads us, the One behind the beliefs and the words, the One whom beliefs and words cannot describe.”

The author, interestingly, seems to be in accord with Fowler’s Stage 0, that is primal or undifferentiated faith, and Haryo Young’s stage of ignorant non-duality when s/he says:
“All children are born mystics, and if you were once a child, you were once a mystic.”

S/he traces the term mysticism to a treatise by the sixth century saint, Dionysius the Areopagite, called The Mystical Theology. However, s/he points out that Jesus, not Dionysius, was the "founder" of Christian mysticism and recognises that there was mysticism long before Jesus was born, citing the following quote from the Old Testament as evidence:

“God ‘strolled in the Garden’ with man (Heb. ‘adam’). Jacob saw heaven opened. God spoke to Joseph through dreams. Moses communed with God on Sinai. David lost himself in dancing for the Lord.”

Tracey R Rich’s article on Jewish mysticism confirms that mysticism and mystical experiences have been a part of Judaism since the earliest days, with references to the work of creation and the work of the chariot (see Ezekiel) being the two primary subjects of mystical concern. Like many parts of the Jewish faith, mysticism is widely interpreted, some traditional Jews take it very seriously, such as in Chasidic Judaism, whilst others are very sceptical.

The Jewish mystical school of thought has come to be known as Kabballah, from the Hebrew word meaning “to receive, to accept.” However, Kabballah has been grossly misunderstood, with some people seeing it as "the dark side of Judaism," involving evil or black magic. Rich suggest that this misunderstanding emanates from the distortion of the Kabballah teachings by mystics and occultists and:

“Christian intellectuals during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, who reinterpreted its doctrines to fit into their Christian dogma.”

In more recent times its symbols have been associated with forms of divination and magic, such as tarot card readings. She does, however, accept that Kabballah includes:

“many traditional Jewish stories that involve the use of hidden knowledge to affect the world in ways that could be described as magic.”

On the other hand there are plenty of stories that discourage the use of hidden knowledge and powers as dangerous and irresponsible, which is one of the reasons why the teachings of Kabballah is not widespread in Judaism. However, these magical effects were achieved through the power of God, usually by invoking His name, so Rich suggests that they are no more "evil" than the miracles that Christians ascribe to Jesus. Indeed, some people believe that Jesus was able to perform his miracles because he used kabalistic techniques learned from the Essenes, a contemporary Jewish mystical sect.

The utter transcendence of the divine as expressed in the Jewish Kabballah is at the heart of Islamic mysticism. Abdel Wahab El Mess in a conversation with Mohamed Islam posted at Islamic Philosophy Online sees mysticism fitting into Islam as a reaction to the extreme materialistic and rationalistic tendencies that dominate religions from time to time. El Mess asserts that reason:
“can deal only with the measurable. The immeasurable is outside its sphere. But let us look at human life: friendship, smiles, love of children, admiring a flower, hate of enemy, all of these are intangible. The materialistic mind cannot deal with it.”

Mysticism is also incomprehensible to the rational and materialistic mind. The word for mysticism in Arabic is Tassawuf, coming from the root word "Suf," which mean wool. This gives rise to the term sufi which is usually applied to Islamic mysticism. It literally means wearing means woollen clothes, as a sign of withdrawing from the luxury of the world, but is not renunciation of the world. By contrast, the wearing of silk stands for the luxury of the world. It began partly as a reaction against the rigid legalism of the orthodox religious leadership and the growing worldliness of the expanding Muslim empire. It represents a practice undertaken by those Muslims who want to transcend the rationality as well as the legalism of much of traditional Islamic teaching.

Usually the sufi mystic experiences a crisis of meaning, needing something more than pure reason. This leads to the call to follow a path or method of searching for the absolute reality (God). Over time there have been many different methods to guide this search resulting in a myriad of Mystical Orders (Tarika) or paths that take the practitioner through the three stages of Al-mahawia (Fear), Al-muhaba (Love) and Al-ma’rifa (Knowledge). The final flowering of this process is not union with God, but better knowledge of God (Wahidat Ash-shuhud or Unity of Consciousness). To many Muslim mystics wahidat wujud, or union with God, would be a heresy, so the idea is more of a ‘consciousness’ of God rather than a ‘union’.

The unknown author of “The Mysticism of Islam” posted on the internet at www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/SUFIMYSTIC.HTML expresses it as follows:

“Sufism searches for a direct mystical knowledge of God and of his Love. Its goal was to progress beyond mere intellectual knowledge to a mystical (existential) experience that submerged limited man in the infinity of God. It used Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Hellenistic, Zoroastrian and Hindu traditions that were brought into Islam by converts from the many conquered populations.”

The last point is interesting, since it illustrates the interconnectedness of many different religious traditions at earlier times in different parts of the world, indeed, sufis were enthusiastic missionaries who spread Islam well outside the Middle East. They believed that the Qur’an and Hadith had secret, esoteric, meaning and symbolism and sought it out rather than be satisfied with the literal interpretation of the holy texts. They developed several techniques to achieve the goal of a blissful union with Ultimate Reality, including special forms of breathing. These were used to aid concentration and help them attain to an ecstatic state in which they actually felt they had reached union with God. To this extent the unknown writer seems to be at variance with Abdel Wahab El Mess and Mohamed Islam who suggest that the aim of Sufism is knowledge of God (Unity of Consciousness) rather than union with God. This is clearly one area of disagreement between different Islam mystical traditions.
Islam was well established in India by the fifteenth century when Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and the first of the ten Sikh Gurus, was born in April 1469. Baljit Singh Bagga in his article on Sikh mysticism states that Guru Nanak asserted that “There is no Hindu and no Mussalaman” in his first doctrinal declaration. This implies that religious distinctions have no real meaning or validity. His followers believe that he enjoyed direct communion the Supreme Being, through which the Truth was intuitively revealed to him by divine grace.

Bagga goes on to describe Sikhism, which teaches that there is a Self-Existent God who manifested Himself into Naam, the divine Creative Immanence. This resulted in the creation of the universe, which the Creator permeates and sustains. Consequently, Sikhism has often been called the “Naam Marga” and emphasises communion with the Immanent God through nature by means of intuition. So the ideal of Sikh mysticism is not to merge with God but only to form a link or union between the mystic (Gurmukh) and the Creative Immanence of God (Naam). However, since the world is real, creative work and virtuous deeds are of fundamental importance for the practitioner.

Against this background of the Transcendent and Immanent God and the reality of the world, the Gurus described the causes of human pain and problems, the right path for spiritual progress including the solution of these difficulties and the goal of each human being, including characteristics of the ideal life for achieving this. Their role is to provide the teaching, based on their personal experience of the Divine, to help all humankind achieve the ideal life. Bagga points out:

“It is this experience that leads to the extinction of all worldly desires. It takes one beyond the realm of time and space and all its attendant limitations. Negatively, it gives one release from sorrow and suffering, release from ignorance and doubt. Positively, it produces bliss, beatitude and external peace. Since it is a state of timeless, it is a state that has no beginning, no end, no growth, no decay. And since this consciousness transcends time, of a necessity it also rises above the level of cause and effect for these terms signify nothing but events that occur earlier and later in time. This personal experience of the Divine, often called “religious experience” is what philosophers call “mystic experience.” In Sikh mysticism, communion with God is the hallmark of the mystic or Gurmukh. The Gurus have made emphatic statements that their mission is God-ordained.”

So Sikhs believe that the Gurus proclaim the Word of God, not their own ideas and emphasize that God can never be comprehended by rational thought, which, as we have seen, is a common theme in mysticism. However, Bagga insists that Guru Nanak did not follow any mystical tradition, arguing that mysticism has no tradition since there is no historical continuity in the sphere of mystic thought.

“It is always new and fresh whenever and wherever it appears. It is always a new phenomenon or revelation.”

In pointing out the originality and distinctness of Sikhism Bagga assert that Guru Nanak’s greatest religious achievement was his unique organisational and nation-building quality, which enabled his successor, Gobind Singh, to pronounce his
doctrine of the equality of all human beings irrespective of position, wealth, social standing, race or creed. Furthermore, since the spiritual life and moral life are synonymous it is available to all people. In this context Bagga claims that the highest attainment is to become God’s instrument in making every human being God-centred. Consequently, through the spiritual life of steady discipline, contemplation and negation of self-hood, a Sikh gains the true consciousness of reality even though he lives in the temporal world. This practice is summarised by the following quotation from Bagga:

“He suffers an utter transmutation of self, yet self-realisation (apachina) is not the goal of a Sikh. It is only the beginning of his mystic life. A Sikh mystic leaves rapture and ecstasy far behind, to reach the goal which is identification of the human will with the Divine Will. In this sublime state, God is there and the soul is in God. Mystery is no more. Problems vanish. Darkness is dispelled and everything is flooded with Divine Light. The soul becomes in thought and feeling, absorbed in God.”

The above quotation contains many of the aspects found in Gnosticism. However, the Gnostics do not put the same value on nation-building, social conventions, moral and ethical imperatives, which are central to Sikhism. There are also similarities and differences in the Gnostic conception of God. In an article on the Gnostic world view Dr. Stephan Hoeller argues that Gnosticism is more subtle than that of most religions. He asserts that there is a true, ultimate and transcendent God, that is totally outside and beyond all created universe, and that this True God did not make or create anything. Gnostics believe that this True God brought forth from within Himself the substance of all there is in all the worlds, visible and invisible. However, they recognize that many parts of this original essence have been projected so far from their Origin that they experienced unwholesome changes in the process. Consequently the realm occupied by human beings is imperfect. So there is a duality in which the Aeons, or intermediate deific beings, exist between the True God and human beings. The Aeons and the True God, make up the realm of Fullness (Pleroma) where the full power of the Divine is in operation. This Fullness is separate from creation, in which human beings exist.

This situation is explained by the myth of the aeonial being called Sophia (“Wisdom”) who, during her journeyings, emanated from her Self a being whose consciousness was flawed. This flaw led him think that he was the ultimate and absolute God himself because he was unaware of his origins. Consequently, he created the material and psychic cosmos in the image of his own flaw. As Hoeller states:

“Since he took the already existing divine essence and fashioned it into various forms, he is also called the Demiurgos or ‘half-maker’. There is an authentic half, a true deific component within creation, but it is not recognized by the half-maker and by his cosmic minions, the Archons or rulers.”

Whilst most religions, in one way or another, teach that the world is imperfect they offer different explanations for it. Many of them suggest that humans are to be blamed for the imperfections of the world. The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis is one example of this. Gnostics, however, do not accept this myth believing instead
that the cause of this imperfection lies with the creator. Since in the monotheistic religions the creator is God this view is seen by many theists as blasphemy and may account for why the mediaeval Christian church persecuted the Gnostics.

These flaws, which include the fact that all life forms prey on other life forms and natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, drought and volcanic eruptions, bring suffering and death in their wake. Gnostics believe that this is a self-evident truth that cannot be explained by any of the traditional religious or philosophical arguments. Consequently, they argue that the creator God, as a debased manifestation of the True God, is the most sensible explanation.

This view also explains why human nature mirrors the duality found in the world since it was, in part, fashioned by the false creator God but also consists, in part, of the light of the True God. These elements are represented by the perishable physical and psychic components of the human being, as well as a spiritual component, which is seen as a fragment of the divine essence, that is the “divine spark”. This dual nature of the world and of the human being has earned the Gnosticism its “dualistic” label. Hoeller explains the human predicament as follows:

“Humans are generally ignorant of the divine spark resident within them. This ignorance is fostered in human nature by the influence of the false creator and his Archons, who together are intent upon keeping men and women ignorant of their true nature and destiny. Anything that causes us to remain attached to earthly things serves to keep us in enslavement to these lower cosmic rulers. Death releases the divine spark from its lowly prison, but if there has not been a substantial work of Gnosis undertaken by the soul prior to death, it becomes likely that the divine spark will be hurled back into, and then re-embodied within, the pangs and slavery of the physical world.

Not all humans are spiritual (pneumatics) and thus ready for Gnosis and liberation. Some are earthbound and materialistic beings (hyletics), who recognize only the physical reality. Others live largely in their psyche (psychics). Such people usually mistake the Demiurge for the True God and have little or no awareness of the spiritual world beyond matter and mind.”

So what is the work of Gnosis that human beings must undertake to avoid the possibility of constant rebirth in the world of suffering? To be liberated from their predicament, human beings need help but must also make an effort themselves. External help comes in the form of the Messengers of the Light, namely Seth (the third Son of Adam), Jesus, and the Prophet Mani, who have come from the True God at different times to help human beings in their quest for Gnosis. However, most Gnostics regard Jesus as the principal saviour (the Soter).

The Gnostic concept of salvation is about freedom from the ignorance of spiritual realities, caused by the flaw in creation that leads human beings to sin. The Messengers of Light bring the revelation of Gnosis that ends this ignorance and so Gnostic salvation is not an unmediated individual experience. However, Gnostics believe that all human beings have the potential for Gnosis and that the process of salvation must be stimulated to enable it to arise within human consciousness. Naturally this stimulation comes from the Messengers of Light who also establish
saving practices or sacraments to be administered by their apostles and their successors. As Hoeller explains:

“The True God of transcendence is unknown in this world, in fact He is often called the Unknown Father. It is thus obvious that revelation from on High is needed to bring about salvation. The indwelling spark must be awakened from its terrestrial slumber by the saving knowledge that comes ‘from without’.”

Although the main focus is acquiring the gift of Gnosis, Gnosticism does recognise the need for rules of conduct for various purposes including securing an ordered and peaceful society and maintaining harmony within social groups. They are not, however, directly relevant to salvation and so morality is be seen primarily in secular terms. As such it is always subject to change as the spiritual development of the individual proceeds. However, Hoeller points out that:

“Gnosticism embraces numerous general attitudes toward life: it encourages non-attachment and non-conformity to the world, a “being in the world, but not of the world”; a lack of egotism; and a respect for the freedom and dignity of other beings. Nonetheless, it appertains to the intuition and wisdom of every individual “Gnostic” to distil from these principles individual guidelines for their personal application.”

To the Gnostics death does not automatically bring about freedom from enslavement in the kingdom of the Demiurge. Hoeller suggests that:

“Those who have not attained to a liberating Gnosis while they were in embodiment may become trapped in existence once more. It is quite likely that this might occur by way of the cycle of rebirths. Gnosticism does not emphasize the doctrine of reincarnation prominently, but it is implicitly understood in most Gnostic teachings that those who have not made effective contact with their transcendental origins while they were in embodiment would have to return into the sorrowful condition of earthly life.”

The spirit and soul of the spiritual man (pneumatic Gnostic) is welcomed at the entrance of the Pleroma by Christ and Sophia to help him to achieve final reunion. For Ptolemaeus, a follower of Valentinus, taught that the psychics, who were below the status of the pneumatics could eventually come to live in a heavenly place at the entrance of the Pleroma, since as Hoeller states:

“In the fullness of time, every spiritual being will receive Gnosis and will be united with its higher Self -- the angelic Twin -- thus becoming qualified to enter the Pleroma. None of this is possible, however, without earnest striving for Gnosis.”

Depth psychology became prominent during the twentieth century and depth psychologists like Carl Jung were very interested in the Gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi in the 1950's. Hoeller suggests that Jung saw the psychological relevance of Gnostic insights, quoting G. Filoramo, a well known scholar of Gnosticism as follows:
"Jung's reflections had long been immersed in the thought of the ancient Gnostics to such an extent that he considered them the virtual discoverers of 'depth psychology' . . . ancient Gnosis, albeit in its form of universal religion, in a certain sense prefigured, and at the same time helped to clarify, the nature of Jungian spiritual therapy."

Gnosticism may, therefore be both a religion and a branch of psychology since most of the mythologems in the Gnostic scriptures have a psychological relevance and application. For example:

“...the myth of Sophia resembles closely the story of the human psyche that loses its connection with the collective unconscious and needs to be rescued by the Self.”

Since Gnostics have always held that divinity is immanent within the human spirit the convergence of Gnostic religious teaching with modern psychological insight is in itself consistent with Gnostic principles, since they complement each other within the underlying order of wholeness.

Whilst Gnosis is undoubtedly an individual experience based the intuition of the heart rather than logic, concepts and moral precepts, Gnosticism is also a world-view, founded on the experience of Gnosis. Hoeller argues that to omit, or to dilute, any part of the Gnostic world view would mean that it would no longer conform to experience. This does feel like the Gnostics are saying that you can have a personal experience but it is only a Gnostic one as long as it conforms to the Gnostic world view. This implies that some kinds of personal experience are invalid, or as the Gnostics would say ‘misunderstandings resulting from the flawed creation of the Demiurge. However, Hoeller points out that:

“Theology has been called an intellectual wrapping around the spiritual kernel of a religion. If this is true, then it is also true that most religions are being strangled and stifled by their wrappings. Gnosticism does not run this danger, because its world view is stated in myth rather than in theology. Myths, including the Gnostic myths, may be interpreted in diverse ways. Transcendence, numinosity, as well as psychological archetypes along with other elements, play a role in such interpretation. Still, such mythic statements tell of profound truths that will not be denied.”

He concludes by pointing to the timeliness of Gnosticism since the end of the second millennium has witnessed a significant weakening of many of the ideologies which, he believes, avoid the big questions. These, he argues, are addressed by Gnosticism with such openness and authenticity that the Gnostic answer to the questions of the human predicament must surely convince everyone in time.

At the other end of the philosophical spectrum from Gnosticism is Humanism. Modern humanism suggests that mysticism is both fruitless and destroys human progress because it promises an alternative source of intellectual and spiritual satisfaction to the one offered by science. They assert that without science human beings would still live in caves. Science encourages the search for new and better explanations that satisfy human curiosity more completely. On the other hand
mystically inclined cultures produce people who prefer the certainty offered by belief in an unfathomable mystery that can be understood only by the initiated. Such people, who are capable of living happily with logical contradiction, accept explanations of phenomena that are essentially magical in nature. Their sources of truth are beyond ordinary sense experience and so cannot be verified objectively. However, is the gap between mysticism and humanism described here necessarily unbridgeable?
Chapter 7 Rational Mysticism

It is clear from Pat Duffy Hutcheon’s essay “The Quiet Exodus: Where Have All The Humanists Gone?” (circa 1995) that mysticism has been having an impact on groups of people who value rational thought. He draws attention to the Unitarian Universalists, whose principles match closely humanist values and draw on the humanist teachings:

“which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.”

Hutcheon is surprised by the number of humanists who have resigned their membership of their local Unitarian Universalist group citing the increasing dominance of mysticism in the teachings being offered. He cites the sixteenth century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne who warned of the danger to humanity posed by mysticism because it represented an attempt to escape from the problems and limitations of the human condition. This attack was taken up in the twentieth century by Sigmund Freud, who when challenged for criticising mysticism, replied that to tolerate claims not amenable to the test of reason and observation is a betrayal of humanity. Similarly Julian Huxley (1957) was convinced that mystical experience

“was on a lower plane than logical thought or moral effort -- for it generally substitutes images for concepts, and is also in many ways a wish-fulfilment rather than a wrestling with fact.”

However, is Hutcheon typical of all humanists when he equates mysticism with magical explanations of phenomena. It is a mistake to classify all practices that are called mystical as being committed to magical explanations. The literature contains a wide variety of experiences that are labelled ‘mystical’. William Johnston (1978) offers a classification of religious experience in which he describes subtly different forms of mysticism, or contemplation. First there are the acquired and infused forms; the former being achieved by one’s own effort in simple, mantra style, contemplation and the latter following a response to an inner call for silence and leads to entry into the void that is beyond discursive thought. Johnston then overlays these categories with two further terms, namely concomitant phenomena and charismatic phenomena.

“These latter were visions, revelations, trances, voices, ecstasies, psychic powers, telepathy, clairvoyance and the like: they were not essential and one must be wary of them. On the other hand concomitant phenomena were inner peace and joy, love, and the obscure sense of presence, the gifts of the spirit. These, it was held, were always present in the experience.” (Johnston, 1978, p. 30)

It is clear from Johnston’s study of Christian mysticism and the different religious experiences described in the previous chapter that the so-called mystical traditions are very different. Consequently, it is not possible to make any broad generalizations about them. Some of these traditions involve visions of deities and other divine beings accessed through a variety of practices ranging from the chanting, drumming, drug taking etc in the pursuit of an ecstatic state. Other practices offer a quiet
stillness to simply notice what arises in the mind of the individual. What they share is that they can be called personal unique religious experiences and are ultimately inexpressible in words.

Unfortunately not all writers on mysticism are sensitive to such distinctions. Once again Zohar’s simple bifurcation of religious experiences into ‘numinous’ and ‘mystical’ categories is helpful. By this definition some of the experiences described above are mystical, whereas others should more properly be called numinous.

It also follows that those having such experiences, whether numinous or mystical, are not all saying the same thing. Indeed, many real mystics are not stating anything but trying to transmit a ‘transformational experience of being’, which is not capable of being expressed in the usual rational terms employed by science and philosophy. This raises the interesting question as to whether ‘irrational thought’ is the same as ‘trans-rational thought’. The latter can be seen as an alternative form of human knowing that is markedly different from the former. It can provide insights that are not accessible to purely rational thinking, and a number of modern scientific theories have been initiated by intuitive speculations that have enabled the scientists in question to go beyond the limitations of their contemporary orthodoxy. Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking provide two notable examples. This does not mean that they did not value rational thought but that any discipline, including scientific ones, can become hidebound by apparent axioms. However, the true scientist, like any other curious human being, is driven to question the current state of knowledge.

So what is the form of mysticism that seems to have driven humanists from membership of Unitarian Universalist groups. The answer may be found in the popular book by Sam Harris called “The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason” (2004). This was about organized religion, the clash between religious faith and rational thought, and the problems of tolerance towards religious fundamentalism. Harris is a neuroscientist, studying the neural basis of belief, disbelief, and uncertainty. However, Tom Flynn, the editor of Free Inquiry delivered a scathing review of Harris’s book which surprised him since he had been extremely critical of religious faith traditions that are based on religious irrationality. Flynn objected to Harris’s use of the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘mysticism’ affirmatively…

“….in an attempt to put the range of human experience signified by these terms on a rational footing. It seems to me that the difficulty Flynn had with this enterprise is not a problem with my book, or merely with Flynn, but a larger problem with secularism itself.”

Whilst secularism and humanism are justifiably opposed to the unsubstantiated claims of religious dogmatists Harris argues that if it has nothing more to offer humanity than a critique of religion then it can lead its followers to reject important aspects of human experience simply because they are traditionally associated with religion.

In the final chapter of his book Harris explores the topic of meditation, by which he means:
“a method of paying extraordinarily close attention to one’s moment-to-moment experience of the world. There is nothing irrational about doing this (and Flynn admits as much). In fact, such a practice constitutes the only rational basis for making detailed (first-person) claims about the nature of human subjectivity. Difficulties arise for secularists like Flynn, however, once we begin speaking about the kinds of experiences that diligent practitioners of meditation are apt to have. It is an empirical fact that sustained meditation can result in a variety of insights that intelligent people regularly find intellectually credible and personally transformative. The problem, however, is that these insights are almost always sought and expressed in a religious context. One such insight is that the feeling we call “I”—the sense that there is a thinker giving rise to our thoughts, an experiencer distinct from the mere flow of experience—can disappear when looked for in a rigorous way. Our conventional sense of “self” is, in fact, nothing more than a cognitive illusion, and dispelling this illusion opens the mind to extraordinary experiences of happiness.”

Harris argues that the only “faith” required is the faith of scientific hypothesis.

“The hypothesis is this: if I use my attention in the prescribed way, it may have a specific, reproducible effect. Needless to say, what happens (or fails to happen) along any path of “spiritual” practice has to be interpreted in light of some conceptual scheme, and everything must remain open to rational discussion.”

He reminds us that, whilst the science of the mind is still in its infancy, secularists like Flynn do not recognise that there really are genuine, introspective insights, which are usually difficult to experience let alone describe.

“What words should we use to acknowledge the fact that the happiest person on this earth at this moment might have spent the last twenty years living alone in a cave? Any experienced meditator knows that this is a serious possibility. (Indeed, I consider it not only possible, but likely.) What can we say about the fact that the conventional sources of human happiness—association with family and friends, positive engagement with society, diverse experiences of physical pleasure, etc.—might be neither necessary nor sufficient to produce happiness in its most profound forms?”

The difficulty of general accessibility to such insights does not mean that they all must be regarded as suspect.

“The average person could spend the rest of his life trying to determine whether string theory makes any sense (and still fail); this is not a measure of whether string theory is mumbo jumbo. As any serious practitioner of meditation knows, there is something to the claims that have been made by mystics over the ages. And yet, the fact that such claims have always been advanced in the language of one or another religious ideology continues to confound secularists.”
Flynn also criticised Harris for his views about the nature of consciousness, which most atheists believe to be entirely dependent on, and reducible to, the workings of the brain. However, the neuroscientific research into and the philosophical literature on consciousness is not yet clear about what the relationship between consciousness and matter is. Harris points out that, whilst there is still a mystery surrounding consciousness, this in itself does not make conventional religious notions about God, paradise etc any more plausible. However, he accepts that:

“...that there is a kernel of truth in the grandiosity and otherworldly language of religion. It really is possible to have one’s moment-to-moment perception of the world radically transfigured by “attentional” discipline. Such a transfiguration, being both rare and profoundly positive, may occasionally merit a little poetry.”

Harris seems to be proposing a search for truth in which the researcher (or practitioner) is attempting to see behind this kernel of truth, which traditional religion offers, by utilising a natural human capability that goes beyond the normal cognitive processes of rational thought. Such a process ought to be acceptable to humanists, who are supposed to value any open approaches to help humanity achieve its potential. That Harris’s argument has been criticised because of its failure to comply with accepted humanist dogma is amusing since it is not significantly different from the kind of intolerance that has been meted out over the centuries by religious authorities to people whose views contradict or challenge their accepted tenets or beliefs!

Harris, in his rebuttal of Flynn’s criticisms, is proposing the concept of ‘rational mysticism’. It is mystical because it values intuition and trans-rational modes of awareness through personal experience. It is rational because exploring any form of knowing and discussing the process and its results is scientific. In recommending meditation as the potentially transforming practice, he is very close to the position that Buddhists hold.

The Buddha recognised that spiritual practice is often primarily determined by religious convention and belief. Consequently, he warned his followers about the danger of slavishly following convention when he suggested that they should not believe what he told them just because it was him that said it, but rather that they should only believe it if they themselves find it to be true. He had been rigorous in trying out various spiritual practices before finally coming to his deep insight into the nature of being (or enlightenment) through a quiet commitment to sit in meditation under the bodhi tree. He had to be prevailed upon to speak about his insight and over time he unfolded a teaching of a practice that was not only available everyone but also had to be expressed in ordinary daily life. The teaching can be encapsulated in the words of an early Buddhist aphorism, which reads:

Cease from evil,
Do only good.
Train the mind.

This was modified by later Buddhism to:
Cease from evil
Do only good
Do good for others.

What the two versions are both saying is:

Stop doing things that harm yourself or others. Train your heart/mind so that, in any situation that presents itself to you, you know what is good to do for the benefit of all beings, yourself included.

It is very hard to argue that this teaching is irrational, it sounds more like simple common sense. Indeed, the Buddha warned his followers about the dangers of engaging in what might be called metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality. He did, however, on one occasion point to the non-dualistic nature of all phenomena in the so-called verses of uplift:

“….Monks, there is a not-born, a not become, a not made, a not compounded. Monks, if that unborn, not-become, not-made, not compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape from this here that is born, become, made, compounded.

But since, monks, there is an unborn, a not become, a not made, a not compounded therefore the escape from this here that is born, become, made, compounded is apparent…” From The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part II (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) translated by F.L. Woodward.

Here the Buddha is pointing to that which lies behind and permeates the whole universe. For most religions such experience gives rise to the idea of God, from which they deduce a whole structure of beliefs and practices. Some of these are promulgated in doctrines and dogmas about which the relevant religious authorities do not welcome challenge. For Buddhism, however, spiritual practice is nothing special or separate but simply requires practitioners to do the best they can to be fully aware of the moment and to use this awareness positively in all aspects of their daily lives.

However, Buddhism, like all religions has both its esoteric and exoteric forms. Many Buddhists are satisfied with simply accepting the Buddha’s teaching and engage in a variety of devotional practices such as bowing and chanting. The practice of dana, or ‘giving’ is often seen as a devotional act, for example, when it involves giving food to monks to sustain them in their religious training. Whilst this is good to do, it only represents one form of giving. Any giving, if it is done without desire for reward, is dana. The important thing is the letting go of self, which as Harris has already pointed out is a cognitive illusion.

So what is the true nature of self? Most Buddhists in thirteen century Japan believed that the true self is Buddha Nature, which permeates all phenomena. One Buddhist monk, called Eihei Dogen, sought to find the true meaning behind this widespread belief. He was ordained in Japan 1213 when he began a systematic study of Buddhism which led him to ask:
“Why, if all human beings are endowed with Dharma-nature by birth, is it necessary to seek enlightenment and engage in spiritual practice?”

The question can also be phrased as, “What is the meaning of existence?” He went to teachers of different schools of Buddhism in Japan and China, staying at various monasteries but did not get a satisfactory response until he met Ju-ching, the abbot of Mount T’ien-tung monastery. Ju-ching was a rigorous daily practitioner of Ņa-zen (formal seated meditation) in the Ts’ao-tung (Soto Zen) tradition. Unlike his contemporaries he eschewed politics, prestige and financial reward but rather focused on helping his students with their personal practice so that they were able to see the truth for themselves.

A traditional story describes how Ju-ching admonished a monk who had fallen asleep during meditation with the following words:

“In Ņa-zen it is imperative to cast off body and mind. How could you indulge in sleeping?” (Quoted in Hee-Jin Kim (2004) p. 36)

According to the story, the remark shook Dogen to his core and he experienced an inexpressible ecstatic joy that engulfed his heart and so Ju-ching acknowledged the authenticity of Dogen’s enlightenment experience. Interestingly, more recent research (Okumura, 2010) suggests that this sudden direct experience, or kensho, did not happen in that way but the incident has been attributed to Dogen’s biography by his later followers. The most important point is that Dogen did see for himself the true meaning of “dropping off mind and body” whilst training with Ju-ching and this led him to return to Japan to establish the Soto Zen school there.

During the remainder of his life he wrote many important works, including instructions on how to practise shikan-taza, the ‘just sitting’ form of Ņa-zen or formal meditation. These instructions are remarkably free from Buddhist specific language and have some key features and suggestions for engaging in meditation, including practical advice about the sitting posture for meditation. They start with Dogen’s original question that caused him to visit so many teachers:

“Why are training and enlightenment differentiated since the Truth is universal? Why study the means of attaining it since the supreme teaching is free?”

He then counsels against intellectual discrimination and engaging in rational thinking during meditation.

“All you have to do is cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself. Should you be able to cast off body and mind naturally, the Buddha Mind will immediately manifest itself.”

“It is no more possible to understand natural activity with the judgemental mind than it is possible to understand the signs of enlightenment.”
“Such understanding is outside the realm of speech and vision, such Truth is beyond personal opinions.”

He also admonishes engagement in supernatural practices:

“Nor is it possible to understand training and enlightenment by supernatural means.”

He points out that there is no need to travel far and wide in the search for the Truth but rather encourages trainees to:

“…look inwards and advance directly along the road that leads to the Mind”

For Dogen, the practice of serene reflection meditation (Soto Zen) can be summed up as:

“….just sitting, with no deliberate thought…”

The above quotations are from Zen Master Jiyu Kennett’s translation of Dogen’s Fukan Zazengi or “Rules for Meditaiton” (1990)

If we are really able to practise “just sitting with no deliberate thought” in formal meditation we may experience a personal sense of the place where the vertical and horizontal aspects of “All is One and all is Different” intersect. This is what Dainin Katagiri calls “the pivot of nothingness” where everything is reflected without ego.” (2008) However, the point of formal sitting practice is not to chase after a deep spiritual experience but simply to be open to ‘what is’ at this moment and take the stillness of this practice into all aspects of daily life. So, ideally, when chopping the carrots we simply chop the carrots. When talking to someone we give them our full attention, and so on.

This practice of being in the moment, both in formal meditation and in all other aspects of daily life is what Eihei Dogen, along with other Buddhists, is advocating. Here faith is not a belief system but rather a simple trust in the chosen practice and has earned Dogen the title Mystical Realist (Kim, Hee-Jin, 2004). This trust arises because the practitioners have tried it out for themselves.

There is a high degree of correspondence between Dogen’s mystical realism and the rational mysticism that is based on research by Harris’s and others in the field of neuroscience. So it may well be that rationalism and mysticism are not incompatible but just different, and complementary, approaches to viewing the phenomenal world in the search for Wisdom beyond mere knowledge.
Chapter 8  Deepest Wisdom of the Heart

In many of the world’s religions Wisdom is equated with leading a good or virtuous life in accordance with the revealed word of God. In the Judeo/Christian tradition, for example, the Wisdom literature, which includes books such as Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, is of two types: instruction and reflection. In the instruction version there are examples such as:

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord will not let the upright go hungry. He thwarts the greed of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:23).

This contrasts with a reflective literature example such as the following which ponders the injustice of life:

"God has delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. Know now that God hath overthrown me, and has caught me in a net. Behold I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud but there is no judgement." (Job 19:6-7)

In both cases the source of authority is external to the individual, which is fairly universal for religions centred on the teachings of a holy book or a particular prophet or founder. In eastern religions, especially in Zen, looking for Wisdom within, through direct personal experience is a much more prominent factor. However, all traditions accept the point that if wisdom is not manifested in daily life it is not wisdom. Put another way, what you think, believe and say should be compatible with what you do. So, in Buddhism, for example, Wisdom and Compassion are inextricably linked.

Zohar and Marshall agree that religious thought emanating from western culture generally has an external focus, rather than an internal one for seeking the deepest truth, or Wisdom. However, as shown above, in the east there is a greater focus on an internal emptiness at the centre of our being, which is seen as a kind of pregnant fullness and stillness, that is witness to the truth. As demonstrated in chapter 6, this sense of indwelling is present in many of the world’s mystical traditions, including Christian and Jewish versions. There is, for example, Meister Eckhart, who in speaking of this oneness with the centre, calls it the condition of being ‘unborn’:

“Therefore also I am unborn, and following the way of my unborn (unmanifest) being I can never die. Following the way of my unborn being I have always been, I am now, and shall eternally remain.” (Zohar and Marshall, page 268)

This, as they point out, closely matches the Buddha’s verses of uplift quoted in the previous chapter and, more specifically, the example of Zen Buddhism where the centre is beyond all imagining and the trainee can experience “true birth completely anew in the ocean of emptiness.”

“This is infinite freedom of no-self, no-mind, no-idea; this is life itself, completely unconditioned.” (Zohar and Marshall, page 155)
“The centre is a source within ourselves that is replete and inexhaustible and itself the heart of some wider, perhaps sacred or divine reality.” (Zohar and Marshall, page 155)

They suggest that knowing the centre and how to experience it is the key. This is the “deepest wisdom of the heart that is beyond discriminative thought” referred to in the Heart Sutra. This is very different from the kind of wisdom offered by conventional religious teaching, whose scriptures often equate wisdom with imperatives for leading a good life. Unfortunately, as Zohar and Marshall suggest, formal religion and ethics no longer hold sway; family structures are fluid and constantly changing, and our sense of community and tradition is breaking down. In the ensuing uncertainty many people are disorientated or even terrified. However, as Sogyal Rinpoche (1994) has pointed out, this very realisation of the truth of impermanence is valuable because it forces us to ask:

“If everything dies and changes, then what is really true?”

Zohar and Marshall suggest that through spiritual intelligence (SQ) we can live with uncertainty and find an inner poise with which to respect it. Furthermore, whereas formal religion kept alive the old certainties and the ethics associated with them, Einstein’s work on relativity and Heisenburg’s exploration of the uncertainty principle have helped to bring about a major change. They suggest that this also involves a movement away from seeing ethics as the ‘top down’ certainty of received wisdom towards a ‘bottom up’ attempt to discover the truth for ourselves, within ourselves, through the application of SQ. This is probably what is really meant in Islam by *Jihad*, or spiritual struggle, and for Hindus by Arjuna’s battle in the Bhagavad Gita. However, the real mystics of all traditions have always taken this path:

“Rejecting the sufficiency of mere belief or obedience as a path to truth, they stress that we must work on ourselves to find some inner light. Mainstream Western religions have rejected, often persecuted, those who hold this attitude, but perhaps their time has now come.” (Zohar and Marshall, page 203)

In the east, this process of looking inward, being present in the moment and taking the stillness into daily life, has a long history. For example, it was described in a poem written by the Chinese master Kakuan in the twelfth century. He wrote it to accompany his rendering of the Oxherding pictures, which were a revision of an original Taoist version. The following presentation of the Oxherding pictures is based on the ones in “Zen Flesh, Zen Bones” edited by Paul Reps.
1. The Search for the Bull

All human beings are called but few respond to the question "What is the true self?" The ‘true self’ is pointed to by Fowler’s pre-stage 0 "Primal or Undifferentiated" faith. Our awareness of this becomes hidden as we learn the norms of our family, faith community and society (Fowler’s stages 1 to 3 – authority is external to ourselves) Fowler’s research suggests that few people progress beyond stage 3 and start to look inwards for the truth.

2. Discovering the footprints

Here the searcher understands the existence of the Ox (or Bull), which symbolises Buddha Nature, as a concept, so at first there is - yourself and the Ox – which is a dualistic position. Gradually the self and the Ox begin to merge through the deepening of spiritual practice as shown in the next few pictures.
3. Perceiving the Bull

When you realize the true self, you reach the source of everything. You escape from the fetters of the ego and see reality just as it is. This true self is experienced without any conceptual or deliberate thought. However, the danger is you start boasting of the experience and neglect your spiritual practice.

4. Catching the Bull

In the spiritual struggle you see directly (i.e. without the use of concepts) that the essence of your self is completely empty of all phenomena. This is another way of saying everything is a manifestation of Buddha. The Heart Sutra points to this unity of all phenomena by stating that “Form is emptiness and emptiness is form”. But it is very difficult to let go our usual understanding of the phenomenal world in which we see self and other as separate (dualism), so our spiritual practice, built round formal meditation, has to continue. On the other hand there is the danger of becoming attached to “emptiness” which can lead to self-complacency; or Zen sickness which prevents our really being able to help other beings.
5. Taming the Bull

Seeing clearly that you and all things in the universe share the same essence (Buddha nature) does not mean that concepts and delusions will automatically all disappear. They continue to come back again and again. Thus they can lead to the idea of an "I" which has experienced seizing the “ox”, and a “world separate from that I”. So, once again spiritual practice must continue, for “When the opposites arise, the Buddha Mind is lost”. Only when the ox has become tamed through spiritual practice will the oneness of ox and self be a reality and the true ox always manifested.

6. Riding the Bull Home

Here the effort put in to taming the ox is over at last. No conceptual distinctions between unenlightened/enlightened, ordinary/holy, good/bad, gain/loss are made, since all phenomena are truly seen as empty of any substance or self. Letting things run their course, day by day, hour by hour, doing what should be done, you live without any hindrances. But your condition looks so comfortable to others that you must continue your spiritual practice in case others think that this training is not necessary. Furthermore, this state is so pleasant and happy that it may lead to a clinging to it, an innate weakness of our human nature. So, in fact there is still further to go on the path of spiritual training.
7. The Bull Transcended

This picture points to the "forgetting of the ox" (our original self or the true self). The reality of a world completely void is beyond verbal expression, it can only be savoured by actual experience. However, self-consciousness still remains. There is still a tiny sense of a person experiencing ‘the forgetting of the ox’, the last vestiges of dualism.

8. Both Bull and Self Transcended

We come to realize the fact that this "self" (person), which has been doing the seeking, and the essential self (ox), which is being sought, did not exist at all as separate entities. Dōgen Zenji knew that all beings have Buddha Nature but he only saw this for himself with “the falling away of body and mind” through his own practice. In forgetting everything all that is left is one round circle without any substance whatsoever. This is what is meant by "person and ox both forgotten." It is the world of ‘no-thingness’, which becomes truly clear and evident through personal experience that is the essence of Zen practice. Zen without this direct personal experience is merely conceptual Zen.
9. Reaching the source

Having realised that the subject (person) and the object (dharma) are both totally empty you need to even let go of this last residue of enlightenment. With continued practice you realise that this emptiness is the essential state of all human beings, thus signifying nothing special at all. This is a return to your original starting point, or "Returning to the source," where not a trace of such things as "Buddhism" or "Tathagata" is found anywhere. This is the state of the infant in Fowler’s Stage 0, "Primal/Undifferentiated" faith. At this point you can affirm that practice of the way or trying to attain enlightenment is unnecessary, since we are all enlightened from the beginning. However, paradoxically, engaging in the spiritual practice of meditation is needed before you can say this from your own experience. At this point there is no distinction between self and others; everything is just as it is.

10. In the world

Through the process described in the Oxherding pictures, advanced Zen practitioners have cleared their heads of all religious concepts and doctrines. All remnants of dualism are completely gone. Living a life of natural simplicity, without striving to do anything, they manifest the spirit of compassion and calmly help others to realise Buddha-hood themselves. In this state they are able to carry on their ordinary daily lives, really seeing what is good to do in all situations.

*****
The Jesuit priest William Johnston recognised that the Oxherding pictures are a symbolic representation of the process of looking within. Interestingly, he imagined a picture preceding the first one showing a man lost in the woods who does not know that he is lost. We could interpret this as representing how easily we can become distracted by what Zen Master Haryo Young describes as the world of duality. The transition from this state can begin, as in Fowler’s stage 4, when the man begins his search for a way out by looking within, as represented in the first Oxherding picture.

It seems, then, that the path to Wisdom has many steps or stages in the long process of moving out of duality, or spiritual emergence. Unfortunately describing the process as a sequence, whether in words or pictures, can give the impression that it is linear, leading from a specific starting point to a definite finishing point. However, as the following line from the Sandokai, here translated by Zen Master Jiyu Kennett (1990), points out:

“And yet in each related thing, as leaves grow from the roots, end and beginning here return to the Source.”

Thus deep spiritual training is about looking within to *see* more deeply into what is *always* already there. Any description of stages in this process is a limited attempt to represent possible points along the path and so it may appear more linear than circular. There is a lot of evidence that many people from different faiths or no formal tradition, are drawn to this inner path. Whether it is linear, circular or a spiral it is the path to what Johnston calls *faith*, or the infrastructure of religion. Such seekers are less concerned with what Johnston calls *belief*, or the superstructure of religion, so maybe it is now time for everyone involved with promoting religious practice, such as clergy and committed lay people, to explore this path from their own tradition and so discover ‘Faith beyond Belief’ for themselves. It involves going beyond the ‘Truth of understanding and actualising the Truth of Being’ in our daily lives.

As this book demonstrates, many of those that have embarked on this process, such as Buddhist and Christian monastics, have found a lot of common ground even if they use different terminology to describe the journey and its outcome. So, maybe ‘Faith beyond Belief’ is the true basis for an inter-faith dialogue that could really lead to peace and harmony within the world’s diverse communities.
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## Appendix 1 Comparison of Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Reasoning with Fowler’s Stages of Faith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Kohlberg</th>
<th>Fowler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-conventional</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Obedience and punishment orientation (How can I avoid punishment?)</td>
<td>Intuitive Projective Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right is blind obedience to rules and authority, avoiding punishment and not doing physical harm.</td>
<td>The locus of authority is parents and family), average ages 3-7 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-interest orientation (What's in it for me?)</td>
<td>Mythic-Literal Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right is serving one’s own or other’s needs and making fair deals in terms of concrete exchange.</td>
<td>The locus of authority is teachers, customs traditions, books), average ages 7-11, corresponds to moral judgements based on instrumental hedonism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interpersonal accord and conformity (Social norms or the good boy/good girl attitude)</td>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right is playing a good (nice) role, being concerned about other people and their feelings, keeping loyalty and trust with partners and being motivated to follow rules and expectations.</td>
<td>The locus of authority is conventionally or consensually sanctioned authorities, average ages 12 to adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Authority and social-order maintaining orientation (Law and order morality)</td>
<td>Individuative-Reflective Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right is doing one’s duty in society, upholding the social order and welfare of society or the group.</td>
<td>The locus of authority is personal experience of oneself or peers and/or, ideological consensus, average ages 18 to adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post Conventional</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social contract orientation</td>
<td>Conjunctive or Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Right is being guided by universal self-chosen ethical principles which all humanity should follow. The principles are justice, equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.</td>
<td>The locus of authority is fully internalized, average age - minimum about 30 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Universal ethical principles</td>
<td>Universalizing Faith</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Right is being guided by universal self-chosen ethical principles which all humanity should follow. The principles are justice, equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.</td>
<td>The matter of authority is now contained within a relationship of un-mediated participation in the ultimate conditions of existence, a loyalty to being, age minimum about 40.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Appendix 2 The Religious Experience Research Centre

Alister Hardy was Professor of Zoology at the University of Hull (1928-1942) achieving FRS status in 1940. After a brief spell in Aberdeen he became Linacre Professor of Zoology in Oxford between 1945 and 1961 and was knighted in 1957. When approaching retirement he decided to go public on his "fantastic" theory that the human species had an aquatic past. This led to such an outcry in the popular press that Hardy was compelled to write up his theory in a more scientific journal - New Scientist.

However, Hardy's other (probably his biggest) interest was in the area of religious and telepathic experiences, which formed the content of his later work. His approach was scientific and he wanted to compile a database of people's religious experiences so that he might try to determine if there were common properties amongst them. This led to the founding of the Alister Hardy Trust which continues to investigate these matters to this day (see http://www.alisterhardytrust.org.uk/). In 1969 Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit (later the Alister Hardy Research Centre (AHRC) and now the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC)). Based originally at Manchester College, Oxford, the unit began gathering accounts of religious experience, and publishing research in the area. In 1989, the centre moved to Westminster College, and since 2000 it has been located at the University of Wales, Lampeter, which currently holds the archive.

The Religious Experience Research Centre is run by the Alister Hardy Trust seeks to promote objective research into religious experience and communicate its findings to the public, thus offering a forum for discussion for those interested in spirituality. It continues to accept personal accounts of spiritual / religious or transcendent experiences, and welcomes donations to assist it in its work.
Appendix 3 Astley’s description of Fowler’s Stages

Stage 0: Nursed Faith or Foundation Faith [Primal Faith]

Age: 0-4 approximately
This is not so much a stage as a ‘pre-stage’, which is not really open to empirical investigation. The foundations for faith are here laid down in the early experiences of being picked up and nursed, when trust is first formed. This nursing ‘is a real and vital part of any sort of nurture that we might dare to call “Christian”. . . . We are loved into knowing and feeling, as we are loved into being.

Stage 1: Chaotic Faith or Unordered Faith or Impressionistic Faith
[Intuitive-Projective Faith]
Age: 3/4-7/8 approximately
At this stage the child’s relatively uninhibited imagination yields a chaos of powerful images. As thinking is intuitive and episodic, reality is perceived as a scrap-book of impressions as yet not much ordered logically. It is another feature of this stage that symbols are viewed magically, and are treated as being what they represent. The powerful symbols of Christian experience, tradition and liturgy can contribute deep and lasting images in this stage of faith. Hence it may be that young children who are excluded from experiencing ritual and sacrament alongside adult Christians, on the grounds that ‘they don’t yet understand’, are being cut off from a vital form of nourishment. Dependable, structured parenting continues to be crucial at this stage.

Stage 2: Ordering Faith [Mythic-Literal Faith]
Age: 6/7-11/12 approximately, and some adults
At this stage the individual’s power to think, to unify experience and to trace patterns of cause and effect enables her to order her experience. Story-telling is important at this stage, including telling the story of the Christian community to which the child or adult belongs. ‘True stories’ are now distinguished from others; but we are always ‘in’ the story rather than ‘outside’ it, and have no viewpoint from which to compare and criticise stories. People at this stage are very much ‘belongers’. (We may recall how junior school aged children are so keen to belong to some club or group; and how their self-image is to a large extent constituted by such belonging.) By this stage individuals have achieved a measure of simple, concrete perspective-taking, overcoming the egocentricity of the smaller child.

Stage 3: Conforming Faith [Synthetic-Conventional Faith]
Age: 11/12-17/18 approximately, and many adults
(It is worth noting that, according to Fowler’s research, over a quarter of adults over the age of thirty are at this faith stage.) The ability to think abstractly has fully developed by now, and there is a new capacity for (mutual, interpersonal) perspective taking, as the adolescent or adult begins to see herself as others see her. What her peers think and say is regarded as particularly important. Interpersonal relationships are now very significant. But the same is true of other ‘significant others’, including parents, teachers - and sometimes church leaders. However rebellious we may view ourselves to be, at this stage we are actually little (or, if adult, big) conformists. ‘It is a time of going with a particular faith-current, or faith-crowd.’ The ability to reason in a new and more powerful way, which is a significant feature of the stage, provides Christian educators with exciting opportunities for more abstract teaching and discussion. The scope of this remains limited, however, because the circle of people to
whom we relate still does so much to provide our meaning-making, and we are largely unaware of that process. Those who are at this stage are not yet able adequately to reflect on their beliefs and values, or the way in which these are held. Thus when our views are challenged we may respond very defensively, without really knowing why.

**Stage 4: Choosing Faith or Either/Or Faith [Individuative-Reflective Faith]**

*Age:* from approximately 17/18 onwards, or for others from their 30s or 40s onwards *(but note that a substantial proportion of the adult population never reach this stage)*

The transition to Stage 4 can be long and traumatic, taking many years of struggle. Christian educators need to be particularly sensitive here, allowing people space to grow out of Stage 3 ‘faithing’ into this new way of meaning-making. At Stage 4 I am able to take a ‘third person’ perspective from which to evaluate my own beliefs and relationships, as I distance myself from my previous value-system. Now ‘I can no longer tolerate having my faith at second-hand. I must know who I am for myself, when I am not being defined by my relationships with other people.’ Beliefs and values which previously were rather unexamined can now be deliberately adopted. For the first time we explicitly and consciously take charge of, and accept responsibility for, our commitments, evaluations and world-view. At this stage faith can become one’s own. The ‘certainties’ of the individual who is at Faith Stage 4 arise from and contribute to his or her new-found autonomy and maturity. Most Christian educators would applaud such changes, as the beginning of a truly ‘adult faith’. But there are also dangers here, including the danger of ‘an arid over intellectualism, . . . a conceited autonomy’, and an unrealistic sense of independence. There is also a tendency in Stage 4 to caricature the faith of others in order to justify one’s own truth, and an over-simplifying ‘either/or’ determination to create a tidy faith. This may result in our collapsing the inevitable paradoxes and tensions within our belief-system.

**Stage 5: Balanced Faith or Inclusive Faith or Both/And Faith [Conjunctive Faith]**

*Age:* rare before the age of 30

Many adults are content with their Stage 4 ‘faithing’, but others eventually find that their compulsion to resolve these tensions and to strive for clarification is becoming a psychological burden. Such people may be moving towards a fifth stage of faith which is characterised by a much greater openness to, and mutuality with, other world-views and perspectives. This faith stage is a marked development from the more rigid concerns for definition and conceptual clarity that are so characteristic of Stage 4. Stage 5 faith is thus a more balanced and inclusive style of faith. It may be regarded as a *reworking* of Stage 4’s unity, tidiness and coherence, and shows a more porous, ‘dialectical’ or ‘dialogical’ way of knowing that keeps in tension the paradoxes and polarities of faith, allowing us to live with ambiguity in our meaningsystem. Those at Stage 5 are truly but discriminatingly *open* to other people and their viewpoints; they recognise that truth is too complex and many-sided for it to be adequately delineated from any one perspective. ‘The person at Stage 5 is willing to engage the other and to be changed by the other in a way that was not possible from the posture of Stage 4.’ Such people also recognise that reason needs to be supplemented by other ways of knowing reality (especially intuition), and that our instruments of coherence and clarity are just too blunt to work the raw materials of
faith adequately. The capacity for self-criticism, self-questioning and self-doubt develops more strongly as people move into Stage 5. Interestingly, Fowler claims that the individual’s transition between Stage 4 and Stage 5 recapitulates the development in the history of ideas from the ideals of Enlightenment rationality, espoused in the eighteenth-century ‘Age of Reason’, to the less tidy and more plural multiperspectival post-Enlightenment modes of consciousness that characterise today’s ‘postmodernity’.

At this stage, then, the unity and coherence of our Stage 4 faith is beginning to fade. The new stage that may emerge from it can result from our coping with failure and/or our living with the consequences of earlier decisions. It is often characterized by a new humility and a fuller recognition of our inevitable interdependence.

**Stage 6: Selfless Faith [Universalizing Faith]**
*Age: usually only in later life; a very rare stage (and something of a theoretical extrapolation from Stage 5)*

This way of being in faith is essentially a relinquishing and transcending of the self. ‘Stage 6 people . . . go out to transform [the] world. And they often die in the attempt.’

Quoted from “Insights from Faith Development Theory and Research” by Jeff Astley
Appendix 4 A short summary of “The Truth of Being” by Rev. Master Haryo Young

The original version of this article appeared in “The Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives”, vol. 11, nos. 1 & 2: 29–51. (1996). This was revised by Rev. Master Haryo and republished on the web-site of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives in March 2012. This summary was made from the later version.

The Truth of Being

The path for undertaking the search for the deepest Truth that lies at the heart of religion may be seen as comprising four stages, which could be called (1) ignorant non-duality, (2) duality, (3) illuminated duality and (4) illuminated non-duality.

Ignorant Non-duality

Human beings are born in this state. This original non-dualistic, or elemental, mind is unknown to us, having no conscious meaning since meaning itself has no meaning. However, we need to create and enter the realm of meaning, which is duality, so that we have a context in which non-duality can be made meaningful. This dualistic experience and the suffering contained within it make awareness of enlightenment possible and provide the impetus to seek it.

The Progression toward Duality

The transition between ignorant non-duality and duality is not a conscious choice but is the almost inevitable effect of powerful factors within our human make-up mixed with the effects of our experience and behaviour. Without an appreciation of these subtle developments religious practice can be observed only on a shallow a level. It can become inflexible and tradition-bound and lose sight of its original purpose, thus failing to address the deepest needs of the individual.

The influences described above can be divided into the unconditioned and the conditioned. The former, such as bodily desires, make up the natural, biological part of our human nature and are deeply rooted and instinctual. The most remarkable effect they have is to help form a perception of ourselves as separate beings, which has the practical value of helping us to survive.

The conditioned forces are the effects of experience, and contribute to the strength and changing character of the dualistic mind. Whereas unconditioned forces are inflexible and resistant to change the conditioned forces derive their strength from their changeableness and adaptability. In the world of the opposites, the conditioned forces serve to strengthen the dualistic world in which we live by helping us to gratify our mechanisms for both coarse and subtle desire. This is where meditation can help to break the grip of this essentially imagined reality, since in meditation we cease to give unconditioned and conditioned forces their usual opportunity for expression. Consequently, their effects are lessened and the incomplete reality they create is more likely to be seen as false.
Duality

The dualistic world is the world of the opposites. The dualistic mind endows each thing that it perceives with an existence (or non-existence) which is separate from the other things it perceives.

“It thereby creates a universe of separate objects, sensations, ideas, people, etc., the individual existence of which are treated as real in an ultimate sense.”

When such a view becomes established it fixes a limit to our understanding and actions. This dualistic mind positions itself between us and what we experience and it then acts as an interpreter of experience. Such subjective interpretations of reality may be mistaken for direct experience.

“We do not enter into the experience of things as they are, but instead experience things as we think they are. In essence, we experience only our own minds.”

The feeling of being surrounded by endless other things is “normal” enough, and seems sensible. But just because something makes functional sense does not mean that it might not be seen as incomplete from another perspective; maybe one that is inconceivable or illogical until it is experienced. If we cling to the view of a separate self as providing the only acceptable view of reality then we will never transcend the world of appearances.

By contrast the non-dualistic mind does not hold that things exist or do not exist, or view things as separate from, or unified with, itself. It simply is and so perceives ‘nothing’ and is simultaneously both conscious and unconscious.

“In so much as the non-dualistic mind can be experienced it might be typified as the conscious absence of subjective experience.”

However, the non-dualistic mind is acutely aware of its surroundings, being totally involved with whatever task it is undertaking.

On the other hand, the dualistic mind’s view of a separate self and separate others is rarely questioned in the day-to-day flow of life, which is greatly concerned with preserving our physical existence. However, we have a body and mind, which are the means of finding enlightenment once life’s experience awakens the yearning for Truth within us. It will be successful if we actively counteract those forces that have created the dualistic mind. However, should we choose to pursue this yearning for the Truth we should avoid disparaging the self.

“Although limited, like a train that cannot escape the track on which it runs, it has nonetheless brought us a great distance. It is not an evil to be overcome or annihilated but something to be understood and converted.”

We need to recognize from the outset that the spiritual path will not be easy and much effort will be required. Travelling it must become more sustaining than the superficial desire for personal happiness. However, we need to remember that only
we can do the necessary interior work. Seeking good advice from others and sincerely following it even if it is difficult or painful, is helpful, but we should not be dependent on others and remember that ultimately we are responsible for our own training.

“No one else can find the Truth for us, nor can anyone else or their opinions prevent us from finding the Truth if we do what truly needs to be done to find it.”

A Model of Training

Having a model of training can help us to rise above the opposites, especially faced with acting contrary to our naturally conditioned inclinations. The difficulty of doing this may rightly lead us to ask: “What am I doing? What am I trying to accomplish? These questions require clear answers.

“If we presuppose some underlying Truth which religion can help us find, such a Truth predates any religion that describes It. As this Truth would be non-sectarian, we should be able to speak about It without having to become too esoteric. Being universal, this Truth binds us together with a common denominator which is overwhelming when known.”

Religious conflicts are not about this Truth, though they may be about our sectarian interpretations of it.

“One dwelling in Truth has no understanding: he or she is the Truth. It is a state of being, not a state of knowing.”

Explanations derived from knowing, however useful, cannot themselves transmit the Truth since words provide an incomplete picture and often cause us to look in a wrong direction. Alternatively, a useful model of training involves changing how we use the senses and the information they provide.

The elemental, ever-present, mind underlies what we call our ordinary individual minds. Its clarity can easily be obscured by the other aspects of our mental makeup. It is like a clear lens which has other coloured lenses, representing the dualistic ego’s world view, placed in front of it and distorts the image. Were the object to be seen through the clear lens alone, would be seen simply as it is.

“When the filters drop away, either gradually or abruptly, their effects cease and our experience of existence is dramatically different. This includes the realization that the meaning and import of the familiar “I” within us is changed as well.”

The Soto Zen practice of shikantaza, or “just sitting” meditation, when coupled with moral preceptual behaviour, is one of many spiritual practices that can bring this change about. In this practice, which can be translated as ‘serene reflection meditation’, there is a gentle but firm attitude of detachment toward the mind and its contents in which the practitioner does not deliberately think or try not to think.
“Both the thought process and sensory impressions are simply let go of when they naturally and inevitably arise, without being pursued, repressed or judged. This effort is, in essence, a bright-minded, voluntary dying to one’s entire world of experience.”

Each time we refrain from exercising the dualistic mind we weaken it a little. Over time the filters of illusion become increasingly lighter thus increasing the possibility of a clearer perception of Reality.

“By “doing nothing” we in fact do a great deal. In my opinion, it is the single most important act we can do, since it changes us on such a fundamental level and its far reaching effects facilitate the many other aspects of our practice.”

If we learn to see without looking and hear without listening then, with the senses stilled and sense objects forgotten, things can be seen as they are and the so-called reality of duality is transcended. This process does not try to approach the Truth intellectually, since the nature of delusion and duality and the nature of Truth are inaccessible to the intellect.

“The mind of non-duality is the mind we are, in effect, emulating in the practice of contemplative meditation.”

We learn about our world through the continuous flow of experiences right from birth and with the knowledge extracted from the basic experience give an interpretive meaning to them. However, this experience-oriented approach will not help us to realise enlightenment since enlightenment is not dependent on experience. Consequently, experience itself must be transcended. This cannot happen if we look within or without for an experience of Truth, which is why the attitude of benign detachment is necessary for contemplative meditation.

“The underlying “meaning” of existence will become clear when it is not being covered up by subjective human meaning. Our senses do not have to be heightened nor does reality need to part, like a curtain, to reveal something hidden. We are staring IT right in the face. There is nowhere we can look where we are not seeing IT.”

Ironically, the Truth is always before our eyes but we do not “know” IT, so we need to change how we experience what is before us. This involves changing ourselves not the actual experience, since our eyes know how to see, our ears know how to hear and even our mind knows how to think. All we need to do is to do is to let go of that feeling of a separate self.

“Allow your body and mind to fall away. You won’t die. What lives on will be the real you, your True Self, the Master of Masters.”

The most important aspect of this practice is the will to train rather than a finely honed intellect, which in itself will be of only limited benefit. The intellect can be used to remove obstacles that it has created itself, however:
“One can go straight to the Source, and the intellect is most certainly not this Source. In fact, like a physical eye that is pained by too bright a light, the intellect undergoes various agonies when facing the Truth directly and meeting Its incomprehensible aspects.”

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the intellect, so we should not deny the intellectual part of our makeup but know ourselves well enough to be able to use the intellect in a beneficial rather than harmful way.

Another important aspect of practice is to avoid seeing it as a formula linked to a predictable time scale. We are all different, so we should just try to do the best we can each day and not become disappointed if we think our progress seems to too slow.

“If we can just patiently and faithfully apply ourselves with little worry, each one of us, in our own time, will blossom.”

**Illuminated Duality**

People often turn to religion from a wish to lead a better life or to answer the important questions that life can pose. Thus it can have a specific goal or be used to find relief from a particular pain. Many people do not go beyond such limited goals, though there have always been some who realise that there is more to life than meets the eye and these inspire us to look deeper into our spiritual journey, with maybe a clearer purpose. However,

“When the transition from ignorant non-duality to duality is a virtually guaranteed progression, as if down a slippery slope, crossing the boundary between duality and illuminated duality is anything but automatic.”

If we undertake the hard work of climbing the spiritual stairway and

“If we do what is necessary to remove any of the filters that obscure the Truth, we will perceive Reality in a new light, the clarity of which is in proportion to the decrease in the obscurity, and is experienced in increments that range from being gradual and barely perceptible to abrupt and dramatic.”

Such a clarified vision will be integrated, over time, into our natural way of looking things. For some, the course of training will have many memorable religious experiences, whereas for others the spiritual life is generally unremarkable. Such experiences are not, themselves, enlightenment and can be obstacles, if clung to, since the cultivation of experience:

“either worldly or other-worldly, is still worldliness and as such is an impediment for someone striving for the perfection of meditation. No one follows exactly in the footsteps of another, nor do any two people start from the same place, therefore it is natural that our spiritual histories should vary.”

Many of the great religious traditions recognise this kind of transformation, which has been variously called
“the opening of the third eye, or wisdom eye, or the seeing with a single eye.”

Such a unique experience, which will inevitably revolutionize the practitioner’s viewpoint, defies a satisfactory description and, in Rev. Master Haryo’s own words*:

“I must admit having more feelings of mystery than of understanding when approaching the topic of the transformation itself. Nonetheless, I will say some of what I know on the matter hoping that what I say may be helpful. I would do so anyway if for no other reason than to be corrected if I am in error.

When, through the deliberate effort of relinquishment of experience or through the weight of external or internal circumstances, one comes to achieve a required degree of correct detachment, there may occur a physically perceived movement within one’s being. Some part of us, as if now unfettered and unrestrained by the weight of even the slightest thought, is felt to rise up, as if floating, from the central part of us and station itself toward the front of the top of the head, or outside of, but in close proximity to, the top of the physical body. As it moves, there is a remarkable general feeling of lightness and a gentle feeling of exhilaration or excitement as its presence and movement are sensed. This experience is the start of a process which may take months or even years to be called “finished,” and can result in an overall remaking of the person concerned. What happens after this process has been set in motion will no doubt vary from person to person, and my intention in describing some of the things that can happen is not to suggest it is a complete account, as I am sure it is not. And even if such a thing as a complete or correct account existed and I could convey it, I doubt if I would do so, since I would not wish to spoil or influence the uniqueness with which an individual meets and understands such an experience, should they encounter it.

Sometime after the Rising of the Spirit, as it has been called, one may notice that one is perceiving the world from another place within the body. It is as if one’s consciousness, where one feels oneself to be, is now in that place where the “spirit” newly resides. One sees from this place and not from the worldly eyes. The new “third eye” sees, among other things, the underlying substratum of illumination in all things. And when it sees objects it is as if it is revealing them, as if their very existence depended on the seeing. This state of affairs can be most perplexing and requires time to adjust to. The worldly eyes are still used, but it is now this third eye that somehow sees through them, seeing what they could not. They, it would seem, have reverted along with the other senses to an earlier pristine state when their grasping quality was as yet undeveloped. There is a profound stillness of each sense faculty, an unconditioned quality, which enables an experience of things that cannot be typified as a usual subject-object relationship. There is a wordless, timeless fusion of all that was separate. Known is the Sufficiency of Nothing-ness, which puts one, finally, at peace. All that has gone before is now as if a dream; a long, desperate, largely unconscious struggle within the opposites to find the peace and freedom which are now known to lie beyond the opposites.
What had been experienced previously as one’s mind may also undergo a change. Transfixed by what it sees, as if gazing forgetfully into eternity itself, it may not respond with its usual willingness. Intellectual functioning may become laborious or even seize up to varying degrees and one may need to make practical arrangements with others to compensate for its temporary lack of ability. Over time its full competent functioning will return, but it will not be the same old mind as before. The individual quality of it will be greatly diminished and distant. It will no longer be entangled with “thinking” in the way it was before. There will also be a deeper appreciation of how subject we are to the power of our thoughts and how hopelessly bound we are until we change our relationship to certain types of thinking.

The previous feeling of “I” may also undergo a dramatic change. No longer bound by bodily and conceptual limits, it can become transcendental, filling all space and time and be experienced as such. Consciousness, when depersonalized, becomes the universe experiencing itself, like a mirror appearing in its own reflection. The fear of personal death, and the reality of separate individuals, fall by the wayside. One can never look into the eyes of another and see only what one saw before. The separate self, which has undergone a drastic dismantling process, can, with care, be reconstituted somewhat into a persona and used when and if necessary. Only now it is not in charge. It must conform to our new perspective, not we to its. When functioning, it does not cling to the belief in the existence of others or of the physical world, since so doing would only serve to strengthen its own sense of being in proportion to the intensity of the clinging. The body is utilized, but one knows it has only a temporary appearance and relative reality. One has a dual nature or, if you like, two bodies: the finite physical body, the human being we see that has personal experience, and the timeless body, the whole of any and all universes, that abides in transcendent serenity. One may infer a third, formless body, or Source, from which the first two spring and to which they return.

Although many other things may be known, and no doubt many others beyond my knowledge, I would next like to mention something of the practical teaching one receives at this time. This teaching makes it clear what one should have been doing in one’s practice all along. For example, one becomes acutely and immediately aware of the effects of those personal thoughts, words, and actions that are counter to what has been comprehended, or counter to the means by which it has been reached. An error of this sort could be the speaking of an unkind word. Even before it is fully past the lips its destructive effect is felt as it reforms some part of the barrier which separated us from True Life.

The emptiness one enjoys makes the conditioning effects inherent in even our simple daily actions all the more apparent. Even elements of our religious practice, if we have one, may need to be studied to see if the actual effect of what we do with our bodies and minds is in accord with its intended purpose. If it is not, we may need to fine-tune either what we do or the attitude of mind with which we do it. No longer can sensory experience, or even the thinking of attractive or compelling ideas, be entered into unmindfully. Through trial
and error, one learns that there is no such thing as a small, unimportant pleasure. Even if the roots of personal suffering have been cut through, this condition will fade if we revert to old ways, thinking we are beyond the law of cause and effect. As long as we have bodies and minds which are capable of experiencing that which is pleasurable or un-pleasurable, we will have to be vigilant.

It will also become clear, should we have forgotten, that our enjoyment of the fruits of training is permitted for but a short time, and that it would violate the very principle that made them possible if we were to try to stay in this place. Moving on, we let go of the subtle burden which some might call enlightenment, and which we have no longing for in any case, as we are little stirred toward experience. We turn again from the known and continue on the road of detachment because even though these Truths which have been revealed are not unreal, until actualized they belong to and sustain a subtle plane of duality, illuminated duality, and they can still bind us. However slight, there is still an element of mental separation between us and the Truth."

**Illuminated Non-duality**

"Imagine a king in dreamless sleep. Although not conscious of anything, this does not change the reality of his being a king; he is simply unaware of it. This is comparable to the state of ignorant non-duality. Suppose he begins to dream that he is a servant. Again, the reality of his being a king is unchanged but, experiencing his dream as real existence, he thinks he is something he is not. This is comparable to the state of duality. Should he wake up, he will then remember with clear certainty that he is a king. He will no longer think he is something he is not. This is comparable to the state of illuminated duality when we experience our True Nature. If he gets up and simply executes his duties, without holding onto the idea that he is a king, he will then be a king, by doing what a king does, and not just lying in bed thinking, "I am a king." He will have actualized what he knew, making it real by his actions. This is the nature of Realization. The knowledge that he is a king may come to mind throughout the day, but he does not cling to it. He does not need to remind himself of what he is to be able to act. By dropping the idea of what he knew he was, he was able to unite with it. This is comparable to the state of illuminated non-duality.

There are two forms of Truth, the Truth of understanding and the Truth of Being. The Truth of understanding is our understanding of the Truth of Being. The Truth of understanding is expressed in true statements about the meaning of the Truth of Being. These statements are made with our minds looking at and describing the Truth of Being as an object. They are dependent on the conceptualizing mind. Actualizing the Truth of understanding means entering the Truth of Being. There is no Truth of understanding when the Truth of Being is entered into. There is no personal meaning or any form of mind to be found when we are one with the Truth of Being. There is none needed. When the Truth of Being is entered into, we unite with it, and we and the Truth of Being vanish, no longer being seen as objects. Thus
Actualization of the Truth is not something we understand in a conventional sense, but instead enter into and become. Our understanding of it may be true, but for the full un-abstracted reality of it to be manifest, for it to become the unimpeded Living Truth, we must go beyond our understanding of it and, like the king, actualize it in daily life. When we let go of our understanding we will not lose it. The letting go is what makes its appearance possible. As we live, it may rise and fall before us, but it doesn’t matter. If we so choose, we can see it at any time. But we do so with the knowledge of what we do: the knowledge that Truth, as the world knows it, is not our True Home. Our True Home, which is without aspect and is everywhere, and to which we have returned, is the Truth of Being.”

* It proved impossible to satisfactorily summarise the remainder of this article from this point, so the full version has been reprinted from here until the end.
Appendix 5 Extract from “Direct Seeing into the Source of All Things” by Anne Bancroft

The Buddha felt that philosophical speculation about Reality was a barrier to the immediate and intimate experience of it … Reality and all things are already united, and to make a union either in thought or feeling is to give oneself the idea that it does not already exist. In thought they can be separated, but in actuality there is no separation. Nirvana (the state of Reality) is Samsara (the state of ordinary life) and to use such a term as the One, or Brahman, or God, is inappropriate.

In our own time this point was made by clear by Father William Johnston, a Jesuit who went to meditate in a Japanese Zen monastery and recorded his impressions in a book, Christian Zen. He relates that after sitting in meditation for some time his legs began to ache terribly. The master gave him advice on this and then asked him what practice he was following in his meditation. Johnston replied that he was sitting silently in the presence of God without words or thoughts or images or ideas. The master asked if God was everywhere, and when he replied ‘yes’, asked if he was ‘wrapped around in God’. The answer was again ‘yes’.

“And you experience this?” asked the master.
“‘Yes.”
“Very good, very good,” said the master, continue this way. Just keep on. And eventually you will find that God will disappear and only Johnston remains.”

Johnston was shocked by this remark because it sounded like a denial of all that he had thought of as sacred. He decided to contradict the master and said, smilingly,

“God will not disappear. But Johnston might well disappear and only God be left.”

“Yes, yes,” the master answered, smiling, “It is the same thing. That is what I mean.”

Other books on Zen written by Christians

Kadowaki J. K. “Zen and the Bible”
O’Brien J. “Christianity and Yoga”
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