

Chapter 18: Religion

Every dogma, every philosophic or theological creed, was at its inception a statement in terms of the intellect of a certain inner experience.

Felix Adler, *An Ethical Philosophy of Life* (1918)¹

Religious experiences which are as real as life to some may be incomprehensible to others.

William O. Douglas, *United States v. Ballard*,
322 U.S. 78, 86 (1944)

I am an apiarian – I flit like a bee from one religion to another,
sucking the honey of each.

Thomas Jefferson

The purpose of this chapter is to give some idea of my religious background and beliefs and how they developed and changed.

A. Background

Of course I am Jewish, and come from a 100% Jewish family, and was circumcised (although by a Gentile doctor). But my family's Jewishness – I don't want to say *Judaism*, because there wasn't much of that that I ever saw – was very tenuous. I used to feel it was just a peculiarity of family tradition, like having a hyphenated surname. It was certainly not religious in any sense.

On my mother's side my family explicitly rejected Judaism. There were the usual undocumented rumors, from my grandmother but common in many Jewish families, of rabbis several generations back. But my grandfather Rubinstein was active in a secular movement called Ethical Culture, which was a deliberate substitute for the old religion. According to its website,

Ethical Culture is a humanistic religious and educational movement inspired by the ideal that the supreme aim of human life is working to create a more humane society.²

¹ Felix Adler (1851-1933) was the founder of Ethical Culture, the philosophy in which my mother was brought up.

² See www.aeu.org.

That should give you some idea – not a Jewish view, in any religious sense, of the “supreme aim of human life.”

My mother was raised in an Ethical Culture environment and indeed my first school was the Ethical Culture nursery school on Central Park West. My grandfather Rubinstein was buried, I have been told, in an Ethical Culture ceremony, wearing a Masonic apron. My grandmother Rubinstein, *née* Sussman, either not having strong feelings on the subject or sympathizing with her husband’s rejection of Judaism, went along with his policy, and stuck to it after he died in 1929.³ I never heard of my parents, or my grandmother, or any member of my family or any of our friends (I except my brothers – see the Israel section below) observing any of the dietary, Sabbath, or other laws or rituals of the Jewish religion, except for circumcision and the Passover seder, and my grandmother’s once-a-year *Yom Kippur* attendance at a very reform synagogue.

My mother’s brother Monas (known as Roy) had a *bar mitzvah* in 1925 – in fact, for reasons I now forget, he had two. But he never cared for the Jewish religion either, and ate bacon and shrimp with the best of them. I am grateful to my grandfather Rubinstein (and to whoever inspired him) for liberating our family from *Yiddishkeit*. Because he broke free, we never had to.

On my father’s side I have less information. My great-grandfather Moses Phillips (Moshe Zvi Filipower) was called *rabbi*, but it was not his profession and I don’t know what training he had or whether he was actually ordained. He was an official (*shammes*) in a synagogue in Suwalki, Poland, and later active in synagogues in America. Given that background, therefore, I assume (without knowing) that he was a believer.

I have heard (records in the Phillips Family Papers will document this, or not) that around 100 years ago the Phillips family was active in establishing Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, an Orthodox synagogue on East 85th Street. I know they were instrumental in establishing Beth Israel Hospital, but Jewish hospitals in those days were needed not only for religious reasons but because of the prejudice against Jewish doctors in Christian hospitals. Judging from my father’s own conduct and from what I can extrapolate from what I know of the lifestyle of his very assimilated family, I’m guessing that by the time he was growing up there was not much Judaism left on his side either. I never heard that my father had a *bar mitzvah*, or that he or any of his family participated in any Jewish ritual (except circumcision) or obeyed any of the religious laws. It would have been startling, in their circumstances, if they had.

³ She was my only grandparent still alive when I was born.

- Christopher's *bar mitzvah* in December 1963 was held in Central Synagogue on Lexington Avenue at 55th Street. I always thought our parents joined it just for this reason, because you had to be a member to have your son called to the Torah. I never remember anyone ever going there on any other occasion, or my parents ever attending *any* synagogue for *any* reason except for this *bar mitzvah*. Christopher says this is wrong, and they did attend this synagogue. I still find that quite incredible – I certainly have no recollection of this ever happening, and I was living in their house until I left for college only a few months before the event. If it happened it was wildly out of character – I still think the explanation even if they did attend probably is that they did so in order to hold Christopher's *bar mitzvah* there.

So when I was born, my family culture held that I was Jewish only in the sense that I was not Christian. "Who was Jesus? He was a great teacher, but we don't believe he was the Son of God." I was never told that God existed, or that the Torah was God's word, or that there was anything particularly to believe, and that was appropriate as they didn't believe anything. My mother used to say, in a scornful and deliberately blasphemous way, "God's in his holy temple, let him stay there."⁴

There were plenty of signs of assimilation, though. My father carried a St. Christopher medal on his keychain – was this one of the tokens from Cartier, from my mother, to keep him safe in the war? I don't know, but there it was (my father's Army dog tags identified him as "Hebrew"). I was sent to Collegiate School where we had chapel of a muscular Christian kind, recited the Lord's Prayer and sang Christian hymns, and said grace at lunch "in Christ's name." For more on that see Chapter 3C.10.

We had a Christmas tree every year, with a star on top yet, and the full-dress accompaniment of stockings and Santa Claus – of course as a child this delighted me, with all the loot, and I wasn't about to challenge it on any ground (even Santa Claus, although of course I never ever imagined that there was any such person). At one point an attempt was made to introduce Hanukkah too – I'm not sure why, perhaps Christopher was behind that – so we got two sets of presents. My interest in both Christmas and Hanukkah was



⁴ Compare Psalms 11:4 ("The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven ...). I wish I had had the knowledge (and the courage) to reply to her: "the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." Habakkuk 2:20.

strictly material. As children we also had Easter baskets full of candy and marshmallow chicks, and eggs hidden around the house – what went through my parents’ minds as they filled Easter baskets for their young Jewish children?

As noted, my grandmother attended *Yom Kippur* services at Temple Emanuel, the cathedral of Reform Judaism on Fifth Avenue and 65th Street (my father must have paid her pew rent). I went with her once or twice, but I was not interested. I must have been around 11 when I was sent to Temple Emanuel Sunday School. I seem to remember that this was supposedly done at my grandmother’s request, but I find that hard to believe now, or to understand why, being unbelievers, they even suggested it. Anyway I was sent with the explicit promise that I could stop whenever I wanted. Maybe the Sunday school *was* at my grandmother’s request, and giving me this option – a very unusual thing for them – was their way out of what they didn’t really want to do anyway.

It did not make much difference – in the typical way of hyper-Reform synagogues, having removed the guts from the religion they had nothing left to teach. We were given the Hebrew alphabet in such a half-hearted way that would have taken us months to get through it, and not much else. I remember hanging around a basement meeting room drinking hot chocolate from a vending machine and looking at posters about Israel. It was totally boring and I exercised my option to quit after a few weeks, to no resistance whatever. I forget how the question of a *bar mitzvah* came up (did I mention it? did they?) but the issue was posed as a tradeoff – lots of rote memorization but also lots of presents. I passed on a *bar mitzvah* and remember being rather surprised when Christopher wanted one.

Christopher – talk about assimilation! My mother’s story was that she was impressed by *Jean-Christophe*, by Romain Rolland (1866-1944), a 10-volume *Bildungsroman* about a German musician, published before World War I. And indeed there was a one-volume English abridgement of it on the shelves in our house. But I don’t believe for a minute that that was the reason for Christopher’s name. It is impossible to think that a Jewish couple could name their son *Christopher* five years after World War II except as a deliberate statement of rejection and assimilation. And maybe as a protection for him, too – *Christopher Rubinstein* would not have been possible, but *Christopher Mark Phillips* might have been intended as a defense against anti-Semitism.

- The story was that they asked my grandmother if she would mind their using this name, and offered her the choice of a middle name, and she chose *Mark* for reasons never explained. I’m not sure I believe that either.
- I don’t know if having this Christian given name has troubled Christopher – in Jewish circumstances, such as in Israel, he calls himself *Chaim* – but I have never heard him complain about it, and he could have changed it if he wished. He once changed his name to *Morning Glory* (see the story in his papers at Yale), so he

could have dropped *Christopher* if he'd wanted to, and become *Mark*, for example, as our mother went from *Norma* to *Nina* and our uncle went from *Monas* to *Roy*.

We did have Passover seders, usually at the apartments of my mother's relatives in Brooklyn – Aunt Sarah Rubinstein, Aunt Sarah Levine, Cousin Judy Rosenberg – and these were treated respectfully although (at our house) with a minimum of *Haggadah* and no Hebrew (because no one knew any). But it was no big deal, and although *matzos* were served I do not recall our house ever being purged of *hametz*. Perhaps Christopher will correct me here.

So it continued until I went off to college – I was a “cultural Jew,” except that my culture was not Jewish. Yes, my grandmother made matzo balls occasionally, and once in a while a Yiddish word would be uttered, but no one knew any real Yiddish, and ham and lobster were staples on our family menu. I may sound disparaging but I'm not – honest, I'm not. First, as noted, they did not believe, so good for them that they didn't try to feed us what they did not believe themselves. Second, it's *good* they didn't believe, because if they had we (I, anyway) would have had a whole extra set of externally-imposed values to break away from. What they taught us were the attitudes of liberal but secular unbelievers – freedom of religion was good, racial discrimination was bad, and so on. There are worse things to learn as a child. There is a joke that a Jewish child goes to school and hears about Jesus. He comes home and asks his mother if Jesus is the son of God. No, she says, some people believe that, but we're Democrats. That about sums it up.

B. Instant Episcopalian



In college I had a brief flirtation with Christianity. It was more than a flirtation, actually – it was an affair. I am ashamed of it now, but here's what happened. President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in the fall of my freshman year at college. I took it very hard and went down to Washington for the funeral. I noticed to my surprise that I did not have vengeful thoughts



toward Oswald, but imagined in my fevered state that I “forgave” him. Well, I thought, if I can forgive regicide, how much better to forgive deicide! So I was probably a Christian! But what *kind* of Christian? Given that kind of choice, the Episcopalians seemed best all around – they were very loose about doctrinal purity and allowed varieties of thought in their church, and also they had great services with celebratory music and colorful vestments and even incense if you got high church enough. On that

incredibly fatuous and superficial basis I approached our college chaplain, Rev. John Dyson Cannon, and asked to be made into an Episcopalian!!!

Chaplain Cannon, an Episcopalian himself and a fine gentleman who later facilitated my draft counseling work at Columbia (see Chapter 12.B), asked me some questions and had me come back with answers. I guess I answered to his satisfaction (I can be very persuasive even when I don't know what I'm talking about), because he baptized me in the college chapel.⁵ It was a very fine ceremony; my girlfriend of the time, Barbara G., a Catholic, stood sponsor for me.

Not long after that I was confirmed by Bishop Boynton in the magnificent Cathedral of St. John the Divine (right). Another terrific ceremony. I was devoted to the forms – that's probably why I became an Episcopalian rather than a Lutheran. I blush hotly to recall that I bought a brass cross at the Cathedral gift shop and kept it in my pocket. I genuflected to reverence the altar, and even went to church on Sundays. I still didn't have much understanding of what it was all about, though, or what Christians really believed, even though I had been through the Creed and the 39 Articles flying on speed.⁶



Everyone was very courteous to me. When I told my parents (at the same time I told them I had been suspended from college – see Chapter 11) they took it without a murmur. Later another girlfriend (Jewish) put up with my ostentatiously going to church when I visited her family – her parents even accepted me as a potential son-in-law under these conditions. Finally the whole thing sort of died of neglect. For the record I am not now an Episcopalian or *any* sort of Christian believer – I think the whole Christian belief system is complete nonsense. I cannot account now for this episode or understand what induced me to do such a thing. I know I wasn't trying to assimilate – I was already fully assimilated, and had never experienced any anti-Semitism to run from. The fact that I did not then identify emotionally as a Jew allowed me to be baptized without the shame it causes me today. But how I could have become even a nominal Christian without either an intellectual encounter with the substance of Christian belief sufficient to justify

⁵ For a picture of St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia, see Chapter 12.B.

⁶ The 39 Articles, dating from 1563 and adopted in America in 1801, are the basis of Anglican (and thus of Episcopalian) doctrine. See the text at http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html. I read them and signed up anyway.

acceptance of its tenets, which seems impossible, or an emotional conversion sufficient to make me a true believer anyway, I can no longer understand.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that, not having yet gone through the training I got at law school, I did not have the appreciation I learned there for the import of words. Today I could never sign up for any religion without going through each article of the creed and doctrinal articles and questioning each one. For example “On the third day he rose again” – do I believe he actually did that, as a matter of fact? If so why did he do it, and how? “Will come again to judge the quick and the dead?” If so why and how, and when, and how do you know this? Discuss. Even as green as I was in 1964, aged 19, I think it is impossible that I could have assented to these propositions if I had really focused on them. As it was I zipped through the 39 Articles as if they were the terms for a credit card (just a simile – no credit cards in those days). I think also Chaplain Cannon could have been a bit more rigorous with me – perhaps he was not too sure himself about some of the elements of the Creed and the Articles.

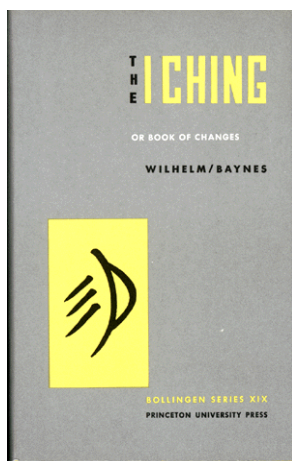
However, while I was an Episcopalian I also became a conscientious objector. My reasons for this are set out in profuse detail and with agonizing pretension in my Selective Service System Form 150: Application for Conscientious Objector Status (coming to Yale as a Supplement). The law was (and still is) that a conscientious objector (CO) could not object only to a *particular* war even religious grounds, but had to object to *all* wars, on religious grounds based either on a Supreme Being or (after *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163 (1965)) on grounds which occupied the same position in his life that a Supreme Being occupied in that of an orthodox believer. My feelings about war came into sharp focus in the spring of 1966 when I was suspended from college and was therefore certain to lose my student draft deferment. I had become an Episcopalian years before this happened, and certainly did not do it for draft purposes or for any later advantage. But as a result I was well positioned as an orthodox believer because there was a minority but authentic pacifist tradition in the Episcopal Church. Two Columbia Episcopal chaplains backed my application on that basis. In the end I was classified IV-F and never had to serve. For more on this see Chapter 12.B.

- As a footnote to my family’s religious background, when I filled out my CO form there was a space for “religion of parents.” I started to write *Jewish* and then thought to ask. Imagine my surprise when I found they were both Unitarians. They had fallen in with a woman named T. Margaret Jamer, known in our family as Jimmie, discussed in Christopher’s papers (she has a file in the Phillips Family Papers). Through her they were introduced to a Unitarian Fellowship in Huntington, Long Island. I never had anything to do with this, or knew much about their life there, but it meant a lot to my parents, and when my father died he had two memorial services, one in Huntington and one at a Unitarian Church in New York.

Anyway, when my Episcopalian phase faded away, and having been classified IV-F no longer needed to think of myself as a religious pacifist, I reverted gradually to the faith of my ancestors, which was having no religion beyond being a Democrat. I was fairly passionate about civil rights and the war, but no longer had any sort of religious basis for anything. I did not concern myself with religious questions as a day-to-day matter, and had more or less formed the idea that these things were inherently unknowable anyway, so why bother thinking about them?

Earl Hall, the Columbia religious affairs office, circulated a card every semester (an IBM punchcard in those quaint days) along with the other punchcards in the registration package. All the religions they could think of were listed on the card so the appropriate chaplains could find their flocks, and we were asked to check one. In my later, post-Episcopalian days at Columbia I used to check *Animist*, hoping an animist chaplain would contact me, but it never happened.

When I was the chair of the Program on Conscience and the Draft at the American Friends Service Committee in 1966-68 (see Chapter 12.B), I was very attracted to the Friends (that is, Quaker) form of worship. The AFSC Regional Board, of which I was a member *ex officio* and which met every month, always began with a silence in the Quaker manner, and in the course of meetings and conferences over those two years I went to a fair amount of Friends meetings. Although I never “joined” in any sense, I did identify to some extent with the Society of Friends.⁷ But nothing lasting came of it.



In law school I became an adept at the *I Ching*, to which I introduced Joel Solkoff. For more on this see Chapter 14, note 9 and accompanying text and image. I used to cast coins and interpret the resulting oracle for people in the Kent Club room, and got very good at it. But there was nothing religious about that either, even though the book is full of Confucian philosophy. In much the same spirit, years later in Truro, I studied and practiced the Tarot,



and got pretty good at that too. This wasn't religious either, although by that time I had had the benefit of exposure to a lot of religious concepts, and those helped me understand the oracles I was reading.

⁷ There was a saying: Some of my best Jews are Friends.

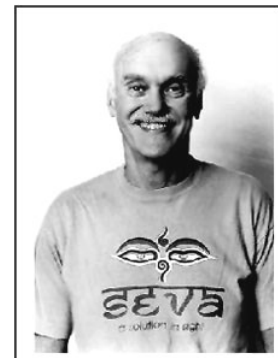
C. Hit by the Meatball

The next thing that happened in my religious development was psychedelics. As mentioned in Chapter 17.F, I started taking LSD in the fall of 1971. From someone who never thought about religion and considered it all unknowable I became, *immediately*, someone who thought about religion all the time and felt he knew at least some answers from direct experience. This was quite a shift. It's a wonder I did not get the bends.⁸

As noted, my second trip was the “meatball” trip.⁹ My meatball came in a rural cabin in Feather Falls, Butte County, California. I sat on a couch with a low table in front of me. Norm Gravem and Trena Beagle (whose cabin it was) and Les Wisner and his wife Makiko were present, and perhaps some other people too. It was just a friendly visit, except that I was tripping, and these experienced trippers knew I was tripping and was new at it and they were thoughtfully providing not only the acid but a supportive setting. During this trip people kept nudging toward me on the table a copy of *Be Here Now* (1971), by Baba (as he then called himself) Ram Dass, which was then a brand new book.



For those who don't know this book, it was a seminal work for the cohort who took LSD in the 1970s and interpreted their experiences in a religious way. Ram Dass ("Servant of God") was the religious



name of Dr. Richard Alpert (shown at right in a later picture), a Jewish psychologist who collaborated with Tim Leary both on his early psychedelic trips in Mexico and in the later experiments and *débâcle* at Harvard. Tim went

⁸ Actually some people at the time may have thought I had.

⁹ The metaphor is by the underground cartoonist Robert Crumb; see his drawing in the text above. In one of his comics he referred to the revelatory experience of LSD as “being hit by a meatball.”

one way after that, becoming a flamboyant public personality, visionary philosopher, and advocate (though he sometimes denied it) of using LSD (see Chapter 19); Alpert went another way, and his journey was mainly a spiritual one.

He went to India, where he met an old saint whom he recognized as his Guru. His experience with his Guru transformed his life. He changed his name and became a religious teacher, which as I write this in 2010 he still is despite a crippling stroke. He is a great teacher and a great man. I got to know him very slightly in his later years through Rosemary Woodruff-Leary, and met him from time to time at NORML events (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws). At Rosemary's parties I considered it a great privilege to help ease his wheelchair over the threshold.

Be Here Now was at that time the most important public product of his journey. It is a book unlike any other.¹⁰ The first part is a straightforward memoir of how Alpert became Ram Dass. The second part is a guide to religious concepts presented as a sort of collage of drawings and idiomatic conversational text. The text reads like a transcription of a talk by Ram Dass. It appears as if printed by hand with what look like rubber-stamp letters. It is full of Hindu and Buddhist concepts, sometimes explained with their traditional Sanskrit names and sometimes with parables understandable to young tripping Americans. Some of the drawings are in modern cartoon format, others are in Hindu or Buddhist iconography. Christian and Jewish and Sufi concepts are thrown in wherever they seem illuminating. The *mélange* of ideas is similar in many ways to those assembled by Aldous Huxley in his anthology *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944), but presented in a less literary, more user-friendly way. The third part, called *Cookbook for a Sacred Life*, is a series of short explanatory essays on particular subjects like Readiness, Mantra, Transmuting Energy, Karma Yoga, Meditation, Sadhana, and Dying. The whole book, in fact, is a cookbook for a sacred life – it explained in a way no other book had ever done the sacred context of existence. Reader, if you have never seen a copy of *Be Here Now*, go now to www.bookfinder.com and order one.

Anyway, as I was tripping I dipped into this book, and then dipped back again into the scene around me. Everything I read seemed confirmed. The invisible effect of people's energy and vibrations (page 27), for example, was a radical concept, almost crazy-sounding to a secular materialist such as I was before the drug came on that October day in Feather Falls. But on LSD this effect is not at all invisible. "And if you can get into that place where you see the interrelatedness of everything and you see the oneness in it

¹⁰ Except Ram Dass' own less successful sequel *Seed* (1973). Both these important books should be acquired for the Yale library if it doesn't already have copies. Yale has several copies of *Be Here Now*, but they are a later edition than the one that made the splash.

all, then no longer are you attached to your polarized position.” (Page 30). LSD makes access to that place easier than thinking about it.

Of course, the drug dose does not produce the transcendent experience. It merely acts as a chemical key – it opens the mind, frees the nervous system of its ordinary patterns and structures. The nature of the experience depends almost entirely on set and setting. Set denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time. Setting is physical – the weather, the room’s atmosphere; social – feelings of persons present towards one another; and cultural – prevailing views as to what is real. It is for this reason that manuals or guide-books are necessary. Their purpose is to enable a person to understand the new realities of the expanded consciousness, to serve as road maps for new interior territories which modern science has made accessible.

Leary, Alpert and Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964).

I read on in *Be Here Now*.

There’s no getting away from it – that’s the way it is. That’s the Eternal Present. You finally figure out that it’s only the clock that’s going around – it’s doing its thing, but you – you’re sitting Here, Right Now, Always.

Page 80. Yes! Wow! Right!

The Atman or Divine Self is separate from the body. It is one without a second, pure, self-luminous, without attributes, free, all-pervading. It is the Eternal witness. Blessed is he who knows this Atman, for, though an embodied being, he shall be free from the changes and qualities pertaining to the body.

Page 86 (quoting the *Bagavadam*). Yes! Clear as light! Law of Karma – yes! Dedicate the fruits of your actions – yes! Desire is Suffering – yes! Renounce Attachment – yes! Four Noble Truths – yesyesyesyes! I imprinted this philosophy when at my most open and receptive, and became (and have since remained) wholly sold on the whole “Eastern religion” approach to understanding life.

You don’t seem to understand. You are in prison. If you are going to get out of prison the first thing you must realize is: *you are in prison*. If you think you’re free, you can’t escape.

Page 42, quoting Gurdjieff.

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is:
Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow
chinks of his cavern.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)

Eastern religion is a very imprecise shorthand, used by westerners who perhaps don't have a particularly good concept of what is involved. *Eastern* itself is a Eurocentrism – it means *east of Europe* – and there are a lot of religions there. Islam, for example, is powerful through much of Asia all the way out to the Philippines. But Islam is not what we mean by Eastern religion. Buddhism is, although strictly speaking it is not a religion at all, but there are forms of Japanese Buddhism in America that look a lot like mainstream Christianity, complete with prayers and pews and hymnals. What *Eastern religion* meant to me, and to my generation, was a syncretic mix of Vedanta and Buddhism, liberally salted with other voices (for example Gurdjieff, just quoted).¹¹

By Vedanta I mean the philosophy underlying the related disciplines of Hinduism and Yoga. In Vedanta it is not necessary to do *hatha yoga* exercises, or *raja yoga* meditation, or perform *puja* to any Hindu gods, or accept any pantheon or scriptures. Vedanta is more about the Hindu philosophy of Self and the World and the relation between the two. The core insight both of Hinduism and Vedanta is the identity between the individual soul and the Godhead, summed up by the Sanskrit phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* – That Thou Art. Vedanta is distilled from many sources, some as ancient as the



Upanishads and some relatively modern.



Swami Vivekenanda (1863-1902) (right) popularized this approach in the west, beginning at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

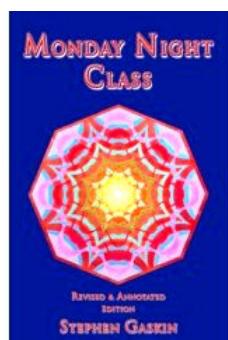
Buddhism is quite a different philosophy. Unlike Vedanta, it is the radical insight of one historical individual into suffering, its roots in desire and illusion, and a method

¹¹ G. I. Gurdjieff (1866?-1949) was an idiosyncratic mystic who influenced a lot of people through groups devoted to his eclectic and esoteric philosophy (sometimes called *The Fourth Way*) and some cryptic books, notably *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1967). His work is best known in America through *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949), written by his disciple Peter Ouspensky (1878-1947). Both these books were published posthumously.

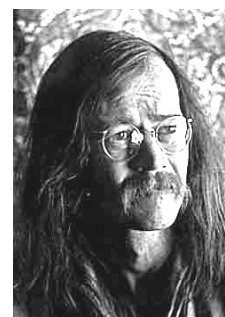
of transcending it. The Theravada (Hinayana) school (surviving now in Thailand and Sri Lanka) is the oldest and simplest form of Buddhism, based on the Buddha's discourses. The more famous Mahayana school of Tibet with its multiplicity of Buddhas and other beings is a fusion of classical Buddhism with an elaborate pre-existing polytheism and demonology. For me, and I think for many of my cohort of Meatballees, it was the knowledge gained from the words of the Buddha himself, without all this elaboration, which mattered the most – that is why I identify as Theravada. While the central concept of Vedanta is the identity of the Self with the Godhead, a central concept of Buddhism is quite the opposite: the personality is an artificial construct, and the Self is identical with Nothing At All, with the empty space *between* our thoughts. The Buddha never taught about a Supreme Being of any kind – when asked about such things he said it was beside the point he was here to teach, which was how to overcome suffering. “Seek ye no Buddha outside yourself,” he advised people. “Work out your own salvation with diligence,” were his dying words.

- Hindu insight: Look inside – everything! Buddhist insight: Look inside – nothing!

Under the influence of LSD, I responded to this syncretic philosophy with an openness of mind and heart I would never have shown otherwise. As I was tripping, and afterward, and through dozens more trips (I estimate a lifetime total of about 75), and after them, and still today, I compared the world I saw while tripping with the world I saw when I was not tripping, and validated the insights of the Perennial Philosophy one by one. I became convinced that we see more of reality while tripping, and what we see then is just as real – indeed realer – than what we see otherwise. My present basic understanding of the world and of my place in it was formed in this way.



I was exposed to many other cultural influences of the same flavor, popular with my cohort, and I learned a lot from them. I think for example of Stephen Gaskin's *Monday Night Class* (1970) – Yale librarians, if you don't have a copy get one, a wise book and very important to those who learned the most in the 1970s.¹² Gaskin (right) led a sort of lecture-discussion group on spiritual issues in the Haight-Ashbury district of San



Francisco, from more or less the same Vedanta-Buddhist (VB) perspective. There are sequels just as wise – transcripts of meetings where Stephen took questions and answered

¹² A “revised edition,” which I have not seen, was issued in 2005.

them with long and intensely insightful raps. He later led interested members of his group to Tennessee to form a commune called The Farm.¹³

Also important was Hermann Hesse (below left), especially his novel *Siddhartha*, about the life of the Buddha. And *The Phenomenon of Man*, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (below center left). And any number of books by the great sardonic adept Alan Watts (below center right). And *The Perennial Philosophy*, by Aldous Huxley (below right), already mentioned, and *The Doors of Perception*, about his first mescaline experience, published in 1954 and seminal for the whole prior generation of psychedelic explorers.¹⁴ And later Tim Leary's *Neurologic* and the more mature work *Exo-Psychology* which grow out of it (see Chapter 19.B). Yale librarians! Get copies! *Exo-Psychology* is a more important book than many of those already on your shelves.



HESSE



TEILHARD DE CHARDIN



WATTS



HUXLEY

Besides these books and plenty of others, including the traditional classics like the *Dhammapada* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads* and the *Tao te Ching* and Shankara's *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* and countless popularizing volumes both Western and Indian, the other important influence on my religious outlook during my psychedelic period was nature, which I first started looking at on LSD. I would drop acid and then observe nature – sometimes up with the hippies in Butte County, but more often right in San Francisco, in a park or by the water. I remember many trips in my neighborhood of Bernal Heights, which in those days had open spaces and vacant



¹³ Still in existence – see www.thefarm.org. With unintentional irony the *Wall Street Journal* called The Farm “the General Motors of American communes.” The journey from San Francisco to Tennessee was the subject of Gaskin’s 1972 book *The Caravan*, revised and reissued in 2007.

¹⁴ The title is taken from William Blake’s line, quoted earlier in this chapter.

lots and meadows where weeds grew (above). I would get right down to ground level and examine the plants (for example wild fennel), or the patterns of clouds, or the trees, or the insects in the ground, or one time at a wedding even a tame monkey, and learn in a radical way about the material world and the zoosphere, which seemed to me one unified organism. I studied high school textbooks of biology and botany to help me understand what I was seeing. It is hard – impossible actually – for those who have never taken psychedelics to understand the radiance of the world as revealed by LSD. But I learned from these experiences about my own place in the biological world.

A rotten log bearing rows of fungus and patches of moss became as precious as any work of Cellini – an inwardly luminous construct of jet, amber, jade and ivory, all the porous and spongy disintegrations of the wood seeming to have been carved out with infinite patience and skill.

Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology* (1962)

I also took from these experiences a very solid belief in God. God was a concept I had not had much respect for earlier, even in my still-baffling Episcopalian period. But suddenly it was completely obvious to me that there was an order to the world, one of surpassing beauty and absolute perfection. The closer I looked, the more this was confirmed. It seemed laughable to me that this order could exist without a creative intelligence behind it. This watch certainly did imply a watchmaker – the arguments of skeptics for a random origin to the world and the universe made no sense at all to me. To the contrary – if an instance of such order could arise from random origins, as indeed it probably did from lightning and methane and other simple ingredients, how magnificent a creation! And how far from random is such potential in inanimate things.

- And while we're at it, if it's all just chaos, why have methane and lightning at all? Why in fact even have chaos? For the Greeks Chaos was the primal god, from whom sprang Earth, and Sea, and Night, and Day, and Love.¹⁵

I sent away through the public library for a rare Christian devotional work called *The Wisdom of God Manifest in the Works of His Creation* (1691) by the English natural historian John Wray (1627?-1705). That title just about summed up my view of the natural world, and it still does. Who God is and what He might be up to is a matter of speculation, but it seemed plain to me, tripping my brains out and resting up afterward, that there was no doubt He was behind it all. I should point out that this has never seemed to me to pose the slightest conflict with science and the Theory of Evolution and the evolutionary perspective on life on earth. What a clever God, to have thought up evolution!

¹⁵ See Hesiod's *Theogony*, 116-138 (eighth century BCE).

My certainty about this and similar propositions contained in the VB or perennial philosophy was based on my own experiences. I believed I had seen Truth, and I still believe that. I have no wish to dispute with people, Christians and Moslems and others, who find truth in other forms. But I derived my religious beliefs from personal experience. As Emerson said, “belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul.”¹⁶

Understanding the Possibility. There are three ways in which one knows what we are talking about tonight. One way in which one knows about it is through direct experience – through some way or other, through being alone in the desert, through falling in love, through bearing a child, through nearly dying, through turning on, through yoga, through taking any one of your senses and pushing it beyond itself. Going through it you have touched a place inside yourself that has an intuitive validity. It’s intuitively valid. Inside you know it’s right.

Be Here Now, p. 16.

My way, like a lot of my generation, was through turning on. As Tim Leary, or was it Stephen Gaskin or Alan Watts or Ram Dass himself, I forget now, explained to us, what could be more suitable for our mechanistic, materialistic culture than enlightenment in a pill, in a product which you obtain and then ingest and which works without effort on your part? Not that a serious religious acid trip is not hard work, as anyone who has ever taken one knows. But it *happens to us*, unlike the Indian model of austerities and meditation or even the radical Buddhist model of sitting under the bo tree with stubborn insistence. In all those models the unaided mind must triumph by its own exertions – in America you can take a pill. And a good thing, too – if there had been no pill I would never have experienced any of this, which turned out to be the hinge of my entire life.

Ram Dass identifies two other ways of realizing the validity of these insights. As well as direct experience there are reason and faith – faith being defined as crediting the reports of realized beings. I have experienced both of these, too – reason following wide reading, and reliance on realized beings in the example of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha. I understand that liberation is possible because the Buddha did it himself under that great tree, whose granddaughter



¹⁶ From his essay “Montaigne” in *Representative Men* (1850).

tree (above) I have seen in India on the site at Bodh-gaya where he did it, in what is now Bihar. This is part of what is meant by taking *refuge in the Buddha*, one of the three refuge vows.

But the greatest of these, for me, was my direct experience. As I base my spiritual understanding at bottom on my direct experience, it has been impossible for me ever to accept religious teachings from books *alone* – impossible for me even to understand how people can say something must be true *just because* it is written in the Torah or the Koran or the Book of Mormon or wherever. I believe in the authenticity of what I felt and saw, and I never saw hallucinations, or anything that wasn't there – just *more* of what was there than I would have seen otherwise, as if my vision were expanded to the infra-red and ultra-violet portions of the spectrum, and beyond. I suppose this belief is equivalent to *faith* – and yet I don't experience it as faith, I experience it as *experience*, it is what I *saw* just as a visitor home from Paris has *seen* the Eiffel Tower and can never afterward doubt its reality. All this is hard to explain, but spiritual experiences always are. Read Ram Dass and Alan Watts – they are many times more skillful than I am at talking about these things.

- How can I distinguish, philosophically, my certainty about spiritual principles, validated largely by my own experience, and the equally confident certainty of, say, the Mormon missionaries who come to my door, believing in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon because they “prayed on it” and it came back confirmed? The only distinction that makes any sense to me is that while I could possibly be wrong, they couldn't possibly be right. But that's not any kind of proof – that's a faith position.

Anyway, once hit by the Meatball I was convinced. I came back to New York with a dozen copies of *Be Here Now*, which I gave out to everyone I knew. I doubt it worked on many without LSD, but it was the best I could do. I made changes in my personal life (such as quitting my job as a lawyer, see Chapter 15.A) based on my new view of what was important. Of course, after such spiritual exhilaration, there was a period of letdown in 1972-73, when I felt I had fallen from grace because I was not exhilarated all the time. But this is a common experience – Ram Dass warns about it in *Be Here Now* – and I got past it.

Although there were important later events, discussed below, my religious world view as developed on these acid trips has remained basically intact except there is a lot more Buddhism in it now, and a measure of Hinduism (mostly devotion to Lord Ganesha). Subsequent acid trips, which I took often at first, then every year, then every few years until 2005, confirmed my insights. Later reading has confirmed them too.

Be Here Now and *The Perennial Philosophy* and the valuable works of Alan Watts and Eknath Easwaran and others have emphasized that Christian and Jewish and Moslem

spirituality can fit into the same matrix, but I am not able to feel much sympathy for them. Part of this is due to their insistence that their view is the only correct one, with everyone else either an infidel or a heretic, which if accepted would discredit my own experience. Part of it is their reliance on scriptures, and on a view of what happened in history that is completely unacceptable to me. And part of it is just my taste – I don't like that flavor.

I know people can live holy lives as Christians or Jews or Moslems. But count me out. I have studied a lot of Christianity, long after my Episcopalian period (when I didn't study seriously, because if I had I would never have taken that step) and even some Judaism, and read the Bible, and I have to say that *to me* Judaism seems like the second-silliest religion I ever heard of, and Christianity the absolute silliest (I am counting the Mormons as Christians here). God spoke to mankind only once, and then *only to the Jews*, and what did He say? He told them what not to eat and what fibers not to mix and what kind of curtains to put around His tabernacle¹⁷ and to avoid mixing with those outside the tribe! It is so obviously a *pastiche* of tribal traditions and Mesopotamian religious concepts and primitive sky-god worship and hysterical prophecies it amazes me that anyone takes it seriously except in an anthropological sense. Ritual circumcision commanded by God? Give me a break! Although I had read large parts of them before, in 2003 I read the historical books of the Old Testament straight through, Genesis to Nehemiah, and the impression I was left with, of a shrieking hysterical jealous cruel bloodthirsty monomaniacal hectoring control-freak of a god demanding fear and cattle, was repellent in the extreme. Putting the book down was like hearing the silence after a dog who has been barking for hours suddenly stops barking. Why anyone would accept a god like that is completely beyond me.

Christianity is worse than Judaism, because it starts from the already unacceptable basis of Judaism, with its relentless appetite for blood, and then superimposes a fantastic structure in which the poor *rebbe*, the one the Romans offed, was actually God who created the world *before* he was miraculously born of a virgin, but who had to be executed by torture to slake his father's (i.e., his own) lust for the blood needed to atone for the sin he put into all people in order to see whether free will would lead them to eternal torment in a lake of fire or to eternal choruses of praise of himself.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Exodus 26:2-4. "The length of one curtain shall be eight and twenty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and every one of the curtains shall have one measure. The five curtains shall be coupled together one to another; and other five curtains shall be coupled one to another. And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of the one curtain from the selvedge in the coupling; and likewise shalt thou make in the uttermost edge of another curtain, in the coupling of the second." Thus saith the Lord?

Well, I never heard of anything so absurd in all my days. I cannot imagine how anyone could credit any of it. And when it is pointed out that there is good stuff in Christianity and Christian writers (and in Judaism and Jewish writers), the Sermon on the Mount and so on, I cannot but think: so what? That just means their silly ideology doesn't blind them to *all* wisdom *always*. The good parts are available elsewhere, for example in the VB philosophy, without the superstructures of Sinai and Calvary. But Judaism without Sinai, and Christianity without the Incarnation and Resurrection, both fall completely apart and become no more than Ethical Culture. The radical personality of Jesus is a compellingly attractive one even through all the nonsense which has been erected over him like a Renaissance tomb. But it is accessible without making him into God and his own father.¹⁸

I'm the queerest young fellow that ever you heard.
My mother's a jew, my father's a bird.¹⁹

I have studied Christianity. Really, I have. After a survey course in college (Intro to OT; Intro to NT) I listened to a lot of Christian preaching, mostly on the radio. This has amused me since law school days at least, and when traveling in the hinterland I still tune it in on my car radio. I know the stories and the arguments and many of the proof texts and consider myself a connoisseur of good Christian preaching. I like best the sermons based in Scripture, especially Old Testament – when you get a preacher like R. W. Shambagh preaching from an Old Testament text you know you are in for some prime stuff. “Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee” – the man knows his Book! There was never the flicker of an instant when I took their arguments seriously, or even considered the possibility of believing a word of them. But I have learned a lot about Christianity from these sermons.

I even studied Judaism a bit – I attended classes in the *yeshivas* Christopher and Adam were at in 1984 (see below), and later studied some Talmud with *Chabad* Rabbi Ahron Hecht in San Francisco. Not deeply, but for several months, enough to get the flavor. The more I learn, the more it repels me.

Anyway, when the dust settled I was pretty much a Buddhist. After the Meatball I stopped answering the religion question on forms *none* or *animist* and started writing

¹⁸ Christopher sensibly asks how this is any sillier than a god with eight arms and an elephant's head. The answer is that the Hindus do not demand adherence to the literal truth of their scriptures or pantheon, and do not link their doctrine to objective historical events.

¹⁹ From Buck Mulligan's song *The Ballad of Joking Jesus*, in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).

acidhead. But later I began to write *Buddhist*, and I still do when required, or when people in India ask me (a very reasonable question in India, where everyone follows one god or another, or put another way where everybody follows God in one form or another). Now, in India, I sometimes say I am a *Ganesh bhakta* – more on that below. There have been the usual struggles – high periods, followed by periods when all my new wisdom didn't seem to make me much wiser on the ground. But as noted I soon learned that that is par for the course, that everyone on a spiritual path experiences this, and not to worry about it. In fact I have worried about it so little that I have grown somewhat lax in the practice of *sadhana* – but more of that below also.

Anyway – desire is suffering! To avoid suffering, renounce desire! That became my task in the years after 1971, and I did make some progress, and I suffered less. And I'm still at it.

D. Israel

I mention this episode here in the Religion Chapter, although it wasn't really about my religious development at all. But here's what happened.



As discussed, I grew up without any real self-identification as a Jew. I don't know what I thought I was, but my viewpoint was sort of half Robert Benchley, half P. G. Wodehouse – a kind of displaced Englishman. I went to Israel as a tourist in 1981 and visited mostly Christian sights. I went from one end of that country to the other, literally – from Eilat to the Golan, from the Jordan to the sea. But I finished the trip without making any emotional connection to Israel. It was like being in a less-interesting Italy – a historic place full of sights significant to Western culture, and that was it.

In 1984 things were different. Christopher was always religious in his own way, but didn't observe the forms of Judaism as far as I noticed, although now that I think of it there was something about not carrying money on Saturday, and he did want a *bar mitzvah*. That seemed quite eccentric but I didn't pay much attention. In Los Angeles he began looking into Judaism more seriously, and took some classes, and studied with a rabbi, and then when he moved to England he studied with Rabbi Freilich (an Irishman), and the more he studied the more observant he got, and soon he was keeping *kashrut*, and keeping *shabat*, and wearing a hat, and at least recognizing the *idea* that hot gay sex was not strictly speaking quite kosher, and eventually he was Orthodox.²⁰ Finally he decided

²⁰ *Kashrut* means the dietary laws; *Shabat* means here the Sabbath and the laws about that.

to go for the real stuff and moved to Israel to study at an Orthodox but respectable *yeshiva* called Ohr Somayach (“Happy Light”), in the northern part of West Jerusalem. No doubt Christopher tells this story differently in his papers, which should of course be preferred to my memoir on this topic, but that’s how I remember it.

Meanwhile Adam was making his happy-go-lucky way from Cairo to Europe, stopping in Israel to see Christopher (or *Chaim* as he was known at Ohr Somayach).



When he arrived in Jerusalem he made his way to the *Kotel* (the so-called Wailing Wall, above) to see the famous sight. There are a number of yeshivas in Jerusalem not as respectable as Ohr Somayach, but devoted to an urgent Messianic message. *Moshiach* (the Messiah) is almost ready to come. The only thing that’s holding him up is that not enough Jews are following the Torah, saying their prayers, laying *tefillin*, performing *mitzvot*, and calling on him to come.²¹ There isn’t much time left – we have to redeem as many secular Jews as possible *right away!* Therefore let’s churn out rabbis as fast as we can and lure as many secular Jews as we can back to orthodoxy – *bal tshuva* is what they are called when they are redeemed.

So these Messianic yeshivas send young men to the Kotel to look for other young men who are probably Jews but who once at the Kotel do not *daven* (recite the Jewish liturgy) in the proper way, or more likely at all. Why not? Because they don’t know how! The quarry is in sight! The young men from the yeshivas, whom outsiders call *bodysnatchers*, befriend the young secular tourists, invite them back to the yeshiva, expose them to the orthodox Messianic ideology, and hope it takes. It does take with a lot of them because (1) lots of secular young people are looking for religion, and (2) these people *are already Jews*. Why search for God in the sacred books of India? Why not look to the Traditional Sacred Book of Your Own People? Then peer pressure and spiritual fear keeps them there – it is a cult.

²¹ *Tefillin* are phylacteries, small boxes with Hebrew texts inside which are to be bound with attached straps to the head and left arm during prayer. *Mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*) means *commandments* – in this context these are the various obligations Jews are expected to perform, including for example laying (that is, putting on) *tefillin*.

However it happened, the bodysnatchers of Yeshiva Aish ha-Torah (“Flame of the Torah”) got to Adam, and instead of visiting Chaim as a tourist he stayed at Aish ha-Torah in the Jewish Quarter near the Kotel and started becoming Orthodox himself. Hats and *tzitzis* and *cholent* and (mostly) chastity and the *Siddur* in Hebrew – Adam threw himself into it.²² When news of this reached me in Truro I grew rather concerned. *Both* my brothers were now studying *Yiddishkeit* (meaning roughly *Jewish stuff*) in Orthodox yeshivas in Jerusalem. If they had been in Zen monasteries or even Hindu ashrams I would not have been concerned, but Orthodox yeshivas? *Gevalt!* So I went to Israel to see what was going on. This was in September 1984 – my notebooks had started by now, and my travel journal of this trip to Israel is found in the back of volume 7.

Adam (and maybe Chaim also) apparently had great hopes that I would sign up too, and all three of us would be *bal tshuvas* together in Jerusalem. But the more I saw the more aghast I became. I went to classes every day (except *shabat* of course), ten days at Aish ha-Torah and then ten days at Ohr Somayach, more or less. I met with the kindly-looking *Rosh ha-Yeshiva*, Rabbi Noach Weinberg, the head of Aish ha-Torah (right). I paid attention and did the reading and spoke to lots of people and went with Adam and Chaim to *sheers* (religious talks) and Sabbath dinners.



I *always* thought it was all rubbish – it was rubbish even in the best of postures, and in the mouths of zealots who said things like fasting can avert earthquakes and Jews can be exempt from the laws of conservation of matter and energy, it seemed like the rankest nonsense. This caused some friction with Adam, as I defiantly turned on a light during *shabat*.

Some of the professors reminded me of my law professors, but with the difference that they had proof texts I did not accept, and their logic was really sloppy. I remember debating with one of them the immortality of the soul. He began by trying to prove the existence of God – I stipulated to that. Then he tried to prove the existence of the soul – I stipulated to that too. Then he argued that of course the soul had to be immortal. What, would G-d create a soul that wasn't immortal?²³ I said sure, why not? He said put

²² *Tzitzis* are ritual fringes commanded to be worn on four-cornered garments. *Cholent* is a sort of thick stew cooked up before *shabat*, when cooking is not allowed, to get you through until *shabat* is over. The *Siddur* is the Hebrew prayer book.

²³ It is an Orthodox tradition to leave the vowel out of the name of God even in English, reflecting the prohibition on saying or writing the holy name in Hebrew.

yourself in the mind of G-d. I said I can't do that – what you really mean is if *you* were G-d that's how *you'd* do it, but you're not, and that's no proof what the real G-d did. He turned to the class and said look, here's a fellow who believes everything about the soul except that it's immortal, as if I were leaving the jelly out of the doughnut. But of course you cannot know whether any soul is immortal or not. He was amazed that anyone would accept everything about the soul except its immortality; I was amazed that such an intelligent man thought that was a proof. I was both too stubborn and too well-educated, and too settled in my own personally-validated beliefs, for the yeshivas to have much of a chance with me.²⁴

I remember an episode from one of those yeshivas. The *tzitzis* (little tassels) are worn to fulfill the *mitzvah* that *if* you wear a four-cornered garment, then it must have fringes attached in certain Biblically specified dimensions, X millicubits from the top, Y centicubits from the side. You don't have to wear a four-cornered garment at all, there's no *mitzvah* to do that, but *if* you wear one *then* you *must* have *tzitzis* and they *must* be kosher. The *tzitzis* are worn (sometimes outside other clothing) on a four-cornered garment called a *begeg* that has no other purpose but to give the wearer the occasion to fulfill this particular *mitzvah*. So we were studying this law one day and I turned to the *yeshiva-bucher* next to me and made a spot inspection of his *tzitzis*. Wouldn't you know it, they were not kosher – off by measurable centicubits. You'd think a ritual garment that has no function but to fulfill a ritual law would be kosher – what else is it for, what could they have been thinking in the *tzitzery* – but clearly it wasn't. Naturally this put the poor lad in violation, because now he was wearing a four-cornered garment *without* kosher *tzitzis*, which is a forbidden act. Therefore the only lawful thing for him to do was to strip it off on the spot. When I put it to him this way, with the unavoidable logic of a lawyer, the kid nevertheless refused to remove his *tzitzis*, probably because he would have had to remove his shirt first (even though it was an all-male study group). I remember with some shame my glee at that moment, encountering a *yeshiva-bucher* who would rather violate the Torah than remove his shirt, but even with the accumulated shame of the last 25 years there is still a little glee left.

I finally left for Istanbul on *Erev Rosh haShanah*.²⁵ Just before I left I paid a courtesy call on Rov Noach. He offered me a job editing his religious lectures for publication. I asked him why he was considering me, as I did not believe in his brand of religion. It seems he was using the questionnaires he collected from all guests for undisclosed graphological analysis, and offered me the position on the basis of my handwriting! But

²⁴ There is a joke about this. Why do Jews always wear hats? It says in the Torah (Genesis 28:10) *Jacob went out*. And what, do you think he'd go out without a hat?

²⁵ New Year's Eve (in September, following the Jewish calendar).

come to think of it, maybe he was right – I would have done a terrific job on that project, and did seriously consider accepting it.

I learned a lot about Judaism, though, besides just that it wasn't for me, and I guess I must have learned something else too, because after this experience, even though the Jewish *religious* part was entirely negative, I found I now identified myself completely as a Jew, thought of the Jews and of Israel in the first person (we), and found my previous self-image as a displaced Englishman had vanished completely. I still feel that way. It was quite an unexpected change. No one had tried to convince me of this – all the arguments from the yeshiva people had been religious ones. After that I read a lot of Jewish history, as I still do, and found it to be the key to locating myself in the stream of history – and it was all due to those three weeks in Israel in 1984.

Unlike my reaction in 1973, when I was quite disengaged and regarded the Yom Kippur War as something happening “in the Middle East,” wars involving Israel now get me all nationalistic. For non-believing, secular, Diaspora Jews like, me, Israel substitutes for Judaism as a focus of Jewish identity. I sometimes wear a pin on my lapel with crossed American and Israeli flags, showing a dual patriotism and carrying the subtext that there is no conflict between American interests and Israeli interests, which I'm not sure is actually true.



Here's something I wrote on August 1, 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, in an e-mail to a friend in Utah who had written to me that he hoped the Jews would “ultimately prevail.”

Ultimately prevail? We have *already* prevailed, just by still being here seven civilizations later, when all those we sojourned among are one with Nineveh and Tyre, as Kipling said in not all that different a context. Where are the Pharaohs now, eh, what what, with their pyramids we built for them? How about the Babylonians, who carried us off, and we hung our harps on the willow trees and wept (Psalm 137:1-2)? How about the Romans, who destroyed our Temple? We're still here without a temple, while the temples of the Romans are mostly either dust now, or Christian churches where their descendants worship our tribal god and our charismatic rabbi. How about the Czars, for that matter, who ground our faces in the dust? They got wiped out, and we moved to New York and opened delicatessens. And we will still be here writing books and making music and practicing medicine and baking bagels and playing chess and breeding children when Sheikh Muhammad Motherfucker and his band of vicious bandits have long been forgotten. When Daniel O'Connell taunted Disraeli with being a Jew he replied that “when the ancestors of the right honourable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon.” Like I say, there's nothing like a war to get me all nationalistic.

Such attitudes may be atavistic and unattractive, but that's how I feel when they lob rockets at us, and note the first person here.²⁶ Let's have peace, by all means, right away if possible, and *then* I'll remember that we're all in this together and that people are people everywhere, and so on. But in the meantime, while the rockets are still flying: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." 1 Samuel 15:2-4.

Or maybe not – it's more compassionate, and better politics, not to. I am only interested in smiting Amalek because he's smiting us. It isn't a religious thing. If they would leave us alone I'd be delighted not only not to smite them, but to build up their pathetic economies so Israel could live in a better neighborhood. Smiting is expensive. We don't need a Biblical title to Israel – we won it fair and square in 1948 when the British abandoned it and the Arabs refused the UN partition plan and preferred to fight it out, and lost.

To return to the religious story, though, Christopher and Adam stuck with orthodox Judaism for a while longer after my visit. I regarded it as a kind of fever. I knew Christopher had recovered when I met him in London a few years later and he wasn't wearing a hat. Adam didn't recover quite so cleanly – for a while thereafter he continued to do things like send me a book that explained how to keep a modern scientific view of natural history and evolution *and* a belief in the literal truth of Genesis in your head at the same time without going nuts. I still cannot understand why people put themselves through torment like that. If you can't square your belief with what you know to be true, change your mind! But you can't change your mind when you're tied to a text. I attach as Document 18-1 a letter I wrote to Adam on this subject in this period.

I wrote to Adam (in a different letter) in 1986, suggesting we stop contending about religion. I said:

Our positions are quite symmetrical. I am frustrated that you persist in believing things there is no sensible reason to believe. You are frustrated that I persist in rejecting things there is no sensible reason to reject. I think you can't have thought it through. You think I haven't studied the evidence. I think you are wasting your life in a delusion. You think / am wasting *my* life in a delusion. I think it is a projection. You think it is a revelation. I think you're afraid of freedom. You think I'm afraid of truth. You think I'm pigheaded in my pride. I think you're cowardly in your submission. And so on, one for one. It can only get worse. So let's agree that religion is a personal matter. I renounce any attempt to influence you if you will renounce any attempt to influence me. When I persist

²⁶ I have been to Sderot near Gaza and seen the rocket craters in the road a few feet from a primary school, missed only through traditional Palestinian incompetence.

in regarding Judaism as a religion, try not to get upset. And when you persist in regarding it as God's unique truth, / will try not to get upset. It will require sacrifice from each of us but I am willing to try.

As part of my dialogue with Adam on this topic, sometime in the 80s I wrote up my own Articles of Religion, in response to Maimonides' 13 Articles of the Jewish Religion, of which I could only subscribe to the first half. (Only one God? No problem. Nothing will ever be added to the Torah? How do I know?) My Articles of Religion are attached as Document 18-2.

- Mark Twain said: "Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand." See Document 18-3 for a series of e-mails written while I was rereading the Old Testament.

Anyway that's the Israel part of this story. I went in a secular Englishman and came out a Buddhist Jew. I learned a lot. Indeed most of what I know about Judaism I learned from reading history and the Bible, and from my experiences during these three weeks in Israel in 1984, and from studies later with Rabbi Hecht of the Richmond Torah Center, the San Francisco chapter of the Messianic group *Chabad*. I attended his weekly class for about 8 months, back in San Francisco after Truro, not because there was ever even the *slightest* chance of taking any of it seriously as religion, but because I was fascinated by the whole method and wanted to know more about Talmud. We studied a piece of Talmud once a week, from Tractate *Berakoth* (concerning benedictions and prayers).²⁷

The more we studied it, the sillier it seemed. There was a lot on how to select a proper pigeon for sacrifice in the Temple, something not done in practice since 70 AD (I mean of course CE), but never mind. My favorite was the lesson on slavery. Slavery is illegal in the United States *at the moment*, so Jews don't keep slaves here *now*, but there is nothing at all wrong with slavery. It's in The Book so it must be OK, but you have to follow the rules: Column A for Hebrew slaves, Column B for others. Slavery for non-Jews is beneficial because the world was made really only with the Jews in mind, everyone else is just here for our convenience, and it is right that you can't manumit a Gentile slave because they're better off as slaves (close to Jewish worship) than free (but away from it). Rules of kosher slave raiding. All very quaint. I am not making this up – Rabbi Hecht taught all this with a perfectly straight face. I spoke to him once about Buddhism and he told me that a Jew has *no other spiritual path available to him* except Torah Judaism of the Lubovitcher variety. How people can study such things and not see that Jewish law and ritual and Talmud are products of culture, and not all that elevated a culture either, is

²⁷ Everything in a tractate is not necessarily about the subject in the title. The topics in the *Mishnah*, or main text, are springboards for wide-ranging riffs that could lead anywhere.

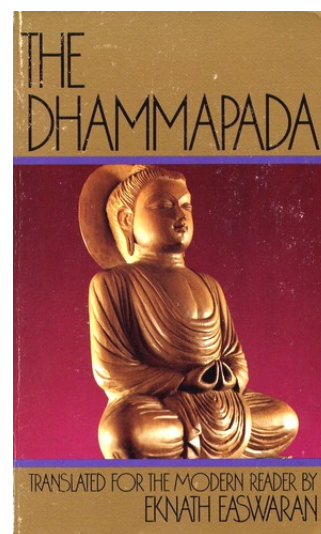
completely beyond me. It still upsets Adam that I regard all this without much respect. But it hardly seems worthy of much respect, no matter how you slice it.

- Is it not a tad ethnocentric, rabbi, I asked, to believe that all the other people in the world were created for the convenience of the Jews? No, because it's in the Book. Nothing really matters but God and the Jews. If the *goyim* are made for our convenience, I asked, how does it happen that they have been so inconvenient for us over the years? Because we've been bad Jews! Start praying, learn Hebrew, stop eating *chazzer* [pig], and *Moshiach* will arrive and fix everything. The rabbi was convinced that Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), the Lubovitcher Rebbe, was *Moshiach* just waiting to reveal himself, even after he had a bunch of strokes and turned 90 – I will never forget the look of devastation on his face when the Rebbe died and seemed not to be *Moshiach* after all (there was some talk about his coming back, but he didn't – or maybe we should say *hasn't yet*).

When Adam's son Noah was studying for his *bar mitzvah* in 2005, his speech about his Torah portion had to do with justice. I attach as Document 18-4 an e-mail about a universal concept of justice – it might be relevant here. And then again, maybe not.

E. Buddhist

Rereading Part C of this chapter, about the Meatball, I realize I have already said a lot of what I have to say about Buddhism. I don't want to make this memoir into an exposition of Buddhism. There is no need for that here – readers who want to know more are directed to the introduction to the excellent translation of the *Dhammapada* by Eknath Easwaran (pronounced *ESH-waran*) (Nilgiri Press, 1985) (right).²⁸



²⁸ This is the best introduction to Buddhism I know. Here's how to use the translation by the late (1910-1999) Indian-born Berkeley English professor. First read the beautifully written 72-page general introduction. This will bring you up to speed on the historical context of Buddhism, its basic principles, and the Life of the Buddha. Then turn to the main text. Easwaran has provided short introductions to the chapters in sets of one or two. Read the first two chapters, then the introduction to those chapters, then those chapters again, and then STOP, think about what you have read, and go no further that day! Wait until tomorrow and then do the same with the next set of chapters. The *Dhammapada* is too rich to swallow at one gulp – if you try it will melt down into one

(footnote continues →)

A few more points, though, about me and Buddhism. There were several things about it which made it attractive to me.

For one thing there is the riveting character of the Buddha himself, Siddhartha Gautama, as charismatic a figure as Jesus and a *lot* better adjusted to living in the world.

For another thing, there is no dogma and no god. Not that God was excluded – I would not have taken that in 1971 or even now – but he (He? She? It? They? We?) was irrelevant to the inquiry. God? Creation? Apocalypse? I'm not here to talk about that, the Big B would say when people asked him questions about it. I'm here to tell you how not to suffer. When you're awakened, then will be time to think about all that stuff. You have a lot of work to do first.

There is no body of faith you have to believe. It isn't about belief, it's about experiment. The Buddha just said here, these are some ideas I have found useful, try them and see if they help. That's the way to talk to me if you want to persuade me, not yell at me like hectoring Yahweh, always on about how I owe him cattle.

Also, it isn't necessary (as in Christianity and Judaism) to be all or nothing. We get better bit by bit, the *Dhammapada* says, like water filling a bucket drop by drop; we purify ourselves grain by grain (image again from the *Dhammapada*), like a silversmith separating dross from silver. If you give up 15% of your desire, your suffering goes down 15%, and that makes it easier to go further. That's certainly how it's been for me – I've kept at it all these years, and I have more insight and equanimity and even a *little* bit more compassion now than I used to have.

Desire is suffering – but desire has many meanings here, not just lust or envy or avarice, although those are certainly juicy examples. Desire in its broadest sense includes wishing things were otherwise. It includes attachment to the fruits of our actions. It includes commitment to unstable structures. It includes clinging, and longing, and trying to hold on. All these things cause suffering. If you want something and don't get it, you suffer. If you want something and *do* get it, you still suffer, because you fear you may lose it – and indeed you will ultimately lose everything. So to avoid suffering, avoid attachment!

From an e-mail exchange with a friend in 2001:

It doesn't matter if what you are attached to is love of family or devotion to justice or some noble purpose. As I wrote to a friend who was impatient with all religions, I question the long-term usefulness of deriving "feelings of purpose or value" from

(footnote continues...)

huge indigestible lump of good advice. There is no hurry – reading in one- or two- chapter portions as Easwaran has separated them will take less than three weeks.

anything in the exterior phenomenal world. Whether your attachment is to specific people or to your interaction with them, no matter how you slice it you will eventually trip over that attachment. Even abstractly, attachment to “purpose” can itself be dangerous – these are all mental constructs, and will ultimately not bear the weight you place on them. Be prepared, is all I’m saying, so when they crumble you don’t crumble too.²⁹

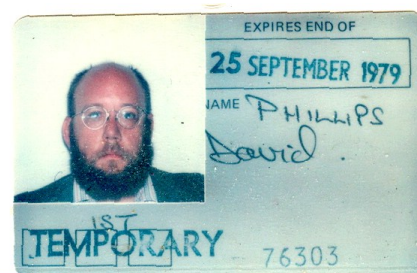
The problem from a Buddhist perspective is in mooring yourself to attachments in the world. As you say, if one attachment doesn’t work out you look for another, but that still leaves you attached to things and relationships which by their nature change. Everything arises and passes away – to the extent we cling to anything phenomenal we set ourselves up for suffering by wanting our connection to those things either to be more the way we would like it to be, or if it is the way we like it, then by wanting it to remain that way and not change. But of course all these things are evanescent, as indeed are we ourselves. That’s what I mean by tripping over attachments – the earth is not firm beneath our feet, the world is a flux, we must not allow our equanimity to be bound to anything because nothing is permanent. Including ourselves – the attachment to self is hardest but the most important to break. We must accept the arising and passing of all things, including ourselves, without sorrow or regret – this cannot be done while we are still attached to them.

Who are you calling a fundamentalist ideologue?

One of the great points about Buddhism is that anyone can gain if not all then most of the benefits of its radical concepts just by understanding them intellectually and working them into his life so they function like a resolving lens. Things seem clearer, illusory structures fade, instinctive but unexamined mammalian motivations are revealed.

About unstable structures – as noted in the e-mail above, a core Buddhist concept is that everything changes. All things (including us!) arise and pass away. Therefore don’t get attached to any of them (including us!) or you’ll be sorry. This rule of perpetual flux applies to our emotions also – they are best seen as surface waves on a deep lake. They arise and pass away – don’t regard them as structural or immutable.

- I realize when I say *including us*, this is at variance with the Buddhist insight that there isn’t really any *us*, but that what we think of as a separate personality is



²⁹ As the Tibetan lama the third Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoché said, “Trying to find lasting happiness from relationships or possessions is like drinking salt water to quench your thirst.”

really just a viewpoint and a collection of sensations and habits. Still, it is a useful construct for discussion purposes.

The more I applied Buddhist insights, the less I suffered. Desire, attachment, reliance on impermanent forms, the illusion of substance – these were causing me real problems. Avoid suffering? That’s a useful skill! Give up desire, give up suffering! Zowie! The more acid I took, the more I learned to see the mammalian element in most human behavior. Display and dominance and aggression and courtship – these are what Tim Leary in *Exo-Psychology* called *terrestrial* concerns (see Chapter 19.B). It’s hard to take them seriously if you’re not attached to the result. The more I used Buddhism, the more I liked it, and the more useful I found it, the more I used it. When, for example, the crisis came in 2008 that suddenly made continuing in my job untenable (see Chapter 27B.6), it was my Buddhist-learned ability not to cling to unstable structures that allowed me to see it as an opportunity rather than as a calamity.

So more and more I came to think of myself as a Buddhist. As noted, I began answering the religion question on forms that way. And one day (it was April 23, 1996), in San Francisco, I was in the audience for a *vajra* ceremony by a Tibetan lama, Lopon Tsechu Rinpoché. The lama said before we start, if anyone wants to take the refuge vows, I’ll administer them. So I said well, why not do that? And I did, prostration and all (I did only one prostration instead of the prescribed many – but one was enough). So now I guess I am *officially* a Buddhist.

- The refuge vows are just these: I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha. And I couldn’t agree more.
 - Taking refuge in the Buddha means, among other things, realizing that enlightenment and purification are not impossible. Big Sid, the Awakened One, not a god but a man like us only somewhat cooler, proved that by doing it, by sitting down under the bo tree and vowing not to stir until he was enlightened. I think the Life of the Buddha is the most inspiring story in all human civilization.
 - Taking refuge in the Dharma means realizing that there is a coherent theory of life and mind, on the human level anyway, and using the principles of the Buddhist conception of the world and the mind to live mindfully and serenely. Tell the truth. Don’t hurt people. Remember everything changes. Stay calm. Pay attention. Desire is suffering. Beware of attachment. “You are what you think,” says the *Dhammapada*, 1:1, “all that we are arises with our thoughts.” This is a refuge because it makes life easier and less chaotic, and protects us from illusion.
 - And the Sangha is the body of monks, which I now understood as other people on more or less the same path.

As noted, I prefer the simpler Hinayana, or Theravada, school to the more complex and demanding Mahayana. Here's something I wrote in 1999 to a friend who had sent me a Mahayana book:

One of the many reasons I prefer the Theravada approach is that it is more useful to my daily life and practice. Other reasons include relative freedom from admixtures of demons and beings from animist and polytheistic traditions, and lack of premature and arid speculations, discouraged by the Buddha, about what to do after attaining perfect enlightenment. Open this book to almost any page and you get a very idealized picture of the Buddha surrounded by 100,000,000 bodhisattvas, each radiating the pure diamond energy of the perfect teaching. It is very hard to relate that to the daily challenges of worry, anger, longing, grasping, sorrow, inattention.

Take for example (at random) "Victory Over Fear." It explains that the true bodhisattva is untroubled by fear because "totally imbued with the living power of Mother Prajanaparamita, the practitioner has the physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual strength to remain unwavering and undivided in transcendent contemplation, while ceaselessly and skillfully engaging in compassionate action." But what about the rest of us? I know this kind of thing inspires millions, but I can't ever seem to get into it. By beginning with perfection, instead of beginning as the Buddha himself did, at the other end, with us as a bunch of suffering, distracted, sad-sack *bhikkus*, the teachings become a reproach rather than an encouragement.³⁰



After almost 40 years of integrating Buddhist concepts into my daily life, I find I am much calmer and less troubled about things than I used to be. I find it a lot easier to accept whatever is – whether it is having my briefcase stolen or (in 2007) the creeping advance of fascism in America. I find it easier to accept the limitations in my life as I grow older and physically creakier, too – the ultimate test will be how I respond to death as it approaches. "You are as the yellow leaf" warns the *Dhammapada*. Can I manage not to be attached to life as it is taken from me? I'm doing OK for now – we'll see how I do at the end.

About the *Dhammapada* (Pali for *Dharma-path*). This is the oldest Buddhist scripture, the original collection of the Buddha's sayings first written down centuries after his death. It is like a red-letter Bible, except the Buddha is not a god (neither was Jesus, of

³⁰ *Bhikku* means *monk*; the Buddha began his discourses *O bhikkus*. I use the term in a wider sense, meaning everyone who is trying to move toward awakening and liberation along the path the Buddha pioneered.

course). It is short – 26 chapters, each the size of a middle-sized poem, 423 verses in all.³¹

I think that the *Dhammapada*, and the Life of the Buddha, contain all a person needs. This view is a sort of fundamentalism, a Hinayana viewpoint (like the Buddhism of Thailand and Sri Lanka) rather than a Mahayana viewpoint like that of Tibet. But Buddhism, unlike other spiritual paths, becomes *more* reasonable rather than less the more fundamental you get. The Hinayana emphasis is on personal purification and awakening. The *Dhammapada* says you cannot do the work of another – don't even try. If you become an awakened being, an *arhat*, you have completed the course. The Mahayana folks say no, once enlightened you have to become a *bodhisattva* and return to save everyone else. "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all" is the *bodhisattva* vow. The Hinayana folks don't take this vow. If I become enlightened maybe I'll reconsider saving everyone else. But I have a lot of work to do first, before I have to make that decision.

Meanwhile, give me that old-time religion. Not that Buddhism is really a religion, because there's no god and no faith involved. It is a psychology more than anything else, an insight into the workings of the mind to help you master it and not be mastered by it. The *Dhammapada* says: "You are your only master. Who else? Subdue yourself, and discover your master."

- As a discipline I read the *Dhammapada* in a brilliantly concise translation by Thomas Byrom (Shambhala Pocket Classics, 1993). I carry it around in my pocket and read a chapter every so often at odd moments, like a breviary. This is a very telegraphic version more suitable for people already familiar with the book than for beginners, who would do better with Easwaran. I buy both versions in quantity to give away. I used this translation when I memorized chapters of the *Dhammapada* as an exercise.

F. Hindu

The Hindu thing arose very differently. I was of course familiar with Hindu concepts from my time of intense study after the Meatball hit. But I never paid them as much attention as I did to Buddhism and the Perennial Philosophy. However, on September 21, 1991 (I know the exact date because of my notebooks) Rosemary Woodruff-Leary (who was living in my downstairs apartment) invited me to come



³¹ By comparison, Paul's Epistle to the Romans has 433 verses.

with her to meet her friend Michael Bowen. A lot followed from that introduction.



Michael Bowen (1937-2009) (left) was 54 when I first met him. He was an artist and made wild, ambitious paintings. Michael had been involved in the art scene from his teen years in the 1950s. He had also been very active in the Beat and Hippie movements and knew a lot of people from those times – that, indeed, is how he happened to know Rosemary (through Tim Leary). He had explored lots of spiritual and religious traditions and done all sorts of drugs – see his biographical timeline at www.zpub.com/sf/history/mb/mb-time.html.

When I met Michael he was in a serious Hindu phase. He had been initiated as a *Kali bhakta* in India some years before, and maintained his studio and household as a sort of *ashram* in a house on 14th Avenue near Fulton Street in the Richmond District of San Francisco. This house had an art studio downstairs, living quarters in the middle, and at the very top a prayer room Michael called the *Shakti Mandir*.³² In his religious aspect Michael called himself *Baba Kali Das Acharya*.³³ The *ashram* consisted of Michael himself, his daughter Maitreya Bowen, his then consort (who called herself *Shakti*), his disciple or *chela* Ron Bruch (who called himself *Ramanatha*), Akbar the gentle Great Dane, and later Michael's beautiful young wife Isabella Bowen-Paoli, who came from Florence. There were no Indians in this *ashram* – everyone except Isabella was American. There were also a number of devotees and hangers-on who frequented the house but didn't live there.

The evening I went with Rosemary to meet Michael was a Ganesha celebration called the *Ganesha Chaturthi* – the annual ritual immersion of a statue of Lord Ganesha. That year it was done from one of the San Francisco beaches, but Michael's celebration wasn't about the immersion. There was lots of interesting talk and a pleasant *puja* ceremony and

³² A *Kali bhakta* is a person who follows the path of devotion (*bhakti*) to Kali, a Hindu goddess of Whom more later. *Mandir* means *temple* – *Shakti* means roughly the *divine energy of the female creative principle*. In the Hindu tradition an *ashram* is a spiritual community operating usually under a leader, often with another parallel function, as in the case of Michael's *ashram* which was also an art studio.

³³ *Baba* means *teacher*; *Kali Das* means *servant of Kali*. *Acharya* is a spiritual title connoting high respect, and also a Sanskrit academic degree. Michael used it to denote a kind of Kali-ordination. The whole name might be fancifully translated as *Reverend Professor Kali's-Man*.

many interesting people.³⁴ I wrote in my diary for that day: *Chanting and ceremony just great! Threatening in Hebrew but not in Hindi. Very jolly time.*³⁵

A few days later Peter Stander, a Buddhist friend from Cape Cod days, came out to visit Rosemary and me, and I took him to see the Shakti Mandir. This time, instead of a Ganesha party there was the usual nightly Kali *puja*, up in the prayer room, with music and the unveiling of a very powerful *murti* (idol) of the head of Kali. The whole experience was very affecting and energizing. I wrote in my diary: *I certainly feel more at home with the Hindus than I do with the Jews. Even the Buddhists always focus on what you need to do to purify – but the Hindu gods (especially Ganesha) accept me as I am.* After this entry I pasted in my notebook a Chinese cookie fortune which read “You may attend a party where strange customs prevail.” *That* was certainly true enough.

I began going often to the semi-public *puja* Michael held at the Shakti Mandir, and eventually went every Sunday night. After *puja* there would be a meal – Michael was a fan of Aleister Crowley and thought of himself as a left-handed Tantric black magician to whom anything was allowed.³⁶ And so of course there was always MEAT at these dinners, a sort of in-your-face gesture to orthodox Hinduism. I usually brought a cake which I had had decorated with a different saying every time – KALI! KALI! KALI! or JAI MA! or OM KALI DURGA or something similar – it amused me to change it every week. One week I even got the cake decorators at Safeway to write something in Sanskrit (I wrote it out for them to copy).

At the *puja* we (8-10 people usually) began with music – there was a harmonium, and simple instruments like drums and tambourines were handed out. We sang traditional Hindu hymns called *bhajans* – I learned the music although not the words. Then there were rituals at the altar, passing around of fire, and offerings (including my cake, and sometimes I brought joints too). Every now and then we had Hindu fire services in the

³⁴ *Puja*, which means *sacrifice*, is the standard Hindu worship service. Offerings are made before an image of the god, there is singing and music, wicks soaked in *ghee* (clarified butter) are lighted and the smoke and light shared among the worshipers, some of the offerings are distributed as *prasad* (sort of like Christian communion) and a *tikka* of colored powder is placed on the forehead of each participant, at the site of the third eye.

³⁵ I later learned the chanting was not in Hindi but in Sanskrit.

³⁶ Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was an English occultist, magician, hermeticist, eccentric, druggie, and some said charlatan. His belief in ritual as the key to magic had resonances with the Indian tantric tradition. He is best remembered today for his aphorism *Do What Thou Wilt is the whole of the law*, which has been used to justify every kind of anarchy and license, perhaps correctly. Rosemary was very fond of his book *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings*, which is nearly incomprehensible, but then that’s what an occult book is supposed to be.

back yard. I became very fond of these Sunday events, which were always the same yet always subtly different. I recorded in my diary that they made me very high. I grew quite intimate with Michael's household. Meanwhile I studied up on Hinduism, and helped the Shakti Mandir revive and keep its non-profit tax-exempt status.

Michael was a Kali *bhakta* because he had been cured of migraine by a Kali priest in Calcutta, and was attracted anyway to the dark death-side of Kali. Kali is usually shown in Hindu iconography with fangs dripping blood, a necklace of severed heads and a waistband of severed hands, standing on the dead body of Her consort Shiva. She is sometimes thought of as a death goddess, but really She is part of a trinity of creation, maintenance and destruction. Kali worship is an approach to the certainty of death in a way not rooted in fear. We might as well love death as a goddess, because death will eat us anyway.

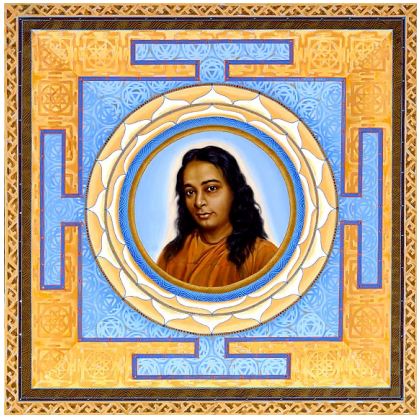


In the *Trimurti* of traditional Hinduism, Kali's consort Shiva takes the role of destroyer. But tantrics like Michael sometimes exalt Kali almost to be the main deity in the Hindu pantheon, which is certainly a minority view, but acceptable in the tolerant Hindu tradition. Anyway the Hindu pantheon is not fixed, but has changed repeatedly over the ages.

- I wrote to a friend in December 1991: I have begun going to Hindu religious services at a Kali temple a friend of a friend has set up in his house near the Park – these are serious Hindus and I am taking it rather seriously myself. It is hard to feel sorry for myself when I look into the face of Kali, mouth dripping with blood, a necklace of skulls around her neck and a skirt of severed arms around her waist. Who am I kidding? Kali eats everyone! Meanwhile the newspaper snaps into proportion – what do you expect? It's *Kali Yuga*!³⁷

I joined enthusiastically into this new spiritual path. But I did not limit myself to Kali worship. I developed a devotion to Lord Ganesha also – more of this in the next section. And I studied classical Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and the

³⁷ *Kali Yuga* is the fourth and coarsest of the four ages (like the Greek gold-silver-bronze-iron ages), just before the end of the present material world and the return to the beginning of the cycle. In my letter I added a footnote saying I would probably be a better Hindu if I didn't keep hearing *Kali Yuga* in my head to the tune of *Boola Boola*.



Crest-Jewel of Discrimination by Shankaracharya, and modern ones such as *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda (left) and *Introduction to Tantra* by Lama Yeshe, and many many others ancient and modern.³⁸ Document 18-5 reproduces four pages of notes from my pocket notebook #100 (May-June 1992), showing lists and headings which I prepared as an aid to study. By such methods, and by learning from Michael, I grew to know quite a lot about Hinduism, and sort of identified myself as a Hindu while still remaining a Buddhist. This was certainly possible in as relaxed a

tradition as Hinduism, where the historical Buddha is often venerated as if he were one of the gods; the Buddha encouraged his followers to keep to their existing religious practices.

I had a Kali altar in my house, where I sometimes made offerings. I also began a regular meditation practice – I never enjoyed this or got much out of it, and it didn't last all that long, but still. I experimented with *mantras* and got some of those going pretty well. There is a whole art to that – sometimes instead of reading on the bus I would do a mantra instead. Michael gave me my own mantra, but I also used the Ganesh mantra OM GANG GANIPATIYE NEMAHA and the Kali mantra OM KALI DURGA NEMO NEMAHA, and also RAM RAM RAM RAM and the HARE KRISHNA mantra and others.

I tried some kundalini yoga and managed to get the *kundalini* energy going – when it rose up my spine and came out the crown *chakra* at the top of my head it was like an orgasm. Heavy! I tried some esoteric yoga practices Michael recommended. The weirdest was pouring water from a teapot up my nose. *Oi vei!*³⁹

Michael kept hinting that he had occult secrets. I believe he thought he did. He had been a disciple of John Cooke (Rashid Sufi) and would tell stories of how he (Kali Das) changed things through black magic. Naturally I wanted to hear more about this, without of course committing myself to believe any of it. In June 1992 he finally agreed to

³⁸ The image looks startlingly like a Christian icon. But that's Yogananda, not Jesus, and the cross-armed structure is not a cross but the outer border of a *yantra* (sacred diagram).

³⁹ In the West *yoga* suggests a course of complex posture exercises. But that is only *hatha yoga*. Yoga (cognate to the English word *yoke*, implying both submission and control) actually includes many disciplines intended to advance the adept spiritually. In addition to *hatha yoga* there are *jnana yoga* (knowledge and philosophy), *raja yoga* (meditation), *bhakti yoga* (adoration and devotion), and *karma yoga* (work in the world). I don't know the Sanskrit name for the yoga of pouring water up your nose from a teapot, but I'm sure there is one.

instruct me in occult matters, but made a condition (as Hindu teachers traditionally do). Michael's condition was that I not speak to any woman for a month. I didn't like either the social inhibition or the implied misogyny of that. I thought it over and decided he was within his rights as a teacher to impose that condition, but I was within my rights not to go along with it, so I didn't.

My courteous refusal caused a rupture in our relations which was healed when Michael called me up to make sure I was not angry at him and plotting to use secrets about him which he had confided to me as a lawyer to wreak revenge on him (!). I assured him I was not angry and respected his right to impose conditions even though I didn't have to obey them. Michael had a huge ego, but I was old enough and sophisticated enough to love him and study with him without buying into the personality cult he sometimes liked to foster. I was studying and experimenting, but I had studied and experimented with a lot of other religions by that time – I was nearly 50 – and knew how to gain what was useful without losing my head. I stayed friendly with Michael and Maitreya but no longer went to their *pujas*. Some time after this Michael moved his family and *chela* to Hawaii, and later to Sweden, where he died in March 2009. I am very grateful for all I learned from him – he was one of the most important teachers on my spiritual path.

Several useful things came out of this Shakti Mandir experience. First, as noted, I learned a lot – about Hinduism, about Kali worship, about yoga and Vedanta, and about a side of religious experience I had not known much about before. Second, after my parting from Michael, I returned to the study of Buddhism with a renewed interest. This led directly to the re-involvement with Buddhism which is the main basis of my spiritual practice today. Finally, without the Hindu education I got from Michael and the Shakti Mandir experience, I would never have had the satisfying experience of being a Ganesh *bhakta*, as I also am to this day.



One story bears repeating – the famous story of the Golden Gate Park Shiva Lingam. A *lingam* is a phallic-shaped object, usually of stone and often resting in a yonic base with a drain in front. It is sacred to Shiva and there is some debate over whether it is really phallic or is aniconic (not depicting anything). Here it is, at left.

In a neglected corner of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco there was a sort of dump containing carved stones said to have been part of a structure imported from Europe for William Randolph Hearst, but never reassembled. Amid these was an upright bollard-shaped stone in the exact form of a lingam – cylindrical but with a rounded top – that was clearly not part of the Hearst group. Some said it was a traffic bollard, but it was much larger than most of those. Michael found this object, declared it to be a Shiva Lingam, and began venerating it. This meant painting the *bindi* and triple lines of the Shiva devotee on it, garlanding it with flowers, pouring *ghee* on it, singing

bhajans before it, and performing circumambulation rituals around it. I participated in many of these rituals.

In time many Indians heard about this and joined in – the Shiva Lingam became a pilgrimage site. One of the Indians wanted to build a superstructure over it and make it into a temple. This pleased Kali Das – after his cure in Calcutta he had vowed to build a temple some day. The site was auspicious, too – the rock pile was in a part of the park where footpaths crossed, and forest crossings were a traditional site for Hindu shrines. But the park authorities grew uncomfortable. They said they could not have a religious shrine in a public park (although up to that time there had never been a problem with a huge cross in a public park atop Mount Davidson).⁴⁰ Rather than allow a shrine, they proposed to remove the so-called bollard entirely. Michael then sued under the First Amendment to stop this interference with his practice of religion – he had not brought the bollard/lingam into the park, he said, but since it was there he had a right to venerate it. It became a *cause célèbre*, which suited Michael because he had a fondness for publicity and street theatre – he had been involved in the levitation of the Pentagon and other such events way back when. The case was settled when Michael agreed to remove the Shiva Lingam to a spot on private property where it could be venerated, and it was taken, with a truck and a crane, to the house of a devotee next door to Michael's own house. But it was quite a show while it lasted.

Michael lived sort of underground, beneath the radar of the system (he hoped), and was always getting into scrapes of one kind or another (car impounded for tickets, house difficulties, etc.). As a lawyer I helped him through some of these scrapes. We became friendly again. Sometime in the mid-1990s he married Isabella and moved his *ashram* to 25th Avenue between Lincoln and Irving.



I represented two Death Row inmates at this time, trying through *habeas corpus* to get their sentences reversed. See Chapter 27B.1. I went with Michael's daughter Maitreya to a Chinese butcher in the Sunset District, near the 25th Avenue house, that sold live turtles for eating, and we bought two, one for each prisoner.

Then we set them free in a lake in the park as part of a Tantric ceremony in which Maitreya petitioned Kali to save my clients. This was around 1996. She told me to make a vow and I vowed to make a pilgrimage to the Kali Temple in Calcutta if either of my clients was spared. Fourteen years later they are, amazingly, both still alive; the original

⁴⁰ Although this display was upheld against constitutional challenge on the basis that it couldn't easily be seen, actually you can see it from miles around. I call it *Mount Goy*.

death sentence of one has already been reversed, and the case of the second is still inching exceptionally slowly through the federal courts.

As it happened I did not wait for a definitive ruling on my clients, but made a pilgrimage to Calcutta anyway in the winter of 1996-97. Hindus sometimes exclude non-Hindus from their temples, and since I considered myself a legitimate Hindu at that time I asked Michael, as an ordained whatever and the *pujari* of the Shakti Mandir, to give me a document introducing me as a visiting Hindu and asking that courtesies be extended to me. Michael gave me the Hindu name *Ganesh Baba* on this document, based on my devotion to Lord Ganesha and also I think my physical resemblance to the portly god.⁴¹ My picture on this document was sealed with a red OM so it looked like an international driving license. It worked about half the time.



One of the things that attracted me to Michael and his *ashram* was the fact that they were very serious about *sadhana*. They did art and ate meat and drank wine and smoked dope and had a good time, but they also did daily *puja* and were involved at all times in serious Hindu practice and a spiritual outlook on the world. But in 1995 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, one of the premier modern art museums in the world, put on a show called *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*.⁴² This show featured several American artists of the Beat Generation period, including Michael. Up until then Michael had been reasonably obscure, his early fame having sort of vanished during his many wanderings and preoccupations, and he sold his art mainly through private showings to collectors who were fans of his. But once this show happened, Michael saw an opportunity to make some serious money on what he called “Bowen art.”

This was understandable, as money was always a problem. It cost a considerable amount to support his household, and now he had a young wife and soon would have a child to provide for. But pursuit of this goal upset the *sadhana*, and selling art rather than Kali-worship became the *ashram*’s principal concern. He set his *chela* Ramanatha to this task, and pursued it intently himself. Also Michael’s health was never really good and was getting worse. He was chronically in a lot of pain from various conditions, including post-polio syndrome, and always went to quack physicians who would give him massive doses of pain-killers in return for art (part of living under the radar was having no health insurance). And his disquiet about American society, always severe nearly to the point of paranoia, increased with the excesses of Clinton and especially Bush 43. As a result of all this Michael and his household appeared to become less spiritually based than before, and more disorderly and manic. It was disorderly before in a charming Bohemian way,

⁴¹ Later when giving Michael some advice about sticking to his *sadhana* (daily spiritual practice), I told him I was speaking to him *baba* to *baba*.

⁴² A catalogue of the show, by Lisa Phillips (no relation), was published in 1995 and is available used at www.bookfinder.com.

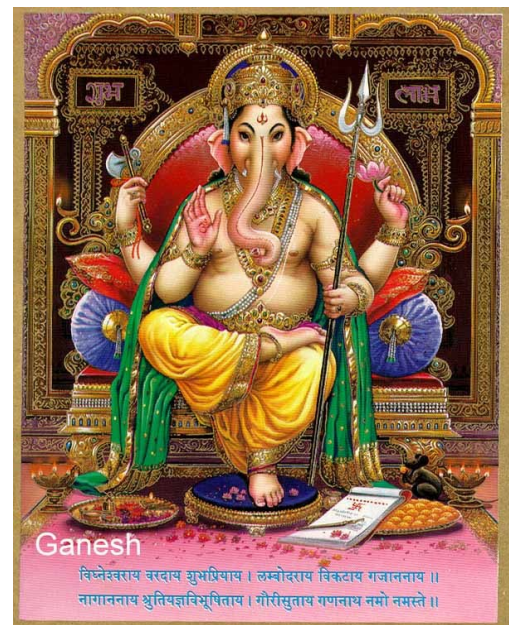
but it became much more so, and much less charming, and Michael grew more and more unhappy and stressed out. After they moved to Hawaii they occasionally stayed with me when they visited San Francisco to sell art, but it grew to be a strain. He was happier and more relaxed in Sweden, during the last years of his life, than he had been for some time before.

I didn't stay a Hindu, except for worship of Lord Ganesha, but I did learn a tremendous amount from Michael and from my time as an intimate of his *ashram*. The spiritual insights of Hinduism and Vedanta remain useful and valuable to me – unlike the binary monotheistic religions, the “eastern” religions are not either/or, and you can be in without rejecting everything else as pernicious Error. Most of what I learned in my Hindu studies is still with me, and especially in India I feel right at home in a Hindu temple (which I don't, for example, in a Sikh or Jain temple).

G. Ganesha *bhakta*

When the dust settled after my exposure to the Hindu religion at Michael Bowen's *ashram*, I stopped thinking of myself as a Hindu in the broad sense. But one Hindu aspect continued to grow and flourish in my life: devotion to Lord Ganesha.

Lord Ganesha is the famous god of India, perhaps the most famous of all the Indian gods. He is the god with the head of an elephant (or three, or nine, or countless elephant heads), and one broken tusk, and four arms (or eight, or fourteen, or countless, but usually more than two), and an ample belly, with a mouse as His familiar.⁴³ An icon of Lord Ganesha appears on the Dedication Page of this memoir. He is the Mighty One, the Remover of Obstacles, the god of wisdom and knowledge and of the discrimination between truth and illusion, the patron of learning and literature, the scribe to whom the *Mahabharata* was dictated. Wikipedia has an excellent article on Lord Ganesha – see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganesha>.



⁴³ He was the son of Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati. One day Shiva wanted to come in to Parvati for some consorting, and in proper Oedipal fashion His young son tried to stop Him. Enraged, Lord Shiva struck off His son's head. Parvati demanded that Lord Shiva repair the damage by putting onto Her son's body the head of the first creature Shiva encountered, which happened to be an elephant. So it will be seen that Lord Ganesha is not an elephant, but an anthropomorphic deity with an elephant's head.

Lord Ganesha is both immensely powerful and immensely kind. He brings grace and prosperity to whoever asks. Lord Ganesha is the god to Whom we can come and ask blessings and protection – He occupies something of the same clement and merciful space Mary occupies for Christians.

I'm not sure quite how this started, but after I started going to Michael's in the early 1990s I began to have a very devout and uncomplicated relationship with Lord Ganesha. I leave offerings before His icon; I ask boons and protection in prayer; and what I ask is often granted to me. I have never prayed to any other god.⁴⁴ I can offer gratitude to Lord Ganesha, gratitude for which without Him I would have no other outlet. This devotion, which I feel quite unreservedly, is far removed from my usual heavily intellectual approach to almost everything else. As noted, *bhakti* is the yoga of adoration.

I cannot justify it intellectually, nor am I interested in trying. Is there really such a being? Is the belief in such a god not just a projection? As the million gods of Hinduism are just faces of the One God, what kind of existence can this elephant-headed divinity actually have? I am happy, indeed eager to answer such questions with regard to other gods such as Yahweh and Allah, but with the Hindu gods, including Kali and Krishna and Hanuman but especially Lord Ganesha, I don't feel I have to answer. My relationship with Him is on a wholly different plane. "I contradict myself?" asked Whitman, who answered "very well, then, I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes."

So when I fell asleep at the wheel and drove off the road, and in the last possible instant awoke and forced the car back onto the road, avoiding death by a split second, my first impulse was to thank Lord Ganesha for saving my life, and not for the first time, either. When I was in the hospital in 2005 and it was unclear what was wrong with me, but the doctors were thinking I might need to take Prednisone, an awful drug, I asked Lord Ganesha to prevent this, and vowed to give \$108 (a Hindu holy number) to charity in His name if He granted my wish. Sure enough, very soon afterward the doctors came to a different (and for the first time correct) conclusion about what was wrong with me, and no more was said about Prednisone. I paid my vow off gratefully. Did Lord Ganesha cause that result? If I hadn't ever heard of Lord Ganesha, would the result have been different? I don't have to answer that question.

- "But now that the gods' indispensable function in human life has been delineated, there is still the residual question of their existence to be faced in all seriousness. Yet perhaps seriousness is the wrong frame of mind in which to approach the being of the gods. Perhaps what is wanted is a certain light-mindedness, a receptivity to Olympian grandeur and Olympian mischief, which is not a

⁴⁴ Well, once. I must admit that many years ago as an experiment I prayed to Aphrodite for the love of a particular woman, which She did not grant me. It was worth a try, anyway.

suspension of some prior rational disbelief, but a withdrawal from questions of belief in existence that force a yes or no answer, when existence – with its connotation of hard fact on earth and demonstrable necessity in the realm above – seems dissonant with the way of being attributed to Homer's gods.”

Eva Brann, *Homeric Moments* (2002)

The same may well be said of the Hindu gods. I wrote about Lord Ganesha to a particularly rationalist friend, and I quote here from the e-mail exchange because it illuminates my thinking (feeling?) as a Ganesh *bhakta*.

Friend: I don't believe any outside help is available from another, perhaps spiritual dimension. It's on me to make my life what I want it to be. If you think Lord Ganesha has a say-so, hurray for you. I don't.

David: Outside help may not be available, but inside help is. That's a lot of what Ganesha and Kali worship is about. The distinction between the inside and the outside is very problematic. The Hindus say there is no difference if you look carefully enough; the Buddhists say the same thing although inside-out as it were – the Hindus saying if you look deep enough inside you will find everything there, and the Buddhists saying if you look deeply enough you will find nothing there. Same thing really.

Nevertheless I asked Lord Ganesha to protect me from having to take Prednisone, and sure enough I didn't have to take it. A rigorous scientific analysis would prevent my feeling gratitude about this, but the gratitude feels so good I don't want to give it up, plus it would be ungrateful. I paid out \$108 in alms to fulfill a vow I made on this issue, and I was glad to do it – cheap at the price. Scientifically is not the only useful way to look at some things.

Friend: Whatever works for you. I don't quarrel with other people's faiths. Just doesn't work for me.

David: Not a faith so much as a parallel technique for operating the brain. Faith asserts an unprovable truth – for example, that Lord Ganesha actually exists as more than a projection and answers prayers. I am not saying that, quite – but I find it enriches my life to *act as if it were so*, without taking a position one way or the other on whether it “really” is or not. (*Really* is as tricky a concept philosophically as *inside and outside*.) It is a delicate equilibrium for a rationally educated person to maintain, but it feels really natural to me. I have always had more religion in me than you could tolerate for you. Could be all that acid, except I had it before acid too, but just didn't understand what it was.

Friend: “I have always had more religion in me than you could tolerate for you” – and your brothers as well. I just never got it. I just can’t believe that there is any mystical unreal force out there determining things, or even influencing things. That is always my dilemma. If there is a god who is in control of things, why doesn’t he do a better job, and if he can’t change things what good is he? Ultimately I think that life is more random than that. The evidence seems to confirm my point of view.

David: But ez I hef been zayink, the kind of “religion” I’ve been talking about works just as well with inside forces as outside. For example Kali worship can work effectively to transform our view of our own impending decay and destruction *without* requiring any actual belief in an external Kali or indeed in any god determining things. The same with *bhakti yoga* (yoga of devotion) such as I have been directing to Lord Ganesha, with prayers and vows and offerings and so on – it accomplishes useful inner transformation without actually requiring belief that a four-armed elephant-headed god (sometimes dozens of arms and three heads – but who’s counting?) sits up in Hindu Heaven pulling the strings and deciding what happens downstairs. It is not only possible but rewarding (for me anyway) to take a less literal and (dare I say it?) primitive view of things, and use a more esoteric approach instead. The same stubborn literalism which keeps you from taking satisfaction in the Hindu gods keeps me from having anything to do with Judaism no matter how reformed or reconstructed. It’s all a matter of taste and approach, and which pathways happen to be blocked and which are open. “In my father’s house [which need not be in Valhalla somewhere – a house being as in dreams a symbol of the self] are many mansions.” John 14:2. I know how you love it when I quote Scripture to you.

- As a footnote to this exchange I add this from Swami Bhaskarananda, *The Essentials of Hinduism* (1994), also quoted on the dedication page of this book: “Personal God (*ishwara*) is no other than Impersonal God or Nirguna Brahman experienced through the veil of time, space and causation.”

Document 18-6 is a litany of the 108 names of Lord Ganesha, the Large-Eared Lord, the Mighty, the Invincible, the Auspicious, the Ageless and Gigantic, the Moon-Complected One. Just reading it through is an act of devotion.⁴⁵ There is also a litany of 1008 names. See also Document 18-7 (icon of Lord Ganesha).

⁴⁵ Read the English column only, not the Sanskrit.

H. Where I am now



Nowadays, I am basically a Buddhist and a Ganesh-*bhakta*. Buddhism is my basic operating system, rooted in the mundane and empirical, based by its founder on observation and direct perception, the most rational and practical of philosophies, the triumph of the mind. *Bhakti*



is transcendent, all spirit and no hard substance, incapable of observation but felt only in the heart. I'm glad to have them both – I couldn't manage with only one.

I never got the hang of meditating and don't include that in my daily practice, but I do read the *Dhammapada* on a semi-regular basis. I am lazy and often neglect this – the *Dhammapada* warns against this laxity when it says:

Neglected, the sacred verses rust.
For beauty rusts without use
And unrepaired the house falls into ruin,
And the watch, without vigilance, fails.⁴⁶

How true. I do my near-best – it would be better if I were better, but I'm trying.

I have internalized the Buddhist world-view to such an extent that I am able to apply its core insights almost automatically now. As a result I strive a lot less after things and goals, and suffer a great deal less than I used to. The *Dhammapada* says:

However many holy words you read,
However many you speak,
What good will they do you
If you do not act upon them?⁴⁷

Here's a little Dharma-lesson from a 2001 e-mail.

Suffering need not go along with feeling deeply, but it can easily do so. The difference is in the grasping. Thus, on my last day there London was at its most beautiful. I was deeply stirred, as I sat waiting for the bus to the airport, by just how beautiful it was, the green buds just filling in over Russell Square. I allowed myself to love London. But what I did *not* allow myself to do was to go that extra step into

⁴⁶ Verse 241 (Byrom translation).

⁴⁷ Verse 18 (Byrom translation).

wanting to hold on to what I loved. If I had done that I would have started suffering at once, by this familiar method: O London is so beautiful, I love it so much, I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE, what a bummer that the leaves come out just as I'm going, I want more, I WANT TO STAY, don't make me go now after I've been so sick and missed so much, it's not fair, when will I ever get to come back, I want I want I want! Instead I managed to realize that everything changes, everything passes, my trip to England arose and was now passing away, I could love London and still not try to grasp it, have it, keep it, close my hand around it and try to hang on. If I had done that I would have been feeling sorrow at losing something I loved, instead of feeling ungrasping love for it, in the final few minutes I had there.

The same is true of life – we can love life but must not be attached to keeping it, because it will be taken from us. We must be prepared to go when The Bus comes to take us to The Airport. And the same for everything else. I have learned to enjoy the sight of beautiful young women without wanting to possess one. I am trying to learn to do the same with everything in my life, from my heraldry books to my health.

I still believe that there is a coordinating intelligence behind the Cosmos, but its perceived presence in my life is not as palpable as it was back in my LSD days. If the lowering of this flame doesn't bother God, why should it bother me?

There's a lot to be said for intelligent design – it is really, if I understand it properly, a recycling of the old proof that a watch implies a watchmaker, because watches don't just happen. As one who learned a lot of biology while high on LSD, this argument has force for me. It doesn't make any sense to me that the Cosmos, and DNA, and Mozart, happened by accident. Of course we can trace it all back to a bubbling sea of methane, but why should a bubbling sea of methane produce Mozart? Or Botticelli? Or Eleanor Roosevelt? Why, come to that, should there even *be* a bubbling sea of methane? I have never seen any conflict between evolution and God – evolution only shows yet again how clever God is, to have set it up that way with such a foolproof method of optimization. Of course none of this *proves* God – but it makes more sense to me than *setting chance up as a god instead*, when chance is only an instrument.

Absolutes are unknowable anyway. Here's an extract from a 2007 e-mail on the subject:

Science will never do it. Papers have been written on this since before there was paper. All the philosophers in the world have been working on this question, and they will never answer it in an absolute sense, because of the basic epistemological problem that we can never absolutely know. You can write a long essay on what you think is real, and all I have to do is say well, maybe you're wrong, and your paper is refuted. That's why sages like the Buddha preferred not to spend time on absolutes. Is there a God or isn't there? Is everything revealed within, or not? Are our visions true or are they just thoughts? You can go around and around on that forever, but you will never get beyond where you are now, because of the basic limitations of our viewpoint.

So it is better, the sages think, and I have to go along with them here, to work *one step down* from absolutes, and ask: what is true *within our frame of reference*. And here what *works* is as good an answer as what's *true*, and a lot more useful. What works we can verify by observation and biofeedback, although still through the lens of our values (what works for Tamerlane, piles of skulls and so on, might not work for you and me). Here is where, given our values, we can say for example that love works, and anger is a dead end, and everything arises, abides, and then passes. That is useful because it is true everywhere we can see. And since truth is useful only as a guide to action, and we can only act on the plane of the world as we understand it, it is both as close to truth as we can get, and as close as we actually *need* to get. Limited beings that we are, we don't need absolutes, we just need to know what we can rely on. And for those purposes the level of truth within our reach is good enough.

Although I am basically a Buddhist, I am still a Ganesh *bhakta*. I make an offering before an icon of Lord Ganesha just about every day (usually a banana or a piece of candy – LG loves sweets), and make a short prayer to Him often except when I am neglectful. I always travel with a Ganesh icon (shown in Chapter 30.E) – I would no more go on a trip without it than I would go without my passport. I have prayer wheels in my house, which help – I made one by writing the Ganesh mantra the blades of an old refrigerator fan I mounted on the wall, and spin when I pass it, and on a ball bearing assembly from car mounted on another wall which works the same way. Icons in every room remind me. The worship of, and reliance on, Lord Ganesha is a highly positive and deeply treasured element in my life – its irrationality is just one of its attractions for me.

I carry a devotion to Lord Ganesha in my heart, and speak to Him, and make *puja* to Him, and gratefully accept His protection and bounty. As noted, there is nothing rational about this, and it is not un-Buddhist, and contradicts nothing, and proves nothing, it just *is*. I mention it here because I could not write a section titled *Where I Am Now* without including Lord Ganesha. Where I am now, He is too.

The classical Buddhist texts make a distinction between *life*, which is common, and *precious life*, which is the fortunate rare condition of being born not only human, but in a circumstance which permits you to hear the Dharma, and recognize it, and follow it, so as to *start* at least on the road to Liberation. I have been fortunate enough to have a precious life – thanks in large part to psychedelics – and while I fall short of what is possible, as almost everyone does, I am still on the path I started on in 1971, and am still picking my way slowly but still resolutely toward the light.

The story of the *mezuzah* on the doorpost of my house seems like a good one with which to close this chapter. A *mezuzah* is a small case containing a scroll with an extract from the Torah. Pious Jews mount them on their doorposts, and sometimes on the doorposts of inner rooms as well. When I was in Venice in 1994 I went to the former Ghetto and bought a lovely one – usually the scroll is hidden inside the case, but in this one it was inside a glass tube, so it could be seen. When I got home I planned to put it up, but

prudent lawyer that I am I checked first with Joel Solkoff's mother, a Doctor of Hebrew Letters, to find out what it said. The first part of the scroll was the *Shema* ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is one."). Deuteronomy 6:4. I had no problem with that, nor with the rest of the first part of the text:

And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for ornaments between your eyes. And you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:5-9. However, the second part of the *mezuzah* text, from Deuteronomy 11:13-21, said if this was not done, God would make it not rain, and all the crops would die. That I had a lot of trouble with, and decided I couldn't put that up on my house. So I put the *mezuzah* away.

I did, however, put up at the top of my front door a bronze Ganesha I bought in Puri, India, and on my garage door I put a Chinese apotropaic charm, a small octagonal panel of wood with the eight trigrams, and a concave mirror in the center. This reflects evil spirits away – no harm in that, I thought. But one day as I was standing in front of my house a Chinese woman



came over from across the street, followed by her elderly mother who did not speak English. She told me her mother was upset because my mirror reflected all the evil spirits across the street to her house! I said she should not worry because the concavity of the mirror focused the reflection so it could not be directed to her house (I was making this up as I went along), and also, I said, this was just one of many such items – after all I had a Hindu charm on my door, and a Jewish one also. This satisfied the Chinese women, but I realized I had said I had a Jewish charm on my door when really I didn't. So then I felt I had to put up the *mezuzah*. Now I'm glad it's there. Since I have it up, I guess I don't need to worry now about the rain not falling.



Tailpiece: The OM is the seed syllable from which the Universe proceeds.

DOCUMENT 18-1: Letter to Adam on being tied to a text

NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF HERALDIC AND FLAG STUDIES

North Parnet Road, Box 88, Truro, Massachusetts 02666 USA

(617) 349-2727

24 Oct86

Adam,

Not a long treatise, but I did want to explain what I meant by using words like "disgusting" and "contemptible" to describe orthodox Judaism. What I meant was that when you ~~say~~ yield your personhood to a book, and put the book in charge of your thought, it is as if a light went out. It is like the part at the end of "Yellow Submarine" where the Blue Meanies would attack someone and suddenly that person stopped moving, the color drained suddenly out of him, and he was lost. That happens to anyone who surrenders his viewpoint, his innermost power of judgment and decision and acceptance, over to an ideology. It doesn't matter what ideology: Moses or Marx or Jesus or LaRouche or ANYBODY!!!! At the essence and center of your humanity ^{and LSD} is your INDEPENDENT VIEWPOINT. This is what all your experience and study ^{are} throughout your life ~~are~~ designed to strengthen and clarify. It is all you have. It is Atman, if you feel like describing it in Sanskrit. Now, the moment you allow anyone else to censor Atman, you are no longer ~~free~~ free. That was what was so appalling about that book of "Torah science" you sent me-- these people were grotesquely twisting around trying to prove that their thoughts, and the science they really did believe in, didn't contradict the orthodoxy they ~~were~~ felt obliged not only to say they believed, but actually to believe! Such people are like slaves or prisoners. Voluntarily to accept such subjection is disgusting and contemptible because it accepts a mutilated humanness. It is a human right to believe what seems right to you no matter what someone else wrote down. "The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time." (Jefferson). In fact, it is not only a human right, it is an absolute necessity, ~~because as unreliable as our independent viewpoints may be for navigation in this world~~ because as unreliable as our independent viewpoints may be for navigation in this world they are all we have. If we give that up or accept abridgements we will really be lost. We make our own light to see by. If it's still dark, well, polish your lens, or turn up the wattage. But a filter will only make it darker, and we need all the light we can get.

Petty subjections — yielding the right to decide what to eat, what to wear, when to have sex, whether to have children, when not to turn the lights on (or off), what pets to own, etc etc etc ETC — are only special cases of the general principle, which is abdication of the power of independent judgment. *dp*

♡ *dp*

DOCUMENT 18-2: Articles of Religion

In 1985 or thereabouts, after I returned from my visit to Israel to see the *yeshivas* my brothers were studying in (see Chapter 18.D), there was a lot of loose talk about religion, Providence, special creation, divinely inspired infallible texts, and so on. Just to clarify in my own mind where I stood, I wrote up these seven points which I called Articles of Religion in reference to the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church and the 13 articles drafted by Maimonides, supposedly stating the essence of the Jewish religion.

As you would expect, my Articles are pretty rationalistic, for an acidhead. More than twenty years later they still reflect what I believe, more or less. Need I even say that if you don't believe *exactly* the same thing I do, after death you'll burn forever in a lake of fire? But that is obvious.

ARTICLES OF RELIGION

1. The perceived universe has an objective existence outside myself, of which I am a part.
2. There is a First Cause of the universe, responsible for its creation and design (= God). The creation of the universe was purposeful but the purpose is unknown.
3. There is a perceptible Presence in the world (= God) which I identify with the First Cause. The perception of this Presence is inward, subjective, and unverifiable.
4. The universe, including this world and all living creatures, operates according to a Natural Order. The design of all forms, elements and conditions in the universe, and their evolution in time from the beginning, are expressions of this Natural Order. The evolution of the universe, including people, continues at this moment and will continue for aeons to come. There is no reason to believe the Natural Order is ever varied, in response to requests by people or otherwise. The Natural Order was complete at the beginning of its development and its subsequent manifestation requires no intervention, nor is any such intervention possible.
5. There is a continuity between people and the rest of nature. People are distinguished from other creatures chiefly by their specialized minds and consciousness. Except where affected by this specialization, people function and behave like other animals. People were not created separately from the rest of nature, but their minds and consciousness may have evolved for a purpose central to evolution on this planet (such as migration from it). Whether there is such a purpose, and if so what it is, is unknown. There is no reason to believe that comparably conscious beings are not

found elsewhere in the universe. Evolution operates on species and populations and (except culturally) the lives of individuals have only statistical importance.⁴⁸

6. A person's consciousness (= soul) is without substance. It is individual and limited to that person. There is no reason to believe in the survival of an individual soul beyond the death of the brain, or in any Afterlife, or Judgment, or Resurrection, or Reincarnation. Human consciousness is not coextensive with God's consciousness and analogies between people and God are unfounded and probably misleading. No Providence directs or intervenes in the lives or souls of individual people. There is no reason to expect any Messiah.
7. All religions are cultural and psychological artifacts. There is no reason to believe any of them to be wholly or even substantially true. There is no legitimate religious authority beyond an individual's consciousness, and even that is unreliable. All books are of exclusively human origin. No religious premises including these can be known with certainty, proved, or even defended against claims that they might not be true.

⁴⁸ Since reading Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976), long after writing these Articles, I am inclined to agree with him that evolution operates in the first instance on the gene rather than the population, and the effect on the population is consequential. The effect of this change in view for my Articles of Religion is negligible – my point was that evolution does not operate on individuals (Lamarckism).

Document 18-3: E-mails written while rereading the Old Testament

In Philadelphia I sat in the hotel and the airport and read the Torah. I have almost finished it now – of course I read most of it in college but never straight through like a novel. This time I am reading the late, brilliant Aryeh Kaplan's all-Jewish translation (*The Living Torah*), very strong, vigorous, totally modern English and translated entirely from Jewish sources. I had this as a reference book, bought when I visited my brothers in Israel in 1984 during their *Yiddishkeit* period, but never used it as anything but a reference book. But I was reading about the Temple, and went to it for diagrams, and got caught up in it, and read it straight through, even skipping most of the deeply scholarly notes. Including notes it is 600 pages of text, and I am up to Deuteronomy 20 or so, almost done. It has a fascinating immediacy read this way – King James Version although beautiful is archaic and those translators were not at home in Jewish sources, and modern Christian translations tend to be flat reading, which Kaplan's is definitely not.

Anyway it certainly shows G-d to be a total psychotic, constantly killing people and bringing plagues on them (mostly on us rather than the Egyptians) and the rest of the time compulsively prescribing every jot (*yod*) of his cult furniture and onerous barbaric sacrifice rituals and raving about how he is G-d. A thoroughly disgusting figure. And of course the Jewish *mishegos* about how every word is literally true led the Christians to say the same thing about *their* scriptures, based as they were on ours, and so they started killing people too, and here we are. Sheeeeeesh! Give me Lord Buddha and Lord Ganesha any day of the week.

* * *

Finished Deuteronomy and into Joshua. We're across the Jordan and into Jericho, which has just fallen. I'll keep you posted in case you want to know how it all comes out. Meanwhile check out the valedictory Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:1-43 in KJV: some of the most vivid writing in the entire Bible. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God." vv. 2-3. But typically it gets abusive mighty fast – most of the OT seems to be curses and abuse, that's what the prophets all did best as it was what this psychotic abusive madman of a God (Madgod?) consistently inspired his prophets to shriek. "For their vine is the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." vv. 32-33. Nutsburger, of course, but you have to admit it's terrific writing.

Or, come to think of it, maybe you don't. You never had much patience for this Biblical stuff, and perhaps its fascination for me still puzzles you. As well it might – since it's mostly horrible Bronze Age savagery and of no use whatever as a religion, why bother with it? Well you may ask. "I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them [that is, on *us*, the Jews, and you can't say *that* hasn't happened], with the poison of serpents of

the dust.” v. 24. Well, thanks a lot! Now go choose someone else! Why not get Jewish history from Sir Martin Gilbert – at least he’s civil to us, and doesn’t rant all the time about the tortures he has planned! We’d all be better off if the Jews *and* the Christians could somehow be persuaded that Sir Martin Gilbert is God, instead of YHWH.⁴⁹

* * *

Yes, it is completely barbarous. That stuff about a merciful god is not Jewish – that is mostly a Christian admixture. The OT god never claims to be merciful – to the contrary he is constantly ordering murders for the slightest infraction, and nice juicy genocides (especially in Joshua, where God insists that the entire population of every captured city be completely exterminated). He does claim to be merciful toward Israel, but only for bringing them out of Egypt where he brought them in the first place and then left them in slavery for 400 years, and then killed lots of them in the desert and made a whole generation die there, before getting on with genocides in Palestine. And he never shuts up about bringing us out of Egypt, adding that to every rant and murder.

It makes one wonder, if this is all so terrible (which it is, and especially the grotesquely horrible sacrifice of Isaac, really an allegory for the shift from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice), why bring your kids to synagogue in the first place, if the lesson from the pulpit is unacceptably cruel?⁵⁰ The OT is of huge historical and cultural importance but completely worthless as a religion. What were you doing in that synagogue in the first place? Why expose your kids to a such message, in such an endorsing environment of listening respectfully in pews while The Word is read from the pulpit (I assume your synagogue used a pulpit rather than a *bema*), when you yourself had quite sensibly rejected that very message?

It shows you how deep this stuff is even in our rationalist, assimilated bones.

* * *

Finished with Joshua and Judges, now up to 2d Samuel. All those guys were mass murderers, wiping out whole cities of which it is noted gleefully that no person or sheep

⁴⁹ Sir Martin Gilbert, a distinguished British Jewish historian and cartographer, has written many books of Jewish history including some very useful historical atlases. YHWH is the English version of the *tetragrammaton*, the unspeakable, unwritable name of G-d.

⁵⁰ The biologist Richard Dawkins, in his atheist screed *The God Delusion* (2006), identifies the moral lesson of the sacrifice story as it being a positive virtue to kill your children when you hear a voice in your head telling you to do it. That seems a fair summary of the message.

was left alive, or killing 85 priests for no particular reason. Even my namesake David was a notable brigand, who after stealing everything in a town would burn it to the ground and kill everyone he did not enslave. All this is presented in an approving, indeed gloating tone. Understandable – that’s how their God behaves, so that’s how they behave. That should really be the other way around – as that’s how they behave, that’s how they imagine G-d.

1 Samuel 22:

16 And the king [Saul, who in a paranoid frenzy is trying to kill David] said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father’s house.

17 And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD: because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

18 And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

19 And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

* * *

Why am I reading it? Good question, actually. Why *am* I reading it? As I told you I started reading about the Temple, and then got into the Kaplan Torah, and then just kept going. Although oppressive and unpleasant it is fascinating, and although it is all central to our culture, my grasp of the material was getting pretty rusty. Call it a refresher course. Who knows – the Greeks may come next. *They* got beyond their own blood-thirsty myths – how come we never got beyond ours until recently (not counting the Hellenization period)? The sight of the gods in Homer sitting around, drinking nectar and complaining to each other, or hitting each other with bladders in Aristophanes, is a lot more appealing than what YHWH does all by himself in that dark room between the cherubim. Moral: having many gods is better than having only One.

* * *

Good question, [what possible purpose would a touchy, irritable, undependable god serve?] No useful, positive purpose at all. That’s why I didn’t make him up. It makes a person wonder, though, why the Hebrews wanted a god like that. In fact, that is one “proof,” if you can call it that, of the authenticity of the message – no one would make up a god like that, it would not serve the psychological purposes people need gods for, so He must be Real. There is a similar proof of the divine inspiration of the prophets – they spend all their time saying how bad the Jews are. No other people has a sacred tradition of saying how rotten they are – all other cultures praise themselves, only ours

is almost completely self-criticism, indeed self-criticism so extreme as to make shocking reading even today. I don't say I accept these proofs, mind you, but they do raise interesting questions as to why the Hebrews would ... let's say *evolve the idea* of a god like this, and a self-critical prophetic literature.

For myself I prefer Lord Ganesha, who is a much more sane, well-integrated, non-violent and grown-up sort of god, and is on top of that a patron of art and literature. YHWH does not get on well with others, and has at least one large screw very very loose. It was not a good thing for the Jews that the Christians made our tribal nightmare god into a god of the entire world.

* * *

Well, I skipped Chronicles, since they largely reproduce Kings with a different and even more partisan slant), and ended with Ezra and Nehemiah (which are actually quite interesting, about rebuilding the Temple in 5C BCE after the return to Judah after King Cyrus released the Jews from Babylon, and Nehemiah is a rather attractive personality). But that was the last historical book of the Old Testament, and enough Bible for now. I started reading an elegantly dry comic novel (*The Towers of Trebizond*, by Rose Macaulay (1956)), and what a relief not to be screamed at and hectored and abused by the mad sadistic God of the desert! You know the feeling when there is a loud, unpleasant, distracting noise, and it goes on for hours, and then suddenly stops? You know that delicious moment of silence? That's what it felt like to be reading something else. Whew! I'm glad I made that experiment, and learned a lot from it, but great balls of fire! Lawzy lawzy, I'm glad that's over, and I didn't even get to the Prophets, talk about abuse, jeremiads, they wrote the book! "Ye are gone away from mine ordinances..." Malachi 3:7. You can say that again. No wonder people who internalize that book and read it every year and try to live their lives by it go nuts. It is enough to drive anyone crazy. Give me the *Dhammapada* any day.

* * *

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 – my favorite!⁵¹ Those people were savages. Agreed, it moderated the prevailing savagery of the time to provide that the captured woman

⁵¹ My correspondent said these verses were the portion at *bat mitzvah* for a 13-year-old girl she knew. They read: "When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house, and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she

(footnote continues →)

should not be sold “because thou hast humbled her.” Among the Canaanites and the Moabites, and yea among the Marmites and the Stalactites, and the Loctites and the Catamites, such things were routinely permitted – only Israel had a rule against it. Vewy pwogwessive, I’ll admit. But the Bronze Age has been over for quite some time – to keep on repeating this rule at coming-of-age parties 3400 years later seems excessively smug. If we want to *kve//* about how great the Jews are (and I’m not against that) how about reading from Einstein or Ginsberg or maybe Lenny Bruce?

I had to release a bunch of my slaves when the rabbis came around to inspect my barracoons, because unwittingly my treatment of some of them had not been entirely kosher. If I’d paid more attention to the rules I might still have some of those slaves, and I would be able to put them to work writing articles on securities fraud, while I went to the movies.

(footnote continues...)

will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.”

DOCUMENT 18-4: E-mail to Adam on a universal concept of justice

From: David Phillips
Sent: May 9, 2005 11:30 PM
To: Adam Phillips
Subject: Useful Bible website

Here's the website I sent Noah.⁵² I also snailed him⁵³ two Jewish translations of his [*bar mitzvah*] text (the standard 1916 Philadelphia one and Kaplan's from 1981) and the Abingdon Commentary (Christian, but with sound scholarship – it will introduce to Noah the idea of the different voices in Torah text, J, P, E and so on, which he has probably not encountered before). Thanks for encouraging him to call me – encourage him again! I enjoyed it and would be happy to talk with him again, about justice or about studying the Bible or whatever else he might find useful. He offered to let me review his draft.

It is useless to appeal to an abstract universal concept of justice. There is no such thing, and thinking there is is a remnant of Jewish monotheistic ethnocentrism. That is discredited as a standard for justice (in my mind at least and probably yours too) by its insistence on barbarous punishments for offenses like adultery and homosexuality, as well as idolatry, blasphemy, striking a parent, sabbath-breaking, witchcraft, and *lots* of other crimes including disobedience to a priest (Deut. 17:12) and continuing to be drunk and dissolute when your parents tell you not to (Deut. 21:18-21; death by stoning required at request of parents). Also by its blithe acceptance of raiding, massacre (e.g., Joshua 8:24-25, among many other examples) and slavery (see e.g. Exodus 21-20-21: punishment prescribed for beating a slave to death, *but not* if the slave lived for a couple of days, for he was only property), and by the hideous *ad hoc* judgments of its god (for example, in Noah's portion, death for favoring a return to Egypt, only commuted to 40 years of hopeless meaningless wandering in the desert when Moses pointed out that inflicting death would be bad for God's reputation). And of course the destruction of two other groups of dissidents a chapter or two later, and the killing of Uzzah for touching the Ark, and of Lot's wife for looking back, and the Flood while we're at it, and a large passel of other violent acting-out for which the only excuse is that he's a god and can do as he pleases.

That's not to say there aren't some humane protective laws in the Torah – there are all kinds of laws in there, some we like and some we don't. But since we can't with a straight face take a definition of justice from Torah without first *on our own authority, based on our personal values*, excising the parts we don't like, we have to face that it is all cultural. For example, the Catholics can't commit any abortions but Democrats can

⁵² The website was www.blueletterbible.org.

⁵³ Future researchers: *snail* as a verb means *to send by snail mail*, that is, by ordinary hand-delivered government post rather than e-mail. In 2319 you probably have no such thing.

for the first trimester, or is it the first two, while for eight days after birth the Greeks could expose an unwanted baby on the mountainside. A Roman father could kill his children, and this happened from time to time even under the Empire. Time was when a person could be punished for impiety – now the Christians and Jews don't do this anymore, but the Moslems do. Did caning an Iranian woman for not covering her hair suddenly become just in 1979, when it wasn't in 1978? How come this is OK in Iran but not in Turkey or Mexico? If it's not OK by you even in Iran, and I'm with you on that one, that's cultural – what else could it be? Whatever your values which make you think that's just *obviously* awful, their values hold the opposite. There is *no objective basis* for any of this – the best that can be said is that there is an emerging consensus about certain things – torture for example (although the Aztecs and Iroquois loved it, and so did Europeans until quite recently), and we're getting there on the death penalty. But a decision to define justice by emerging consensus is just a liberal preference, really – even California voted something like 2-1 not long ago to retain the death penalty. “Universal” just means it's obvious TO YOU. If other people don't agree (and they don't), no claim to universality is sustainable.

So to get to mercy, first you need a set of values to decide on justice, and another set of values to decide whether, and if so how and how much, to temper justice. These two sets of values can be the same, or related, or independent, according to culture. For example, in the Moslem tradition, justice is death for murder, but the victim's family can intervene to stop it, it being by the Moslems (in theory at least) better to forgive. In America a victim's family *cannot* intervene to prevent a death sentence or execution, because as a matter of criminal justice the crime is seen as being against the People (in England, the King) rather than against the victim and his family. There are cultural and historical bases for both views. So do they have more mercy than we have? Is it *objectively* more just to allow a family veto over punishment? Both the Moslems and the Anglo-Saxons, and the Icelanders too, had an elaborate system of *wergild*, or payments for injury (*wergild* means *man-gold*). Rather than an eye for an eye, retribution was commuted to money as a way to avoid feud cycles. That was a practical measure aimed at civil peace – but was it any more just? Or is it more just to punish crimes against the person by imprisonment, as America does, without providing any restitution? The Anglo-Saxons had a detailed schedule – 20 marks or whatever it was for death, 10 for a limb, 5 for an eye, and so on – but there were several levels. Thus a king's eye was worth a lot more than a knight's, and a knight's more than a peasant's. All this is solemnly recorded in the Anglo-Saxon statutes, which survive. Is it a universal truth that everyone's eye is worth the same? Sez who?

And so on. This is an inexhaustible subject. Noah won't get to the bottom of it by next month, and neither will we. Feel free to pass this e-mail on to Noah if you think these ravings might interest him, or help him plan his speech.

DOCUMENT 18-5: Vedanta study notes (1992)

"EVEN AS A ROCK IS UNSHAKEN BY THE WIND, SO ARE THE WISE UNMOVED BY PRAISE OR BLAME."

- Dharmapada

"AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS ONE NEEDS A TEACHER, BUT THE GURU NEEDED AT THE BEGINNING CAN BE DANGEROUS. TO ATTACH ONESELF TO A CHARISMATIC PERSON MAY BLOCK THE PATH TO IMMEDIATE AWARENESS IF THE CLINGING IS TOO TIGHT."

- BUCK, op cit @ 32

"ALL SCIENCE IS THE REDUCTION OF MULTIPLICITIES TO UNITIES." - ALDOUS HUXLEY

"DREAMS ARE REAL AS LONG AS THEY LAST. CAN WE SAY MORE OF LIFE?" - HAWESOCK ELIAS

"ALL THIS IS FULL. ALL THAT IS FULL."

FROM FULLNESS, FULLNESS COMES.

WHEN FULLNESS IS TAKEN FROM FULLNESS, FULLNESS STILL REMAINS.

OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI.

- ISHA UPANISHAD

"NACHIKETAS' SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE, HIS SINGLE DESIRE, IS THE TRAIT OF THE SUCCESSFUL SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT. AS RAMAKRISHNA SAYS, IF ONE FIBER IS STILL STICKING OUT, THE THREAD WILL NOT PASS THROUGH THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE. NOT ONLY TO DESIRE THE RIGHT THING BUT TO UNIFY ONE'S DESIRES ON IT IS THE KEY."

- Commentary on Emerson's translation of the KATHA UPANISHAD (Death as Teacher)

"MEDITATE ON THE SELF, FOR IN IT ALL ARE KNOWN, AS ONE MAY KNOW AN ANIMAL BY ITS FOOTPRINT." - Brihadaranyakopanisad 1.4.7

UPASANA

1. BRAHMANUBHAVA : Impartite awareness of Self

2. PUJABHAVA : Internal worship

a. Dhyana bhava (form of devotion)

b. Japa (repetition)

c. Jatra (praise)

3. ~~MANAS~~ PUJA : External worship

a. Murti

b. Lingam

c. Yantra

3 pratima (objects of worship)

5 AGAMAS :

SHAKTA

VAISHNAVA

SHAKTA

SAMKAS

GANAPATHYAS

FLYING MANTRA

JAPAM

ATAP

ALAY

ADAM

BUDDHA · DHARMA · SAMASHA

THE SELF HAS FOUR STATES

1) CONSCIOUSNESS

- VAISHVANARA (all senses outwardly making life)

- TAIJASA (all senses inward, dream state)

- PRAJNA (indrawn but not unconscious; dreamless sleep)

- TURIYA : consciousness in Brahman, superconsciousness

- from MANDUKYA UPANISHAD

SADHANA

Upan + Niyama

Mind Training: sense control
concentration
awareness

Meditation

Study of Teacher

Puja + worship

Reading

Mantra

Swadhyaya (self study)

Prayer

PANCHA-KRIYA

5 ACTIVITIES OF SHIVA

1. CREATION (SRIKSHIT)
2. MAINTENANCE (STHITI)
3. DESTRUCTION (SAMHARA)
4. CONCEALMENT (TIRO BHAVA)
5. FAVOR (ANUGRAHA)

FOUR BRAHMANE AXIOMS

1. AHAM BRAHMASMI
I am the Absolute
massive Brahman
2. TAT TVAM ASI
You are That
you are that
3. PRANATMA BRAHMA
The conscious self is the Absolute
Consciousness is Brahman
4. SARVAM KHALVIDAM BRAHMA
Everything that is, is truly the Brahman

① AHAM ATMA BRAHMA The Self is Brahman

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. RIGHT SEEING | 5. RIGHT LIVELIHOOD |
| 2. RIGHT ASSOCIATION | 6. RIGHT EFFORT |
| 3. RIGHT SPEECH | 7. RIGHT MINDFULNESS |
| 4. RIGHT CONDUCT | 8. RIGHT MEDITATION |

EIGHT GROUPS OF SUBTLE BODY

1. 5 organs of perception
eyes, ears, tongue, nose, skin
2. 5 organs of action
voice, hands, legs, sex, excretion
3. 5 functions of vital force
breath for respiration, downward breath for excretion, distributive breath for digest + assimilation, diffused breath for holding together, ascending breath for enervation
4. 5 subtle elements
earth, air, fire, water, ether
5. 4 mental organs
mind (to consider aspects of object)
intellect (to determine real nature of object)
ego (to identify us w/ body)
emotions (to draw us to pleasing things)

6. 1 ANDRONEF

7. DESIRES

8. KARMA

THE RAJAS:

Purity

Concentration

Insight

5 FORMS OF GOD

1. PARA Supreme
2. VYUHA Emanations
3. ANANTYA Immanence w/ us
4. VISHAYA Incarnations
5. ARCHA presence in consecrated image

YAMA (Self-restraint)

- ahimsa (non violence)
- Satya (non falsehood)
- asteya (non-stealing)
- brahmacharya (non-sensuality)
- aparigraha (non-acquisitiveness)

NIYAMA (self-discipline)

- Saucha (clean, diet, dress, hygiene)
- Santosha (contentment)
- tapas (austerity)
- Swadhyaya (self-study)
- Ishvara (devotion, pranidhana to god)

ASANA (posture)

PRANAYAMA (breath control)

PRATYAKHA (sense withdrawal)

ANTARANGA

Dharana: concentration
Dhyana: meditation
Samadhi: contemplation

The ASHTANGA (8-limbed)

~~Rock candy~~ Santosha
~~Vision in the seat~~ Ganesh for SW
~~Mandir musti dargah~~
Kandalaivi jolt BUSINITION
Rena fire-transcendence
Ungam-shakti
Arum

EKAMPA GADWANA'S 8-fold PATH [from introduction in PG no 8000]

1. Meditation
2. Mantra
3. Slowing Down
4. One-pointedness
5. Training the Senses
6. Putting Others First
7. Reading the Mysticism
8. Assoc. w/ Unmanifest L.

3 criteria of Vedas Knowledge:

1. Perception (pratyaksa)
2. Inference (anumana)
3. Revelation (agama)

UPASANA (worshiping upon)

- adoration
- contemplation
- invocation

FIVE GREAT OBSTACLES (ch 143)

ANGER LUST
INFATUATION
AVARICE FORTN



SHANMAY'S 4 QUALIFICATIONS FOR ATTAINMENT

1. Discrimination
2. Renunciation
3. Six Treasures of virtue
 - a. Tranquility
 - b. Self-control (detachment from senses)
 - c. Mental peace (control of mind's reactions to stimuli)
 - d. Forbearance
 - e. Faith
 - f. Self-surrender (keeps path on Brahman)
4. Longing for LIBERATION

Crest Jewel @ 36

8 SIDDHIS

1. ANIMA (immortality)
2. MAHIMA (radiance) greatness
3. LAGHIMA (lightness)
4. PRAPTI (knowledge of all persons)
5. PRAKAMYA (impurity) " " "
6. ISHITVA (spreading of shakti or maya)
7. VASHITVA (freedom from gunas)
8. KAMAVA SAVITVA (achievement of all desires)

PANCA MAKARAS

1. MADYA wine intoxic. knowledge
2. MAMSA meat consequence to life
3. MATSYA fish identifi. of myself
4. MUDRA granth relinquishment of all
5. MATSHONA sex union of kundalini + Shiva/Shakti

6 DARSANAS

Hatha yoga - control of body
 Karma " " " action
 Jnana " " " thought
 Mantra " " " mind
 Bhakti " " " emotions
 Laya " " " energy

JAPAS: VACHIKA v. audible
 UPANISHU J. soundless
 MANASA JAPA mental

11 SATYAKATHA VOWS

1. Non-violence
2. Truth
3. Non-stealing
4. Celibacy
5. Non-possession
6. Bodily Labour
7. Control of the palate
8. Fearless ness
9. Equal respect for all Religions
10. Svadeshi
11. Freedom from Untouchability

18 SUBJECTS OF TANTRIC MEDITATION (TRAKATA)

1. Candle flame
2. Black dot
3. Symbol of Ishta-Devi
4. Tip of nose (nasagra drishti)
5. Third Eye (Bhruvina adya)
6. Shiva Lingam
7. Sky or water
8. Rising sun
9. Sun
10. Crystal
11. Own shadow
12. Darkness
13. Emptiness (Shunya)
14. An element
15. A character
16. mirror
17. Lunar form
18. Yambha

BHUKTI (enjoyment) + MUKTI (liberation)
 MANASI PUJA (Concentrated) + Bahya Puja (intended)
 VAMA VARA (left) + DAKSHINA VARA (right)

JIVATMA = PARATMA . SHAKTI = SHIVA

SHIVA himself = Shiva mani festival
 SVARUPA VISHNURUPA

Supreme
PARA

Subtle
SUKSMA

Gross
STHULA

3 GUNAS

Sattva purity DEVA
 Rajas passion VRA
 Tamas ignorance

3 FUNDAMENTALS OF TANTRA SADDHIS

1. Guru
2. Mantra
3. Devata

4 STEPS OF TANTRA SADDHIS

1. JNANA PADA knowledge
2. YOGA PADA union
3. KRIYA PADA ceremony
4. CHAYA PADA inner world

DOCUMENT 18-6: Litany of the 108 names of Lord Ganesha

Just read the English column; ignore the Sanskrit.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Akhuratha	One who has Mouse as His Charioteer
Alampata	Ever Eternal Lord
Amit	Incomparable Lord
Anantachidrupamayam	Infinite and Consciousness Personified
Avaneesh	Lord of the Whole World
Avighna	Remover of Obstacles
Balaganapati	Beloved and Lovable Child
Bhalchandra	Moon-Crested Lord
Bheema	Huge and Gigantic
Bhupati	Lord of the Gods
Bhuvanapati	God of the Gods
Buddhinath	God of Wisdom
Buddhipriya	Knowledge Bestower
Buddhividhata	God of Knowledge
Chaturbhuj	One Who Has Four Arms
Devadeva	Lord of All Lords
Devantakanashakarin	Destroyer of Evils and Asuras
Devavrata	One Who Accepts All Penances
Devendrashika	Protector of All Gods
Dharmik	One Who Gives Help
Dhoomravarna	Smoke-Hued Lord
Durja	Invincible Lord
Dvaimatura	One Who Has Two Mothers
Ekaakshara	He of the Single Syllable
Ekadanta	Single-Tusked Lord
Ekadrishta	Single-Tusked Lord
Eshanputra	Lord Shiva's Son
Gadadhara	One Who Has The Mace as His Weapon
Gajakarna	One Who Has Eyes Like an Elephant
Gajanana	Elephant-Faced Lord
Gajananeti	Elephant-Faced Lord
Gajavakra	Trunk of The Elephant
Gajavakra	One Who Has Mouth Like an Elephant
Ganadhakshya	Lord of All Ganas (Gods)
Ganadhyakshina	Leader of All the Celestial Bodies
Ganapati	Lord of All Ganas (Gods)
Gaurisuta	The Son of Gauri (Parvati)
Gunina	One Who Is the Master of All Virtues

Haridra	One Who Is Golden Coloured
Heramba	Mother's Beloved Son
Kapila	Yellowish-Brown Coloured
Kaveesha	Master of Poets
Kirti	Lord of Music
Kripalu	Merciful Lord
Krishapingaksha	Yellowish-Brown Eyed
Kshamakaram	The Place of Forgiveness
Kshipra	One Who Is Easy to Appease
Lambakarna	Large-Eared Lord
Mahabala	Enormously Strong Lord
Mahaganapati	Omnipotent and Supreme Lord
Maheshwaram	Lord of the Universe
Mangalamurti	All Auspicious Lord
Manomay	Winner of Hearts
Mrityuanjaya	Conqueror of Death
Mundakarama	Abode of Happiness
Muktidaya	Bestower of Eternal Bliss
Musikvahana	One Who Has Mouse as His Charioteer
Nadapratishtha	One Who Appreciates and Loves Music
Namasthetu	Vanquisher of All Evils and Vices and Sins
Nandana	Lord Shiva's Son
Nideeshwaram	Giver of Wealth and Treasures
Omkara	One Who Has the Form of OM
Pitambara	One Who Has Yellow-Coloured Body
Pramoda	Lord of All Abodes
Prathameshwara	First Among All
Purush	The Omnipotent Personality
Rakta	One Who Has Red-Coloured Body
Rudrapriya	Beloved of Lord Shiva
Sarvadevatman	Acceptor of All Celestial Offerings
Sarvasiddhanta	Bestower of Skills and Wisdom
Sarvatman	Protector of the Universe
Shambhavi	The Son of Parvati
Shashivarnam	One Who Has a Moon-Like Complexion
Shoorpakarna	Large-Eared Lord
Shuban	All Auspicious Lord
Shubhagunakanan	One Who Is the Master of All Virtues
Shweta	One Who Is as Pure as the White Colour
Siddhidhata	Bestower of Success and Accomplishments
Siddhipriya	Bestower of Wishes and Boons
Siddhivinayaka	Bestower of Success
Skandapurvaja	Elder Brother of Skand (Lord Kartik)

Sumukha	Auspicious Face
Sureshwaram	Lord of All Lords
Swaroop	Lover of Beauty
Tarun	Ageless
Uddanda	Nemesis of Evils and Vices
Umaputra	The Son of Goddess Uma (Parvati)
Vakratunda	Curved Trunk Lord
Varaganapati	Bestower of Boons
Varaprada	Granter of Wishes and Boons
Varadavinayaka	Bestower of Success
Veeraganapati	Heroic Lord
Vidyavaridhi	God of Wisdom
Vighnahara	Remover of Obstacles
Vignaharta	Demolisher of Obstacles
Vighnaraja	Lord of All Hindrances
Vighnarajendra	Lord of All Obstacles
Vighnavinashanaya	Destroyer of All Obstacles and Impediments
Vigneshwara	Lord of All Obstacles
Vikat	Huge and Gigantic
Vinayaka	Lord of All
Vishwamukha	Master of The Universe
Vishwaraja	King of The World
Yagnakaya	Acceptor of All Sacred and Sacrificial Offerings
Yashaskaram	Bestower of Fame and Fortune
Yashvasin	Beloved and Ever Popular Lord
Yogadhipa	Lord of Meditation

Document 18-7: Icon of Lord Ganesha



Basohli miniature from around 1730, in the Indian National Museum, Delhi