

## Chapter Thirty-one

### RELIGION I

*The main function of religion is to protect people  
from a direct experience of God.*

**Carl Jung**

*That truth does not lie in any temple, in any mosque, in any church. And it has no path to it except through one's own understanding of oneself, inquiring, studying, learning. Then there is what which is eternal.*

**J. Krishnamurti, *The Ending of Sorrow***



#### **O Fearlessness and Love**

I ran across this quote this morning. Sounds rather like something I might have said —

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.

Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations.

But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

It is fearlessness, and it is love.

Buddha

## **O**                      **Major Consideration**

As I continue mulling over this issue, it occurs to me that there is a major point we should consider when talking about religion. Many writers have probably thought these things. However, in my limited readings I don't see anybody discussing them except Ken Wilber, notably in his book, *Integral Spirituality*.

He points out how —

During the Enlightenment (1600-1800) modernity gave us reason, the scientific method, and political freedom, even as it debunked and threw out the faith-based mytho-magical *stage* of religion. During the Industrial Revolution (1800-1900), it also threw out the ascending *line* of spiritual intelligence that passed through archaic nature-fusion, ego-centered magic, and ethnocentric mythology on its way up and into globalcentric reason and the scientific method. Unfortunately, we in the West stopped *there*, dead in our tracks.

As a result, Wilber points out, we live in a materialistic, reason-dominated post-modern culture that cannot evolve into still higher realms of evolutionary psycho-spiritual development. That is, we threw out the dynamic on-going *line* of evolutionary psycho-spiritual intelligence along with the pre-modern *stages* of ethnocentric mythology and its attendant superstitions. To cite a cliché, we threw the baby out with the bathwater.

Today, because we reject anything and everything “spiritual” as superstitions twaddle, we live in a spiritual wasteland and cannot evolve beyond reason upward into worldcentric, all-embracing Higher Consciousness that honors not only man’s inner life, but plants, animals and the earth itself. Man feels the spiritual impulse inherent in our human nature, but is presently given only two choices: regress into pre-modern and for the most part rationally unacceptable mytho-magical religion, or hide in the closet and pray without letting friends know.

On the other hand, faith-based mythological religions around the world were perfect extensions of the *line* of psycho-spiritual development appropriate for their archaic and pre-modern times. They became the great repositories of humanity’s early archetypal myths, a kind of giant “library” representing peoples from the Middle East (Muslims), to the Far East (Buddhists), to the West (Christianity), and to every other place in the world, including even the most obscure ethnocentric tribal peoples.

Today, rejected by rational, scientific and predominately materialistic cultures, many of these pre-modern mytho-magical believers are enraged because their *stage* of development is not honored and given room to flourish in the modern world. Hence, religion-based terrorism, wars, and unending local and international violence.

Instead of growing *up to* the level of rationality and good will toward all, pre-modern religious zealots would rather blow modernity off the map. This is disconcerting, to say the least, especially when we consider that 70% of the global

population is ethnocentric and rooted in a mythological world view — and soon with will have access to nuclear bombs and bio-chemical weaponry.

Solution: Modernity (especially the West) needs to acknowledge the value and universal validity of the life-affirming, evolutionary developmental *line* of spiritual intelligence. Modernity needs to give *itself* permission to continue the psycho-spiritual ascent beyond rationality into more expansive levels of consciousness.

As well, modern contemporary cultures need to honor and respect the value of pre-modern religions as a stage of development that has given us the world's repository of humanity's enduring psycho-spiritual myths. Those ethnocentric, faith-based, mytho-magical religions were appropriate and significant *stages* of evolutionary development along the ascending *line* of spiritual intelligence.

Simultaneously, pre-modern, faith-based, non-evidentiary, mytho-magical religions need to relax their grip on that *stage* of spiritual realization, open their hearts and minds to further evolutionary development beyond egocentric, ethnocentric, and pre-rational mythological confines, and embrace the ascending *line* of spiritual intelligence that will *include* and honor humanity's myths even as it *transcends* them and ascends to higher stages of reason, empathy, compassion, love and respect on a worldcentric scale.

If modern rational civilizations and pre-modern religions embrace these guidelines, there is hope for humanity's future. If not, the nightly news will continue its on-going display of horrors.

**MH**

**The Washing of Hands**

Re: Jesus and Christianity — I have zero problem with Jesus but zillions of problems with Christianity and all other superstitious faith-based theocentric outdated and destructive mytho-magical "isms" established by the *followers* of the enlightened masters.

The masters themselves (Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Socrates, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Zoroaster, et. al.) were towering visionaries, the Everests of consciousness. The theologians and church builders who followed — such as the bureaucratic Paul of Tarsus — in effect erected authoritarian institutions and stifled personal responsibility along with further psycho-spiritual evolutionary development.

Paul and so many other “legalists” proved to be precisely the kinds of mediocre minds the masters were rebelling against in the first place. The masters celebrated psychological and personal freedom. The followers almost inevitably stripped the masters’ words of freedom, and set up rules, regulations, administrators, and guilt-based power structures. Superstitious beliefs replaced personal responsibility and the expansion of consciousness. Hence, organized religions arose, complete with hierarchic institutions, costumes, rituals, mythological dogmas and hypnotized followers. Modern psychologist Carl Jung said it well: “The main function of religion is to protect people from a direct experience of God.”

Magical myth-based religions were appropriate expressions of the level of consciousness that evolved in the emergent agrarian age, but they are inappropriate in today’s post-Enlightenment era of reason, rationality, and all-inclusive worldcentric consciousness. Myth-based ethnocentric religions served humanity well as springboards to post-egoic, post-ethnocentric expansions of consciousness. Today they serve only as barriers to on-going psycho-spiritual evolutionary development. It’s time we stop tolerating yesterday’s childish superstitions and emerge into the full light of Higher Consciousness.

Good to keep this in mind as you go along. Remain interested and inquisitive, yes, but also wary of orthodox, faith-based, non-evidentiary religious perspectives.

Keep in mind what Friedrich Nietzsche said: "After coming into contact with a religious man I always feel I must wash my hands."

## **LI                      Spirituality and Life-affirmation**

Somebody once said, "Those guys invented religions in order to spoil my sex life."

In my opinion, that's true. There is a pathological streak in religions that condemns desire, pleasure, sexuality, dancing, drinking, laughing, secular artistic beauty and just about everything else that gives pleasure, joy, and emotional exuberance. They call life-affirmation a "sin," and condemn it.

Spirituality, however, is good and good for you. It is an awareness of the sacred in nature and in life. Spirituality is reverence and respect for life, for love, for art, for nature. (I heartily urge you to read some of Osho's books from the Seventies, perhaps *Zen: The Path of Paradox*. He speaks of these matters with brilliance.)

But spirituality is not religion, and religion is not spirituality. Spirituality involves reverence for life and the developmental evolution of consciousness. Religion is organized spirituality. It poisons the mind with fairy tales and institutional dogma. It makes life a pain through self-hatred and self-condemnation. Religions and their priests retain their power by making their followers feel guilty. They divide life between "good" and "bad." In that way, they create a split within you, and set up an inner conflict. "If I obey, I am good. If I follow my own inner light, I am bad."

Guilt keeps believers enslaved, which is just what the priests and their churches want. They make you feel bad about yourself; they tell you that if you confess, the church will forgive you; and in that way they keep you psychologically imprisoned. Their whole trip is designed to keep the power for themselves. They

know nothing about spirituality, the sacredness of life, and the joy of psychological and spiritual freedom.

I am saying, that even as you are on the right track in the writing domain, so you are on the right track in the religion domain as well. Affirm your desire. It is natural. It is beautiful. Affirm your sexuality. It is natural. It is beautiful. You are young and lovely and your sexuality is a source of tremendous power, pleasure, joy and love. You can be sensual, you can be sexual, you can be creative, and you can be pure at the same time. I stand in admiration of your insight — "There is no conflict in this," you said. And you are absolutely right.

There will be judges, whether Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. They are always there. They lurk in the shadows or hover around your shoulders, waiting to make themselves feel more powerful and righteous by condemning those who embrace life, love, laughter, beauty, joy and creativity. And they always do it in the name of "God." Don't let them fool you. You take pleasure in turning men on, so turn men on. Enjoy yourself. Celebrate your beauty. Know you are pure. You are a gift to the world. You are nature's gift to poetry, to beauty, to love. Follow your own light, use good judgment (your *own* judgment), and all will be well.

Woody Allen is a great American comedian. You may know of him. He has nothing to do with organized religion, even as he knows that the heart of human fulfillment is joy, love, laughter, and reverence for life. I love his line — "How can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue caught in the roller of an electric typewriter?"

Keep on keepin' on!

Best,

L

**JS            When There is No Fear There is Knowing.**

Dear J,

Thank you so much for letting me know how your son fared during his final weeks. Dying of AIDS at such a young age was not what he had in mind, nor you, for that matter. In the letters I wrote to him — *Letters to A Friend In Jail* — I tried to help him move out of orthodoxy into a realization of his own Divinity. Alas, perhaps my efforts were wasted. I won't take issue with you, as this matter is close to your heart in a deeply personal way. He was, after all, your son. . . .

For myself, however, I ask the questions, "Where do belief systems come from? What is it in the human psyche that gives birth to gods? Thought-created forms most certainly give comfort, but do they not serve as barriers to that which is sacred? Do they not block access to that which is not created by thought, to that which is unbounded and timeless, immense and so real, so true, that thought cannot measure or contain it?"

I look at these kinds of questions and begin to see how illusions, delusions, childish dreams and immature thought-forms may assuage fears, suppress them, heave them down into the basement, but they do not conquer or eliminate them. The fears remain, doing their mischief just below the surface of consciousness. And the priests exploit them. Fear gives birth to beliefs, gods, heavens, priests and churches. We create our gods, then bow down and worship them, and importune them to save us and grant us immortality. In effect, we are talking to ourselves — and to a silent, empty sky.

Hidden fear is not knowledge born of clear perception. How can it be? Illusory beliefs born of man's conceptual mind in the desperate hope of a continuity for the

ego after death are not truths, but veils, walls, barriers that come between us and the real.

Those who would *know* do not believe. They confront their fears face-to-face and ask Why? They search into the fear and into the self and go beyond that self, into selflessness. The separate ego dissolves and the ego-barrier disappears. One then unites with the whole of existence. In beliefs, which only mask ego-fears, one remains separate, isolated, cut off from the whole. In selflessness, all ego-barriers of projected beliefs, gods, systems, philosophies, authorities, saviors disappear. One becomes unified with existence. One does not believe. One knows. And in this knowing there is no fear. When there is no fear there is knowing. The end of fear and sorrow is the beginning of love, compassion, intelligence. Wisdom is harmony with the whole of existence.

Can anybody do it for us? Can a belief in Jesus or a god or a thousand gods dissolve fear and connect us with the universal spirit-energy within us? There are those who point the way, give us guidelines, tell us that "The kingdom of heaven is within," but they also tell us that we have to create our OWN path by walking; there are no saviors; we have to do it ourselves — and it CAN be done.

Arduous, yes. Frightening, yes, at least at first, because we must leave the known behind, strip ourselves of all dogma, beliefs, thought-forms created by the mind, and confront ourselves and existence openly, cleanly, honestly, directly. We must set knowledge and conditioning behind us and move into the unknown — that is, into the here, the now, the new, the present, the real. It takes work, it takes courage. And when one does it, fear ends, sight becomes clear, one's inner being is filled with light, joy, infinite being. This is not fear masked by comforting neurotic illusions invented by frightened children at the dawn of humanity and then organized by corrupt priests down through the centuries and presented to us as "religion." This is *knowing*, authentic being. It is the at-one-with unity-consciousness that the masters have *always* been telling us about. This knowing — not knowledge, but knowing/being — is what the masters have been trying for

millennia to convey to us. And this is what I was trying to help your son attain before he died.

The "fearlessness" you say he felt because of his consoling beliefs was a kind of self-ignorance, and that is okay, is it not? I would be the first to say it was okay. That is what he wanted. That is what he got.

In terms of our discussion, however, can ignorance of one's fear be called bliss, or is it a kind of self-deceiving oblivion? One can drink and feel great or take drugs and feel great or believe in this or that savior or god or philosophical system, and surely all of these sensations help us escape fear, guilt, anxiety, depression, anguish, despair, at least momentarily, do they not? They give us a lie, and that lie gives us hope. In fact, one might easily mistake this darkness for enlightenment, ignorance for bliss, intoxication for clarity, painless oblivion for inner peace. I did it for years. The whole culture around us has done it for hundreds of years, and humankind has been doing it for millennia. It does not look like we are going to wake up very soon, no matter how much or how long the Awakened Ones talk.

And so we continue on our way. Every once in a while, a man or woman connects with the things I just spoke about. They tell other people that they too can come to this clarity, this truth, this bright-light reality. Well, of course none of the priests or politicians want to hear that sort of thing. If they allowed such talk, they would lose their jobs in a hot second. So they and their followers crucify those who speak of these things in effective ways. They nail them up and then build statues of them and tell their sheep to worship them — Jesus, Buddha, Socrates and hundreds of others. Worship the statues, the preachers tell us. Believe in the systems, give us your authority, we will mediate between you and God, and all will be well. Go back to sleep. Forget what the crucified ones said. Listen to *us*. We will take care of you. Put your heart in our pockets along with your money, follow the rituals we give you, believe in the dogmas, and Ye Shall Be Saved.

Sound familiar? Can you see what I mean? Turn on one of those fundamentalist channels and watch that grotesque circus with clear eyes. It's all right there, is it not? I am not lying to you, or trying to deceive you in any way, or make you feel bad or any other such thing. Just pointing out some of these realities.

I am happy for your son. I would rather he died feeling as he did, than feeling cynical or bitter or consciously aware of the absolute termination of his own egoic continuity. And the fact that he could not and did not look through the portals I shared with him is quite all right. It was his life, not mine.

The words I speak have nothing to do with me personally. No person "owns" these truths. They are simply truths. It doesn't matter who utters them, me, you, somebody else, your philosopher father, whomever. If your son went to his grave feeling good, then feeling good is good enough for me as far as he is concerned.

It is not a matter of asking questions and expecting answers or belief systems or philosophies. The things we are talking about cannot be grasped intellectually. There are no relevant questions, and no meaningful answers. The realities we are talking about are not thought-forms. This domain is not a science. To be known, these things must be *experienced*. The journey is not a question to be answered, but a quest to be lived. Many people have taken the journey and shared their findings, methods, experiences, exploding the lies our cultures feed us in the name of "religion," and opening gateways into self-realization, the nameless, timeless, unbounded, mentally ungraspable domain of universal being. These wonderful seers and sages are tremendously alive, awake, insightful, helpful. They don't presume to "save" you. They only offer profound insight and freedom-enhancing guidelines.

It seems to me that the people who have shared their realizations with us down through the centuries, right into our own time, have tapped into a quality of

awareness, consciousness and perception that is available to all of us. They are forerunners on the frontier of consciousness. We all have this quality of awareness within us already, and there will come a time when the human race as a whole will realize and fulfill it.

Even as we have evolved from nonconsciousness, into pre-rational mythologizing consciousness, into rational scientific consciousness, so we are already into the early phases of the next stage: universal consciousness, unity consciousness. Some call it Self-realization, some call it God-consciousness. Whatever we call it, many have known it, shared what they have known, and beckon us onward.

It is a great adventure, the most exciting life-journey one could ever imagine, because it is perpetual creativity: moving out of the known into the unknown, out of the conditioned into the present, out of the old into the new, out of dead knowledge into living reality. It is already in each and every one of us (as every one of the Seers have shown and explained to us). All we need is intention, courage and a willingness to take the leap and persevere.

Talk with you soon,  
Best, L

## **SL                      Renew the Fires and Share the Light**

. . . .Do not fall into hopelessness. At this point, there is no need to feel despair about vanished teachers, vanished mythological gods, and outmoded traditions. It is true, there are no saviors, but you are at the point *now* where you can recognize that truth, and courageously stand on your own two feet. You do not need a leader to regenerate hope, love, confidence. All of these fires remain within you, albeit

subdued under the avalanche of negativity that besieges every one of us in today's world.

But the fire is yours to be renewed. It is your own, not another's. Your morals, your ethics, your ideas, your aspirations are all worthwhile, and all carry within them the seeds of potential world-saving grace that carries the possibility of change, survival, affirmation, and eventual good health. You have within you incredible spiritual energies. You just need to tap into them.

Think globally, then act locally AND globally. Each small act of benevolence makes a difference. Every life-affirming creative gesture matters. If you fall into hopelessness, then the immediate local environment and the planet itself can only weep that another warrior has given up, given in, and abandoned ship.

In terms of your own well-being, it does not matter that so many other people don't bother, don't care, and have knuckled under, joined the greed-pushers, and have set about joining the mad rush to plunder the world for selfish reasons. You don't have to do that just because they did. You are you. You have your *own* way to go.

Yes, you are a separate person in a certain sense. In another sense you are not alone and you are very much a part of the whole. Each gesture to nourish a plant, heal a wounded bird, set a lost little house spider free back into its proper environment creates a rush of love within you, making you stronger, more awake, more conscious and alive. That rush of love makes all the difference.

Even as you say, we are all connected. If you live with integrity, love and creativity, you create an ever-greater you. And you send your golden love-light out into the world. Your husband, your furry four-footed friends, your feathered friends, and all who meet you will feel it. And those who are capable of responding will do so, even as you responded to your new friend, Peter. He passed the torch on to you.

Renew the fires, and share the light and warmth. Serve your highest ideals through love and creativity. Dive into it. Serve with commitment and energy.

I know you can do it and will do it. Why? Because you are in touch with the deepest, highest aspects of your own nature!

As I said near the end of one of my poems (“Crack-Whack”) —

Think I'll hip-hop up the mountain,

Lay my head on a cloud, listen to stream water turn into a flood

That clears and cleans the whole earth green and gives birth and rebirth to

New dawn sunrise-splashed orange-and-red-rose heavensongs

That wake us up, shake us up, break us up. Rebuild castle towers

That stretch up straight as lightbeams all the way to Heaven's Gate

And clack-jack, whack-crack, right-on-track back to be-here-now —

Here, where we belong, not there — Now, where we are, not then —

You got a better way? Gotta better song? Gotta song at all?

Then sing it, fling it, heave it up and out into the glory-air —

You are the one, full of fun, blissed out, blessed and supercool,

One of a kind, unique in all the world, in all the universe, for all time —

Sing it, baby, Sing it, beauty, Sing it whoever, wherever, whenever,

However, whatever and whyever you are — celebrate yourself right now!

Keep on keepin' on, lovely one — Go for it!

**SL                      Who Are We to Fight the River?**

So sorry your dear friend has been stricken with cancer and will not last very long. I also feel sorry for you as well, for the pain you feel. It is deep. It hurts. It infuriates. It frightens. You cry out, “All my beliefs just seem to drift through ever-opening fingers and blow away on the four winds. I don't know what the hell to hold on to anymore! I mean... Just what the fuck is it all about????”

I know how you feel, yes, and I am with you.

Beliefs inevitably shatter on life's shoals. They are tricksters, and completely illusory. A belief may give you consolation today, but sooner or later you will see through it, even as you are seeing through it now. Don't blame the belief. That is its nature. Embrace the metaphorical reality of a river: it has duration, and it looks the same every moment, but it is never the same even for an instant. It is constantly flowing, shifting, changing. Nothing stays the same.

Happy comes, yes, and it's real. But at a moment's notice, happy fades or shifts into its opposites — rage, resentment, sadness, frustration, bitterness, god-awful fear. Our nature is celebratory, but within the celebration of life and consciousness, beauty, love and aspiration, dark heartbreak inevitably rears its head. Shock splinters yesterday's delight. The illusion of yesterday's permanent happiness and of the beliefs that supported it cracks into a thousand shards in today's shift of fortune. Disillusioned from the illusion, we find ourselves plunged into a nightmare. If we try to stop the river, believing it is possible, these harsh realities strike like lightning. Change, impermanence, flux, flow — *these* are real. They have nothing to do with beliefs. Rage and despair inevitably follow hot on the heels of our refusal to accept this fact.

So sorry for your anguish. I wish I were there. I wish you and your dear friend and I could all be together and get drunk and gnash and wail and cry together, and laugh and throw dishes and rocks and books, and stride out to the sea and rage into

the night, and then all tumble into bed together and disappear into sleep's sweet oblivion.

But that is not to be. It might give us momentary cathartic relief, but it would not bring change to a stop, and it would not alter your friend's condition.

The greatest rage comes when we pit ourselves against the nature of life and living and being alive. Every single thing, from the smallest grain of sand to towering passion to the greatest friendship to the most mighty star and blazing galaxy, emerges from the Great Silence. Everything dances in the cosmos or in the rain and wind and sunshine of life's duration, and disappears back into that Great Silence. Who are we to fight it? Who are we to demand *permanence* in the face of the river's eternal flow? Who are we to fight the river?

With death sitting on my left shoulder, I sit at the piano and sing life's beauty and joy through my fingertips as if there is no tomorrow. Every moment of shifting light sparks joy in my heart for the beauty I see in a friend's loving eyes, in a woodpecker's peeking into the tree's nest-hole, in the bending of a purple iris in a soft spring breeze. I relax into the music and disappear. I float without swimming up *or* down the stream. I attune myself with the ripples, the coolness, the slow curves and gentle swirls. I give myself to the river and let the music sing through me, even when the music is harsh or dark or fierce.

*The river and I are One. That is what it's about. That is where the meaning is.*

I do so hope your friend finds her way through the physical difficulties as painlessly as possible. You can help her by remaining her friend, helping her remember the love she feels for you and for being alive. And you can help her remember too the truth we all face sooner or later. And no matter when death arrives, it always feels too soon. And that's where you can be of greatest help.

Comfort her, not with fairy tales but with empathy, love, compassion, and abiding friendship. . . .

Write to me, won't you?

L

**JC-E                      Religion and Pathology**

Apologies for not getting right back to you. As you recall, you wrote me a wonderful letter about your acting in a movie about Sister Rosa and Caravaggio (a fabulous painter, by the way; I assume you looked into his work). I think it's wonderful that you are getting acting jobs.

I guess I did not respond right away to your letter, because I felt uneasy about the pathological nature of Sister Rosa's masochistic quasi-religious hysteria. As you know, that sort of thing was not uncommon back then, and it is quite common today (with Christians starving themselves, or donning crowns of thorns, and beating and mutilating themselves at Easter time, even volunteering to be crucified — which is actually performed, even in this day and age).

That aspect of so-called "religion" has always disturbed me, especially in the Christian domain (but by no means limited to Christians — many Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and primitive tribal religions are equally pathological). Self-degradation, mutilation, cutting, whipping, etc., is often done in the name of "suffering for God (and Jesus)." But in fact it is a serious psychological problem. People did not know of depth psychology in Caravaggio's day, of course. But even today, there are people who enjoy inflicting pain upon themselves in the name of "God" and various "saviors."



scientific religious irrationality as revealed in history's social contexts; and clearly states the threats and dangers that face us today as a result of peoples clinging to pre-rational superstitions in the name of both “religion” and “tolerance.”

I applaud you and your response to the Joe's Witness who recently knocked on your door to troll for new converts. I was delighted with what you said to his face, “There is no God out there. If there is a God-like presence, it is within us all. Goodbye!”

Way to go, S. You're tapping into insights that are relevant not only in your neighborhood, but worldwide as well!

*At the heart of a truly spiritual vision is reverence for life.* You've got it. A few others around you have it. You are not alone.

Keep on keepin' on,  
Talk with you soon,  
All the very best, L