

The Essential



God

Experience

Change Your Thoughts
Change Your Life



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The Essential God Experience – Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life

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1. Religion & Spirituality, 2. Spiritualism, 3. Mindfulness & Meditation, 4. Religion & Science, 5. Religion & Philosophy, 6. Self-improvement

Edited by James Woodward

To my daughter and my son, and all others who
desire to know more about spirituality, the nature
of God, and the meaning of life.

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PART I

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

Inspirations

The world abounds with confused and unreasonable ideas about God, religion, and spirituality, so it's not surprising that many good people throw it all in the rubbish. And those who try to make sense of it all, or try to live a spiritual life, often find themselves wanting and confused.

But it's possible to clear our heads by acknowledging realistic notions about the nature of God and spirituality. This begins by having a good look at ourselves, our long-held beliefs, and our deep-rooted biases. It means sweeping aside the rubble of archaic religious thought and weeding out the vines of materialism.

Changing our settled ideas and lifelong stereotypes begins with fresh, innovative ideas that illuminate the true nature of spirituality, inspiring us to make real contact with the Divine Source (by any name). This is the God experience.

Throughout history, progressive thinkers have made remarkable contributions to our understanding of spiritual living. We can only admire these prophets, sages, and mystics of all ages whose driving passion in life was, and for many still is, to contact a spiritual world that exists beyond the human senses but not entirely beyond the human mind. From among such astute people, we glean valuable messages of love, wisdom, and spiritual insight.

Truth is revealed to us in countless ways, not only through spiritual writings, but also scientific research, philosophical musings, and a profusion of books and websites of every genre. Many of the concepts and assertions in this book are drawn from both Western and Eastern religious philosophies, but of all my sources, the one that has inspired me the most is *The Urantia Book*.¹

Your God Experience

Your personal God experience is as real as any experience. It's an authentic, supernatural encounter with spiritual reality freely available to anyone willing to embark on the adventure of a lifetime. It's an extraordinary and transforming experience that begins whenever we truly desire to know the truth about spiritual forces or spirit beings.

The rewards of the God experience are many, including a real spiritual transformation, achieving true peace of mind, gaining courage and confidence, feeling love and compassion, learning discretion and wisdom, attaining cosmic awareness, and reaching the heights of God consciousness. All of this gives our lives real meaning.

We could begin by exploring the spiritual wonders of the universe, our spiritual potential, or the possibility of eternal life.

Others prefer self-improvement books, how-to websites, spiritual writings, meditation, or even traditional religions.

All of this is good. There is no fixed or correct approach to either spirituality or God—the number of different avenues is as varied as the number of people on the planet. It is a very personal and unique experience. The only commonality is the goal—to live a life guided by spiritual ideals—to live consciously in the transforming presence of a loving and divine Spirit, a God by any name we choose.

The essential God experience is an ever-expanding comprehension of the reality of God. It is coming to know the supernal values and meanings that define a spiritual life. And it challenges us *to live out those values* in our everyday lives—a conscious and willing embrace of the Spirit Way.

Finding God and realizing the eternal, infinite nature of this Creator Spirit is a profound and fulfilling experience that

delves into the uncharted realms of mind and soul. It is indeed the true quest of a lifetime, an exhilarating adventure that transforms our lives, our families, our careers, and our goals into exceptional and meaningful endeavors.

But as appealing as all this may sound, some feel they don't have the time, or that it's too difficult to begin the experience. In their hearts, they may doubt their ability to become spiritual, or they are not entirely convinced of the reality of God or the existence of helpful celestial forces.

One of the great troubles with modern life is that you think you are too busy to find time for spiritual meditation and religious devotion.

– *The Urantia Book*

Much of our inhibition stems from our preconceived notions about the nature of reality, especially about God and spiritual reality. We are often unaware of the

unreasonable ideas and prejudiced views that adversely affect our thinking and beliefs (see *What You Believe Is What You See*).

None of the Above

Despite all the bad press about religion, many people around the world truly desire a spiritual experience, even though they may outwardly reject traditional religions. In recent polls, those who refuse to be affiliated with any organized religion are often referred to as *Nones*, as in “none of the above.” A similar category, as defined by Pew Research, is “nothing in particulars.”²

When Nones were asked why they chose not to identify with any religion, the most common reply was that they disagreed with, or questioned the validity of, religious teachings.³ This is understandable, although it does not necessarily imply that Nones are nonreligious or nonspiritual. In fact, the same report points out that 74 percent of Nones believe in God to varying

degrees, while only 44 percent say religion is important.

If we view these polls in isolation, we may get the impression that people who claim to have no religion are either agnostics or atheists. But broad research suggests otherwise. When people say they are not religious, we cannot assume they are not spiritual, or even that they do not believe in God. ⁴

Putting aside all religious affiliations, 80 percent of Americans say they still believe in some form of God or a higher spiritual being. ⁵ In Canada, about 70 percent say the same. ⁶ And almost half of those who say they do not believe in God still claim to believe in a higher power or spiritual force, including some who, ironically, also profess to be atheists or humanists. The same is true in Europe, which is often seen as more secular. But even there, 65 percent admit they believe in either a Biblical God or a higher spiritual force. ⁷

Overall, these polls suggest that most people in America, Canada, and Europe remain surprisingly spiritual in their outlook, even as attendance at religious institutions is declining.

This suggests that young and old alike are undeterred by the handwringing of religionists who fear losing their flocks to the forces of evil. But the same people also ignore the pleas of atheists and cynics who attempt to redeem them from the folly of their ways.

This persistent human proclivity for spirituality explains why so many young people who consciously reject formal religions are happy and eager to identify as “spiritual but not religious,” a term first popularized by Sven Erlandson’s (2000) book of the same name.

The problem that arises from this predicament is that many spiritually inspired people who have deserted the sinking ships of organized religion find

themselves adrift in a sea of spiritual uncertainty. For all such people, I hope to offer some firm ground.

God by Any Other Name

Whatever name we give to God, or whatever gender we prefer to assign, it makes no real difference to our personal God experience. However, when it comes to any notion about the *true nature of Deity*, our conceptions *can and do* make a difference to our spiritual growth. Much depends on how closely our preconceived notions and settled ideas align with divine reality. In other words, as our thoughts approach the truth about Divinity, we become more *spiritually enlightened*.

It doesn't really matter which name we choose for this Divinity. It could be God, Mother Spirit, Elohim, Allah, Brahma, Buddha, Cosmic Mind, Creative Spirit, Heavenly Father, Yahweh, or The Force.

A rose by any other name would smell as
sweet.

– William Shakespeare

Adopt a name that is meaningful to you, one that conveys an awe-inspiring, devotional, and divine meaning. Once again, it is not so much the name or gender you assign to God, but rather how you imagine *the spiritual nature and divine attributes* of such a Deity.

There are many different ideas about God, but no matter how you define or describe this greater Power, or what meaning it has to you, we are all thinking about the same eternal and infinite entity.

God has ninety-nine names.

– Kutub al-Sittah

Upgrade Your Vision of God

The God experience is one of spiritual power, breathless exhilaration, cosmic

insight, and compassionate love—all of which are freely available to anyone who truly desires a spiritual transformation.

But despite the supernal reality of this supreme adventure, there appears to be a growing aversion to the concept of God, especially the doctrine-bound notion of God as depicted in Judeo-Christian writings. This is an understandable response to the primitive portrayal of God as an overbearing, judgmental, and vindictive monarch.

Nonetheless, we have to ask: to what degree do these archaic ideas reflect the true nature of a Universal Creator?

Our preconceived notions and negative stereotypes affect our ability to understand any subject, whether scientific or religious. Our established ideas and misplaced prejudices about God and religion can not only limit the extent of our spiritual experiences, but also the range of our spiritual insight.

This is why it is so important to upgrade our vision of God so that it more accurately portrays the divine nature. And we begin by exploring divine meanings and spiritual values. See also *Four Divine Values*.

God as Spirit Reality

As we mature and grow wiser, we move beyond antiquated notions of a vengeful, jealous, and angry God, as so often portrayed in religious texts. Clearly, these are human traits that ancient peoples attributed to a superhuman but primitive god.

When God is portrayed as an angry man, it's no wonder that some feel inclined to throw out religion altogether. But the alternative view is that God is an all-wise, kind, and compassionate Spirit, one who is far above the childish emotions and violent behavior of human beings. Any depiction of a heartless and spiteful God is sadly naive, but

regrettably, it is a view still flaunted by gloomy religionists.

May God protect me from gloomy saints.

– Teresa of Ávila

Thankfully, throughout history, a steady stream of prophets, seers, teachers, and mystics has reached a far more virtuous and genuine realization—that God is a loving spiritual entity and the eternal origin of spiritual goodness, wisdom, and compassion. God is indeed the very *Source of all reality*—the Supreme Creator at the very center of all things.

Our spiritual quest begins by getting to know this God. It is not necessarily a difficult task because the inner Spirit that patiently guides each of us is a living spark, a divine gift, of that Greater Spirit.

No mere mortal can profess to know the full nature of an infinite and eternal God, but we can still formulate concepts that

approximate this nature. In other words, it is possible to achieve a *relative* understanding of God. There are many sources we can draw on, including Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, Lao Tzu, Guru Nanak, and many others, all of whom view God as a real spiritual entity.

There is but one God. His name is Truth. He is the Creator.

– Guru Nanak

Even in recent times, devout spiritual minds continue to elaborate a more progressive religious philosophy. A few examples include Joseph Benner, Emmanuel Swedenborg, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mother Teresa, Baha'u'llah, Leo Tolstoy, Wayne Dyer, and Alan Cohen. Through their own spiritual experiences, these individuals have come to know God as a Force of positive love and action.

For more on the nature of God, see [*God Consciousness*](#).

Knowing God and Yourself

While it is impossible for any of us to truly comprehend the full magnitude of an Infinite Creator, it is difficult to proceed much further on the path of spiritual enlightenment until we can at least accept the reality of God in some form or essence.

The fact that human minds cannot hope to grasp the true infinity and eternity of this reality is no reason to dismiss it. If a child cannot understand the differential equations of mathematics, we cannot say such equations do not exist.

We don't need to understand all of God to know God. As a loose analogy, we may not know everything about our fathers or mothers, but we still love them. As children, we may not fully appreciate all their personal qualities, skills, or intellect, but we can still adore those we do understand. Our lack of knowledge, experience, or moral insight does not diminish either our personal

relationship with them or the sincerity of our love. And so it is with God.

The God experience is getting to know God as well as ourselves. A great part of our spiritual journey is being mindful of how we perceive the people, events, and relationships in the world around us, how our beliefs shape what we see and what we can achieve, and how our thoughts and habits affect our comprehension of God and reality.

Daniel Siegel (2015) suggests that none of us can escape the formative influences of our childhood and the extent to which we have been shaped by our parents, families, friends, communities, societies, cultures, and social histories.⁸ And a significant part of any spiritual journey is having the honesty and courage to accept the truth about what we believe and who we are—our strengths and weaknesses.

I'm not advocating long sessions of psychotherapy or excessive introspection as

a solution, but simply for us to take an honest look at the kinds of ideas and perspectives we accept as true. Think of it as a critical examination of fixed views, prejudices, and stereotypes. Without exception, we all have a belief system or worldview that shapes how we perceive and interpret the world around us. Taking a closer look at these beliefs, spiritual or not, is an effective way to understand ourselves.

Getting to know God and actually feeling the presence of God are the main goals of the God experience. And while I cannot claim to fully portray the true nature of an infinite, eternal, and divine Creator, I try to do so anyway, hoping to illuminate the magnificence and majesty of the First Creative Source and Divine Center of All Reality.

When we come to know God, we become God-conscious. And this consciousness is the necessary prelude to the ultimate experience of feeling the divine love and vibrant presence of God in our daily lives. Whenever

we consciously share our innermost thoughts with our Spirit Guide, we actively take part in our very personal and unique God experience.

What You Believe Is What You See

Our everyday beliefs about the world around us are so strong that they can warp our perceptions of reality. Our strong convictions alter our reasoning and even twist our interpretations about obvious things, such as what we see and what we do. In truth, what we believe limits what we can see.

Psychological experiments show that fixed beliefs can distort the personal observation of events to the point where some claim to see the effect before the cause of that effect.⁹ In other experiments, participants created vivid spatial illusions to mold reality to their belief systems.¹⁰

Such distortions of perception result from cognitive bias, a mental inclination that is not limited to religious beliefs. In fact, neither of the experiments referenced above has anything to do with religion.

Unexamined and uncritical scientific beliefs, philosophical beliefs, and religious beliefs all affect how we see the world and how we understand it. Headstrong opinions about the way the world is, or the way it *should be*, can obscure the truth.

What you see is evidence of what you believe.

– Wayne Dyer

Granted, it's difficult to live and work without some mental framework. But we should always be willing to question our preconceived notions about the way things are—how we view the world around us.

The culture and era in which we live directly affect our views, consciously or not, making it impossible for us to be entirely objective. Even so, scientists and philosophers encourage us to dismiss *a priori* notions in order to look objectively at the evidence and the arguments.

As difficult as this may be, it is good advice because, without exception, everyone has positions they like to defend. A scientist may embrace beliefs about the empirical nature of the universe, while an atheist is convinced there is no God.

Confirmation bias is one type of cognitive bias, described simply as wishful thinking.¹¹ It's the common tendency to collect and interpret information so that it either conforms to, or confirms, our existing beliefs. As such, it demonstrates the direct influence of our desires on our beliefs. When we desperately want something to be true, or fervently believe it to be true, we will do whatever is necessary to make it appear true, creating any number of excuses or even fabricating evidence.

Our assumptions, suppositions, premises, prejudices, and cherished theories are preconceived notions that either shape or distort our sense of reality or our interpretation of events. While some of our

ideas may be close to the truth, those that are not function as mental barriers to any comprehension and acceptance of a greater truth.

If you choose to believe that something does not exist, it will not exist to you. The same applies if you are unaware of the existence of any condition or quality. It's a psychological fact that nothing can become real to you if you are not conscious that it exists.

That which you become conscious of, comes to exist to you.

– A. K. Mozumdar

Unlocking the door to the experience of God first requires our *conscious awareness and willing acceptance* that a spiritual phase of reality exists. And I'm not referring to blind faith, but to mental awareness. It's often the case that we simply do not notice, or refuse to grasp, what is going on around us.

The Obvious Is Elusive

There are several reasons we miss the obvious. Sometimes we are so focused on one thing that we don't see what is right in front of us. At other times, we don't expect to see anything, or we refuse to believe a particular event could possibly occur.

Psychologists Arien Mack and Irvin Rock (1998) coined the term *inattentional blindness* to refer to people's inability to perceive something that was either right in front of them or going on around them. One of the best-known experiments designed to test this theory is the "invisible gorilla test," also called the "selective attention test," first conducted by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons in 1999.¹² You may be familiar with this test as it has been popularized in several publications. Nevertheless, it's worth reviewing in order to make a point.

In this experiment, participants volunteered to watch a video in which two groups—one dressed in white, the other in black—pass basketballs back and forth. Researchers asked the volunteers to count the passes between players in white and ignore those in black.

Afterward, they asked all participants if they had noticed anything unusual while watching the video. In all tests, about 50 percent of participants reported seeing nothing out of the ordinary. But the other 50 percent noticed something quite unusual. Someone dressed in a gorilla suit strolled across the back of the scene, turned to the camera, thumped their chest, and then walked away. Most of those who had missed the gorilla were incredulous and insisted on watching the video again.

The whole intent of this experiment was to show that people who focus on one thing can easily overlook something else. In much the same way, when we focus too much on our daily material environment, we can entirely

miss the obvious reality of our spiritual environment.

The presence of the Spirit within us is like the gorilla strolling through the room. But when we focus too much on our family problems, work environment, or shopping lists, we can miss it entirely. Our everyday distractions take our attention away from the reality of the spirit presence within us. This presence is a very real phenomenon, one that we can fully experience in our subjective, inner world just as much as we would experience the gorilla in the objective, outer world.

And there are other ways in which we either miss or ignore the obvious. When I first moved to a big city, I was astonished at the continuous roar of traffic. But after three months, it faded away to white noise. In the same way, amid the busy rush of life, we can numb ourselves to the presence of the Spirit, and it becomes just another form of white noise. But we can discern this divine presence if we listen carefully.

There are many things we take for granted as we struggle through the vicissitudes of life, so much so that we often fail to notice or recognize their true significance or character. For instance, in the days of Isaac Newton or perhaps Galileo, very few people thought of gravity as a distinct, measurable force directly related to an object's mass. Gravity was so pervasive and so commonplace that most people did not think of it as something distinct or definable in everyday life.

Like gravity, our human ability to be self-reflective—to be morally conscious of our thoughts, actions, and decisions—is a force we often take for granted, as if it were an inherently human ability. But this common ability actually demonstrates the workings of the Spirit Teacher living within all of us.

Illusion and Reality

If the volunteers in the gorilla test were told about the gorilla beforehand, they

subsequently noticed it every time, as we would expect. Once we become aware of a thing or an event, we notice it more frequently. Cognitive science calls this the *frequency illusion*.

Let's say you purchased a new car, Model X. Before you bought this car, you rarely noticed them on the road, or anywhere else for that matter. But now that you own one, you begin to see them everywhere—on the road, in the parking lots, even your neighbor has one. This is the *frequency illusion*. The cars are not illusions; they actually exist. The illusion is that the car is appearing more frequently. But this is true only because you never noticed them before—and so it is with the things of the spirit.

To find the Model X of spirit life, we first need to know what it looks like, the design of the grill, and the look of the taillights. Once we know what to look for, we begin to see it everywhere.

Seek and you will find.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

The spirit world is an alternate phase of universe reality. Whenever we seek this spiritual reality, we gradually become aware of the spirit life within us and around us. This, in turn, makes us aware of the very real possibility of being transformed in spirit—being born of the spirit. It's a spiritual transition full of challenges, adventure, and exploration, and all it takes to begin is our desire to embrace it, all the while accepting in our hearts that God and spiritual forces will help us along the way.

Tea and the Telescope

You may have heard the story of the novice monk who was having tea with his master, a wizened old monk. The young man bragged on and on about his great knowledge of the world while the old man poured the tea. But the novice soon got a nasty jolt when

scalding tea ran off the table and poured over his legs. Yelling in pain and jumping up, he realized the old monk had overfilled his cup—and was still pouring.

“Father!” cried the novice. “My cup is full!”

“Yes,” said the old man. “And that is why you learn nothing.”

In our stubborn arrogance, we often entertain preconceived notions about how things are—the state of the world, as it were. But our ideas can be completely misleading, if not just outright wrong. The trouble with pride, vanity, and misguided convictions is that they effectively block or impede our reception of new knowledge, novel ideas, and spiritual insights.

When our cups are full, we feel self-sufficient and self-satisfied but, as the wise old monk knows, this attitude of mind does not reach out for truth—it is *unteachable*.

If we desire a genuine spiritual experience, our minds must remain open and receptive

to fresh ideas and new possibilities. The moment we become entrenched and obstinate in our views is the moment we learn nothing new. Indeed, it's an unfortunate human propensity to persist in fixed views about the world and then to ridicule or persecute others who disagree.

If you are the smartest person in the room,
then you are in the wrong room.

– Confucius

Galileo's Experience

In the year 1615, the Roman Inquisition investigated the Italian astronomer, Galileo, for supporting the theory that the Earth traveled around the sun, a theory put forward 60 years earlier by the Polish astronomer, Copernicus.

The church of the time was very fond of the idea that the earth was at the center of the universe, a creation in which hell was at its center and heaven was up in the skies. And

many prominent people agreed with the church, thinking Galileo's idea was absolutely ridiculous, if not intrinsically evil. After all, anyone looking up to the heavens could clearly see the celestial orbs revolving around them. Only a fool would deny the obvious.

Unfortunately for Galileo, the Inquisition concluded that heliocentrism was heretical—it was “foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical since it explicitly contradicts in many places the sense of Holy Scripture.” He was found guilty of heresy and spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

Galileo's story is instructive in several ways. First, it shows how things or events that appear so obvious to the human eye—such as the sun, moon, and stars revolving around the earth—may not be the truth at all. Or they may be only a partial or relative truth because, of all these celestial bodies, only the moon orbits the Earth.

This reminds us that, although the truth is all around us, the lazy or fearful eye rarely sees it. Perceiving truth requires keen observation and diligent investigation as well as courage and an open mind willing to set aside preconceived notions.

Secondly, Galileo's experience shows how original ideas can terrify people. Most people do not like change, especially when it seriously shakes their worldview, political power, or social status. They do not like philosophical rebels such as Galileo, who come along and try to upset the "natural order" of things.

Other intellectual rebels were not as lucky as Galileo. Giordano Bruno was another 16th-century philosopher and a contemporary of Galileo. He went as far as to claim the stars were distant suns that had their own planets—worlds that could foster life—a shocking view for the time. But his real undoing was his denial of core Catholic doctrines, including eternal damnation and the virginity of Mary. It all proved too much

for the Inquisitors, and they burned Bruno at the stake.

People are afraid of innovative ideas, especially when they are perceived as acts of defiance or threats to the established power structure or political order. The willful intolerance of opposing views by religious and political leaders has caused thousands of years of grief on our world. Even today, tyrants continue to lock up or kill those who disagree with them, while many so-called democracies suffer from intolerant and uncompromising partisan views. And on a personal level, intolerance persists when so many of us try to forcefully assert our views over those of others, whether they concern politics, religion, or economics.

But wise people know that intolerance is nothing more than an ugly mask of fear. It's an anxious need to always be right—a lingering dread of having our cherished ideas shattered. Those who honestly and courageously believe in their virtuous ideals with the utmost confidence never fear

criticism. Bigotry is the sign of a weak and fearful mind, and one day, the world will appreciate that no civilization can ever hope to cultivate an enlightened society while intolerance persists.

We must learn to live together as brothers
or perish together as fools.

– Martin Luther King Jr.

While intolerance is often associated with religious views, it is a matter of historical record that humanity has suffered far more death and destruction through endless clashes between conflicting political and economic ideologies. Take, for instance, the long wars fought between liberalism and authoritarianism, or those between capitalism and communism. Other instances include wars over land and resources, as well as colonialism and the right to rule.

The evidence for this is laid out in the *Encyclopedia of Wars* by Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod (2004). They report that

less than 7 percent of all recorded wars were religious wars. And the casualties from these wars account for less than 4 percent of all war casualties.

During the Spanish Inquisition, which is a favorite example of many anti-religionists, researchers estimate that 3,000 people died, a number much smaller than most of us might have imagined. Another touted example is the Crusades, a Latin Christian offensive in the Middle East that lasted about 200 years. In this lengthy encounter, estimates of casualties range from 1 to 2 million.

We can add to this the Irish-British conflict, one disguised as a Catholic-Protestant war. Or the Muslim-Hindu conflict after the partition of India. Or the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But, except for the Inquisition, all these conflicts involve ethnic or national groups fighting over land, resources, and political power—not religion.

Compare these so-called religious wars to Russia's Civil War under Stalin, which lasted three years and killed almost nine million, or Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China, which lasted ten years and killed over three million. We could easily add to this the tens of millions who died in the First and Second World Wars. And in the recent Congo wars in Africa, some estimates are as high as five million dead in only four years. But none of these wars were religious in nature. In fact, they were decidedly secular.

It follows that those who would throw out any notion of religion because of sporadic religious conflict must, by the same reasoning, throw out any notion of politics or economics. Clearly, this is absurd. Politics in general is not the problem; the question is whether a specific political structure or ideology is tyrannical or democratic, cruel and unjust, or kind and fair. And for economics, it depends on whether a specific system benefits only an elite few or all members of society.

It's not difficult to see that there are good and bad, or efficient and inefficient, political and economic systems. If we understand this, then surely we can extend the same reasoning to religious affairs.

The third lesson taken from Galileo's story (and Bruno's) is how people will stop at nothing to protect their vested interests and enshrined ideas, not only by perverting and manipulating the truth to justify their malicious intents, but even to the point of murder.

The Roman Inquisition concluded that Galileo's heliocentric idea was "foolish and absurd in philosophy," but it was not. In fact, his idea was firmly grounded in observation and sound premises. The Inquisition also stated that Galileo's idea "explicitly contradicts in many places the sense of Holy Scripture." But nowhere in Judeo-Christian scripture does it imply that the earth is the center of the universe.

This kind of narrow-minded, agenda-based interpretation continues today when either scientists or atheists reject even the *possibility* of spiritual reality. Or when so-called religious fundamentalists dismiss any notion about the evolution of life, despite the mountain of scientific evidence proving otherwise.

Thankfully, modern society is overcoming the tyranny of religious authority, and rightly so. The secular revolt in Western society helped to liberate the populace from corrupt religious power, leading to improvements in government, social institutions, and education.

But in the well-intentioned frenzy, many righteous dissidents, not content with the defeat of religious tyranny, continued to revolt against any notion of spirituality or, heaven forbid, the possibility of a divine Source—a Creator God.

This human tendency to swing from one extreme to the other, rather than seeking a

reasonable middle ground, is an ongoing problem for society. It should be clear that any attempt to free society from religious totalitarianism does not require wiping out all sense of moral, spiritual, or divine values. Indeed, the complete secularization of society can only lead to increasing cynicism, conflict, and grief.

Without God, neither freedom and liberty,
nor property and wealth will lead to peace.

– *The Urantia Book*

Science and the First Source

Much of the spiritual discontent in contemporary society stems from two things. The first is the rapid advance of science over the last two centuries, an advance that promoted materialist philosophies and a sweeping rejection of religion. The second is rooted in the backward views of mainstream religionists who not only reject the legitimate discoveries of science but also appear completely out of touch with the spiritual yearnings of a well-educated, younger generation.

But despite the ongoing efforts of materialists to reject God, and those of religionists to reject science, it's somewhat ironic that Judeo-Christian ideals played a decisive role in philosophical thought and the rise of modern science. ¹³

The scientific philosophies that evolved in Western society proved to be a great boon to humanity, at least to a point. They helped to

clarify our thoughts about the material universe and encouraged a logical approach to scientific experiments. And although many philosophers have since discredited materialist approaches on various grounds, there can be little doubt that they served as important stepping stones to our discovery of truth.

The Religion of Materialism

In Europe, a decline in spiritual thinking began in the Age of Enlightenment, led by a resurgence of materialist philosophies. This decline was offset to some degree by innovative ideas emerging in the following Romantic era. But in this age and later, many materialist theories were adopted as gospel truth, eventually becoming rigid belief systems, much like entrenched religions.

This human tendency to forcefully (if not fanatically) defend and promulgate one's cherished beliefs has led to an increasingly dogmatic approach to scientific thought that

persists to this day, resulting in much confusion and strenuous debate.

The confusion mounts whenever we mistake philosophical theories for fact. Theories are often predicated on facts, but they are still no more than educated guesses about the nature of reality. Empiricism, for example, is the *theory* that the origin of all knowledge comes through sensory experience.

Rationalism, in its radical position, is the *theory* that reason is the only path to knowledge. And materialism, in its original construction, is the *theory* that matter is the fundamental substance in nature.

Scientific philosophies contrast with religious philosophies such as theism, in particular monotheism, which is the *theory* that all limited or finite things are dependent on one ultimate personal reality.

Nothing can be absolutely proved; both science and religion are predicated on assumptions.

– *The Urantia Book*

It comes as no surprise that materialist philosophies are popular in the scientific community; after all, science is the study of material reality. And while it is important to adhere to the scientific method, problems arise whenever scientists adopt preconceived ideas about the nature of reality. Such headstrong notions effectively close their minds to the discovery of new knowledge and progressive ideas. Once again, the risk of such obstinate thinking is that scientific and philosophical beliefs become just as dogmatic as religious ones.

In the secular 20th century, a variety of materialist doctrines were fostered in academia. These ideas gradually trickled out of universities and drained into mainstream public thought, convincing many ordinary citizens that there was a logical and

reasonable excuse to separate God from reality, if not to entirely dismiss any notion of a Creator God.

Religious institutions did not help. Rather than acknowledging the important discoveries of science, many religionists repeatedly attacked the validity of these findings, not with evidence but simply because the facts undermined their own fixed beliefs, ones based on little more than antiquated myths and questionable interpretations of religious literature.

The unfortunate result of these ongoing developments is that materialist and hyper-rational philosophies, along with the parochial thinking of religious fundamentalists, have only served to distract and curtail any concerted effort to enhance spiritual perception or expand cosmic consciousness and, in effect, have discredited the vital importance of religious experiences.

But despite this disparaging trend, it seems the inherent spiritual drive of humanity cannot be stopped by sterile scientific theories, as evinced by the continual resurgence of spiritual movements over the millennia. See also *God & New Age Spirituality*.

Truth Is a Reality

Reality is the state of things as they are rather than as we imagine them to be. But reality is not limited to the material world. Intangible things are also real. For instance, consciousness is real, but it is not a physical entity. Love is real, and while we can see its effects on personal relationships, it is not a material item. Spiritual ideals, such as truth and goodness, are very much realities in the spiritual and personal domains, although we cannot observe them in material things.

Not only is much of reality intangible, but our perceptions of it are relative. The way we saw the world as a child is not the same way

we saw it as a young adult, and our views change once again as we approach our senior years. But these changes in our perceptions of the world do not alter the truth about the universe or the nature of reality itself. They simply reflect changes in the way we have come to see and understand that reality. And the same can be said about our advancing scientific perceptions of reality.

All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered—the point is to discover them.

– Galileo

This brings us to the truth that all truth is relative in a finite world. But when viewed in a wider context, truth is also expanding and evolving. We invariably build on the knowledge and truths of the past, a process that not only accelerates scientific knowledge but also promotes greater wisdom and spiritual growth. And all of this leads to our continually improving

awareness of the truth about all reality (see also *God Awareness*).

If we peruse the science and mathematics of the Arab Middle Ages, we see they were progressive and beneficial for the time, and they set the stage for later scientific developments in Europe. But now we discard much of medieval science as primitive or irrelevant, just as many of our current scientific views will be cast aside in the ages to come. Nonetheless, the scientific discoveries of today are relative truths that eventually lead to the discoveries of tomorrow.

The way we perceive and evaluate the universe around us is constantly changing and improving, which is why it would be foolish to stop this ongoing train of development at any one point and then proclaim to have reached the end of the line. And yet this is what many religions do, even to the point of regressing to a mythical, golden era that never existed.

Christian teachers perpetuated the belief in the fiat creation of the human race, and all this led directly to the formation of the hypothesis of a onetime golden age of utopian bliss.

– *The Urantia Book*

What we know about the universe and about ourselves comes by way of observation, experiment, reason, and personal experience—all of which occur in the conscious mind. And since we cannot possibly know the limits of knowledge, we cannot close our minds to all possible explanations of reality, even spiritual ones.

While absolute truth must be infinite and eternal, the mortal mind is not. We should ask ourselves if it is possible for mere humans to know all there is to know about matter, mind, spirit, or the universe at large. Can we really understand everything? Can we reasonably conclude there is no reality outside of that which we can see, hear, or feel?

The physicist and philosopher, Marcelo Gleiser, argues that it is presumptuous and naive to assume the human mind can comprehend all things.¹⁴ The operation of mind is affected by multiple factors—chemical reactions in the body, the physical and cultural environments in which we grow, the knowledge we have gained, the experiences we have been exposed to and, to a significant degree, by what we have come to believe. The mind is particularly useful, but it is not infallible.

We strive toward knowledge, always more knowledge, but must understand that we are, and will remain, surrounded by mystery.

– *Marcelo Gleiser*

We do not have to look far to see the limitations of the human mind and its senses. We are, for instance, incapable of perceiving the full range of sound or color. We cannot observe energy or thought. We cannot see microscopic substances or clean

air. Granted, we can detect a wider range of this unperceived world with scientific instruments, but these too have their limitations. This inevitably begs the question about our ability to perceive all reality.

Real knowledge is to know the extent of
one's ignorance.

– Confucius

And yet, despite these physical shortcomings, the mind has abilities of perception not limited to the senses, nor to reason and logic. Moral and spiritual insights are human intuitions that reach far beyond the simple capacity to reason—they are more than an accumulation of scientific facts and knowledge—they are deeper perceptions of unexplored relationships, new combinations, new associations, and new possibilities. Scientists, inventors, philosophers, and religionists all benefit from intuitive insights.

A comprehensive understanding of the cosmos requires scientific research, philosophical methods, *and* spiritual insights. Science, philosophy, and religion are all human endeavors that, ideally, share one common pursuit—the pursuit of truth.

The Expanding Nature of Reality

Philosophy theorizes about the fundamental nature of reality, but this theorizing is more than wild speculation. The strength of any philosophical argument depends on the strength of its logic, on its validity and soundness, which in turn, all rely on the strength of its premises.

Philosophy, therefore, makes intelligent guesses about the nature of reality based on a foundation of premises, observation, logic, reason, and fact—which is the very same foundation used to formulate scientific theories.

Philosophical arguments and scientific theories are efforts to explain the

inexplicable, and we all entertain philosophical constructs that help us to explain and cope with the universe as we see it. But the potential danger is that our philosophical thinking can also *affect the way we see the world*.

See *What You Believe Is What You See*.

Our views of reality are often based on premises we rarely question. Indeed, the sum of our premises constitutes our belief systems—our acts of faith in the nature of reality. And while these premises provide a useful framework for our thoughts, they can also be groundless or misleading.

One popular premise still touted in modern society is the outdated view that everything in the universe is made of matter or energy. This is the fundamental premise of materialism.

Materialist notions of reality persist to this day, even though, almost one hundred years ago, both Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Max Planck's discoveries in

quantum mechanics left the philosophy of materialism in serious doubt and disarray.

In his book, *The Nature of Matter* (1944), Planck claims there is no matter as such; it exists only by virtue of an (as yet) unknown force that holds it all together. The effects of this force are so patterned and deterministic that Planck is left with little option but to assume there is some conscious and intelligent mind behind it all, one he calls the “matrix of all matter.”

So rather than saying that the material world gives birth to consciousness, as a materialist would claim, Planck is saying that some *greater consciousness* holds together the entire material universe—a consciousness that is the essential matrix of reality.

In his thinking, Planck joined several other leaders in the scientific revolution, among them Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Blaise Pascal, Joannes Kepler, and René Descartes, all of whom perceived the hand of God in the perfection of the universe. And several

contemporary physicists and scientists, such as Rudolf Peierls, Erwin Schrödinger, and Werner Heisenberg, also shared Planck's views, along with more current figures such as Stephen Hawking, Francis Collins, and Carl Sagan.

Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality.

– Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan, an American astronomer, emphasized that the objectives of science and religion are nearly identical—they both pursue truth. Only in contemporary times have we developed the rigid view that science and God are incompatible. Before the 1950s, it was common for scientists to be religious. They saw little disparity between science and religion.

Even Einstein, although he dismissed any notion of a personal God, still upheld a belief in some kind of cosmic religion.

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe—a spirit vastly superior to that of man.

– *Albert Einstein*

It's the job of science and philosophy to discover the truth wherever it may lead, which means that individual scientists should remain open to all avenues of inquiry rather than adopting a fixed philosophical approach. A true scientist searches for the truth instead of trying to create it. Their attitude of mind should be unbiased and free of all preconceived notions and prejudices. Whenever a scientist adopts an unwavering philosophical stance such as materialism or empiricism, they have betrayed the very essence of scientific research.

Atheism is inconsistent with the scientific method.

– *Marcelo Gleiser*

Just as there is a working relationship between science and philosophy, there is also one between science and religion, and another between philosophy and religion. In fact, all three modes of exploration are interrelated. There is no need for science to reject religion, nor is there any need for religion to reject science. The gulf between the two is bridged by philosophy.

Indeed, it may be possible for logic and reason to harmonize the facts of science with spiritual insights if courageous people desire to follow the truth, regardless of the conclusions they reach.

Science in Mind

Science attempts to confirm the reality and nature of physical existence through observation and experiment. This process is known as the *scientific method*, or the empirical approach. The premise of this approach is that all reality is observable and measurable.

To ensure the validity of all experimental results, other researchers must be able to duplicate them in a similar experiment. In other words, all scientific claims must be *testable*. Such rigorous requirements have gone a long way to furthering our knowledge of the material world.

However, the empirical approach cannot explain the whole of reality. The weakness of empiricism lies in its main premise—that all reality is observable. This shortcoming is obvious whenever we consider the essential role of the invisible mind in the construction of any empirical theory.

The inconsistency of empiricism and materialism is that human consciousness, which is the only medium used to construct and observe scientific experiments, can neither be observed nor measured itself, at least not objectively. And this holds true even if we believe consciousness has material roots. Consciousness, or the subjective awareness of mind is, therefore,

neither an objective nor empirical reality, but few of us would deny that it exists.

Ironically, it takes a supermaterial consciousness, a sense of values, and intellectual insight to devise any concept of a materialistic universe.

The very fact that a mortal materialist can deny the existence of supermaterial realities in and of itself demonstrates the presence, and indicates the working, of spirit synthesis and cosmic consciousness in his human mind.

– *The Urantia Book*

Universe Laws

The universe has laws—it does not exist in a state of random chaos. In science, theories are considered laws only after they have been tested to the point of being generally accepted as true. At this point, we call these consistencies *natural laws*, or universal laws.

A good example of a universal law is Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation. Throughout the entire known universe, without exception, we can observe and measure the phenomenon of gravitational attraction in any object with mass. We may not fully understand why this is the case or how it works, but we observe the regularity of it.

And this brings us to another important point—the laws of nature are good for *describing* reality, but they do not necessarily *explain* anything. The laws of nature are laws because they define the regularities of nature. They are widely accepted facts about the operation of the universe, facts no longer considered theories or figments of the imagination.

According to the British philosopher (and onetime atheist), Antony Flew, the regularities of natural laws are mathematically precise, universal, and connected. ¹⁵

Flew's insightful question is, "Who wrote these laws?" And his conclusion, like that of other notable scientists, including Newton, Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg, and even Hawking, is that it must be a manifestation of an infinite mind or intelligence, even spirit.

These great scientific minds arrived at this conclusion because the physical laws of the universe are systematic and deterministic, not random and chaotic. They are immutable and universal, not capricious and provincial. In other words, the evidence strongly suggests the regularities of nature were *planned and designed*, and that wherever we may go in this almost infinite universe, they will apply equally.

The same could be said about the designs of life. Several scientific experiments have been conducted on the premise that life originated as an accident of nature. The classic example in this regard is the Miller-Urey experiment, which tested the theory that life arose spontaneously from a spark of energy (e.g.,

lightning) striking certain chemicals or materials. ¹⁶

Of interest, this experimental interaction of electricity and matter produced several inanimate amino acids, some of which are the building blocks of genetics. But repeated experiments over the last sixty years have failed to instill the spark of life in this or any other material.

More recent theories claim that life started with self-replicating mixtures of RNA (ribonucleic acid) and other molecules, and that it arose on, or near, the Earth's surface, nurtured by sunlight. ¹⁷ But the obvious weakness in such theories is the assumption that self-replicating genetic information (genetic code) emerges naturally and spontaneously. This is a convenient assumption that ignores reality.

Even if we conjecture that these dead organic compounds could, in some way, be infused with a spark of living energy, how would this apparent accident of nature

suddenly create a complex genome with at least 160,000 functioning base pairs of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), which is now considered the minimum required for the most basic form of life? ¹⁸

Furthermore, if this first formation of life could not *reproduce itself*, it would have died out in a single lifetime. So how would this experiment or any associated biological theory explain the *sudden* appearance of *inherent genetic programming* for the self-replication and evolution of life?

Organic evolution is not a mere cosmic accident.

– *The Urantia Book*

Perry Marshall, an electrical engineer, put forth a number of compelling arguments supporting the view that life, as well as the ongoing process of the evolution of life, is neither a random affair nor a cosmic accident. In fact, he strongly suggests that an

honest study of biology inevitably leads us back to God.

Marshall summarizes his findings by saying, “DNA is a code. All code is created by a conscious mind. Therefore, DNA was designed by mind.”¹⁹ As a challenge, he organized a private equity group to create the *Evolution 2.0 Prize*, which offers a \$10 million reward to anyone who can prove otherwise.

Real-world biology doesn't support atheism at all.

– Perry Marshall

Marshall's deduction is supported by another experiment conducted by a multinational team of biologists, which tested the theory that the evolution of life is not a random affair. And indeed, they concluded that developmental evolution is *not random*—it has inherent direction; it is deterministic and orderly.²⁰ In other words,

there is some built-in, or programmed, aspect to the process of evolution and mutation. This is not to say that God preordains every genetic outcome, but instead that genetic reproduction is directed by an unknown (for now) set of universal laws, ones set in motion by an Original Source.

As Flew suggests, the very existence of this end-directed genetic programming demonstrates the existence of an “infinitely intelligent Mind.” Like Einstein, Planck, and others before him, he concludes that the universe must be purpose-driven, even if we are unaware of the purpose.

I have followed the argument where it has led me. And it has led me to accept the existence of a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, and omniscient Being.

– Antony Flew

Logically, there is no need for *creationism* (that a higher power created life) and *naturalism* (only “natural” laws and forces operate) to be at odds. They are not mutually exclusive. In any theory of life, we could just as easily speculate that the implantation of primordial life and its continuing evolution by means of genetic mutation and natural selection is an integral part of God’s creation plan—as a form of progressive creation over time.

Creationism (or intelligent design) is a term applied to any theory proposing that either the universe or life itself originated by means of supernatural acts of divine creation. Even if we agree with this basic premise, it is clear that some “intelligent design” theories are neither intelligent nor reasonable.

Furthermore, just because we accept one particular theory, this does not imply that we accept *all* creationist theories, some of which are no more than literal interpretations of creation myths. And others appear to be

disingenuous attempts to mold the facts of science to agree with religious literature.

Those who search for spiritual truth do not deny the scientific facts, including the biological processes of genetic evolution, natural selection, the fossil record, the geological record, or dating methods—and there is no need to.

The Original Source

Since at least the time of Parmenides (515 BC), philosophers have argued that, for anything to exist, something must have caused it to exist.

And if we follow this almost infinite string of causes back through time eternal, we inevitably come to the First Cause of all causes. As such, this Universal First Cause must be an eternal, primal, volitional, and intelligent Creative Agent. In philosophy, this is called the *cosmological argument*, and it has been a topic of debate for at least 2,500 years.

There cannot be any emptiness; for what is empty is nothing, and what is nothing cannot be.

– *Melissus of Samos*

The great philosopher and teacher, Philo of Alexandria, who was a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, attempted to harmonize Greek thought with Judaic literature. He accepted the primacy of God as a philosophical absolute, even extending this primacy to the concept of time. “Since time is the interval of the motion of the heavens, there could not have been any such thing as motion before there was anything which could be moved.” ²¹

By the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas became the first (known) Christian to speak openly of God as the First Cause and the First Mover of all things, and since then, philosophical debates about the primacy of God have grown increasingly heated.

But despite the serious assault against the cosmological argument, especially in the 18th century, a number of philosophers, past and present, have defended Aquinas' arguments with sound logic and clear reason (e.g., W.L. Craig, R. Koons, A. Pruss, W.L. Rowe, R. Swinburne).

One popular retort to the cosmological argument is that the universe was not created—that it is eternal and self-existent—it always was and always will be. This is a fundamental belief in many Eastern religions, including Buddhism and Jainism, both of which reject any notion of a creator God.

But this argument is logically flawed. If the physical universe had always existed, it would be dead by now. All stars in this eternal cosmos would be burned out, even though they can last for several billion years. According to the second law of thermodynamics, the cosmos cannot be a perpetual motion machine. Given an eternity, it would be completely dark and

motionless. The only way an eternal universe could continue to exist is by being consistently re-energized by an *external source*.

Along the same lines, even the Big Bang theory of universe origins cannot explain the eternal existence of a hypothetical, massive ball of energy-charged matter. Nor is there any agreed-upon theory for why, after all eternity, this ball of matter exploded (or expanded) a mere 14 billion years ago. This is a convenient but unsubstantiated theory that avoids awkward scientific questions about an Original First Cause.

Nothing comes from nothing.

– *Parmenides*

Something cannot come from nothing. For anything to exist, some force must have caused it to exist. No matter how elaborate and contrived arguments may be in any effort to discredit the chain of causality,

there must be an intelligent First Cause. Some Intelligent Power had to start the ball rolling—the initial Creator of Reality—and that same Eternal Power keeps it rolling.

All sincere scientific research and philosophical reflection lead to the inevitable truth that a higher power exists. No matter what manifestation of reality we perceive, God, by any name or description, is the First Cause of that reality—the First Source of all things.

In the beginning, God created the heavens
and the earth.

– *Genesis 1*

Spirituality, Religion, & God

Rejecting God and religion is a popular sport in contemporary times. Even so, it's ironic that millions of people who openly toss out religion also profess to live spiritual lives, or at least to entertain spiritual ideals. These good people call themselves “spiritual but not religious.” But can we really separate the two? This apparent contradiction of terms is a good example of the confusion surrounding spirituality, religion, and God.

From old habit, unconsciously, he thanked God that he no longer believed in him.

– *W. S. Maugham*

The basic distinction between religion and spirituality is that religion refers to traditional religious institutions, while spirituality encompasses almost any belief in the supernatural, embracing a broad range of spiritual disciplines and practices.

Despite this distinction, almost all spiritual practices and concepts have deep roots in established religions of every genre. In the West, Judeo-Christian ideals are the most familiar, but many of these ideals were constructed on a foundation of much older Middle Eastern beliefs, some originating in ancient Sumerian and Persian religions. And later, Western Judaism absorbed much of Greek philosophy, particularly through the writings of Philo of Alexandria. These concepts and ideals were eventually passed on to emerging Christianity and European culture.

This age-old mixing and matching of religious creeds resulted in a syncretism of beliefs, philosophies, cosmologies, and myths that have subsequently become deeply embedded in Western culture, exerting a subconscious influence on our worldviews, belief systems, and social behavior. A few examples include notions of sacrifice, atonement, confession, prophecy,

salvation, purification, life after death, worship, and original sin.

A number of Western religious ideas can be traced to ancient Greek and Roman cults. The Christian doctrines of original sin, hereditary guilt, and the need for atonement have deep roots in Mithraism, a religion that originated as a Persian mystery cult and, centuries later, in modified form, became extremely popular throughout the Roman Empire. It reached a peak of popularity around the same time that Paul of Tarsus preached his new religion about Jesus, a cult subsequently recognized as Christianity.

Paul never met Jesus, except perhaps in his epiphany on the road to Damascus. But he was a brilliant man who won thousands of converts to his new religion, not just because he delivered a spiritually inspiring message, but also because he was a great religious compromiser who managed to attract new followers by integrating some of their pagan beliefs into his Christian theology, including Mithraic beliefs.

In addition to the teachings of Jesus and the strong influence of Judaism and Mithraism, Paul's personal views on the resurrection, atonement, original sin, women, and homosexuality significantly shaped the emerging doctrines of Christianity. ²²

The thrust of all this is that none of us is entirely free of deeply embedded ideas, religious or otherwise. As much as we laud freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and freedom of religion, we are all very much constrained in our views by thousands of years of social, cultural, and religious history.

The Trouble with Religion

It's time to break from the past in order to rethink religion, to strip it of its pompous ritual, mechanical prayers, and austere doctrines—to reveal it for what it really is—a sincere human attempt to connect and identify with *the spiritual dimension of reality*.

Religion is not science, nor is it philosophy, and it should not pretend to be either. But like science and philosophy, it should at least be an honest and open search for truth.

As authoritative institutions, religions falter for several reasons. The most obvious is their tendency to place a greater emphasis on rules of behavior, rules of thought, social issues, or political power rather than advocating true spiritual progress for the individual.

It's also troublesome that so much religious teaching remains narrow-minded and spiritually unattractive. Indeed, a fatal shortcoming is that so little of it has any genuine emotional appeal to the vibrant, spiritual longings of the average person.

In almost every nation, religious authorities are more concerned about reproductive rights, sexual orientation, race relations, political influence, and social policies rather than encouraging more advanced concepts

of morality and higher ideals of spiritual living.

Organized religions of all stripes (East and West) fail us whenever they refuse to uphold the moral principles they so proudly flaunt, or when they find themselves at odds with the facts of science and the reasoning of philosophy. And they go astray whenever they cling desperately to dogmatic versions of the truth, even though much of this “truth” has been either socially constructed or politically compromised to suit the agendas of influential figures, past and present.

Throughout history, it’s not unusual to come across powerful leaders, both men and women, who have perverted lofty religious ideals to justify their overcontrol of the populace or to further their opportunistic schemes for power and wealth—a shameful prostitution of religion that continues to this day, even in so-called advanced nations.

And many religious leaders, intolerant of alternative ideas about God and the universe, have committed crimes inconceivably cruel and duplicitous when compared to the messages of love and mercy given to us by more enlightened sages and prophets.

Those who fervently believe their religion is the only true religion will have little success introducing others to a loving and merciful God. Teachers of truth should be wise, tolerant, flexible, and adaptable to the many ways people experience spirituality.

And those who promote blood-soaked, draconian laws and then attempt to disguise them as God's laws appear to lack any personal knowledge of the loving and compassionate nature of a Universal Creator God.

It's not reasonable to assume that God would constrain our spiritual experiences with harsh laws and doctrines, ones often loosely based on the culturally conditioned views of

people who lived in the distant past. It may be true that some people, societies, and religions are cruel, angry, vengeful, and barbaric, but we cannot assume they represent God or divine ideals in any way.

We make laws for God and impose limitations upon him and ask him to act accordingly. We make dogmas and creeds and want God to sanction them.

– A. K. Mozumdar

Recently, we have observed the glaring insincerity of so-called religious men and women who claim to espouse God's love and mercy while abusing those entrusted to their care. Such a devastating betrayal of trust is hardly spiritual in nature.

It's not difficult to understand why spiritually minded people become disillusioned and disappointed when so many individuals associated with religious organizations fail to live up to the noble ideals they openly profess. And it's a serious

mistake to think that younger generations cannot see this long-standing trend of immorality and hypocrisy, one that continues to permeate religious institutions and many avenues of society and business.

Despite all this trouble with religion, most Christians today believe God is all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful.²³ This positive trend is commendable and authentic. But for all those who exist outside these dwindling Christian communities, ongoing religious troubles have only served to undermine their views of God and religion.

It's no surprise, therefore, that tyrannical depictions of God still persist—a stereotype best summed by the humanist and author, Walt Whitman (1819-1892), “God is a mean-spirited, pugnacious bully bent on revenge against His children for failing to live up to His impossible standards.”

Whitman, who was a deist (God is revealed through nature, not revelation), directed his

satirical portrayal of God at church authority in an effort to underscore the dismal failure of religious teachings, for it is not God who is the pugnacious bully but rather the church leaders who forcefully propagate such immature and misleading ideas about God. And what is truly dispiriting is how these unwarranted impressions continue to circulate in contemporary society.

What many devotees at religious institutions fail to see is that their gloomy views, unreasonable fears, and outbursts of intolerance appear increasingly parochial, selfish, and ignorant in the modern era. It's unrealistic to expect people of the 21st century to succumb to the bondage of medieval religious thought and primitive fears. Such backward views only serve to stifle civilization and progress.

Overall, it is no surprise that those who seek the truth are reluctant to identify with any institutional religion. Not only do they tire of zealots dictating what they must believe, but they also disagree with many of the outdated

and irrelevant teachings presented to them. They can no longer abide immutable, yet conflicting doctrines about such things as the nature of God, origins of the world, sacrificial atonement, or transmigration.

It is far better to have a religion without a church than a church without religion.

– *The Urantia Book*

We simply cannot expect a new generation to accept unreasonable religious beliefs that are not only inconsistent with scientific and historical facts but also remarkably out of touch with more progressive ideals of truth and goodness.

The Promise of Religion

Despite the faults of organized religions, we cannot conclude that such failings hold true for all religions or for all people of all religions, most of whom are wholeheartedly dedicated to a greater good and a spiritual

life. Like any topic of interest, we should look at all sides.

No doubt, religious people have made many mistakes, just as people have in all occupations and institutions—social, economic, and political. But despite the present faults of religious institutions and a prevailing trend to reject religion, we cannot deny that, over the millennia, religion has served as a powerful moral force, a refuge for the poor and unfortunate, and an advocate of education and civilized society.

In the past, some religions were remarkably progressive, contributing much to the early formation of scientific research, philosophy, human rights, education, law, and medicine. Albeit from a modern perspective, these achievements were far from perfect, but relative to the time, they far surpassed anything that had gone before.

It is, therefore, lamentable that today we still find devotees of organized religions who either persist in backward views or have

succumbed to a secular humanism, refusing to seek deeper spiritual insights or even to keep pace with enlightened ideas and new scientific discoveries.

With improving education and an increasing sense of globalization, it's difficult to enslave religious followers to rigid dogma and primitive ritual. We can no longer expect people to accept outdated doctrines originating thousands of years ago in the fanciful myths and fear-ridden traditions of ancient patriarchal and pastoral societies. If current leaders of religious organizations persist in this antiquated approach, their misguided efforts are doomed to fail.

Religion should welcome science and philosophy with open arms, for science dispels superstition while philosophy teaches us to think clearly and logically, not only about our societies and destinies, but about religion itself.

Religion without science is superstition.
Science without religion is materialism.

– *Baha'u'llah*

Indeed, there is absolutely no logical reason to assume that an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God would oppose the advancement of science, technological achievements, or the philosophical exploration of the cosmos.

Religions should broaden their horizons, giving equal weight to scientific facts, philosophical concepts, and spiritual experiences. And rather than dictating behavior, they should emphasize the positive, thoughtful development of moral character.

There is no reason to assume that religion cannot be progressive in every way. We applaud innovative ideas in science and philosophy, and yet, for some unknown reason, resist doing the same for religion. It's time for religious people to underscore

new ideals of living, ones built on a foundation of progressive truth and notions of divine goodness.

In its true essence, religion is a faith-trust in the goodness of God.

– *The Urantia Book*

If indeed religion is a search for truth, as it should be, then it cannot remain fixed on outdated and irrelevant ideas and then go about proclaiming them as the only truth. This would be akin to stopping all scientific research because, in our arrogance and conceit, we conclude we know all there is to know. To succeed and survive, religions and their adherents must be willing to continually expand their spiritual horizons and open their established ideas to critical examination.

Happily, we do not need to look very far to find truly spiritual people who manage to extract the highest insights and the most admirable ideals from the most meager of

information. And the reason for this, as we will see, is that they have actively embraced spiritual meanings, spiritual values, and spiritual living. This is the God experience.

As a reality in human spiritual experience,
God is not a mystery.

– *The Urantia Book*

God Has No Religion

God has no religion, as the Indian activist, Mahatma Gandhi, once said. Religions, in whatever form, represent humanity's sincere attempt to grapple with the unknown and to understand the true nature of a dimly perceived spiritual reality—a supermaterial dimension. Religion, rather than being ordained by God, is a *human attempt to know God*.

Religions define a set of beliefs about the nature of God and the universe, but these beliefs do not necessarily represent any truth about God, partial or otherwise. And any

claim that God is uniquely identified with a particular religion is merely wishful thinking. Religion is the human contemplation of spiritual reality, just as astronomy is the contemplation of the stars, and physics is the contemplation of the atom.

If science gets something wrong or discovers a greater truth, we don't throw out science altogether—we fix it and change our thinking. And just as we don't know everything in the study of science, so it is that God cannot be perfectly defined or understood by any religious formula, dogma, or creed.

The true essence of an infinite and eternal Creator must be far beyond the time-space boundaries of human comprehension. Nonetheless, like science, our understanding of the character of God is *relatively* true—it is always evolving, just as we are evolving. Religion, like science and philosophy, is the ongoing search for truth.

There is no reason why religion cannot be progressive in every way. A religion should eagerly pursue spiritual truth, not attempt to formally define it. It should encourage the highest moral conduct, not a submission to ritualistic behavior. And it should be an intellectual quest for advanced spiritual meanings and divine values, not a slavish adherence to fixed dogma.

A religious group should be able to enjoy the liberty of freethinking without having to become “freethinkers.”

– *The Urantia Book*

The fact that religion and spirituality are so prevalent in human society strongly suggests they are more than culturally determined phenomena. Indeed, if numbers lend any weight to truth, it's more likely that the persistent and prevailing spiritual drive so evident in so many people is actually an integral and very real part of the human psyche, if not a reflection of reality itself.

Religion, far from being a social aberration, appears to be quite natural and not a thing apart from the whole of human experience.

Indeed, there is a case for arguing that
Homo sapiens is also *Homo religiosus*.

– Karen Armstrong

True enough, some religious ideas are ignorant, superstitious, mythical, and delusional. But these defective traits are purely human shortcomings that affect all institutions, political, economic, or otherwise, not just religious ones. On the other hand, religions instill high morals, selflessness, charity, fellowship, and service—traits that are not necessarily inherent in the principles of economic or political institutions.

Spiritual and Religious?

Despite the growing aversion to traditional religions, we cannot entirely divorce spirituality from the long history of religious

thought any more than we can separate religion from spirituality. A religion is no more than a system of spiritual attitudes, beliefs, and practices. By definition, any spiritual creed, cult, doctrine, or philosophy is religious in nature.

While spiritual beliefs vary widely, a notable difference is whether they embrace a personal God. This raises the inevitable question of whether Universal Intellect, Cosmic Consciousness, or Supreme Mind can function without personality, as some Eastern religions imply. Could any Supreme Being do anything without first deciding what to do? And if this intelligence is volitional, conscious, and self-aware, then it must be personal (see *Personality and You*).

Those who would invent a religion without God are like those who would have children without parents.

– *The Urantia Book*

Another important distinction in religions is whether spirituality is a *religion of the spirit*—one that is always open to new truth, spiritual insight, and freedom of expression, or a *religion of the mind*—one that upholds a fixed, authoritative belief system that demands conformity without question.

A Religion of the Spirit

There are advantages to separating ourselves from institutional and authoritative religions. But this is true only if we can define a personal religion that completely satisfies our spiritual longings—one that sets out clear spiritual ideals, rewarding spiritual practices, and attainable spiritual goals.

In our ongoing process of spiritual discovery, it's neither necessary nor desirable to discard all religious beliefs. In fact, most religions carry bountiful seeds of truth, even if some truths remain deeply buried in sterile doctrines. Prudent spiritualists seldom reject all religious motivation just for

the sake of rejecting all religions. This would be akin to throwing out the good with the bad, the relevant with the irrelevant, and the useful with the useless.

Spiritually liberated people are free to draw the best from all religions without having to adhere to the religious authority, dogmatic principles, or prescribed rituals of any specific religion. Indeed, a religion of the spirit is not necessarily a matter of *doing* something—of performing the correct rituals and prayers—but of *being* something—being morally good, honorable, and faithful.

Spiritually motivated individuals promote positive and progressive spiritual values in their everyday lives. For all such people, religion is a *personal spiritual experience*, or a personal experience with a personal God—a higher Being with whom they can personally interact. It's a religion without traditional beliefs, without preconceived notions, and without prejudice. It's a religion of the Spirit—one that stimulates genuine spiritual progress.

The religion of the spirit leaves you forever free to follow the truth wherever the leadings of the spirit may take you.

– *The Urantia Book*

Do We Need Social Religion?

Despite a growing aversion to traditional religions, there is a great need around the world for socialized religion. And by that, I don't mean another institutional or authoritative organization to tell us what to do or what to believe, but rather a simple religious philosophy that acknowledges and accepts universal spiritual goals and values, including the recognition of a Divine Source of existence and, on a planetary level, the social value of spiritual fellowship for all humanity.

A socialized religion should be greater in scope than any national identity or any particular religious doctrine because its objective is to inspire the *whole of humanity* to reach out for divine values—to make

truth, love, goodness, and beauty the ideals of everyday life, not just for ourselves but also for our families, communities, and nations. When we are filled with the Spirit, we look for the commonalities among us, not the differences.

Traditional religions will survive as social organizations only when they begin to appeal to the most advanced spiritual ideals—ideals honestly reflected in their actions and policies. To succeed, they must emphasize understanding, tolerance, cooperation, and beneficial goals. Only through messages of love and compassion can religions ever hope to address the inner longings of those who seek true spiritual contact.

Progressive thinkers have lost interest in pointless rituals, repetitious liturgy, mechanical prayers, and sacred writings. Instead, they desire *real* spiritual progress by contacting a *real* spiritual domain and by living *real* spiritual lives. They yearn to extol the supreme values of living, such as

improving self-control, growing in wisdom, elevating the ideals of family life, encouraging friendship, and helping neighbors. They desire to cooperate, to be good people dedicated to the loving service of their fellows.

The purpose of socialized religion cannot be to support political agendas, debate economic systems, protest climate change, or advocate social policies. No doubt these are important concerns, but they are material and social concerns, not spiritual ones.

The most important and valuable task of religion is *to promote spiritual growth and divine values for the individual*. When the majority of people come to revere the higher ideals of living, we will soon see politics, economics, and society change for the better. It is the moral caliber of the people that defines the moral caliber of institutions and governments. Real change begins with the individual.

What can you do to promote world peace?
“Go home and love your family.”

– Mother Teresa

This is not to say socialized religions should entirely ignore what is going on in the world. All religions should speak out against injustice, immorality, and violence whenever they occur. They should keep pace with developments in all other social institutions, not by actively participating in them or by taking political stances, but by persistently upholding universal moral values and providing spiritual guidance.

In these times of rapid social change and increasing social complexity, it's easy to lose our moral bearings. Only a worldwide spiritual devotion to more meaningful ideals of living and a greater sense of morality can bind us together peacefully as we face a constant barrage of new social challenges.

Social and national divisions must end if we truly seek world peace. True world peace

begins only when all social groups and all nations of the world begin to help one another rather than compete for dominance.

Without world peace, you can forget about all other global progress.

– Hans Rosling

Only with peace can we turn our minds to even greater things—only then can we begin to unite on a planetary scale by realizing the liberating truth that we are all spiritual brothers and sisters of One God. And by “One God,” I don’t mean a Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Hindu portrayal of God. We are all praying to the same God. We just have different ideas about the true nature of that divine Being.

We cannot impose our views on others by forcefully asserting yet another religion of authority. Instead, a worldwide social religion should promote spiritual unity for all by enabling and empowering individuals

to progress in their own way, on their own path of spiritual discovery.

As long as any religion claims to be the *only* path to God, we will never have peace. As long as so-called religious people kill or persecute others in the name of God, opinions about religion will forever remain besmirched and darkened. Such evil cannot survive in religions that honestly promote love, compassion, and understanding.

Those who sincerely try to live spiritual lives know in their hearts that the true values of life embrace love, kindness, truth, education, service, beauty, compassion, goodness, health, respect, tolerance, and cooperation. These are spiritual values originating from the Spirit of God within all of us. And by revering these progressive ideals, we not only transform ourselves but the entire world.

Benefits of a Personal Religion

Social religion has important purposes and functions but, if a spiritual life is to be personally meaningful to any degree, religion must become a *personal spiritual experience*.

True religion resides in the individual, not an institution. It's time to take the religious experience out of the hands of organized religions, personality cults, and fanatical factions and put it where it belongs—in the hands, hearts, and minds of average, spirit-seeking individuals. Only when religion becomes an individual, living experience that is both genuine and spontaneous, can it ever hope to outweigh purely intellectual notions about God and spirituality.

Indeed, if we accept the truth that religion is a personal spiritual experience, then there must be about 8 billion experiences on the planet today (world population 8 billion in 2022). But no matter how many unique

approaches or different definitions there may be, there is only one destiny. A religion of the spirit does not require a uniform approach but rather the recognition of a universal and divine goal—the perfection of spirit and the divine embrace of an infinite and eternal Source.

There are many spiritual paths and hundreds of religious beliefs, and they certainly do not agree on all points. But it would be unreasonable to dismiss any notion of God, spirituality, or the supernatural because we cannot reach agreement on religious ideas. It would be equally illogical to claim there is no such thing as love because psychologists cannot agree on how to define it, or that neither reason nor logic really exists because there are over 1,200 contending philosophical approaches according to *Wikipedia's* “List of Philosophies” (2022).

A personal religion has no rules other than trying to live a righteous life—to live God’s way. Prayer is important, but spiritual living

does not necessarily mean you have to go to church to pray in the pews. Meditation and contemplation are important, but this does not necessarily mean you have to meditate on a mantra or contemplate God in an isolated monastery. Neither do you need to be ordained by the church or hold an academic degree in theology to know God or live the Spirit Way.

The essential thing to living a spiritual life is to deepen your insight into spiritual and divine *values* and, once identified, to cultivate these values within yourself—to adopt these values in your everyday life (see *Four Divine Values*). It's a process of making them an integral part of yourself. And you do this by recognizing in your mind and accepting in your heart all that is spiritually true, good, and beautiful.

I cannot prove the existence of God to you or to anyone else. It's impossible to formulate a logical argument that proves the existence of either a spirit domain or an Eternal Spirit, just as it's impossible for anyone to *disprove*

their existence. Those who claim to know beyond all doubt that there is no God, cannot possibly know. There is no objective method to either verify or dismiss the reality of spirit.

Objective methods are premised on objective reality—all those things in the outside world that, by means of the physical senses, everyone can observe and agree on (an empirical approach). But the very perception of that objective reality is a subjective (inner) experience, and only subjective experiences can validate the presence of God in our lives. Everything we know comes to us through personal experience, whether it's intellectual knowledge, insight, experiment, or spirituality.

Subjective reality is not only real, it is really important.

– Daniel J. Siegel

No one can honestly discredit another person's subjective experiences. If I am

injured and feel pain, I cannot prove this pain to anyone, but no one can deny that I feel pain. Even if someone touches me, I feel their touch but cannot share that feeling with anyone else, not even the person who is touching me.

In the same sense, if I feel the presence of God in my life, even if I cannot prove this to anyone, I *know* it myself because I am experiencing it. No amount of intellectual force nor any web of sophistry could convince me otherwise. *I know that I know.* Only our very real *personal experiences* can ever validate the existence of God, regardless of what others may think or say.

Those who know God have experienced the fact of his presence.

– *The Urantia Book*

God and Suffering

In Buddhist philosophy, the first of the Four Noble Truths is that all life is suffering or, to

use a contemporary euphemism, that all life “is not being at ease.” It is a belief that suffering is an inevitable part of a transient human life and that this affliction comes about as a consequence of our cravings (desires) and attachments (devotions).

To some, this may seem like a dismal philosophy. But it is important to note that Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism, was trying to reveal the futility of a purely materialistic existence and the inevitable suffering that follows.

No doubt, there is much suffering on earth, and in the time of Buddha (circa 500 BC), there was a lot more of it. Indeed, human life 2,500 years ago was considerably more harsh and barbaric than it is now.

There is little dispute that our selfish desires lead to disillusionment, disappointment, and suffering, but it is also clear that millions of people suffer because of things beyond their control, such as natural disasters, disease, and the accidents of time.

People Cause Suffering

But none of the grief caused by natural disasters compares to the amount of human misery generated by tyrants, warlords, and bad governments. Conquest for the sake of land, resources, and power has left nothing in its wake but devastation, suffering, and poverty. The vast majority of humanity suffers as a result of the selfish ambitions of those who pursue power and wealth regardless of the cost to others.

Undeniably, acts of violence are never fair to innocent victims, but these are human acts of violence, not divine ones. And clearly, human suffering would be greatly diminished if everyone on the planet lived moral and virtuous lives rather than lives dedicated to the pursuit of money, power, and self-glorification.

But can we expect God to save every innocent victim or to solve all the world's difficulties by creating an instant Utopia—a worldwide garden of Eden? The problem is

that neither God nor any celestial being will ever interfere with human free will. It is a law of the universe—God will not interfere with our choices, no matter how ill-advised, evil, or disastrous they may be to ourselves or others.

The forces of the spiritual world will not coerce man; they allow him to go the way of his own choosing.

– *The Urantia Book*

Understandably, people get upset and confused when terrible things happen, especially when they have been taught that God is compassionate, loving, and kind. But we need to recognize that a wise parent never takes sides in the petty quarrels of their children, just as God does not take sides in the quarrels of his children, whether they be individuals, social groups, or nations.

If we truly wish to know God, then we have to accept that he does not always live up to

our expectations. We may become extremely frustrated when the Divine Being does not act or intervene in ways we think he should. We ask, if there is a loving God, how can he allow such misery and suffering to continue? Our disappointments may run so deep and become so bitter that, in our mounting frustration and dismay, we are inclined to cast out any notion of a benevolent God, or of any God at all. And in our childish spite, we blind ourselves to his greater designs.

If we can accept that God is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise Creator of an almost infinite universe, it seems unrealistic and presumptuous of us mere mortals to expect him to conform to our rapidly changing, intellectually limited, and somewhat capricious ideals of divine morality.

It is irrational, therefore, to dismiss any belief in a Higher Spirit because he or she refuses to comply with our culturally determined ideals of appropriate behavior, ideals grounded in our very limited understanding of the nature of reality, the

cosmos, our spiritual destinies, or life after death.

This does not mean that God is indifferent. It is more a policy of non-interference. And even if the Almighty did intervene to create an ideal society, it would not last long before it deteriorated back to its present state. There is no way to successfully speed up social evolution or the progress of civilization. Only when humanity at last overcomes the ruinous philosophies of materialism and secularism, and learns from the harsh lessons of the past, will civilization ever progress beyond its present state of barbarism.

But God's policy of general non-interference does not imply that we should remain insensitive to the suffering of our fellows; quite the opposite. It is our moral duty and our individual responsibility as sons and daughters of God to ensure worldwide peace.

The religionist is not unsympathetic with social suffering, not unmindful of civil injustice, not insulated from economic thinking, neither insensible to political tyranny.

– *The Urantia Book*

Our ongoing and progressive problems on earth, whether individual, social, or national, are important problems that humanity must learn to solve for itself, just as a growing child must learn to solve problems and overcome the challenges of life. Any wise parent knows that doting over their children and protecting them from every mistake does nothing to help them deal with the difficulties of life. Nor does it help them to achieve the profound self-confidence and robust courage of a truly spiritual individual.

Does God Punish?

In Western religious culture, as in many other cultures, there is a long history of associating suffering with divine retribution—God’s punishment for the sins

of the individual or the nation. But those familiar with the loving and merciful nature of God know he does not punish or avenge. The truth is that all the terrible episodes once attributed to God's vengeance were either natural events, physical accidents, or the inevitable consequences of misguided human actions.

We all make mistakes, but there is no need to appease a supposedly offended God through sacrifices or penance, nor is it necessary to whip ourselves or to wallow in remorse. It is inconceivable that any loving parent would condone such inhumane practices.

It makes no sense that a perfect, loving God would watch over us with malign suspicion, just waiting for us to make a mistake so he can retaliate with a big stick or curse us with bad luck. It is unthinkable that a wise, loving, compassionate, and divine Parent would take delight in the torment of their children.

Can we honestly believe that a compassionate God would create such a thing as an eternal Hell—a wretched place to punish erring children with eternal damnation? It is inconsistent that an all-loving and all-wise Father-Mother God would be a cruel and vengeful parent intent on torturing miscreants for all eternity.

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the object of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own – a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty.

– Albert Einstein

Notions of Hell originated in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia and can be traced to the fearful, superstitious minds of the Bronze Age. ⁵¹ Before Persia's domination and influence in the 6th century BC, early Judaism had little concept of divine retribution or a place called Hell. After death, everyone went to *Sheol*, the Hebrew underworld. Notably, the word *Hell* did not

appear in the original Greek New Testament, the earliest transcript of the text.

At first, Hell was simply a place where all people were morally judged after death, a notion similar to early Egyptian beliefs about the day of judgment. But early Christians (under strong Greek influence) preferred to emphasize the dark side of the house of Hades, where notorious sinners such as Tantalus were tormented for their crimes. Concepts of torment and eternal damnation were subsequently imported into Christianity and Islam, where they proved useful to rulers and religious firebrands, especially as a means to control the populace through fear.

A loving father does not frighten his children
into yielding obedience to his just
requirements.

– *The Urantia Book*

The God of Universal Love

The spiritual domain is cheerful, positive, helpful, and kind. There is absolutely nothing negative in this Eternal Positive Being, and the more you identify with this joyful, creative energy, the more positive, kind, and cheerful you become—the more Godlike you become.

You don't need to suffer, nor do you need to do anything to win the love of God because he loves each and every one of us equally, just as a wise mother would—with no conditions attached. Divine love is lost only when we decide to reject it.

The God of Universal Love is a positive personality, not a merchant of doom threatening to extinguish the human race if it fails to live up to the grim expectations of a fanatical few. Rid your mind of all negative thoughts about God and the destiny of humanity. Negativity is a direct consequence of not living in the spirit because negativity is not a spiritual reality.

No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.

– Helen Keller

All social research suggests that human life on this world is constantly improving. No doubt, it still has a long way to go, but it is important to adopt a glass-half-full attitude and openly recognize that social progress has been made (see *The Spiritual Value of Thankfulness*).

Visualizing God as a good and loving Divine Parent helps us to comprehend, as much as we can, the positive and helpful spiritual attitude of Divinity, a vision that we can, in turn, share with others. The positive, unconditional love we offer our children is the same comforting, uplifting love God offers to each of us.

In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have triumphed in the world and shown you the way to eternal joy and everlasting service.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

God & New Age Spirituality

People from all walks of life identify with established religions. But in Western societies of the 21st century, all religions are suffering a similar fate—attendance at religious services is falling abruptly—and the trend continues.

Churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples struggle to find eager participants as more and more people distance themselves from traditional religions and old ideas. ^{24 25} In all cases, the greatest drop occurs among the younger generations, who have a declining interest in religion, but not necessarily in spirituality. ^{26 27}

This recent trend is nothing new, although the extent of it is. The Western religious landscape changed rapidly during the Romantic era, a European social revolution of the early 1800s. The social activism of this time was partly a reaction against the overly

materialist philosophies of the Enlightenment.

Materialism cheapens human life.

– *The Urantia Book*

The refreshing spiritual concepts associated with Romanticism led to considerable innovation in the arts and sciences, including literature, politics, and religion. It also sparked widespread protests against pollution, corruption, war, and church authority.

While all this was going on, renewed European military interventions in the Middle East and South Asia had the unintended consequence of introducing Eastern religions to European society. Translations of Sanskrit texts by the French scholar, Eugène Burnouf, were among the first, including an *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* (1844) and the Buddhist text, *Lotus Sutra* (1852). Following

on his heels was F. Max Müller, who edited a 50-volume set of translations titled *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879).

In North America, the Romantic era emerged as the New Thought movement, an intellectual and spiritual trend that flourished in the latter half of the 1800s and became particularly popular in the early 1900s. Unlike Romanticism, this movement was overwhelmingly spiritual in nature.

New Thought drew extensively on Greek and Roman philosophies and Eastern religions, primarily through the recent European translations. Subsequently, many Hindu and Buddhist beliefs were interlaced with those of Christianity to create an age of syncretic spirituality, one manifesting in many forms.

Proponents of New Thought teachings embraced ideals of God as Infinite Intelligence, and spirit as Ultimate Reality—concepts borrowed directly from Brahmanism, an ancient religion of India. But the range of ideas varied widely. Some

writers dealt explicitly with Eastern ideals, while others integrated Greek metaphysics or the teachings of Jesus. Some saw God writ large in the universe, while others were atheistic.

The New Thought movement had a tremendous effect on Western spirituality and religious culture, transforming both Eastern spiritual traditions as well as those of mainstream Christianity. Some prominent contributors of the time include Prentice Mulford, James Allen, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, Napoleon Hill, Joseph Murphy, A. K. Mozumdar, Ernest Holmes, and the prolific William W. Atkinson.

Although there were some questionable practices and dubious concepts associated with New Thought, the positive effects of this unique resurgence of spirituality included a wealth of new literature, a fresh consideration of Christian teachings, and significant and beneficial changes in the

study of sociology, psychology, and the humanities.

The ideas embraced in the New Thought era receded during the world wars but enjoyed a notable resurgence during the counterculture movement of the 1960s, when many young people again shunned traditional Christian thought and began to explore alternative religions, especially Eastern ones.

Indeed, the cultural revolutionaries of that time explored and resuscitated almost anything deemed supernatural, including ancient practices such as astrology, crystals, Tarot cards, and the I Ching. This was the beginning of so-called New Age spirituality.

New Thought Becomes New Age

Many ideas prevalent in New Age spirituality can be traced to the New Thought era, which, in turn, was greatly influenced by Greek and Indian philosophies. Overall, New Age thought and practices were heavily

eclectic, drawing from a wide array of spiritual beliefs.

But when it comes to ideas about God, divinity, or spirituality, New Age thinking was, and still is, dominated by Hindu and Buddhist notions of consciousness, mindfulness, meditation, and enlightenment as well as moral and philosophical concepts outlining the goals and duties of a religious life. And as we dig a little deeper, we see that both of these religions were themselves constructed on an even earlier foundation of Brahman ideals.

Brahman philosophy has its roots in the ancient Vedic beliefs of northern India, a tradition founded by at least 1500 BC. The Rishis (sages) of the Vedas portray Brahman as the Ultimate Reality without beginning or end—the Supreme Being, the prime cause and creator of all reality. This entity is also believed to exist outside reality and is so powerful that the human mind cannot comprehend it.

Another idea stemming from Brahmanism is the concept of a Supreme Soul (*Atman*) from which all other human souls derive. This soul (or self) is believed to be a divine spark carried within everyone as a means to commune with Brahman. ²⁸

On several points, Brahman beliefs correspond to Judeo-Christian ideas, in which God is the creator of the universe and the source and cause of all reality. Also similar is the idea that the Spirit of God (*Atman*) dwells within every person—the kingdom of heaven within—a divine spark that is a part of the very same Divine Source.

But the weakness of Brahmanism was that it had little appeal to many struggling souls, simply because it lacked any personal intimacy. Brahmanism promoted the existence of an Absolute Being, which, of course, God is. But this infinite Being is portrayed as an impersonal entity that is distant, indifferent, and unreachable to most. It's a concept of a Supreme Being

devoid of compassion, understanding, and love, thereby depriving its followers of the pleasure of a personal relationship with a personal God—the personal and intimate experience of true communion with the very Source of personality—the First Person.

Even an anthropomorphic Yahweh is of greater religious value than an infinitely remote Absolute of Buddhism or Brahmanism.

– *The Urantia Book*

Brahman metaphysics had a strong influence on Eastern religions, and much of its philosophy figures prominently in current religious and spiritual thought, giving rise to reworked practices and ideas, including modified forms of yoga and post-colonial notions of *chakras* (body focal points), *atman* (soul), and *moksha* (enlightenment). Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism and a contemporary of Lao Tzu and Confucius, was frustrated with the many

human-like gods of India. In his concerted effort to eliminate the worship of these anthropomorphic gods, he rejected all gods, including Brahman as the Universal Creator or the First Cause. He also dismissed the Brahman belief in a Supreme Soul as well as any ideas about reincarnation or divine beings. ²⁹

But despite Siddhartha's rejections, traditional Hindu beliefs and Brahman ideology were so firmly embedded in Indian culture that later Buddhist sects reintroduced these long-cherished beliefs in various forms, notions they later attributed to Buddha, just as early Christian leaders attributed some of their personal beliefs to the teachings of Jesus.

Siddhartha was progressive. He greatly enhanced and enlightened the spiritual thought of his day by discarding many of the crude practices and rituals so prevalent at the time. He did his best to teach as a messenger of God, and yet, with some

inconsistency, he rejected any notion of a personal, creative God or any other spirit being with whom one could commune. And today, this inclination to discount the existence of a *personal and communicable* God deeply permeates almost every branch of Buddhism and much of New Age spirituality.

He [Buddha] tried to live and teach as a messenger of God, but without God.

– *The Urantia Book*

Humanistic Religion

Siddhartha's nontheistic approach and his rejection of a Supreme Soul and an ultimate Source of reality left his followers with few spiritual alternatives and little motivation for authentic contact with either a divine Creator or spirit personalities. Subsequently, some branches of Buddhism have become merely philosophical—an exalted humanism. Even the words of the current Dalai Lama

reflect this philosophy: “The most important thing is to be a good human being... Whether you believe in God or not does not matter so much, whether you believe in Buddha or not does not matter so much...” ³⁰

Without a doubt, we all need to be good human beings. It's also understandable that humanist inclinations are widely popular among Buddhists and most New Age followers, if not society at large. Humanism, while evolving over the years, is a well-intentioned philosophy that focuses on human welfare, advocates freedom and progress, and has faith in science and reason, all of which are highly commendable and desirable.

But humanism also rejects religion, revelation, and the supernatural as potential sources of change, although this was not always the case. Before the growing conflict between science and religion in the 18th century, God remained the creator and supreme authority. But as the rebellion

against church authority gained ground, humanists eventually rejected religion in favor of human agency, thereby creating a form of scientific or secular humanism.

At the time, this was a reasonable reaction to the oppressive power of the church and its intractable dogma. It was a way of taking responsibility for human progress out of the hands of religious organizations and putting it squarely in the hands of humanity, asserting that such things as civilization, ethics, morals, and compassion are human obligations, not religious ones.

The premise of humanism is that there exists an innate, yet inexplicable, sense of goodness in humanity and, contentiously, that each person can decide for themselves what is good. It is a *laissez-faire* philosophy that holds that all values and morals derive from human experience and culture.

Overall, humanism is an advanced humanitarian philosophy, if not a secular religion in its own right. In general, I agree

with most of its ideas and ideals, except for its rejection of God and spiritual powers as potential sources of positive change and moral direction.

Religion is only an exalted humanism until it is made divine by the discovery of the reality of the presence of God in personal experience.

– *The Urantia Book*

Humanism is an appealing philosophy in a materialistic age—*but it is just another theory*—one that does not explain why some people are *not good*. An alternative theory is that the ultimate source of moral direction is not genetically inherent in the human brain but instead is explained by the living Spirit existing within all of us—the source of all divine values—the Divine Value Giver. And good people are those who accept and embrace these divine values.

Your God experience rests on your belief and faith in the goodness and wisdom of God—

that God does matter—that faith in God’s guidance not only makes you a good human being but also *recreates* you as a spirit-born individual. This transforming experience is appreciably more than simply “believing in God”—it is *knowing and trusting* this compassionate Source of all existence.

In its true essence, religion is a faith-trust in the goodness of God.

– *The Urantia Book*

Even so, the humanist trend in Buddhism, along with its indifference to God (or at least the Judeo-Christian idea of God), was a welcome relief for many New Thought spiritualists who were increasingly uncomfortable with Christian authority and doctrine, particularly the Old Testament portrayal of God as a pugnacious bully, as Walt Whitman once pointed out.

In an age of enlightenment, many intellectuals found it difficult to reconcile their newfound ideas with the illogical and

unreasonable teachings of Christianity, such as the belief that God, as a loving, good, and merciful Father to all humanity, requires penance, sacrifice, or the ritualistic shedding of blood to atone for sins and win his favor.

What eventually emerged from the New Thought era and continued in New Age philosophy was an inclination to view spirituality as a science of the mind. And perhaps the most influential author in this regard was Ernest Holmes (*The Science of Mind*, 1922). At first glance, this seems like a reasonable approach, and a welcome one when it comes to an honest assessment of current religious beliefs.

But the “science of mind” philosophy, as defined by Holmes, did not reject God or spirituality. In fact, he openly professed to believe in “the Universal Spirit, which is God.” Despite this, many contemporary practitioners misinterpret the science of mind approach as pure science or social science, when it is actually metaphysics with a dash of psychology.

As a result of these attempts to align with science and perhaps gain some credibility, the spiritual tone of Western Buddhism became increasingly secular and, instead of a religion or spiritual quest, became better known for its meditation and mindfulness techniques, ones developed for the express purpose of relieving stress by attaining inner peace and wisdom.

But this was not true for all Buddhists. Despite the cavalier tone of many Western Buddhists who wish to appear more rational by explicitly putting aside God and spirituality, more transcendent devotees of Buddhism maintain that their religion is a purely spiritual tradition, putting an emphasis on spiritual growth and spiritual insight (*nirvana* and *bodhi* mind). It's a tradition with a strong moral component, teaches compassion, and has an ultimate goal of wisdom, all of which are supernatural and spiritual pursuits.

Just as a candle cannot burn without fire,
men cannot live without a spiritual life.

– Buddha

Pantheism Revival

Pantheism—the idea that God is everything—views God as a spiritual force or divine essence that either permeates or encompasses the universe, even as Infinite Mind. From another perspective, pantheism holds that the universe and God are one, a notion evident in Hinduism and Taoism, although similar concepts appeared independently in ancient Greek philosophy.

Under Brahmanic influence, some Eastern religions promoted the idea that the original entity, first revered as Ultimate Reality, is little more than the physical universe and its energy systems. This is one belief of the Jain religion, which, like Buddhism, rejects any notion of a creator God, believing instead

that the universe and all things have always existed (see also *The Original Source*).

Pantheism was an understandable evolution in religious thought because so much of religion, past and present, East and West, was dominated by crude anthropomorphic gods rife with human frailties.

In these early religions, it was assumed that, if God were a person, he would have to have a body limited to space and time and subject to human characteristics. Pantheism was a reasonable reaction against this kind of thinking. It was an attempt to strip away anthropomorphic gods by equating God with the universe but, in the process, it also stripped away any notion of a personal God.

For neither is God a being with the form of a man, nor is the human body like the form of God.

– *Philo of Alexandria*

What advocates of pantheism failed to understand is that God could be personal

without being human. As a result, pantheism evolved as a philosophy that not only rejects a personal God but also dismisses any concept of a supreme creator. Rather than seeing the universe as an act of creation, the universe *is God*.

The implication, similar to Jain beliefs, is that the universe is eternal and self-existent, and that consciousness, or mind, is naturally inherent in energy and matter. Such beliefs are a form of animism in the sense that either consciousness or spirit is attributed to inanimate objects, such as rocks, trees, or the physical universe.

Much later, among European academics, pantheism was popularized by the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, who subsequently influenced generations of philosophers and scientists, including Albert Einstein and Carl Sagan. But to be fair to Spinoza, he did not claim to identify God with any manifestations of nature, not even the universe. ³¹

Later still, philosophers and spiritualists, reluctant to dismiss any notion of a creator God but faced with Spinoza's reasoning, developed a new pantheism that encompassed more traditional notions of God. Guided by Brahman and Christian ideals, they portrayed the cosmos as an all-powerful, all-present, all-loving, and all-wise entity. But once again, these concepts were stripped of personality. The Eternal Source remained as some-thing rather than someone.

In materialism, since man loses his body at death, he ceases to exist as a personality; in pantheism, since God has no body, he is not, therefore, a person.

– *The Urantia Book*

The New Thought movement was fond of pantheistic ideas, as we see in the writings of Prentice Mulford, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others. Like many people of this era, New Age spiritualists were reluctant to adopt the Judeo-Christian image

of a personal and communicative God, preferring to believe that a spiritual experience is the act of tapping into the energy, power, or spiritual essence of the cosmos.

The Resurgence of Nature Religions

In addition to Indian and Greek religious cosmologies, nature religions and holistic notions of divinity are also popular today. *Holism* is the philosophical view that all life and everything in the universe are interconnected, interactive, and unified. This is one premise of Gaia philosophy, a belief that the planet and all life function as a single, self-regulating system in which life supports life.

There is also a relatively recent resurgence of pagan and neopagan religions, such as Wicca and other ancient Celtic practices, much of which was popularized by Gerald Gardner (*Witchcraft Today*, 1954). Since his time,

many traditions have evolved within Wicca, blending Celtic beliefs with ideas derived from Greek and Indian philosophies.

Similar to some New Age beliefs and practices, Wiccan philosophy embraces concepts of pantheism and a revival of polytheism. In vogue is the portrayal of a universe equally dominated by male and female deities, often revived as nature deities or, on a grander scale, as a Mother Goddess who stands alongside or replaces a Father God. But in its original form, both gods were believed to be overseen by a genderless Supreme Deity, also described as the Prime Mover or the Supreme Cosmic Power.

Overall, we see that many popular spiritual practices of today have their origins in ancient religions, as do most concepts of spirituality. Indeed, one crucial difference between New Age spirituality and a religion of the Spirit is that many adherents who profess to be spiritual have no belief in a Spirit, at least not a personal, eternal, and infinite Spirit who is the creator of all reality.

Those who would invent a religion without
God are like those who would gather fruit
without trees, have children without
parents.

– *The Urantia Book*

Spirit Life Is Your Destiny

It is easy to be distracted by life, especially when we are young, and there is so much going on. As young adults, we think about our education, careers, sexual partners, and social lives, all of which are valid concerns. By the time we reach our thirties, many of us have settled down into marriages, children, and established careers. Our lives are hectic, driven by a passion to succeed in whatever we do, whether in our relationships or our careers.

And then comes the late forties, when many of us begin to realize that we haven't been able to live up to the often unrealistic goals of an overly materialistic and self-seeking society. More so, we begin to grasp the inevitability of our own mortality. With a little apprehension, we realize that life is engaging but short, and that we are all going to die someday.

This is a critical point in life: a time when we start to question our motivations, lifestyles, and goals, and when we feel a strong, spiritual drive to search for greater meaning—to explore our spiritual destiny.

Coming to grips with our own mortality is not necessarily a grim endeavor, especially if we believe there is life after death, and that we will continue to advance spiritually on the worlds to come. Death is a natural and inevitable part of life, and openly acknowledging our mortality as well as our spiritual destiny can be a wonderful motivator in our search for spiritual truth.

Even death is not to be feared by one who has lived wisely.

– *Buddha*

Having said that, there is no need to wait for middle age to embark on a spiritual adventure. Just as young minds can easily soak up the facts of science and the logic of philosophy, they can also be extremely

receptive to the spiritual forces working within them and around them. For many young people, the true motivator in this adventure is simply a desire to know more about the truth, not just about themselves but about God and a seemingly infinite universe.

A spirit quest begins whenever we desire to improve ourselves, to reach for deeper meanings, to appreciate worthwhile values in life. At first, we may feel guilty or regretful, but this initial sense of unworthiness will pass and, from the positive desire to better ourselves, we gain the impetus for real change.

Changing anything requires the desire to do so. Desires drive us forward—they motivate us. They are not necessarily evil or misguided. Even in the Buddhist tradition, there is a distinction made between *tanhā*, which refers more to desires of the flesh, and *chanda*, which is a positive desire to act, such as a desire for enlightenment. It's impossible to achieve much in our personal

lives unless we desire it, no matter the endeavor.

We should never be discouraged by any perceived lack of spirituality on our part. The very fact that we feel poor in spirit is what brings about our desire for self-improvement—a desire to change for the better. It is, indeed, a divine blessing that opens the door to a truly spiritual life.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

The same could be said of our perceived failures in life. Dwelling on all that went wrong in our lives will only impede our progress. Learning to deal with failure is a part of growing up, and learning to admit our failures promptly is more beneficial than trying to mask them with false optimism. We do not need to dwell on regrets; we only need to recognize our desire to improve and

then contemplate how we can make the necessary changes.

Making a mistake is falling down; failure is not getting up again.

– Helen Keller

Embarking on a spiritual journey is a personal choice. It is your supreme decision and yours alone. But on this road, you are not alone—it is a road traveled by many who came before you, and it will be traveled by many who come after you. It is not a path for the egotistical or the selfish. There is no preferential seating and no first-class fare—there is only one price to pay—and that is to devote yourself wholeheartedly to the supernal enterprise of finding God, the Source of all things.

There is no need to isolate yourself in a secluded forest or to hide away in a gloomy cave in order to find God or enlightenment. You can live spiritually no matter what your occupation, whether it's closing a sales

contract, building a house, or washing the dishes. A spiritual life is not just an inward journey of the soul; it's an outward path of daily living; of performing moral and spiritual duties to family and friends, as well as anyone you meet along the way.

No two journeys are alike. What works for you may not work for others. There is no need for all of us to follow the same path because all paths lead to the same end—spiritual enhancement, cosmic consciousness, and a spiritual life in harmony with the Way of God.

Transform Yourself

It's never too late to begin your spiritual transformation. At first, you recognize your need for spiritual outreach. Second, you begin to feel a true inner desire to become more spiritual in your day-to-day living. And third, you realize you need to *do something* about it. The fact that you begin to feel this

way is a sure sign that the Spirit within you is making contact.

Your inner experience of the divine Teacher becomes a very real part of you once you begin to live these teachings, to express them, to manifest them in the outside world. It's not just an intellectual pursuit—it's a genuine spiritual experience. It gives your life meaning, teaches you spiritual values, helps you enjoy peace of mind, helps you learn to love others, and helps you learn to be loved.

Each person's task in life is to become an increasingly better person.

– Leo Tolstoy

A spiritual transition requires a freewill surrender to Spirit, but it's not a slavish surrender, nor does it imply giving up your personal identity or self-control. Instead, think of it as a positive, active willingness to follow the guidance of the Divine Presence within you, with the faith that it will always

guide you along a virtuous and honorable path. Think of it as being motivated in the moment by your heartfelt desire to dedicate your life to love, truth, and goodness.

Only you can begin your own journey. But as soon as you take the first step, the spirits within you and all around you happily provide the essential assistance required for your success. Indeed, you cannot do it on your own. Just as everyone in this world relies on other people for their material survival and success, your spiritual transition relies on the indispensable help of your Spirit Guide.

Your spiritual experience is individual and unique. It's a journey no one else can make for you—it cannot be lived vicariously, although you can always benefit from the wise advice and good examples of others. It's your own personal accomplishment; you earn it honestly through your own efforts.

The God experience is open to everyone. It has nothing to do with whether we are rich

or poor, educated or ignorant, privileged or persecuted. Neither will our cultural backgrounds, social standings, or criminal records affect our ability to contact the divine Spirit Within. All it takes is honest motivation, pure intent, and the faith that, with God's tireless and patient help, we can do it.

And it doesn't matter what troubles we may have encountered, what miseries we have endured, or what misfortune and injustice we have suffered—none of this can affect our ability to contact our inner Spirit—the divine spark within us. There is absolutely nothing, no one, and no power in the entire universe that can stop us if we have a true and heartfelt desire to know the truth about God.

I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else shall be able to separate us from the love of God.

– Paul of Tarsus

Life Is Tough

In the trials of life, it's often tempting to find fellowship in misery or to wallow in self-pity, but these sentiments are ultimately self-destructive—nothing can be gained by indulging in despondency.

It's also tempting to blame others for our misfortunes, or to find fault in social, economic, or political organizations. But none of this fault-finding will help us in our quest for spiritual success. And if we roll over and give up because we think life has given us a raw deal, no one will be able to help.

Instead of focusing on insurmountable difficulties, we should be encouraged by the truth that our very ability to be pessimistic indicates we have spiritual potential. It means we have a mind that is conscious of both values and facts. And any conscious ability to assign value to anything is an indicator of potential morality—a God-given

ability that becomes the foundation for spiritual choice.

Your transformation begins with your power to choose. So rather than choosing to dig deep, dark pits of despair, you can choose *to allow the Spirit* to lift you up to the spiritual light of living truth, enduring beauty, and eternal goodness. The Spirit will not act without your free consent. Only with your permission and wholehearted desire can it begin to lend a helping hand.

The forces of the spiritual world will not coerce man; they allow him to go the way of his own choosing.

– *The Urantia Book*

Many first-year psychology classes teach us to avoid giving advice unless it is asked for. Not only is this wise counsel, but it's also a principle of the spiritual universe.

Unsolicited advice is rarely effective because most people don't want it. So it's unlikely we

will receive any spiritual advice or guidance unless we open our minds to it.

Rest assured that all celestial beings genuinely want you to succeed. They want you to become the best you can be, not just spiritually but also with your family and career. They want you to achieve grand things that, as of this present moment, may be totally beyond your imagination. But the Spirit, as great and as powerful as it is, will never interfere with your free choice.

Your great challenge in life is to make real contact with the Divine Presence within you. Nothing else compares to the thrill of this adventure—no distant travel, skydiving, bungee jumping, or rock climbing is equal to the challenge or exhilaration of coming into actual conscious contact with the Divine Source living within your mind.

It's an undertaking that requires courage, persistence, unwavering trust, and an honest effort to follow the guidance of your priceless

Spirit Guide, who works day and night to help you along the road to true freedom.

Be Something

To grow in spirit, it's not enough to know or believe something, or even to do something—we must also *be something*. It's important to do good for others, but we must truly *be good*. It's important to promote the truth, but we must also *be truthful*. A rich, spiritual life is fully realized not just by entertaining spiritual ideals, but by *becoming* those ideals.

However many holy words you read,
however many you speak, what good will
they do you if you do not act on them?

– Buddha

Spiritual living is a happy and rewarding experience, but it's not a carefree trip of the light fantastic. It's a stimulating journey that requires effort, determination, learning, and

understanding as we persistently strive for spiritual maturity.

No matter what we do in life, whether it's learning to play music, being good at sports, or becoming a professional, it requires a concerted effort, a broad education, and a lot of practice. Spiritual achievement is no exception.

But as we strive for perfection, we should have reasonable expectations. If we entertain unrealistic notions, we will soon become disappointed and frustrated. Becoming spiritually mature is a lifelong endeavor, not something we achieve by meditating for a week.

Don't be disappointed when you discover your limitations; you are merely human, like everyone else. All spiritual improvements entail some struggle to overcome animal instincts and dispositions. And most of us harbor a few biases, prejudices, or personal issues we need to work through and eliminate. Wealth and social status, or the

lack of them, will not exempt us from any of the common problems associated with real spiritual improvement.

A good way to overcome our problems is to develop spiritual habits. We are often unaware of our habitual behaviors and the many ways we have trained ourselves to react to different life situations. By cultivating positive habits, we are more likely to make the right decisions under stress. This topic is explored further in *Spiritual Habits for the Soul*.

A true spiritual life is not self-centered. Selfish traits have no place in a cosmic approach to spiritual progress. We cannot claim the spirit for ourselves, nor can we dictate how others should live. Instead, we *share our spiritual selves* with others through acts of love, compassion, and understanding.

God's love is given freely to us, not to hoard it all to ourselves, but to give it freely to others. And just how much we are willing to

pass on this love with compassion, kindness, and respect is the true measure of our spiritual progress.

You are destined to live a narrow and mean life if you learn to love only those who love you.

– *The Urantia Book*

To help others, it's not necessary to work in the slums of New York, Mumbai, or Mexico City, although these are admirable avenues of service. All you need to do is pay attention to what is happening around you every day. Look around to see what you can do for others as you go about your daily routine. Every day is a new day to express the unconditional, divine love so freely given to you.

Love & Courage

While it is true that following your Spirit Teacher will make you more loving and

compassionate, never for a moment think it will make you weak and powerless. Quite the contrary, your experiences will fill you with convictions of confidence, strength, and courage unlike any you have ever known.

This God within is my all-sufficient strength
and ever-present help in time of trouble.

– W. W. Atkinson

When we begin our spirit quest, there is no need to defend ourselves or our actions. We soon discover that those who criticize our motives and insist on arguing every point often have little to offer in return. They may claim to be more reasonable and logical, but on close examination, their reasoning is often hollow, their intentions misguided, and their goals unavailing.

Do not be led astray by those who would accuse you of being whimsical or an intellectual featherweight. Indeed, to progress in the spirit requires solid

determination, moral courage, sincerity, and a considerable amount of reflective thought.

Never doubt the courageous power of love and kindness, or the ability to turn away anger with a soft voice and a smile. When we learn to love and understand our neighbors, all hostilities dissolve like sugar in water.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

– Jesus of Nazareth

When we gain the courage to admit that we don't always need to be right, that we don't have to have things our way, that there is no gain in revenge, that there is no benefit in petty resentments, or that our selfish opinions mean little in the great scheme of things, then we have reached true peace of mind, achieving the spiritual freedom and personal power that comes with it.

Spiritual Desires

For some, the spiritual adventure begins early. For others, it begins only after enduring much disappointment, sorrow, and tribulation. And for the rest, it may never begin at all.

But for those who decide to begin this thrilling enterprise, it starts with a sincere recognition that some things in their lives need to change. They begin to see how the rush of life has distracted them from the realization of greater values and more honorable pursuits.

The highest happiness is indissolubly linked
with spiritual progress.

– *The Urantia Book*

Spiritual enlightenment begins with an awareness of our shortcomings, an experience followed by a strong, inner desire for self-improvement and spiritual contact. We work out at the gym, do yoga or sports,

watch our diets, try to earn a good wage, travel, and attempt to broaden our knowledge through study and exploration.

All this effort is commendable and serves as a positive indicator of progressive change, but in and of itself, it may not be entirely satisfying. We may feel there is something missing—deep in our hearts is a growing urge for spiritual values, for something more profound and meaningful.

We live on a very confused and troubled world. From birth, we are taught trite clichés such as: Look out for number one; it's a dog-eat-dog world; every man for himself; it's all about the money; you gotta be tough to survive, and countless other self-centered tropes of utter nonsense.

We know it's not all about the money. Even wealthy, organized crime networks emphasize the value of family. We know how good it feels to be loved, to be hugged, to have someone who cares for us. And we know how satisfying it feels to reach out to

help a neighbor or someone less fortunate. Likewise, loving parents feel immense joy when their children do well in life. And world citizens are pleased to see the progress of civilization and science. But none of this is about the love of money.

In a purely selfish, animalistic, materialistic, and logical world, motivations of progress, love, and altruism are not necessary for basic survival. And yet, without such feelings and values, life is empty and pointless.

How do we explain this human desire, this inner drive to do better, to love others, to enjoy life? On a material level, we are motivated to increase our wealth and assets, and on an emotional level, we wish to live happy, rewarding lives. But what is the source of this desire that impels us to do good, to improve, to search for truth, to appreciate beauty? Can any material thing, force, or energy explain our love for one another, our desire to help others, our feelings of compassion?

Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists try to explain why we have these kinds of motivations and desires. In the past, they invariably sought Darwinian explanations of survival and evolution, usually expressed in terms of beneficial social or biological functions, as if all behavior and social phenomena could be reduced to survival, material needs, or base desires.

But academic explanations will always fall short as long as scholars refuse to admit, or at least account for, one very real truth—that the diverse scope of human experience far exceeds the material level of existence—that it actually touches on a very real superconscious and spiritual dimension. Thankfully, this notion is slowly gaining wider recognition among researchers.

Apart from our ability to reason, any desire for spiritual truth and self-betterment is not an inherent part of the human psyche. It is a *spiritual drive*, and the very source of that drive is the Divine Spirit living within the

mind of everyone who has the capacity for moral choice. If we allow it or desire it, this Spirit imparts to us the insight and wisdom needed to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, and spiritual from material.

The Benefits of a Spiritual Life

A spiritual life is progressively more understanding, more compassionate, more loving, and more real. And we become more aware of our place and purpose in the great cosmos. This growing awareness of our cosmic identity gives rise to a sublime inner peace, a peace of mind unrivaled by the satisfactions of wealth and fame.

A spiritual life is energizing and invigorating. Improving contact with your Spirit Teacher enables this divine entity to release spiritual energies into your body, mind, and soul. It is a way to recharge your spiritual batteries and vitalize all that you think and do. And in the process, it contributes to the fortitude

and direction you need to overcome life's difficulties.

Spiritual energies elevate our thoughts to transcendent levels, enabling us to see ourselves above and beyond our current state. We become conscious of the spiritual unity of the cosmos and realize we are cosmic citizens who truly belong in a universe more glorious and majestic than we could possibly imagine at this time.

Progressive spirituality brings deeper wisdom and a better understanding of the nature of God, the world, and ourselves. Whenever we acknowledge and accept our spiritual potential, we become motivated to improve ourselves, to cooperate, to help others, and to make the world a better place.

Social science researchers are coming to similar conclusions. Increasingly, psychologists and sociologists recognize the importance of spirituality and religion for maintaining mental health, improving relationships, and increasing happiness.

Increasing happiness is always the experience of all who are certain about God.

– *The Urantia Book*

Justin Barrett of Oxford University investigated the theory that people are predisposed to religious beliefs and found that children as young as three naturally attribute supernatural abilities and immortality to God, even if they have never been taught about God. ³²

Harold Koenig and associates researched the theory that religious beliefs affect mental health and found that people with spiritual beliefs have longer, healthier lives and are less prone to depression. ³³

The *Journal of Family Psychology* (2014) included nine studies that found that positive spiritual beliefs and behaviors strengthen and transform marriages, help people cope with adversity, bond family members, and improve children's

development. This relatively new subfield is sometimes called *relational spirituality*.³⁴

A study appearing in the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* (2015), found that recognizing and giving thanks for the positive aspects of life resulted in improved mental and physical health in patients with asymptomatic heart failure. More gratitude was associated with better mood, better sleep, less fatigue, and lower levels of inflammatory biomarkers.³⁵

Another important finding is that our happiness is, to a great extent, determined by how much we help others.³⁶ While this notion is nothing new in religious and philosophical circles, it's good to see it getting scientific recognition.

What is the essence of life? To serve others
and to do good.

– Aristotle

These continuing studies are just a few examples of the indirect ways you can gauge the workings of spiritual forces. The Spirit is like a summer breeze; you feel it brush your cheeks as you stroll through the wildwoods of life, you see the branches sway, you hear the rustle of the leaves.

And so it is with all spiritual experiences. You perceive the workings of the Spirit by its noticeable effects in body, mind, and soul. You know it exists, and although you cannot see it with material eyes, you can actually *feel* the divine presence of God.

Your Road to Destiny

It is foolish to embark on a journey if we have no idea where we are going. And it's difficult to imagine a spiritual destiny if we are unaware of the nature of our destination. We need some idea of our goals and objectives, as well as some expectation about what we will encounter when we arrive.

Few of us plan a fun holiday in a war-torn region or a place with rampant crime. We would like assurance that our destination is a safe place, one that allows us to achieve and experience fresh insights. But if we have no conception about what to expect from a spiritual journey other than some pie-in-the-sky notion about a spiritual high of some sort, we are unlikely to make much headway.

If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.

– George Harrison

If you are traveling to either New Zealand or Greece for the first time, you may expect these destinations to be pleasant places to visit, especially if they are highly recommended by others. From your brochures, you have selected many wonderful sights to see and places to stay. But despite all the information and photos, you will never really *know* what the place is like until you actually get there.

The fact is, we travel to these places *with the expectation and with the faith* they will be exactly as described by those who went before us. And so it is with our spiritual journey—we begin with the same kind of expectation and faith.

Once we decide on a destination, it makes sense to start looking at a roadmap—a planned and willful approach to our destination. But the map is not always clear, and often places are unmarked—or perhaps we encounter a thick fog of confusion.

When adverse conditions occur, we rely on a guide, just as the captain of a ship relies on a harbor pilot to steer him through unknown waters. In our case, we look to our spiritual guide, our Spirit Teacher, who faithfully points the way.

Accepting God as our spiritual destination is more appealing when our minds are clear about what this Eternal Source is like. We can either conjure up our own ideas about this, or we can ponder the words,

proclamations, revelations, and spiritual experiences of many others who have already traveled this path, from Buddha to Jesus, and fast-forward to Mother Teresa.

(For more on the nature of God, see *God Consciousness*.)

Throughout history, there have been hundreds of spiritual teachers from all nations of the world, some better than others, and much has been written about their spiritual messages. If we are to sum up these revelations about our spiritual destiny, one thing is clear—almost all teachers of truth suggest that, to reach our destination, we should attempt to be perfect, to be spirit-like, to be Godlike.

And this is an important point because an even greater destiny awaits us—eternal life in an amazing and magnificent universe. If we wish to take part in this fantastic enterprise, if we wish to join this majestic celestial circle, this great company of spirit

beings, then we need to *become like them* by following the Spirit Path.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

Your initial reaction to achieving Godlike perfection may be one of great skepticism, and rightly so. But in terms of living a life on this planet, limited as it is by your mortal and finite existence, there is a relative level of perfection that is attainable.

Your First Life

This life is your first life—but it may not be your last. Religious literature is rife with ideas of reincarnation, resurrection, heavenly abodes, rebirth, and transmigration. Indeed, some notion of life after death is central to almost every major religion or spiritual movement, and it is a

popular subject in many ancient stories, fables, myths, and songs.

As we would expect, scientists and empiricists object to any supposition that is inconsistent with scientific evidence and research. But science deals with the material universe, not the spiritual one. There is no possible way to prove God or spirituality with material science or mathematical logic, nor is it possible to disprove the existence of either by similar means.

Life after death is no exception in this regard. While there is little disagreement that the *material* body returns to the elements, any possibility of a future resurrection would have to rely on the existence of a *non-material, spiritual entity* such as the soul (see *Your Soul – What Is It?*). But no matter what you believe, the possibility of either a soul or eternal life is not beyond reason.

A man asked me, “How can a sane man believe in the hereafter?”

I replied, “How can he believe in anything at all?”

– A. K. Mozumdar

We can believe whatever we like about life after death. Skeptics may sneer at the idea, taking comfort in empirical theories and materialist views. Meanwhile, spiritual people celebrate the idea, taking comfort in the many revelations and promises of wise prophets and seers. The significant difference between opposing views is that spiritual people have complete surety of their own inner experiences.

No harm can come to us by believing in the possibility of eternal life in a friendly and loving universe. In fact, it gives our lives a depth of meaning that neither a skeptic nor a cynic can ever hope to achieve. Indeed, what is the point of improving ourselves, doing good, and growing spiritually if it all comes to naught? If we have faith that God wants

us to succeed and progress, then it makes perfect sense that life on this earth is not the end of the line.

A belief in life after death implies there is a place in which we are resurrected for continuing life—a heaven, if you wish. But stereotypical views of heaven as a paradise in which we continue to indulge the pleasures of the flesh for all eternity are remarkably out of touch with the rigors of a genuine spiritual life.

A spiritual heaven is not likely to be a place where we continue to live selfishly, harbor hatreds, or exact vengeance. Nor is it likely to be just one perfect and ideal place that is the end of everything. If both the individual and civilization are on a path of progressive evolution, then heaven is more likely to be a series of advancing worlds, or stages, through which we continue to improve.

In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

This world is our first stage, a vast school in which we learn, experience, evolve, and progress. And because the spiritual administration of the universe is progressive, we should expect the next world (and the next) to be similar in principle—an educational and constructive milieu in which we continue to grow in ability, in mind, and in spirit—an eternal voyage of discovery, progress, and perfection.

The Spiritual Experience

No matter what we think about spirituality, it's illogical to say we are spiritual if we do not believe in the existence of spirit in one form or another. Spirit can be a supernatural being or a supernatural essence. It can also be a divine substance, a divine mind, or a personable God. And from a different perspective, spirit alludes to an alternate dimension—a non-material world—a unique phase of universe reality.

God is spirit.

– Jesus of Nazareth

So when we think about being spiritual, what are we actually thinking about? No doubt our ideas vary a lot, but to clarify some of our concepts and beliefs, it helps to look at two grand divisions in the way we view spirituality—the *nonpersonal* view and the *personal* view.

Those who believe in nonpersonal spirituality believe they can have a *mental interaction* with a nonpersonal, supernatural essence, while those who believe in personal spirituality assume they can have a *personal relationship* with a supernatural being, such as an angel or God.

Nonpersonal Spirituality

A belief in nonpersonal spirits or forces is a belief in the existence of spiritual things, energies, or events, but not necessarily spirit beings or persons. Generally, it assumes we can personally interact with these things or forces to some degree.

Such beliefs about a nonpersonal essence, a spiritual state, or a supernatural force are prevalent in many religions and philosophies. Even people who claim to be non-religious or non-spiritual often entertain supernatural notions. Any belief in fate or luck, or any superstition such as knocking on wood or avoiding black cats,

would fit this category, as would all attempts to predict the future by means of astrology or Tarot cards.

A belief in good luck implies that we are favored in life by unseen forces and that all outcomes result from supernatural favoritism rather than random chance or good planning. And of course, bad luck implies the opposite.

A belief in any form of magic, sorcery, or witchcraft assumes the existence of secret forces of nature or powers residing in nature that are believed to influence the course of life events. It also presumes that select individuals can control these powers and subsequent events through esoteric words, secret rituals, or magic formulas.

A belief in the supernatural power of charms, amulets, talismans, incantations, or rituals is similar in nature, as is any belief in the power of religious relics, artifacts, or symbols. Inherent in all these animistic beliefs is a conviction that some

supernatural force or nonpersonal, spirit-like entity can, in some way, be compelled to act or intervene in our lives.

Such supernatural forces are often poorly defined in terms of their nature or attributes, but in nearly all cases, they are believed to act or take effect only after performing a prescribed ritual. For instance, a baseball player who touches the brim of his cap for luck, a stock trader who feels the need to recite some motivating mantra before the trading day begins, or a religious devotee who hopes to attract spiritual forces by reciting certain incantations in a specified order. For all such enthusiasts, their actions appeal to certain unseen forces that they believe will respond positively, but only if they perform the rituals correctly.

Many nonpersonal religious ideas infiltrate the arts and sciences. Science fiction and fantasy writers like to create supernatural powers that parallel real-life beliefs. One example is *Jediism*, a belief system derived from the *Star Wars* film series. It entertains

supernatural notions about a power called “The Force,” which is perceived as an advantageous, unseen force for good. And becoming a Jedi Knight is a spiritual or enhancing experience in which one makes beneficial physical and mental contact.

Other so-called religions have no supernatural element, but instead reflect materialist ideologies founded on extreme rationalism. For example, *transhumanism* is the belief that humanity's ultimate progress will depend on applied reason and advancing technologies, including the integration of man and machine. Some adherents prophesize that the final salvation of humanity rests with artificial intelligence, another nonpersonal reality.

Any attempt to invoke nonpersonal supernatural powers, no matter how selfish, materialistic, or rudimentary the motivation may be, constitutes an expression of spirituality on some level of experience. All these beliefs, whether they entertain magic, myth, or superstition, assume the existence

of supermaterial entities or supernatural powers and, therefore, pave the way for more progressive concepts about the nature of the spiritual universe.

Way Beyond Magic

Some nonpersonal religious beliefs are quite advanced, reaching far beyond superstition and magic. Most of these take a more subjective approach, looking for something *within oneself* rather than supernatural forces entirely outside oneself. This is the main thrust of Indian philosophies and Buddhist beliefs.

There are many schools of Buddhist thought and a wide variety of practices but, in general, Buddhists seek an improved or altered state of mind or consciousness. It is believed this state can be achieved by accepting certain truths (as defined by Buddha) and by following certain practices. Perhaps the best-known example is the concept of *nirvana*, which is said to be a

transcendent mental state of enlightenment or emancipation. Some Buddhists see *nirvana* a little differently—viewing it as the psychological act of “blowing out” the fires of base emotions such as greed, lust, hatred, anger, and worldly desires.

Ways to achieve *nirvana* differ, but in the older tradition, it is attained by accepting the Four Noble Truths and following the practices outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path, such as right speech and right action. Other paths have become popular as well, and perhaps the best-known in Western Buddhism is the “Three Doors of Liberation,” especially as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk and teacher. ³⁷ These three “doors” are also considered to be truths.

There is much about these truths to explore but, in a nutshell, the Four Noble Truths are: 1. All life is suffering, 2. All suffering is due to desire, 3. The cure is letting go of desire

and, 4. To let go, we must walk the Eightfold Path.

And the truths of the Three Doors are: 1. Everything is connected, so there is no individual self, 2. Forms may change, but nothing is ever lost, and 3. There is no goal in life because you already have it all.

Similar in principle to *nirvana* but much older in origin is the Hindu notion of *moksha*, which also refers to a state of enlightenment or liberation considered the ultimate goal of life. But rather than accepting certain truths, as in Buddhism, its followers believe that *moksha* can be achieved through knowledge of Atman, the Supreme Soul that gives birth to the true self.

Both *nirvana* and *moksha* are similar, deriving their root meanings and principles from ancient Brahmanism. There are many interpretations of both, with much depending on the school of thought, but generally, they are attempts to achieve peace

of mind through self-knowledge and the realization or understanding of certain cosmological concepts. And for both, the ultimate intention is to liberate oneself from a cycle of misery, suffering, ignorance, and fear.

One significant difference in Hinduism is the idea that *moksha* is the realization, or perhaps the mental feat, of attaining union of the self (or soul) with the ultimate reality known as Brahman, the source of all reality. As we have seen, achieving unity with the cosmos is a central mission of Brahmanism.

The concept of *cosmic unity* is also shared in Zen Buddhism, a discipline that places particular emphasis on meditative states of mind said to bring us into mental contact with a nonpersonal, infinite intelligence or a higher state of consciousness.

Zen Buddhism was greatly influenced by the religious philosophy of Taoism (or Daoism), a school of thought attributed to the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu. One premise of this

belief system is the existence of Tao, a term loosely translated as *The Way* or *The Road*.

But Tao is more than a road; it is also conceived as a primal, eternal, and vital *Source* that can guide human action, akin to the *dharma* of Hinduism or the *will of God* in Christianity.

As in many religious philosophies, Lao Tzu portrays the Supreme God or Tao as a pantheistic Deity (see *Pantheism Revival*). This is the notion that God is equivalent to the forces of the universe, if not being the physical universe itself.

But despite the rather materialist or animistic views associated with pantheism, Lao Tzu presents an advanced concept of Tao that is, in fact, a profound insight into the nature of God. He describes Tao as existing “before Heaven and Earth,” and as the “Mother of all things” — “the mysterious Quality” that is the source, pattern, and substance of the entire universe. ³⁸

The Tao produced One. One produced Two.
Two produced Three. Three produced all
things.

– Lao Tzu

When we strip away the cultural differences in ancient Chinese idioms and the forms of presentation found in the *Tao Te Ching* (supposedly authored by Lao Tzu), we discover that the concepts of Tao are remarkably similar to many Western ideas of God, even of the Trinity.

One objective of Zen Buddhism is to recognize that we are one with Tao. In this way, we put our minds into a state of intuitive contact with the essence of Tao, thereby achieving wisdom and enlightenment. This objective is similar to those of Christian mystics, which is to become one with God or, as the American theologian Bernard McGinn suggests, “to attain a consciousness of being in the transformative presence of God.” ³⁹

Although Lao Tzu portrays Tao as the ultimate Source of all reality and all creation, he still sees this Source as a nonpersonal, if not nonspiritual, entity. Tao is viewed as an impersonal, yet potent, universal Source with which we can interact (or merge) to achieve wisdom and freedom from suffering. It is a *nonpurposive* but beneficial Force rather than a *purposeful* Spirit Personality that makes decisions and has a plan.

This brings up the question: Can we attribute consciousness, volition, or wisdom to an inanimate object? If so, then by extension, we are suggesting that rocks, planets, suns, and cosmic rays can be conscious, make decisions, and be wise.

Wisdom is defined as a *personal* ability to use knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments, and the only way Tao could impart wisdom to an individual is through shared consciousness. Therefore, the ability to give spiritual advice (wisdom) implies that Tao has personality and purpose.

Even if the universe as a whole is viewed as a greater form of life, it would have to be an intelligent, conscious, and wise entity capable of deciding to share its wisdom with others.

Apart from this shortcoming, Zen Buddhism touches on the God experience because the wisdom of God lives and acts within all of us, and we contact this Paradise Spirit (Tao) through our superconscious mental channels. There is also good reason to believe that the transcendent mental states of *nirvana* and *moksha* are analogous to this superconscious mode of spirit contact. Therefore, both pursuits prove to be effective approaches to the experience of God, but more so in practice than in philosophy.

Indeed, the divine spark within each of us is a powerful force and a reliable guide to virtue and wisdom, as Zen Buddhism suggests. It is a spirit with a direct connection to the Source of all Reality, Cosmic Mind, and the God of all Creation.

But if it really does guide human action, as Lao Tzu insists, it cannot be devoid of purpose or design. And if we allow for the volitional nature of Tao, then it represents a personal God in every way, whether as Infinite Mind, the Mother of the Universe, or the Creative Principle.

Personal Spirituality

A belief in personal spirits implies a belief in intelligent spiritual beings or spirit entities who are truly alive, can make decisions, and are aware of our life situations. It is a belief in supernatural beings with whom we can have a *personal relationship*.

Whenever we attempt to communicate with spirit beings or forces, we implicitly assume they are personal. We talk to them because we believe they understand our problems, desires, and anxieties as well as our challenges in life. And we believe we will receive personal benefits through such contact, whether through divine providence

or some contribution to our strength, courage, or faith.

Spirit is the fundamental reality of the personality experience of all creatures because God is spirit.

– *The Urantia Book*

Any meaningful human contact is personal. The very act of prayer (a spiritual petition) assumes the existence of superhuman agencies apart from the self-conscious individual. We appeal to these spirits because we believe they can, and will, assist the individual as well as society at large.

The oldest recorded instances of a belief in individual spirit beings or gods come from the Sumerian culture of ancient Mesopotamia (about 5,000 years ago), although archaeological evidence suggests these ideas extend much further back in time.

Every civilization and empire on earth entertained polytheistic beliefs at one time

or another. The many gods of Egypt, China, Rome, Greece, and India were all seen as personal gods to whom devotees could make appeal—to beg or barter for prosperity, children, a good harvest, or victory over their enemies. And if the gods did not meet their demands, they would curse them for failing their expectations, as some still do today.

Even in traditional Eastern Buddhism, there are many divine beings, most of them adaptations of Hindu deities. These include gods of healing, protection, and truth, among many others, all of which are anthropomorphic gods with human temperaments.

In almost every ancient society, gods were given human qualities. The authoritarian God depicted in the Old Testament was prone to wrath, jealousy, and revenge. People saw God in an entirely different way three thousand years ago, and it was difficult for the average person of that time, and perhaps for some at this time, to conceive of

an all-perfect, all-loving, all-merciful, and non-human Creator God.

Personal gods were assigned to almost anything—crops, trees, weather, luck, love, or fertility. Even today, some of us are still inclined to animate material things, such as ships, cars, machinery, or weather, often endowing them with human traits such as love, anger, or happiness. We see this whenever people get frustrated with things or machines that do not “cooperate,” as if they had a mind of their own.

Any belief in spirits of the dead also fits under the umbrella of personal spirituality. In these belief systems, those who have died are thought to remain on earth within a spiritual dimension. Such notions can be traced back to early forms of ancestor worship or the veneration of the dead, both of which were popular practices in ancient Egypt and Rome and are still common in many parts of Asia.

In the West, similar beliefs and practices gained popularity in the late 19th century under the unfortunate rubric of *spiritualism*, a supernatural belief that remains popular in the 21st century. Like ancestor worship, spiritualists believe in the existence of spirits of the dead who can communicate with the living, thereby providing a source of esoteric knowledge and spiritual guidance.

In contrast to a belief in unseen spirit beings, others believe in the spiritual power of beings they *can* see, such as male or female priests, saints, preachers, prophets, gurus, and shamans, who are all thought to have the power to intervene on their behalf by contacting gods or metaphysical forces in the spiritual domains.

Until recent times, kings and queens were believed to be divine beings, descended from divine beings, or at least divinely ordained. This collective belief in the power of ordained religious and administrative authority is a universal concept found in almost every religion around the world, from

the times of ancient Sumer to the modern era. While such notions are not so prevalent today, vestiges still exist, such as the Pope of Christianity, the Dalai Lama of Buddhism, the Aga Khan of Shia Islam, or the Gurus of Hinduism.

In most societies, dominant religious figures were believed to be the ultimate authorities on religious teachings, possessing special knowledge, esoteric wisdom, spiritual connections, or divine privileges in relation to a higher spiritual power and, therefore, could issue decrees or grant certain favors and absolutions to those who asked.

A New Revelation

Only in relatively recent times, particularly through the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, did people become aware that religion could be a *personal spiritual experience* rather than mere obedience to doctrine and ritual.

Jesus proclaimed a religion free of sacred relics, holy rituals, dead ancestors, and

religious authorities. It was a simple, yet compelling, belief in an unobstructed, direct, and personal experience with the personable God of all creation. Indeed, he taught that the only requirement for a truly spiritual life was sincere faith in the goodness, wisdom, and fellowship of God; a belief so elementary and yet so forceful and dynamic that many followers in his day, and even today, could not grasp it.

Jesus taught that faith, simple childlike belief, is the key to the door of the kingdom.

– *The Urantia Book*

Regrettably, the freedom, simplicity, and spontaneity of spiritual expression that Jesus so ardently proclaimed were soon stifled under the rigid dogma and elaborate hierarchy of the Christian religion.

The original teachings of Siddhartha also embraced notions of spiritual freedom, though they differed in concept from those of Jesus. But here too, his followers

submerged and formalized his ideas of spiritual liberty by creating a Buddhist priesthood and hierarchy. Only recently, with much credit to the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, do we see a return to the original freedom of spiritual expression that Siddhartha so strongly espoused.

The significant difference between Siddhartha's ideas, which had more to do with freedom from suffering by attaining a state of selflessness, and those of Jesus, was that the God-led man of Nazareth taught that true spiritual liberty is achieved through individual loyalty, or dedication, to a personal, omnipotent God—one he portrayed as a wise, just, and loving Father of all creation.

When Jesus talked about “the living God,” he referred to a personal Deity—the Father in heaven.

– *The Urantia Book*

After the fall of Rome, in the Dark Ages of Christianity, it seemed as though Jesus' ideas about spiritual liberty were forgotten. But his revolutionary ideas about the loving nature of a personal, friendly God could not be suppressed for long. And we see these ideas re-emerge with force in the Christianity of 14th-century Europe.

This trend came to a head in the 16th century with the teachings of Martin Luther, a German priest and an avid writer who, through the power of the printing press, led an intellectual rebellion against church corruption, hierarchy, and authority. His controversial theological views gave rise to the religious movement known as the Protestant Reformation.

One of Luther's most shocking claims was that believers did not need priests or clergy to reach God, an idea that bypassed the authority and control of the church. Another was that salvation comes by faith alone rather than by acting out ostensible good deeds, as the church upheld. Predictably, the

Pope of Rome and others saw Luther as a threat to their vested interests and excommunicated him, even though most of his ideas fully agreed with Jesus' teachings.

If we do not love God and his word, what difference does it make if we love anything at all?

– *Martin Luther*

No doubt, Luther had his faults. But his rejection of the intractable dogma and elaborate ritual of the church also agreed with Jesus' teachings. Luther's emancipating philosophy further evolved in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment despite the ongoing rebellion against church authority. And such liberating and powerful ideas about having an intimate, personal relationship with a loving Creator continue to evolve today, regardless of appearances to the contrary.

The culmination of Jesus' ongoing revelation about personal religious experience was that

making an intimate connection with a higher power is simply the act of sharing one's inner life—all that we think, feel, and do—with the Divine Presence. In his approach, contact (or communion) with God is a powerful, direct, personal, and spiritual relationship, one in which no lucky charms, doctrines, rituals, formal prayers, or priests are needed.

Man does not have to go farther than his own inner experience of the soul's contemplation of this spiritual-reality presence to find God and attempt communion with him.

– *The Urantia Book*

Morality, Magic, and Sacrifice

What clearly separates magic and superstition from more enlightened forms of spirituality is an evolving sense of morality. The religion of ancient Egypt was one of the first to extol advanced concepts of morality and ethics. In their belief, the source of this

morality was the divine force of *ma'at*, which embraced truth, justice, order, and righteousness. This was a remarkable transformation for the time.

The Egyptians, instead of placing all emphasis on the auspicious control of unseen forces and magic, moved on to a deeper appreciation of *moral values*. Earlier religious practices were not overly concerned with whether individual actions were right or wrong; the main objective was to achieve a particular outcome, regardless of the means.

In the past, it was socially acceptable for religious devotees to curse others with evil or to pray for their demise. Notions of legitimate revenge were common and often considered honorable. Such morbid convictions persist today, even among some who call themselves spiritual.

Human sacrifice was another common ritual in early societies. It was a socially acceptable way to appease the gods in order to improve crops or consecrate religious buildings.

Indeed, it was not until the Iron Age (about 2,500 years ago) that human sacrifice was largely abandoned in the Middle East and other regions. But the practice persisted in other areas, such as the Americas, where it diminished only 500 years ago. This brutal practice later gave way to animal sacrifice, as indicated by archaeological and historical records.

We see this transition in the Old Testament, which is pervaded by notions of sacrifice, primarily as a means to remit sins, but also as a test of faith. One example is the Book of Genesis story in which God tests Abraham by asking him to kill his son, Isaac. Although Isaac was his second son, sacrificing firstborn sons was not uncommon in those times. But later, as a sense of morality grew, this primitive ritual was reformed by dedicating the firstborn son to the priesthood.

Even in the time of Jesus, the sacrifice of lambs and doves was considered necessary to atone for one's misdeeds. And this

fundamental notion of sacrificial atonement continued as a major theme in Christianity, as evinced by the atonement doctrine so ardently promulgated in the many letters of Apostle Paul—a lengthy collection of his thoughts and opinions that make up thirteen books of the New Testament.

This familiar, age-long belief that shedding blood was required for penance and salvation led to the early acceptance of Paul's doctrine among budding Christians, most of whom were Jews or Greeks accustomed to the notion of sacrifice. These early followers viewed 'sacrifice for atonement' as a reasonable explanation for the seemingly inexplicable death of their Master, the awaited messiah.

Today, however, blood sacrifice would not be considered moral, even if restricted to the sacrifice of animals. This change in attitude over time is just one indicator of the worldwide social trend toward a higher sense of morality.

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice; and the
knowledge of God rather than burnt
offerings.

– Hosea 6

God is not an irascible old man whose displeasure with the sins of mankind could be appeased only by the sacrifice of his perfect son, Jesus of Nazareth. And there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that Jesus condoned any kind of morbid, blood sacrifice. Indeed, despite the barbarity of the time, he courageously delivered a cheerful and enlightened message—that his Father in heaven was a loving, merciful, and understanding God.

Jesus made it abundantly clear that a spiritual life and salvation (eternal life) are freely available to all who believe—to all who have simple faith in the compassion, goodness, wisdom, and grace of God—no sacrifice needed. Even Paul recognized this when he wrote, “It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

Are You Right or Wrong?

Morality is a broad term, but in short, it refers to an individual's innate sense of right and wrong behavior, whether alone or in a group. The goal of morality is to live a better life, not just for oneself but for everyone.

Morality should not be confused with government law or justice, even though the legal system is often guided by moral principles. It is society's right and duty to pass laws and administer justice to control personal behavior, but this has little to do with an individual's sense of morality. We can legislate social rules of behavior, but we cannot legislate an individual's inner sense of morality.

Morality has nothing to do with so-called common sense unless, of course, one means good sense. But as the French philosopher, Voltaire, suggested long ago, good sense is not all that common. And common sense often has a strong cultural component, varying from person to person, society to

society, and nation to nation. Without a doubt, morality should be reasonable, but it falters when subjected to the temperamental prejudices and whims of individuals.

Morality is not religion, although it is the very foundation of religious experience because it opens the way for spiritual guidance and soul growth. This does not necessarily imply that all religious thought is moral. We cannot confuse religious doctrines and superstitious rules of behavior with a truly spirit-led morality. Instead, the spiritual quality of any religious belief or ritual is directly proportional to the degree of truth and morality it contains.

In the Buddhist tradition, morality is the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path, a path one must walk as the prelude to liberation. Any progress along this path requires the practice of right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, and right effort. The very use of the word *right* explicitly defines the Eightfold Path as a moral mandate.

Set your heart on doing good. Do it over and over again and you will be filled with joy.

– Buddha

The Eightfold Path does not specifically outline which behaviors are right or wrong. This has some advantages because defining a long list of acceptable beliefs and behaviors often stifles true spiritual growth rather than setting it free to seek the spiritual guidance so necessary for a spontaneous life in the spirit. Indeed, allowing freedom of thought is one reason Buddhism has survived the test of time.

However, some followers of Western Buddhism take great pains to distance their religion from morality, insisting there is no such thing as right or wrong—that it is actually a false duality. Buddhist instructor Rodney Smith prefers to interpret *right* as meaning *wise* to avoid any connotation of morality, which he perceives as making judgments and passing laws (e.g., the Ten

Commandments).⁴⁰ But there is a significant difference between spiritual morality and society's moral codes.

Even if we accept Smith's use of the word *wise*, we are still left with the task of discriminating between what is wise and what is not because we are working on the premise that wise is good, but foolishness is not. In all our choices, we cannot escape the fact that we are trying to reach the best decision—the right decision.

At times, the best decision is not always clear. All moral discernment becomes a matter of recognizing *relative* right and wrong. At times, we need to consider many competing factors and then make the best choice in difficult circumstances. We can, however, improve our moral decisions by adhering to the highest values in life. And the highest values are always spiritual values (see *Four Divine Values*).

Morality and ethics define acceptable behaviors for the good of all members of

society because, if society and civilization are to work at all, they require that we work together to solve common problems. Overall, the crux of morality lies in a sense of social duty and living a virtuous life.

Morality and ethics are firmly linked to notions of fairness. This applies to all levels of social interaction, including politics and economics. The most advanced (moral) political and economic systems are those that are fair to all members of society. They are ethical.

Morality is an outgrowth of reason but reaches a peak of discernment when guided by spiritual ideals. As one example of the potential cross-cultural nature of morals, consider the Golden Rule, which is to treat others as you would like to be treated—do for others as you would have them do for you.

Treat not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.

– *Buddha*

Your capacity to conduct a moral evaluation demonstrates your spiritual and supernatural nature—your superanimal ability to choose between truth and falsehood, good and bad, beauty and ugliness. In the spiritual domain, there is no evil, there is no falsehood, and there is no ugliness. By choosing goodness, truth, and beauty, you bring yourself into harmony with divinity and the wisdom of your Spirit Teacher. Consciously or not, those with discerning moral insight are invariably those who follow the Spirit Way.

Our moral thinking changes considerably when we realize and accept that we are all spiritual sons and daughters of a Supreme Being—a Creator God. This spiritual insight helps us to determine what is truly right and wrong in our relationships. It allows us to

rise above the trivialities of life to see our personal problems in a different light.

An increasing sense of morality is essential to spiritual progress and God consciousness, but moral thought alone does not necessarily lead to more progressive levels of spiritual experience. If we wish to take morality to a more transcendent level, we need to enact our moral convictions in a positive, active, and spontaneous way—to actually *live out the high morals we profess to believe*.

The highest moral choice is the choice of the highest possible value, and always—in any sphere, in all of them—this is to choose to do the will of God.

– *The Urantia Book*

Making a Moral Evaluation

From a God-centered perspective, moral evaluation is the task of assessing all situations in light of divine values. Without a consciousness of spiritual values, a moral evaluation is no more than a matter of

ethics, being largely conditioned by the social mores of the present.

A sense of morality cannot be learned from material science, social conventions, or religious doctrines. Instead, morality flourishes in a mind completely devoted to divine values and virtuous ideals, one free of preconceived notions, stubborn opinions, and inhibiting bigotries.

It's easy to make excuses for our immoral choices. We can blame troublesome circumstances or some limitation of our character, or we can blame our parents, the government, economics, or even the environment. And if we are superstitious, we can blame it on misfortune, fate, or bad luck.

But to achieve any degree of spiritual maturity, we must accept responsibility for our actions and deal effectively with whatever situations arise, no matter how unfair they may seem. This is not to say we should never attempt to change the world or the circumstances of our lives, but instead

that we learn, grow, and become wiser through our own moral efforts and experiences.

Morality is the essential pre-existent soil of personal God-consciousness.

– *The Urantia Book*

Deciding the right course of action is not always easy, and much depends on our experiences, wisdom, sensitivity to divine values, and the depth of our connection with spiritual forces. But in all cases, it helps to think things through, meditate on immediate problems, and then weigh all viable solutions (see also *Divine Problem Solving*).

Seven Vital Questions

Your values in life are important because they serve as your moral yardsticks for measuring and evaluating all situations. Whenever in doubt as to the veracity of a

moral decision, you can always ask yourself seven vital questions.

1. **Is it true?** Are you being truthful with others and honest with yourself? Do you have ulterior motives that obscure the truth? Have you considered all the evidence?
2. **Is it good?** Is your decision beneficial, productive, and positive? Have you considered all the consequences?
3. **Is it beautiful?** Is it attractive, appealing, and charming? Is it graceful, elegant, and strong?
4. **Is it loving?** Is it affectionate, friendly, and caring? Is it personable, kind, and respectful?
5. **Is it compassionate?** Is it merciful, sympathetic, and comforting? Is it forgiving and tolerant?
6. **Is it fair?** Is it just, impartial, and objective? Is it open-minded and virtuous?
7. **Is it helpful?** Does it help or hinder others? Is it truly beneficial to your family, friends, and acquaintances? Is it for the greater good?

The Power of Divine Spirituality

Many of us associate spirituality and religion with sacred artifacts, solemn rituals, holy incantations, or dogmatic beliefs. But the truth is, we don't need any of this to contact the indwelling Spirit. All we need to do is imagine, accept, and believe that the Spirit is helping us. And then we simply open our hearts and minds to receive its wise counsel and spiritual energy. This is the secret to *divine spirituality*.

The straightforward answer to a dynamic and progressive spiritual life is steadfast faith and complete trust in the goodness of the Divine Source. The extraordinary power of faith raises us to higher levels of God consciousness. See [*What Is Spiritual Faith?*](#)

Divinity

God, by any name or conception, is the Primal Source of all divinity. Thus, all things divine are either related to God or proceed

directly from God. Essentially, divine spirituality is our *personal spiritual experience or consciousness of divinity*.

God is not only the source of divinity, but also a divine personality. We comprehend this divine, personal nature by first recognizing and appreciating the qualities of divinity, such as love, truth, goodness, beauty, wisdom, and compassion. We then acquire these qualities as personal possessions by conveying them to others through acts of kindness and social service.

Consciousness of divinity is a progressive spiritual experience.

– *The Urantia Book*

Achieving consciousness of divinity takes time. Our success depends not only on faith but also on our ability and willingness to receive spiritual guidance. And it depends on our willingness to do the right thing in all circumstances—to live God's Way. To

become divine, therefore, is to become increasingly Godlike.

Become One With God

Divine spirituality is a matter of achieving *spiritual union* with God through communion, which is no more than your personal rapport with the Paradise Spirit within you. It is not an attempt to unite with God by dissolving your unique self in an infinite ocean of impersonal existence. Instead, you achieve unity with divinity by your freewill choice to live a spiritual life, to follow the guidance of your Spirit Teacher as God wants you to. It's a *unity of purpose*.

In this purposeful unity of self and spirit, we come to realize that spirituality is not a thing we possess. Instead, it's an ongoing *dynamic experience* in which we become living conduits for spiritual energy, love, and wisdom. In other words, we fully participate in a spiritual existence by being both a receiver and a transmitter of divine qualities and forces.

Thus, to complete our God experience, we must be willing to *live a life in the spirit*. Until we reach a point in our lives where we can love others freely and with sincere affection, we will find ourselves confined to a religion of the mind rather than being liberated in a religion of the spirit.

Freely you have received, freely give.

– Jesus of Nazareth

Divine spirituality is an energetic, active, and eager enterprise in which we are happy, receptive, and willing participants who freely choose, consciously and assertively, to embrace the Spirit Way. It is the delightful result of our overwhelming desire to be pure of heart—sincere, loving, and faithful.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

– Jesus of Nazareth

Balanced Spirituality

Get the most from your spiritual experiences by taking a balanced approach. Strongly felt emotions, physical rites, and self-inflicted pain are not necessary conditions for a spiritual life. Nor should our honest and transformative experiences be confused with any fanaticism, religious intolerance, or narcissistic tendency.

A divine experience is a rational, level-headed, and personal approach to God. It is the happy, sane, and sober experience of living in the presence of God while actively engaging in a truly spiritual life. It's alive, spontaneous, and authentic.

Take a balanced approach to spirituality by making the necessary improvements in body, mind, and soul. Our objective is to stimulate the growth of all three without overemphasizing any of them. It is a balanced, integrated, and harmonious development of *all* personality endowments.

The best and safest thing is to keep a balance in your life, acknowledge the great powers around us and in us. If you can do that, and live that way, you are really a wise man.

– Euripides

The body functions best as a temple of God when all its electrochemical processes are working normally. The mind works best when it is free of all vices, fears, and detrimental emotions. And the spirit thrives in an atmosphere of dedication, contemplation, and worship. For more on this topic, see *Balance Your Self*.

The Spirit Within You

To find God, there is no need to travel to distant lands, exotic places, or sacred sites. God doesn't live in Rome, Amritsar, or Mecca any more than anywhere else. The presence of God is all around us, and a spark of his Divine Spirit lives within each of us. We carry this gift of God wherever we go.

For indeed, the kingdom of God is within
you.

– Jesus of Nazareth

The Spirit Guide is a powerful source of wisdom and energy. It is a *conscious living entity* that always endeavors to convey to us divine values, ideals, and goals. It is literally the gentle whisper of God. Our task is to draw closer to this divine wisdom and rejuvenating energy through meditation, contemplation, prayer, and worship.

The Spirit Within is a fragment of God, yet it retains all the elements of God just as a drop of ocean water retains all the elements of the ocean. This is not to say that God will eventually merge our identities in a great universal ocean. We will always be unique beings because we enjoy the divine gift of a unique personality, endowed with the free will to make moral choices (see *Who Are You?*).

Divine spirituality is a wholehearted trust in the love and goodness of God's Spirit, knowing that it will lead us through every difficulty and challenge in our lives. It will not exempt us from tragedy and tribulation, but it will help us to solve our problems—to face our difficulties with an indomitable spirit guided by love, tact, wisdom, and reason.

Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind.

– Charles Spurgeon

Communion, or fellowship, with God brings happiness, strength, courage, and peace, but it will not endow us with a life of ease. Being spiritual does not entail living a passive life of indifference wherein we can forever avoid our duties, obligations, and responsibilities by hiding away from the world.

The Spirit is forever attempting to guide us through the maze of life's problems by adjusting our thoughts to enhance our

spiritual insights and cosmic perspectives. In effect, it is transforming us into new, spiritual creatures. We can think of this Spirit as our Much Higher Self while keeping in mind that we are not that Self as yet—it's a divine goal, a destiny to be achieved.

True power is within, and it is available to you now.

– Eckhart Tolle

The inner Spirit is a divine gift of God that works day and night to reach you. And you can assist its efforts by learning to recognize spiritual realities, by accepting the truth of those realities, and by opening your heart to receive them.

Who Are You?

Ego, Self, and You

What is it that makes us human? And why are we so different from the rest of the animal kingdom? This chapter explores the nature of the mental self—the mind—and ways to take control of our thoughts. It also probes the nature of the spiritual self—the soul—and ways to improve soul growth. But first, we take a look at the *true self*—that part of us that has the *power to decide*. This is the personality, the same entity that makes that momentous decision to follow the Spirit Within.

Personality and ego are synonymous but often misunderstood. The word *ego* is simply the Latin word for *self*. It was popularized in 20th-century psychology by the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud, who used it to refer to the conscious activities of the brain, as opposed to the

unconscious activities of the *id* (instinctual brain) and the *superego* (moral brain).

Having an ego does not necessarily imply we are *egotistical*, which is having an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Nor does ego imply that we believe in the doctrine of *egoism*, a cynical philosophy that claims the chief motivation for all conscious action is individual self-interest.

Is the Ego an Illusion?

There is a continuing trend in New Age spiritual teachings and even in modern psychology that the ego, or self, is a figment of the imagination. Thus, any notion of self is either an illusion or a delusion. ⁴¹ ⁴² Such notions have deep roots in Buddhism, giving rise to psychological theories postulating that all conceptions of self—the way we perceive ourselves—are constructed realities. They are narratives about ourselves that we have come to accept as real.

There is some truth to this. But whether our ideas about ourselves are self-constructed or socially constructed, *the self is real*. When contemplating the self, we must be careful not to confuse or conflate the manifestations of mind (thoughts, feelings, emotions) with the true self—the *personality* that is you.

No doubt, our concepts about ourselves are constructed; nonetheless, it is the self that constructs the narrative about the self, and it is the self that accepts its own self-created constructs. Anything that can be known or seen can only be known or seen by the self. And any notion of enlightenment can only be to enlighten the self.

The true delusion is not the self, but rather the belief that the self is a thing independent of, or existing apart from, the rest of the universe. This misguided sentiment is reinforced by illusions of selfishness and delusions of self-importance.

Any belief in a truly independent self is a delusion because no one in this world is

entirely independent; we all rely on society and the world at large for our existence.

Whenever someone claims to have “made it on their own,” they are ignoring the obvious—that they would have had no success if not for a country’s already established infrastructure, a free economy, dedicated employees, and all the individuals who bought into their ideas or products. ⁴³

However, the self, while not entirely independent, is a separate reality, a spiritual reality. The grand illusion is self-importance, a self-centered frame of mind that cultivates a self-serving lifestyle, one that inevitably results in self-isolation.

Whenever we live a self-centered life, we separate ourselves from other selves and distance ourselves from the reality of all personal relationships. Whenever we entertain narcissistic notions of self-glorification or superiority, we increase the risk of becoming lonely, confused, and despairing. Pride in oneself is good in

moderation, but it can be self-destructive when taken too far, especially if it negates the value of others.

Our spiritual aim is not to eradicate the ego (which is impossible anyway) but rather to *integrate the self* with the reality of the universe, as the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu advised. It is coming to realize who we are as well as where and how we fit in God's universe. In other words, it is understanding our true nature and our true relationships to others, both human and divine, within the existing cosmos. See [*Way Beyond Magic*](#).

God-consciousness is equivalent to the integration of the self with the universe, and on the highest levels of spiritual reality.

– *The Urantia Book*

We are all interconnected in a cosmic system in which the parts depend on the whole and the whole relies on the parts. But despite our interdependence, we cannot deny our individual uniqueness and our powers of

free will. If anything, we should celebrate the personal and unique contributions that our selves have to offer the whole, while being mindful that any vain clamoring for selfish recognition is unrealistic in a God-centered universe.

Personality and You

As we ponder our individual selves and our inescapable relationship to the whole, the inquisitive mind must wonder—what exactly is the self? And what do we mean by personality?

In psychology, personality is commonly defined as a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, aspects we usually associate with a person's character or character traits. However, there is no generally agreed-upon definition of personality, even within psychology.

Early studies proposed that personality is a unity of individual mental traits—a psyche. Sigmund Freud proposed his personality

theory in 1923, which divided the human psyche into the three parts already mentioned—id, ego, and superego.

In his theoretical model, the ego is the mediator or *unifier* between the id (animal instincts) and the superego (moral direction). It is the conscious self operating in the tension between the id (subconscious self) and the superego (superconscious self). But since Freud's time, the paradigm of personality studies has changed, evolving into a behavioral science that tries to explain the differences in behavior from one individual to the next.

Instead of defining personality only in terms of behavior, consider an alternative concept of personality. ⁴⁴ In this unique depiction, individual behaviors and character traits are viewed as expressions of personality rather than personality per se.

Personality is not limited to associations of behavioral traits, nor is it just consciousness or the psyche. Instead, imagine your

personality as a separate entity; it is the *observant you* who overlooks and directs your mind. But you are not your mind any more than your thoughts are your brain.

Each personality is *unique and changeless*—there is no one else just like you in the entire universe of universes. It is that part of you that other people recognize, no matter how much your mind, body, or soul change over the years. Although personality in its pure form is changeless, it has the inherent ability to unite all the other parts of you that are constantly changing, such as your body, mind, and soul. Personality has the quality of *unity*, similar to the function of ego that Freud alluded to in his personality theory.

We are usually unconscious of this personal unity. Nonetheless, we think of ourselves as *having* a body, *having* a mind, or *having* a soul. We are subconsciously aware that these different parts of us are aspects of our personality. And to varying degrees, we realize these parts are not entirely

independent—they are interactive and inseparable components of ourselves.

Personality functions as a *system* that is more than the sum of its components; it is more than a collection of behavioral traits and physical qualities. Imagine the personality as an encompassing, living matrix in which body, mind, and soul are integrated components in a unified system.

While this unique matrix never changes in and of itself, it serves to *articulate and unify* the constituent parts into a working and functional whole, one that changes and evolves continuously. And the product of this working is what we perceive as human identity or character.

Another vital component of the personality matrix is the inner Spirit, which serves as your shining guide for spiritual character and behavior. This active Spirit sits at the very core of personality and is our portal to the absolute nature of God. It may not be a

personal possession as such; nevertheless, it is *your* guiding light.

Personality is a level of deified reality.

– *The Urantia Book*

Personality is a creation of Deity; it is a supermaterial reality. A physical body, therefore, is not a prerequisite for personality. Humans have personalities, but so do angels and countless other types of celestial beings. And there are different orders of personality types—they are not all the same, nor do they all have the same spiritual status.

Personality Is Aware

Personality is not the intellect, but it is aware—it has a quality that allows you to be consciously aware of your own existence. It is a gift of God that endows you with an inner sense of self and a corresponding ability to be self-conscious as well as other-

conscious; an awareness that other people are just as consciously aware as you are.

Personality awareness extends into the realm of superconsciousness, where you become conscious of your consciousness. Indeed, this is the true essence of mindfulness: being fully conscious of your body, your thoughts, and your soul, as well as other personalities, the universe around you, and God's Spirit within you.

It is this sense of self and self-consciousness that allows you to say, "I exist." This statement alone embodies a profound level of self-awareness, enabling you to see yourself. This self-awareness is an endowment that puts you far above the animal mind and further identifies you as a potential spirit being.

Personality is a distinct reality. It is not the mind because a thing cannot observe itself—the eye cannot see the eye. True enough, you can self-reflect (as in mindfulness), but it is your self that is reflecting. The very fact that

you can observe your thoughts and feelings distinguishes your personality-self from your mind. Animals have no personality (as defined here); therefore, they have no ability to observe their thoughts. Instead, they *are* their thoughts.

Personality is perhaps what Eckhart Tolle would call the “silent watcher.”⁴⁵ Or what Daniel J. Siegel alludes to when he states, “The mind has a mind of its own.”⁴⁶

The observer cannot be the thing observed;
evaluation demands some degree of
transcendence of the thing which is
evaluated.

– *The Urantia Book*

While personality is not the mind, it operates within the realm of mind. Think of your personality as your self wandering among your many thoughts and feelings. It observes these thoughts and chooses, consciously or unconsciously, among them. This is the vast mental arena in which your

personality functions, evaluates, and decides.

Make a conscious and clear separation between your personality and your thoughts and feelings—realize that you are a personality that *has* a mind. This empowering knowledge helps you to objectify your thoughts and feelings, thereby making your mind something *you control* rather than letting it control you.

Unique Attributes of Personality

Personality discriminates by its moral awareness—the ability to choose how to conduct oneself in any situation. Moral awareness, or moral insight, enables us to evaluate and choose between different goals as well as the means needed to reach them. In particular, your personality distinguishes spiritual and altruistic goals over and above animalistic or selfish ones.

A moral being... knows what he is doing,
why he is doing it, where he is going, and
how he will get there.

– *The Urantia Book*

Personality has the innate ability to communicate with other personalities as well as to understand, sympathize, and love. True enough, animals can communicate to a limited degree within their own species, but they cannot share philosophical ideas or inner experiences as humans can. It is the intelligent and communicative aspect of personality that allows us to contact spirit—even the Spirit Source of all reality.

Personality is ambitious. Embodied within this matrix of identity is the spiritual desire to master the physical universe through the mediation of mind. Without this innate drive, there would be no scientific innovation, no philosophical pursuit, no religious quest, nor any progress in civilization or its institutions.

Personality is creative. The physical brain structures and memory patterns of animals and humans are similar, but only humans have the ability to associate and recombine facts, ideas, and relationships to discover new facts, new ideas, and new relationships. It is this creative and exploratory capacity that leads to art, invention, philosophy, and ethics.

Personality is not time-constrained—it is aware of past, present, and future. Animals do not regret the past, nor do they anticipate future events. The animal mind may think and have feelings, but it is only aware of the immediate objective world, whereas human consciousness is aware of both the objective and subjective worlds, past, present, and future. Only personalities can decide what they will do before they do it.

Your Spirit Guide is the spirit nucleus of your personality. And when you allow it to govern your heart, you begin to identify with that Spirit—to become spiritual in nature. Personality, when willingly unified with

spirit, fosters spiritual insights, meaningful experiences, real achievements, and a sense of adventure— it is your individual, unique self on an ongoing, progressive spiritual journey.

Spirit is the fundamental reality of the personality experience of all creatures because God is spirit.

– *The Urantia Book*

Your Soul – What Is It?

The soul has long been recognized as a spiritual component of human life. Indeed, all major religions acknowledge the concept of a soul, which is often defined as an immaterial essence or the animating principle of an individual's life. But these are hazy concepts that say little about the true nature of the soul.

One of the most important things to know about the soul is that it is partly *your own creation*—it is your *spiritualizing self*. Just

as you have a material body (your physical self) and a mind (your intellectual self), you also have a spiritual counterpart. The soul originates from the spirit potentials of your mind, eventually emerging as a separate entity—an act of personal creation.

But this creation is not yours alone. Indeed, without the Spirit of God within you, your soul would not exist. Whenever you (personality) make a moral decision that is consistent with the Spirit Way—the guidance of your Spirit—you foster and further the growth of your soul. (see *What Does the Will of God Mean?*).

Your Spirit Teacher is continuously attempting to *spiritualize* your mind, to adjust your thoughts and foster a new being—a spirit complement—essentially a new you that can survive death. In truth, your soul is your immortal self.

From its earliest inception the soul is real; it has cosmic survival qualities.

– *The Urantia Book*

Whenever we speak of body, mind, and spirit, the spirit part of us is the soul. But this is not the same entity as the inner Spirit, which is the presence of God. Nor is the soul the personality, although personality encompasses the soul.

The soul is semi-spiritual and alive. It's a growing spirit body that intervenes between physical reality and the spiritual level of existence. Scientific inquiry and philosophical discourse cannot prove the existence of the soul but, as a morally conscious individual, you can discover it through your own spiritual experiences.

Most of us go through life unaware of the presence of our souls. But that's primarily because the soul is always with us, an integral part of us. We are so accustomed to its presence that we fail to see it as a

separate, progressing, spiritual self. But as we advance in spiritual perception, we become more aware of its distinct character.

Essentially, the degree of our spirituality is correlated with the degree of our soul consciousness. And as our soul evolves, we begin to feel an overwhelming urge to contact the Divine Presence within us.

The Soul Grows

The creation of your individual soul, as well as its continuing existence, depends on your moral (spiritual) choices. The soul is born when you make your first moral choice—*one that denotes your capacity to determine right from wrong*. It's a joint creation between you and God.

Moral choice, spiritual attainment, the ability to know God, the urge to be like God, are the characteristics of the soul.

– *The Urantia Book*

The creation of the soul in this way inspired the prophets of old to declare that we truly are children of God, true sons and daughters of a Creator Spirit. And if we accept our spiritual origins in both personality and soul, it logically follows that we are all spiritual brothers and sisters.

The soul, once created, does not remain static for our entire lives—it continually evolves as we make spiritually progressive choices. Metaphorically, the soul grows just as the material body grows, or as the mind grows in intellect and wisdom. The body grows when it is nurtured and exercised, as does the mind. The spiritual self is no exception in this regard—the more we nurture it and the more we exercise it with moral decisions, the more it progresses in both quality and quantity.

Whenever we make a decision that agrees with the Way of God, we nurture the evolution of our soul. Whenever we help others in any way, such spiritual activity exercises our soul with love. The process of

soul growth is one of harmonizing our choices with the Spirit Power within us, thereby making an eternal alliance with this gift of God.

The evolving soul is not made divine by what it does, but by what it strives to do.

– *The Urantia Book*

The Soul Reflects

The soul is *self-reflective*—a uniquely human trait. Self-reflection differs from the self-consciousness of personality. While self-consciousness provides us with self-awareness and an awareness of other selves, the self-reflection of the soul enables us to examine and evaluate ourselves, thereby objectifying our thoughts, feelings, and actions. It's the ability to examine ourselves at arm's length—to be morally mindful.

The soul is the self-reflective, truth-discerning, and spirit-perceiving part of man which forever elevates the human being above the level of the animal world.

– *The Urantia Book*

Being morally mindful is being morally self-conscious, which requires courageous and sincere self-reflection. This is an essential meditative exercise for discerning moral implications and choosing divine values. It leads to progressive soul growth and an increasingly spiritual life. See *Meditation and Contemplation*.

When aided by the Spirit of Truth, all reflective thought of a spiritual or moral nature helps us to *discern truth* in any situation and is, therefore, always linked to wisdom. The ongoing process of self-reflection and moral choosing, when done in harmony with the Way of God, opens a spiritual channel that increases the amount of divine love, wisdom, and energy we can receive.

The Soul Survives

The soul is your celestial shuttle to eternal life—your living connection to the spirit world. As we all surmise, the material body and the material brain do not survive death. But as many spiritual and religious visionaries have taught over the ages, the soul does.

The spiritual self (soul) survives death simply because it is not material, and also because it has an eternal purpose; namely, that the soul, along with the personality, goes on to form the nucleus of our new, immortal selves.

The soil of the evolving soul is human and material, but the destiny of this combined creature of mind and spirit is spiritual and divine.

– *The Urantia Book*

Whether or not you choose life after death is your own prerogative. But one thing is certain—without a developed soul, there will

be nothing of you to resurrect on the worlds to come. And even if you do possess a mature soul, you can still choose not to go on. If you do not wish to survive, your personal identity will simply dissolve in the great pool of universe energy. However, if you choose to move forward, you can fully anticipate an amazing life of eternal wonder!

But don't expect your new life to be a bed of ease. You start just where you left off. There is no jumping the queue. All that we achieve in this life or the next will be through our own efforts and experience, not by some magical transformation into a perfect being.

A complaining soul complains even in
Paradise.

– Baha'u'llah

Nothing is more important for the moment than what you can accomplish in this life and on this world. Wherever and whenever you are, nothing is more important than *how you live your life at any given moment.*

Your Connection with God

When we try to understand ourselves and to grasp the meaning of life, nothing helps us more than the simple realization that we are indeed spiritual children of a spiritual Father. This is an essential attitude of mind because it is a *profound acknowledgment of truth* that opens the door to heightened spiritual insight.

We reinforce the truth of this relationship whenever we ponder our spiritual possessions, such as personality, mind, and soul, as well as the fact that our souls are the creation of a joint venture with God. All of this points to the spiritual truth that we are indeed creatures of a Creator God.

God is the Divine Parent of all freewill beings. And anyone who has been a parent or can identify with the love and care of children is keenly aware of the depth and scope of this unselfish, unconditional love. It is a divine love we can easily cherish.

In an ideal world, a child doesn't need to do anything to make their parents love them. Similarly, we do not have to do anything to make God love us since his love shines on all of us at every moment. True, we can destroy ourselves by our own choices, and we can reject his infinite love if we so wish, as any child can. But it is always there whenever we are ready and willing to receive it.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God,
are the children of God.

– Paul of Tarsus

Prepare yourself for a spiritual experience unlike any other when you wholeheartedly come to believe that you are, in truth, a spiritual child of a Spirit Creator. It is a truth that will transform you, bringing you peace of mind and inner happiness. Indeed, the *first step* in your divine journey is to imagine, accept, and believe this truth. It is an essential belief that leads you to the very

gateway of an amazing and eternal spiritual adventure.

By accepting that you are a spiritual child of God, you come to understand the true nature of your relationship with such a magnificent and almighty Power. Only the trusting and humble can ever hope to approach the infinite, eternal, and majestic presence of the Universal Father.

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

When Jesus tells us to become like little children so that we may enter the spiritual realm, he's not suggesting we should be childish in our approach to spirituality, but rather that we humbly recognize and accept our true parent-child relationship with God. It is a relationship of love and understanding, one that combines an adult's resolute courage and determination with a

child's wholehearted faith and trust in the goodness and wisdom of a Divine Parent.

We Are More Than Mind

Despite decades of research in neurology, psychology, and philosophy, the true nature of the human mind remains largely unexplored. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that mind consists of the cognitive faculties that, among many other tasks, allow us to feel, think, reason, discriminate, and imagine.

Previously, we looked at the possibility there is more to mind than mind alone. The qualities of personality, the soul, the Divine Spirit, and even our material bodies, all come into play within the mind. Together, they determine self-consciousness, self-reflection, self-evaluation, moral decisions, and spiritual desires—even the ability to know God.

Delving into the intricate workings of the mind or an in-depth exploration of

psychological research is beyond the scope of this writing. Nonetheless, there are a few relevant observations to make.

Mind is Malleable

Research by Daniel J. Siegel of the UCLA School of Medicine suggests, among other things, that mind is not spatially limited to the body or the brain, and that there exists an extended mental connectivity between individual minds—that mind is relational. ⁴⁷

This extended connectivity is a quality of both personality and mind and suggests that there is much more to the human condition than material science will admit. But more importantly to the objectives here, Siegel's research also demonstrates that minds are *manageable*. While this is not an entirely new concept, it has seldom been evaluated in an experimental context.

Mind is the creator of everything. You should therefore guide it to create only good.

– Yogananda

Mind is not only manageable, but also *malleable*. In science, the brain's ability to reprogram and rebuild itself is known as *neuroplasticity*. In this process, the brain physically adapts to thoughts and feelings by creating new neurons and forming new neural networks. These physical changes can actually repair dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behaving.⁴⁸ In other words, you can literally mold your material brain by means of active thought and repetitive actions (see *Spiritual Habits for the Soul*).

Communion with God also changes the physical structure of the brain. Two neuroscientists, Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman, maintain that a daily routine of prayer and worship permanently alters brain structure and function (*How God Changes Your Brain*, 2010). This is a proven way to

physically and spiritually recreate yourself, thereby becoming more enlightened, empowered, and improved.

Mind Is the Gateway

We take control of our thoughts through the power of personality awareness, which is simply the ability to observe our mental activities (mindfulness). With spiritual guidance, the personality can train the mind to be positive and progressive. We begin by acknowledging and accepting only those thoughts that are loving, truthful, good, and beautiful. These thoughts motivate and direct our vital, soul-changing choices.

Mind is a divine gift—it is one of God's precious endowments. But although mind, or consciousness, is spiritual in origin, it is not spirit. It is, however, our door to the spirit dimension—the spirit phase of existence; it is the medium through which we harmonize our lives with that of spirit life.

While the mind is not the seat of the spiritual nature, it is indeed the gateway thereto.

– *The Urantia Book*

Through the power and presence of your personality, learn to engage your mind as a good friend. Teach it new ways of thinking by adopting an instructive attitude of kindness, respect, and love. If you find your mind unruly, you will have to be patient, persuasive, gentle, and persistent in your efforts.

By being aware of our thoughts, we can actively teach our minds to become spiritually mature, adopt a graceful poise, be selfless, love others, be patient and forbearing. And just as importantly, we do our best to avoid unrealistic fantasies, harmful thoughts, and childish emotions.

Idealize the positive. Train your mind to remember the good and worthwhile events of your life. Recollect the great moments you shared with family and good friends, and use

these to construct a gallery of positive mental images you can draw on for your personal betterment and enlightenment.

Training the mind begins by understanding that mind and consciousness are things we possess, but they do not represent who we are in entirety. The mind is a tool at our disposal. We can focus it, shape it, and direct it any way we choose.

All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts.

– James Allen

Clear Your Mind

There are always challenges and problems to solve. We cannot evade the difficulties, responsibilities, and duties of everyday living. Instead, we muster courage, step forward, take up the gauntlet, and face our daily challenges with faith and determination. This is the Spirit Way.

We minimize our disappointments by not expecting too much from others. And if we expect social institutions or governments to live up to our cherished ideals, we simply set ourselves up for even more disappointment.

Instead of complaining about the present, we try to do something about it. Instead of regretting the past, we learn from our mistakes. And instead of worrying about the future, we make plans. Complaints, regrets, worry, and even guilt are not spiritual states of mind.

There ain't no future in the past.

– *Vince Gill and Carl Jackson*

Let your Spirit Teacher orient you in a broader, universal context as you evaluate your thoughts with reason, logic, wisdom, and spiritual insight. God is always trying to assist you, and all you need to do is become conscious of that help and be willing to receive it. Trust in the goodness, wisdom,

love, and power of the Spirit to transform you—and it will.

For more on this topic, see *Tame Your Mind*.

God Consciousness

The first step to God consciousness is getting to know *the divine nature of God*. This knowledge, as imperfect as it may be, lays the groundwork for the next step, which is becoming consciously aware of the presence of the Spirit living within your mind.

Although the full character of God is far beyond our grasp, and despite the limitations of mind, it behooves us to stretch our imaginations to the uttermost limits of comprehension. By doing so, we not only deepen our understanding, acceptance, and love of the divine nature but also improve our reception of the spiritual gifts of God.

When it comes to knowing God, we cannot judge the divine nature solely based on humanity's minimal knowledge, limited awareness, or religious doctrines. No matter how much we think we know God, no matter how much we grasp the true nature of this First Great Source, there will always be so

much more to know. Having said that, we do not need to know everything about God to achieve God consciousness.

Getting to know God begins by understanding that God is the *First Source* of all things—the primal source of all reality. Indeed, except for God, there would be no such thing as reality. God is the Supernal Ancestor of all things—the limitless power at the center of all creation—beginningless, endless, timeless, and spaceless.

God is the only stationary, self-contained, and changeless being in the whole universe of universes.

– *The Urantia Book*

There are many concepts of God to contemplate. Becoming familiar with some of these helps to raise our minds to superconscious levels of God consciousness (see the section below, *Essential Concepts of God*).

God Awareness

Consciousness is a state of awareness associated with self-consciousness—it is our experience of *self* as well as our awareness of something within ourselves. It is this awareness of something within us that is the beginning of true God consciousness—an awareness of the presence of God. It is a consciousness that goes far beyond thoughts or words.

Our growing awareness of the Spirit Within relies on our intellectual capacity to know God—it is a *consciousness of divinity* that unfolds on increasingly progressive levels of realization. Anyone of average mind has the capacity for God consciousness. It is only our individual depth of understanding or comprehension that varies.

As an illustration, a swaddling infant may be completely unaware she is enclosed in a crib or in a room but, as she grows, she begins to recognize the crib and the room as separate

entities and, as she begins to move around, she notices other rooms, each one with a specific purpose, such as one for sleeping, one for eating, and another for entertainment. Later, she realizes that all the rooms are part of her house and are contained within it. And later still, as she experiences life outside the house, she sees that her house is just one house on a street with many houses.

But she also becomes aware, perhaps unconsciously, that the house is more than just a house. It is also a home that carries meaning, a place where she learns to appreciate different values, a dwelling where she learns duty and loyalty to family, and a community where she learns about social interactions and greater morality. In other words, the house connotes *meaning and value* in both the intellectual and spiritual states of her consciousness.

At each stage in this venture of consciousness, there is a gradual increase in the understanding, meaning, and value of

the house and, therefore, a greater consciousness of the house in the context of the whole. Each stage of consciousness is a more comprehensive level of reality perception, but each level of perception along the way remains *relatively true*. This step-by-step process of increasing consciousness is the same process we go through in our attainment of God consciousness.

Just as the young girl became aware of various levels of house reality, so it is that we become aware of various levels of God reality. We first come to understand the *idea* of God, a purely intellectual pursuit that any child can grasp. Secondly, we begin to realize the *ideal* of God—a more advanced recognition of the true nature and attributes of God. And last, through personal experience, we come to realize the *spirit reality* of God, a consciousness of the actual presence of the Spirit Within.

To Love Is to Know

It's easy to judge others prematurely because of their inconsiderate actions or rash words, but when we *understand* why they act the way they do—when we consider their circumstances in life and what they may have endured or suffered, we become more compassionate and merciful. And just as we come to love others by getting to know them, the same can be said of God. By understanding the true nature of the Divine Source, we come to admire and adore this nature.

But with some distinction, we can never truly *know* God until we first learn to *love* this supernal Being with all our heart, mind, and soul. Our reverent love for this eternal Source of Love opens our minds to the true nature of God and thereby heightens our grasp of God consciousness.

Whoever does not love, does not know God,
because God is love.

– John 4

God consciousness, therefore, goes hand-in-hand with our increasing ability to know God through love. We are simply returning the extraordinary love that God lavishes on us, thereby forging a profound love relationship with our Creator. This love is real. It is not an artificial feeling of euphoria. Neither is the presence of God a figment of your imagination. The truth is, you can be as certain about the reality of God as you can about the reality of any other person in your life. *It's a very real experience.*

But for all that, many have difficulty loving a parental God or giving any kind of adoration to a Creator Spirit. The reasons for this vary, but in some cases, our aversions can be traced to poor parent-child relationships. Children naturally draw strong correlations

between their earthly parents and an ideal heavenly Parent.

The effects of poor parent-child relationships run deep, making it extremely challenging for victims of misguided or abusive parenting to picture a loving, heavenly Guardian. Even much later in life, it's difficult for such wounded souls to dismiss or even discuss their hurtful, formative memories.

What God is to the world, parents are to their children.

– *Philo of Alexandria*

But any confounded or misguided thoughts about the true nature of God must be resolved if we wish to progress in the spirit. The truth is that the personalities of our parents have *nothing to do* with the personality of God. Family metaphors are used only because they best represent the truth about our relationship with God. It is a

way of creating a desired ideal that exemplifies perfect family relationships.

Fortunately, over time, as fathers and mothers become wiser, more caring, and more loving, their children will be better equipped to envision a wise, caring, and loving heavenly Father.

All peoples and nations are of one family, the children of one Father, and should be to one another as brothers and sisters.

– Baha'u'llah

God Is Someone

An important step in God consciousness is the realization that God is *someone*, not something. One of the most profound realizations we can have is that God, as the First Universal Personality, is a *personal being*. God's personality, along with his precious gift of personality to us, is the very thing that allows us to make an intimate connection with this Spirit Being.

God is not a person as we commonly conceive of one, but this infinite Source is a person in the sense that we can come to know him in a meaningful way, just as we can come to know our next-door neighbor. God is personal not just because he is intelligent and conscious but also because he can know and be known, love and be loved.

While God must be infinitely more than a personality, he cannot be anything less.

– *The Urantia Book*

As we discovered in the previous chapter, possessing a personality is what allows us to recognize and interact with other persons—it is the ability to have intellectual contact, to communicate. We are conscious beings who can share individual life experiences, discuss personal problems, love each other with unselfish love, and know each other on a profound level of understanding.

What is meant by a personal God is a God who is conscious of his creation, who has a mind, a will, a purpose.

– Shoghi Effendi

Knowing God as a person is not something we can ever discover through reason or logic alone. An eternal and infinite God who is the source of all reality cannot be limited to the confines of human logic or the fetters of human philosophy. Nor can there be any logical limit to the scope of God's manifestations. Nevertheless, we can increasingly realize the truth of this Divine Person through *our very own religious experiences*—through spiritual communion and spiritual insight.

As the creator of all things, God embraces the personal, the nonpersonal, the prepersonal, and the superpersonal, or any other state of personality you can imagine. God must have a personal side in order to interact or commune with personal beings.

The Creator of a universe is much more than just a spiritual force or universal intellect.

God is far more than the thing he creates. If we envision God as an energy or force, then how does this inanimate energy express love? *Love is a personal act*, a feeling of devotion between two or more persons. The Divine Spirit is a personality with whom we can converse, a friend to whom we can reveal the innermost desires of our hearts, a being we can love.

Only a person can love and be loved.

– *The Urantia Book*

God is the First Person and the creator of all personalities in the entire universe. Our experience of God consciousness is our experience of this Divine Person. It is a personal experience of an intimate relationship; it is the love of a trusting child for an all-wise, Divine Parent. It is this faithful, trusting, and humble attitude of

mind that makes it possible for us to approach God, to know God, and to love God (see *What Is Spiritual Faith?*).

Whenever we speak of contacting God, we are actually contacting the Divine Presence within us, which is our direct connection to the Eternal Personality at the center of all things. And while this Spirit of God is not a person *per se*, it does *fully represent* the personality and essence of God—it is of God. While it may be prepersonal in this sense, it exemplifies the perfect personality of an infinite and eternal God.

The divine spark within us exhibits the nature and attributes of God in every way imaginable to a human mind. It is a living, conscious, and thinking Spirit entity that embodies the divinity of God. It is the cosmic window through which we glimpse the realities of Deity.

God is Your Divine Parent

Without a doubt, many religious views are unreasonable, but this is not to say that *all* religious ideas are unreasonable. In all fairness, we could just as easily say that many current views and stereotypes *about* God and religion are equally unreasonable.

We could begin with the portrayal of God as a divine father, an image primarily emphasized in Christianity but also in line with Judaism and Islam. To those who lobby for a gender-neutral world, such a view of God may appear unreasonable, if not disagreeable. But keep in mind that the concept of God as a spirit father is both an analogy and a metaphor, best understood within a historical and cultural context.

Long before the time of Jesus, male authority dominated almost all societies to the degree that it affected the entire framework of religious and administrative thought. In this long era of male dominance,

people envisioned the supreme God as a male disciplinary king—as a lord and master, yet with human frailties and susceptible to unchecked emotions, such as anger or jealousy. God was to be feared and obeyed as though he were a fickle but all-powerful sovereign.

But Jesus of Nazareth was the first religious teacher to widely advocate God as a compassionate Father—a *Divine Parent* rather than a heartless dictator. Instead of fearing God as king and master, Jesus urged us to love and revere God as the all-loving and all-wise Father of all personalities—a divine Creator.

Above all, his revelation of the divine, parental love of God to the people of that time (and this time) was an improved and more accurate vision of the true character of God. It was not only a declaration of God's affectionate attitude *toward us*, but also defined the nature of God's relationship *with us*. Thus, Jesus portrayed the heavenly Creator as a loving, wise, and caring parent.

Rather than someone to be slavishly obeyed and feared, Jesus revealed a friendly, loving, and compassionate God—someone to be followed willingly and happily, someone we can love in return. This is the critical analogy—that God loves us with the same deep devotion and unconditional love that all good parents have for their children—not that God is an earthly, paternalistic father figure, but instead that our Creator loves *as a perfect father would love*.

While Jesus portrayed the love of God in this way, he was well aware that the Eternal Source of All Reality is much more than a loving father or mother. But when it comes to any human understanding of our relationship to God, the notion of divine, parental love is the best analogy.

Even though God loves with a fatherly love, it is not reasonable to assume that the Divine Source is either a man or a woman, male or female, masculine or feminine. The creature is not the Creator and, as the First Cause of all things, God created gender.

God must, therefore, be just as maternal as he is paternal. Nonetheless, terms like God the Father, God the Mother, or sons and daughters of God are powerful family metaphors intended to impart the highest ideals of parental love within a spiritual family.

Essential Concepts of God

When we examine the many works of spiritual authors, mystics, sages, and prophets appearing through the ages, there is some consensus about the inherent attributes of God (as perceived by the human mind). Summarizing all these works is beyond the scope of this writing, but it's good to make ourselves familiar with as many of these essential spiritual concepts as we can. By contemplating and embracing the higher ideas and ideals of God, we can raise our thoughts to a superconscious level of spiritual insight and God consciousness.

Reach beyond your space-time-limited consciousness to contemplate the supernal nature of God (see also *Venerate the Source*):

- God is the First Cause of all things.
- God is eternal—always was and always will be.
- God is self-existent—the only thing not created.
- God is life and the source of all life.
- God is spirit.
- God is the infinite power upholding the universe.
- God is the First Personality.
- God is love and the endless source of all love.
- God is truth and the divine source of all truth.
- God is beautiful and the divine source of all beauty.
- God is good and the ultimate source of all goodness.

- God is your friend.
- God is your destiny.

For time-space creatures such as us, it's almost impossible to imagine things existing outside the movement of time and the boundaries of space. But a useful meditative exercise is to imagine a fictional beginning when only one single entity existed. This is the I AM, the absolute, infinite, eternal, volitional, and intelligent Power behind all creation—the Source of all spirit, all life, all love, and a near infinite universe.

This cosmos of the Infinite I AM is therefore endless, limitless, and all-inclusive—timeless, spaceless, and unqualified.

– *The Urantia Book*

God Is the Source of All Goodness

The divine goodness of God is an inseparable part of the personality of God. We discover the full extent of this goodness in the spiritual world of our personal religious

experiences. Indeed, it is our personal realization of the greatness and goodness of God that compels us to love and trust the Divine Source. And it inspires us to be good to others.

God is so positively good that there is absolutely no place in him for negative evil.

– *The Urantia Book*

God Is the Source of All Love

Divine love is an intelligent, wise, compassionate, and farseeing love. God loves each of us as an individual child in a vast heavenly family. This love is given to us freely so that we can share it freely with others.

When man loses sight of the love of a personal God, the kingdom of God becomes merely the kingdom of good.

– *The Urantia Book*

God is the Source of All Truth

God is absolute truth, and a life in the spirit is an eternal search for this higher truth. Spiritual beings live truthful lives because truth is a divine reality permeating the entire spiritual universe.

How can we know any truth about spirituality, or even religion? In the physical world, scientific facts, reason, and logic are practical ways to assess truth. But when it comes to spiritual truth, experience, judgment, wisdom, and insight provide the best answers.

Living truth is dynamic and can only enjoy an experiential existence in the human mind.

– *The Urantia Book*

God is the Source of All Happiness

There is absolutely nothing negative in God. The more we identify with this joyful, creative energy, the more positive, kind, and

cheerful we become—the more Godlike we become.

Negativity is not a spiritual reality. Clear away all negative thoughts about God and the destiny of humanity. All research suggests that life on this planet is constantly improving, even though it still has a long way to go (see *The Spiritual Value of Thankfulness*).

Happiness with God is genuine. Pretending to be happy and being overly optimistic are not sincere spiritual attitudes. We acknowledge all things honestly, while maintaining a cheerful faith that, given time and effort, great things will be achieved.

The highest happiness is indissolubly linked
with spiritual progress.

– *The Urantia Book*

God Is Here Now

God lives in the present moment within all of us, and to commune with this Spirit, we

too must live in the present. The notion of an “eternal now” is common to Eastern religions as well as Christianity. Augustine of Hippo, a religious philosopher, envisioned “an ever-present eternity” 1,600 years ago. ⁴⁹

For the past is not now and the future is not yet.

– Augustine of Hippo

Indeed, living spontaneously in the present is a distinguishing feature of God consciousness and, therefore, an essential objective of the God experience. But this works only when we allow ourselves to be directed by the Spirit.

However, too much concentration on an eternal present should not lead us to ignore the lessons of the past or the possibilities of the future. We cannot escape the fact that the eternal now is a consequence of an eternal past as well as the foundation of an eternal future.

Study the past if you would define the
future.

– Confucius

Living in the moment means living an unconstrained life in which our thoughts are open to spiritual guidance and free of stereotypes, conventions, and preconceptions. But spontaneity does not mean being impetuous or careless.

It is an interesting fact that our minds are not entirely bound by time. Anyone who has had a premonition or dream of the future will attest to this. In 2015, a YouGov survey of 2,300 participants found that 30 percent of women and 19 percent of men had dreams that anticipated or predicted a future event. ⁵⁰ This is one more example of the timeless, spiritual nature of human beings.

What the Spirit Says

When you become God-conscious, you realize that your Spirit Teacher is continually trying to communicate with you. It is doing all it can to awaken you to spirit realities and to guide you on a path of spiritual thinking and spiritual behavior. Its divine objective is to transform you into a spiritual being without interfering with your free will.

Most religions recognize the positive, inner workings of this guiding Spirit, which forever encourages you to walk a spiritual path—to live a virtuous life. And there are many ways to achieve this.

Hinduism encourages its followers to follow the Three (or Four) Paths to God, which include devotion, work, knowledge, and mind training. Confucianism advises its devotees to follow the Five Virtues: benevolence, honesty, knowledge, faithfulness, and correct behavior. And in Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path extols

right speech, right intention, right understanding, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

In Christianity, followers are exhorted to live according to the will of God, a path not as clearly defined, but a useful parallel would be the “fruits of the spirit,” which are nine attributes of character observed in those who follow God’s guidance—love, joy, peace, tolerance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But there is much more to it than that (see *What Does the Will of God Mean?*).

Underlying all these religious traditions is the belief that living a dutiful and moral life—following a virtuous path—is what constitutes a spiritual life. But this life must be more than *acting out* virtues in a pretentious manner. The best approach is to make an honest, genuine, and unequivocal attempt to follow the directions of the indwelling Spirit. Walking the Spirit Path is always more than just doing something—it is

being something. It is being good, being truthful, being patient, being graceful, and so forth.

We make progress by following the guidance of the Spirit Within because we are not yet perfectly spiritual and, therefore, possess no inherent or spontaneous spiritual wisdom. We simply ask for divine direction in our lives, and then our task is to be still and receptive, to listen and learn.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says.

– Revelation 2

God is trying to spiritualize our thinking, not control it. We may not be entirely conscious of the process because it occurs primarily in the *superconscious* realms of the mind. Nonetheless, we need to give our conscious consent for this Divine Guide to function. With our permission and cooperation, the Spirit can achieve considerably more than it could in a stubborn or reluctant mind.

While your spiritualization may be an unconscious process, the proof of this superconscious spiritual activity is in your personal religious growth—your transformation into a caring and helpful person who is attuned to the Spirit Within and completely dedicated to a life of goodness, beauty, and truth.

By tuning in and harmonizing with divinity, you are refreshed, comforted, and inspired. Everyday challenges, rather than being insurmountable barriers to your progress, become unique opportunities for you to express your spirituality with love.

Never underestimate the power of the Spirit to adjust your thoughts and transform your character.

God is not the mere invention of man's idealism; he is the very source of all such superanimal insights and values.

– *The Urantia Book*

Divine Values & Meanings

A spiritual life requires spiritual goals, and such goals are defined by what we value in life. The values we assign to things, people, and events are important because they determine not only our priorities but also how we judge the world around us.

Even so, things have value and meaning only within the scope of human experience, spiritual or not. That is to say, they have no value or meaning except for those we give them. Values do not exist in a purely materialistic and animalistic world, nor are they inherent in the sciences, mathematics, or any avenue of scientific research. The facts of science, as well as historical events, have no intrinsic value in and of themselves. Meanings and values are mental constructs, but they are real nonetheless—they are subjective, experiential, and supermaterial realities. Of all visible life on this planet, only humans are capable of attributing meaning

and value to any aspect of physical, mental, or spiritual reality. This capacity alone is enough to demonstrate our spiritual roots.

Humans recognize the meanings of symbols, which is why we can master a complex language, use mathematical equations, or comprehend the meaning of meanings. The ability to recognize and use symbols is indicative of self-consciousness, reflective thinking, and intellectual insight—mental qualities that are not only superanimal but also supermaterial and supernatural—they are spiritual.

The meanings and values we ascribe to things, actions, and events strongly influence our goals and motivations in life. But, like everything else in an ever-changing life, our perceptions change too. The things we valued in our childhood are not necessarily the things we value later in life. And things that were meaningful to us when we were teenagers may not be as meaningful when we later become parents ourselves.

Spirituality enhances the ability to discover beauty in things, recognize truth in meanings, and discover goodness in values.

– *The Urantia Book*

The Meaning of a Spiritual Life

We can look at the meaning of a thing from different perspectives. One way is to look at the meaning of a word, such as its definition in a dictionary. Another is to try to decipher the meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or essay—what someone is trying to say. And another is to interpret the meaning of a thing by its relation to something else, such as the meaning of its existence.

Using the dictionary approach, we are simply trying to understand the common interpretation of a word. We wish to understand how the word is used, defined, or explained. We may, for instance, wish to understand faith, the soul, personality, or spirituality. Such meanings are important because we cannot truly grasp what someone

is trying to say unless we have common ground.

In addition to various definitions of words, there are also differing levels of meaning depending on the object, or context, of a sentence. We could say, for example, “I love chocolate ice cream” or “I love my child.” Both examples are typical uses of the word *love*, but each embodies a different level of meaning. If I ask which level of love, or expression of love, is the most meaningful to you, most of us would choose the love of a child over that of chocolate ice cream, especially if you have ever been a parent.

However, when we ask a question such as, “What is the meaning of life?”, we are not concerned with the dictionary meaning. We are asking, “What is life’s purpose?” or “Why do we exist?” We are asking for the meaning of life in relation to the entirety of existence—does it have an ultimate value, purpose, or objective? From a spiritual perspective, these are the kinds of meanings we wish to explore.

Questions about the meaning of life may sound like tired clichés, but nothing is more depressing than a life without meaning. Such inquiries have long been a topic of philosophical discussion, and the study could fill whole libraries. But to make a very long story very short, if there is any purpose to human existence, it is impossible for us mere mortals to know what it is unless it is revealed to us from on high. We did not create ourselves and, therefore, we cannot possibly know if there is any ultimate intention for our existence.

This leads us to conclude that any satisfactory answer to the meaning of life requires reference to a universal, personal, and intentional Agent that must have existed before, and is independent of, the existence of human life itself. In other words, the ultimate meaning of life can be answered only with reference to a Supreme Being. ⁵²

This leaves us with two avenues of thought. The first is that there is no higher Being, and

life is a cosmic accident, so we will never know if life has any meaning. The second is that there is a greater Being who created life and reveals that life is meaningful—that we have a meaningful purpose and a meaningful destiny.

In the first instance, we can only conclude that, without divine purpose, all human conduct is motivated by self-interest (cynicism). And without divine values, we are encouraged to think that all values are relative and therefore unfounded; in other words, that existence is senseless and useless (nihilism). Both cynicism and nihilism are materialist philosophies that deny the purpose and potential of a spiritual life. But it comes as no surprise that these gloomy outlooks often lead to depression and anxiety. ⁵³

But nihilism ultimately proves to be a shortsighted view of reality because even a nihilist cannot negate the reality of his own thoughts. And if his beliefs, values, and

thoughts are unfounded and unreal, then his philosophy of nihilism would also be unreal.

If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning.

– C. S. Lewis

The second avenue of thought—that there is a Supreme Being and life is purposeful and meaningful—cannot be substantiated (objectively) any more than the view that life is meaningless. But it is a truth that we can recognize and experience in our inner lives.

Those who know God have experienced the fact of his presence.

– *The Urantia Book*

Having a faithful optimism in the divine plan and in the goodness of the Divine Source leads to inner peace, confidence, self-esteem, and happiness. ⁵⁴ And this is true for the simple reason that it is *in harmony with the*

truth. Even though we may not know the full particulars of why our lives are meaningful, we can rest assured that there is some greater and divine purpose to our existence on this earth.

Believing that life is meaning-full is a way of filling our lives with meaning, specifically spiritual meaning, which is itself derived from spirit contact and spirit guidance. But not all philosophers agree with this view. Some maintain that people who believe they are spirit-led are simply avoiding responsibility for their behavior by giving themselves up to an ultimate authority like God, who then controls them or gives them answers. ⁵⁵

But if we follow this line of reasoning, then taking advice from any source—lawyers, doctors, or psychologists—would be an attempt to avoid responsibility for our actions. The truth is, we are *accepting* responsibility for the course of our lives by looking up to the wisdom and counsel of the

spiritual realm in our search for meaningful answers.

Discovering new meanings is not limited to finding new facts or having unique experiences. It's more about discovering new meanings in the everyday facts and experiences *already well known to us*. It is the delightful discovery of profound spiritual meaning in a mundane world.

Consider the possibility of finding new spiritual meanings in marriage, family, or rearing children. Look for enhanced meanings in your daily work, in leisure time, or when helping others. Discover more transcendent meanings in commonplace words such as honesty, goodness, patience, tolerance, loyalty, truth, and courage.

Grow spiritually and help others to do so. It
is the meaning of life.

– Leo Tolstoy

One spiritual exercise is to consider the different levels of meaning associated with the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like them to treat you. At a low level of understanding, a person who likes having his back scratched may think he should scratch the backs of others. But on a more sublime level of understanding, this individual realizes he should treat everyone with respect and kindness, just as he would like to be treated. And on an even more profound level of spiritual meaning, he realizes he should treat others as God would treat them, as a Divine Parent treats them—with love, patience, compassion, and understanding.

The Value of a Spiritual Life

Meanings and values shape our decision-making, which in turn determines the course of our lives. If we honestly believe, for instance, that life is all about money, then

money will be our prime goal as well as our prime value-motivator in life.

How the love of money influences our individual values is reflected in the dark humor of the “Ferengi Rules of Acquisition” as enacted in the *Star Trek* film series. Some of these rules are: trust is the biggest liability—a man is only worth the sum of his possessions—exploitation begins at home—never place friendship above profit.

To a moral mind, these quips may sound humorous, but to a mind dominated by greed and selfishness, they could make sense. The caveat is that any value system dominated solely by material gain or a self-centered lifestyle cannot persist for long in a progressive civilization because it doesn't work for the benefit of all. It's not only unreasonable, but also spiritually unreal.

As we have seen, some philosophers reject meanings and values not only because they are not objectively real (like a rock), but also because they are *relative*. The fundamental

argument in relativism is that, because we all see things differently, there can be no absolute value or truth, only relative ones. The danger with this approach is that anything goes—one value, no matter how immoral, is as legitimate as another. It is a dismal view that tends to devalue human life.

In the God experience, we fully acknowledge that truth is relative. But the crucial difference is that we also believe in the reality of absolute values—the divine values inherent in the nature of God—*truth, beauty, goodness, and love*. These are the absolute values and ideals of perfection that make up our spiritual framework; they are the yardsticks by which we measure our thoughts and actions. Divine values are not an arbitrary framework of moral codes; instead, they provide the very foundation for all moral codes.

The first principle of value that we need to rediscover is this: that all reality hinges on moral foundations.

– Martin Luther King Jr.

The human mind does not create spiritual values; it can only discover, recognize, interpret, and choose among them. No doubt, our differing perceptions of value are subjective and relative, but this does not detract from their absolute reality in God. For instance, even though our perception of the physical universe is limited and relative, few would deny that it exists.

Most of us have a good grasp of divine values, even if we are unaware of them. And this is due to the untiring work of our Spirit Guides. But we can reach even deeper realizations through spiritual communion—meditation, contemplation, prayer, and worship (see *Spirit Contact Methods*).

As used here, *communion* does not refer to a Christian sacrament but rather to

conventional meanings such as intimate fellowship, rapport, or sharing. Other meanings include cooperation, communication, interaction, and togetherness.

Communion with God is no more than sharing your life with the Divine Source within you. And by this simple act, you gain a greater appreciation for the divine values of spiritual existence. You begin to see life and the universe through spiritual eyes, which allows you to transcend the material world to some degree and thereby, to re-evaluate yourself, your family, and your society more objectively. Your new spiritual evaluations, in turn, provide you with new direction.

A highly developed values system is like a compass. It serves as a guide to point you in the right direction when you are lost.

– Idowu Koyenikan

Four Divine Values

We can achieve a remarkable degree of spiritual growth by gauging our thoughts, feelings, and actions with four divine values—**truth, beauty, goodness, and love**. At first glance, these appear simple and obvious. But it requires sincere self-reflection and deep contemplation to make them integral components of our spiritual lives.

Divine values are not naturally inherent in the physical brain, nor are they a part of the physical universe; nonetheless, they are realities—they are *divine realities*. These realities originate in the Divine Source of all reality and come to our minds through the inner workings of the Spirit.

Cultivating divine values in our thoughts provides us with a moral framework that guides our decisions in everyday life; they are a means of making our highest ideals a living reality. Such vital decisions augment

our soul growth and open our minds to profound spiritual insights and a higher sense of God consciousness.

Contemplating these four divine values and making them an indispensable part of our inner lives is a highly effective way of coming into harmony with the nature and character of the Spirit within. This is how we become spiritually mature.

It's easy to gloss over these values by assuming we know what they mean. But our spiritual objective is to delve deep into each one and consider how we can integrate them into our own personalities.

Truth, beauty, goodness, and love are viewed differently by different people, so let's have a look at these values from a spiritual viewpoint.

Truth Is More Than Fact

Truth is a divine value that can be discerned in mind and expressed in life by all who remain open-minded—open to new

knowledge, new meanings, new values, and new truths. The Spirit of Truth lives within you, and it will guide you to the truth if your mind is open.

Those who have failed to work toward the truth have missed the purpose of living.

– Buddha

Truth is more than mere knowledge; an accumulation of facts. Facts may be true, but they are not necessarily the whole truth because, by themselves, they tell us little about patterns, relationships, and associations that may exist among and between facts. Discerning truth is an attempt to evaluate the parts as well as the cosmological whole—to grasp the big picture.

There are many kinds of facts, such as scientific facts, historical facts, and social facts. Each fact is an isolated, static bit of knowledge, whereas truth is dynamic,

discovering relationships and associations between these fact-bits.

For example, archaeological evidence for the evolution of human societies includes artifacts, structures, and geological data. But in and of themselves, they do not tell us much. Only when we interpret these facts in the context of their spatial and temporal associations can we determine relationships, social and economic functions, and how societies have changed over time.

Truth can be absolute, but in a time-space universe, it is relative; it is conditioned by continuously changing facts and events. Truth is flexible, yet progressive—it adapts and evolves as humanity’s awareness of the cosmos evolves. Our ‘truths’ will always be relative to the extent of our knowledge, experience, insight, and wisdom.

Nonetheless, there are valid statements of absolute truth, such as “gravity attracts” or “wheels are round.” And there are many absolute truths we can understand, such as

“I exist,” or “God is love.” Even if we disagree with specific statements such as these, any argument that claims there is no such thing as absolute truth is, in itself, a claim to absolute truth.

Even though heaven and earth shall pass away, my words of truth shall not.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

Goodness Is More Than Being Nice

God is supremely good and the source of all goodness. By venerating goodness, you become good—you come to understand, to love, and to help others whenever and wherever you can. There is goodness in love, goodness in beauty, goodness in truth, and goodness in a spirit-led life.

Goodness is inherent in the personality of God—a goodness manifesting as parental love, compassion, and forgiveness. Through spiritual experiences, we soon realize the truth of divine goodness. And this insight

into the infinite and eternal goodness of Divinity is what inspires us to be good.

Being good means that, no matter what troubles we encounter, no matter how evil others may be, no matter what injustice we suffer, we always return goodness. Being good despite all circumstances is a reliable indicator of our spiritual progress.

Goodness begets goodness, but to the one who is truly good, evil also begets goodness.

– Lao Tzu

Beauty Is Spirit Deep

Beauty is a divine value because Spirit life is the epitome of beauty—there is nothing more beautiful in all creation than the perfection of divinity—the beauty of God. Beauty comes to us in many forms, not just in the marvel of nature but also in our own artistic creations. Yet notions of beauty far transcend the material world; beauty of thought, beauty of action, beauty of spirit,

and the beauty of divine love are just as real as the beauty of a lotus flower.

As with all divine values, the Spirit Within enables us to recognize and appreciate true beauty. We express spiritual beauty through actions and words by being beautiful in our inner lives and gracious in our outer lives. All spiritual achievements are divinely beautiful.

Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting.

– *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Beauty manifests in wonderful ways—truth is beautiful, love is beautiful, and compassion is beautiful. There is beauty in harmony, beauty in rhythm, and beauty in symmetry. Divinity is beautiful, wisdom is beautiful, and the creative patterns of the universe are beautiful. Learn to fully appreciate the spiritual beauty of the

universe and to recreate and manifest this beauty in your daily life.

Love Binds It All Together

Love dominates all divine values. It is the ultimate spiritual force—a dynamic and irresistible power that embraces and unifies all other divine values. Love is the outward, living expression of truth, beauty, and goodness. It is a rule for living that provides the highest motivation for all who choose to walk the Spirit Path.

Love is God's divine attitude to all personalities, a love best understood as compassionate love—as parental love. The love of God defines the supreme relationship among all individuals from every culture and all nations.

Love is the greatest of all spirit realities.

– *The Urantia Book*

Even if you have never been a parent, you can still appreciate the depth of parental love. And you can let it shine in your own life, first by graciously accepting it, and then by graciously giving it to others. Love is not something you possess—it is something you share.

Spiritual love is not a frailty. Any mature expression of love is assertive and practical, not fawning and fanciful. Divine love is intelligently applied, disciplined, compassionate, affectionate, and wise.

Creating Goals From Values

Our values go hand in hand with our ideals, and together they shape how we see the world and, to a great degree, how we define our ambitions and goals in life. The objective of the God experience is to cultivate *spiritual* values and ideals, and an effective way to make them part of our lives is by *visualizing* them. This is a constructive exercise yielding

practical results (see also *Creative Imagination*).

Many unnecessary problems result from a lack of worthy goals or ideals. For example, a recent poll by AP-NORC (June 2022) found that 85 percent of Americans say the country is heading in the wrong direction. This is an interesting fact, but there is no mention of what conditions or goals would define the *right* direction. Only by taking the time to clearly visualize ideal governments, ideal economic systems, ideal social systems, or an ideal spiritual life can we ever hope to achieve such objectives.

It is not only important to clearly conceptualize our present ideals but also to reach for the highest virtues of divinity we can imagine. And this is true because it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to ascend any higher in our spiritual evolution than our highest ideals will allow.

Our ultimate goal of spiritual betterment is to become progressively more spiritual, an

ideal that finds expression in our outer lives. This is the supreme aim of any worthwhile self-improvement program. It is an attempt to become more like the Divine Spirit that lives within us, at least in terms of spiritual meanings and values.

Spiritual Priorities

You cannot serve two masters. You cannot bow down to Mammon, the god of material wealth, while pretending to worship the God of Light and Life. It's just not possible to have true peace of mind when you have one foot stuck in the mud of materialism while the other seeks firm ground on the rock of spiritual ideals.

Divided loyalties give rise to internal conflicts and unsound judgments. But we can overcome our inner discord and succeed in spirit by being completely loyal to spiritual values. Loyalties cannot be divided, and the highest devotion is best given to the God of universal love.

There is nothing unspiritual about being highly successful in life or having riches—it is simply a matter of priorities. Self-respect and wealth do not impede our spiritual growth, but self-importance and the love of wealth do.

We do not have a money problem in America. We have a values and priorities problem.

– *Marian Wright Edelman*

Ambition is a wonderful motivator that should never be inhibited, but self-centered ambition is harmful, not only to yourself but to those around you. If you are obsessed with personal gain at a cost to others, you can hardly claim to be walking the path to God. Having said that, it is still possible to be both ambitious and selfless. It all depends on your goals and priorities.

What Does the Will of God Mean?

The will of God is the way of God. It's a way of spiritual living often celebrated as the spirit way, spirit road, spirit path, Tao, sacred way, Buddhist path, or the path to awakening.

The essential meaning behind all these expressions is that the will of God is a path of devotion to a divine Source of goodness—a high moral path of doing the right thing in all circumstances. When you share your life with God, you walk this spirit path. That's all it takes. The will of God is your progressive spiritual experience of becoming more Godlike by actively living in the presence of God.

It's Not a Set of Rules

The will of God is not a set of rigid laws or a strict moral code, although laws and codes may be grounded in spiritual realities. Time-

honored rules of religious behavior, such as the Ten Commandments, were great starting points in the early evolution of human societies, but in the present age, it's obvious to most of us that it's morally wrong to lie, cheat, or steal.

Ancient moral codes often emphasize what we *should not do*. But the will of God is not about what is wrong; it's about what is right. It's about *wanting to do the right thing*. It's a positive and dynamic approach to morality and spirituality because God is the Divine Source of all that is positive, good, and true (see *Morality, Magic, and Sacrifice*).

The happy and effective person is motivated, not by fear of wrongdoing, but by love of right doing.

– *The Urantia Book*

The Sacred Way is the way of divine truth, supreme beauty, and supernal goodness. It is living spontaneously in the spirit and enjoying a genuine spiritual life that forever

adapts to changing circumstances and life's challenges.

The Way of God is thinking more and more like the Spirit Within, thereby *identifying* with this Spirit. We begin by sharing our inner lives with God and by making good choices in harmony with spiritual truth. It is the experience of living consciously in the dynamic presence of God.

Put your creative imagination to good use. Imagine a friendly and loving version of God—a Spirit Teacher living within you and always guiding you. Infuse this divine persona with the highest ideals and the most supreme values you can imagine; create a Supreme Being who is all-good, all-wise, all-loving, and all-powerful. And then enjoy a God-conscious life by sharing your thoughts, longings, and aspirations with this animated Divine Being.

Visualizing the holy and affectionate presence of God is a mental technique that aligns your thoughts with the Spirit of Truth

because what you are imagining *is real*. Don't be concerned if your creation seems fictitious at first. You will soon become aware of the very real presence of your Spirit Guide. See *Creative Imagination*.

It may take a while to communicate directly with the indwelling Spirit. Nonetheless, we can still *commune* with God through meditation, prayer, and worship. And by doing so, we improve our future ability to receive guidance. But without any form of direct communication, the inevitable question is, how do we know the will of God? How do we know which choice is the right choice?

The good news is that knowing the way of God is not as difficult as we may at first surmise. If we start with the basics of morality, it is likely *we already know what we should do*. We know it's not the right choice to lie, to harm others, to be angry, rude, or deceitful. And we know this because our Spirit Guide coaches us to speak the

truth, help others, and be respectful—it's a positive, progressive approach.

The divine nature is loving, beautiful, good, and true, and by focusing on these values, the will of God becomes clear. In all our decisions, we keep these values in mind and then guide our actions accordingly (see *Four Divine Values*).

The Golden Rule as a Spiritual Benchmark

An effective benchmark for spiritual living is the Golden Rule—the will of God in action. Indeed, when it comes to any social relationship, there can be no greater guide in life than this positive injunction, especially when interpreted on advanced levels of spiritual comprehension.

Do to others as you would have them do to
you.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

Anyone with a sense of morality will recognize the truth of the Golden Rule, even those who refuse to believe in God. But we attain a deeper meaning when we consider the rule from a spiritual perspective. In its highest sense, it is treating others as a caring and compassionate Divine Being would.

The golden rule, when divested of the superhuman insight of the Spirit of Truth, becomes nothing more than a rule of high ethical conduct.

– *The Urantia Book*

The Golden Rule prompts us to consider our actions from a more objective perspective. It is a sincere attempt to understand, respect, love, and care for others by taking a God-centered approach—the loving attitude of a wise parent. If everyone were to abide by this simple rule, the entire world would be remarkably transformed.

There are times when we need to make decisions that do not concern relationships

with others but instead have to do with personal problems. Knowing the will of God in these instances can be more challenging. But there is little need to wrestle too long over non-moral issues, such as choosing a career. It's not so much *what* we do in life as *how* we do it.

Sharing Your Life with God

In difficult times, we may need to make crucial decisions, ones that come about when raising children, when holding positions of trust, or when disaster strikes. Knowing the best policy for the good of everyone concerned is not always clear or painless. Resolving these kinds of problems depends on our personal experience, knowledge, and wisdom—and sometimes a little help from others.

But in all instances, we can better evaluate solutions with reason and logic, and by sharing our problems with God through meditation, mindfulness, prayer, and reflection. To receive spiritual guidance, all

we need to do is listen (see *Divine Problem Solving*).

Making spiritual choices is how we transform ourselves. Every decision we make determines the outcome of our lives. And whenever we make decisions that agree with the will of God—which is no more than cooperating with Spirit—we enhance our soul powers and become more spiritually real. Never doubt that God wants us to succeed in this endeavor.

The doing of the will of God is nothing more or less than an exhibition of creature willingness to share the inner life with God.

– *The Urantia Book*

What Is Spiritual Faith?

We often think of faith as religious doctrine—the beliefs, rules, and rituals associated with organized religions, such as Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. The same applies to the many different branches or sects of these religions, such as the Catholic, Sunni, or Theravāda faiths.

When used in this way, faith defines a system of religious rules, ideologies, and traditions. If we wish to affiliate with any particular religious group, we are expected to believe what they believe and to do what they do.

But when faith is defined (or confined) this way, it is not spiritually productive.

Whenever we accept dogmatic teaching as the whole truth, it can inhibit our spiritual sensitivities and restrict our thinking. In effect, it shatters any hope of discovering deeper spiritual meanings.

Modern religion finds it difficult to adjust its attitude toward the rapidly shifting social changes only because it has permitted itself to become so thoroughly traditionalized, dogmatized, and institutionalized.

– *The Urantia Book*

Faith Is Confidence

Faith is better defined as simply having *complete confidence or trust in someone or something*. It is a firm belief in something for which there may be no empirical or objective proof. For instance, we could have resolute faith in the triumph of science, or persistent faith that our sports team will win. We cannot prove an event will occur, or that some spiritual force will act on our behalf, but we have unequivocal faith that it will.

When my son was just a toddler, he wanted to climb onto the mantelpiece above the fireplace (when houses had fireplaces). Cautiously, I stood him up on the shelf. He looked at me with a big smile and then, bursting into a laugh, he jumped from the

ledge and flew right at me with his arms wide open. I was stunned for an instant, but caught him midair.

This was a turning point in my grasp of faith. I realized that my son's complete trust in me—his unwavering faith that I would catch him in my arms—is the same trusting faith I have in the eternal love and infinite goodness of our heavenly Father. This is the uninhibited and courageous leap of faith, one completely free of religious doctrine.

The faith of a trusting child is an *essential attitude of mind* simply because it opens our consciousness to receiving the spiritual gifts of God. Accepting and believing that we truly are spiritual sons and daughters of God underscores our sincerity and trust in the loving support and divine guidance of a caring universe. I cannot begin to over-emphasize the spiritual importance of such trusting faith.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.

– *Martin Luther*

It is easy to dismiss faith as false hope or a belief in fantasy, but everyone believes in something—everyone has faith in something—otherwise we could not begin to function in the world. We all operate within an ideological framework we accept as true, and we all have strong convictions about the true nature of reality, with or without proof.

If you are an atheist, you have faith that there is no Deity, although you cannot prove it. If you are a humanist, you have faith in the inherent goodness of humanity, but you cannot prove it. And if you are a materialist, you have faith that all reality is material in nature, but you cannot prove it. You can have faith in anything you choose, so what will you choose?

Having faith in God means we choose to *trust* the eternal goodness, infinite love, and wise counsel of the holy Presence within us. We have faith that God will always help in the long run, even if it may not appear so from our limited viewpoints, and even if we are not consciously aware of that help. Despite all obstacles and challenges, we persevere with courageous faith in our divine destiny.

While faith requires no empirical or objective proof, its outcomes are firmly bolstered by subjective proof. In other words, the evidence of the power of faith is seen in our personal spiritual experiences and in our improving relationships with others. We can never prove these inner experiences to others, but *we know* them to be true.

For those with faith, no evidence is necessary; for those without it, no evidence will suffice.

– Thomas Aquinas

The confidence of spiritual faith is a personal experience best described as a *positive and trusting attitude toward divinity*. Instead of a creedal formula or a set of principles, faith becomes a frame of mind in which we place enduring trust in the existence of spirit life, one coupled with our strong conviction about the goodness, wisdom, and love of God.

Faith Is a Psychological Technique

Just as there are natural laws of science, there are supernatural laws of the Spirit. One of these immutable laws is that neither God nor any of his celestial assistants will ever try to change or re-create you without your explicit consent. The Creator of a universe wants you to come to him—but only if you *want to come* of your own free will.

The Creator refuses to coerce or compel the submission of the spiritual free wills of his material creatures.

– *The Urantia Book*

It is therefore almost impossible for spiritual forces to help a doubting and reluctant mind. The crucial point about faith is that God and his angels function more effectively through a believing and willing mind. When we freely *believe* in the truth about God, when we have complete faith in his love and help, we fully *enable* spiritual forces to take an active role in our lives.

Imagine, accept, and believe that God is helping you.

– A. K. Mozumdar

Faith is a psychological technique that takes us to the border of God consciousness and then empowers us to enter that domain. It's a method used to reach beyond the limitations of reason and logic. Moreover, it's a way of harmonizing our thoughts and behavior with divine truth, even if we cannot fully comprehend it.

Spiritual faith extends beyond any belief about the nature of material reality because

humanity's ideas about this vast universe are circumscribed and constantly evolving, just as scientific knowledge, social policies, and governments are evolving. *As we saw*, Galileo shocked the existing religious order because he contradicted current beliefs about the nature of reality—namely that the earth revolved around the sun—that it was not the center of the universe.

Faith, therefore, is more reliably based on *supreme values and divine ideals* rather than religious doctrines or fixed views about the nature of physical reality. Whenever religious beliefs become grounded in perceived material realities or fixed philosophical ideas, they stagnate, whereas faith in divine love is alive, vibrant, evolving, and adaptable.

Faith is the complete reliance on the power and goodness of Spirit and the firm belief that you're always connected to this goodness.

– Wayne Dyer

Our faith in the goodness and wisdom of an infinite and eternal Creator works for the better because, in all truth, God is always good and perfectly wise. For all who have experienced the presence of God in their lives, he is real, even a fact. Although our minds cannot begin to grasp the full magnitude and magnificence of this First Source, we maintain faith in the oversight of a loving, friendly, and caring Creator who always urges us to be the best we can be.

Our spiritual thoughts and ideals cannot rise any higher than what we can imagine. Such faithful imaginings not only heighten our spiritual awareness but also become our spiritual compass, the inspiration that invariably points us in the right direction, forever enticing us to forge ahead—to achieve more in life. What a tragedy to limit our hopes and dreams to the dark confines of a cold, empty, and godless materialism. It's no wonder so many good people imagine the future as a bleak and hopeless dystopia.

When you know that you are saved by faith,
you have real peace with God.

– Jesus of Nazareth

Humble and positive faith is a tool of consciousness; a necessary spiritual attitude for opening the door to the Divine Presence within you. It allows the Spirit to release its beneficial and dynamic superhuman activities into your consciousness. It is a positive and faithful attitude of mind that enables God to spiritually transform you.

Faith Is a Bridge

Faith creates a celestial bridge between the material mind and the spirit phase of existence. This bridge of faith is vital to spiritual progress because there is so much about spiritual reality and divine nature that the human mind simply cannot grasp with analytical reason alone. Our material thoughts lead us right up to the door of the spirit dimension, but from that point forward, it's our *spiritualized channels of*

thought, as defined by our faith and as adjusted by the Divine Presence within, that lead us Godward.

Faith is a bridge to spiritual insight. We discern outward beauty with the physical senses, and we discern truth with the intellect. But only with spiritual insight can we begin to fully grasp divine realities. Having faith in the goodness of our Creator, which is an absolute truth, allows us to enter the reality of the spirit realm despite the intellectual limitations of the mind. It's our ticket to divinity.

Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.

– Augustine of Hippo

It's what we *believe* rather than what we know that determines what we can achieve in life. All the knowledge in the universe will not necessarily make us happy or help us to progress in the spirit. But the good news is

that faith can do these things because it reaches beyond knowledge and embraces spiritual realities we may not (as yet) comprehend.

The humble attitude of a faithful mind is at the heart of spiritual progress. It is the supernal approach to the magnificence and glory of an eternal and infinite God.

Living Faith

Faith begins with our unwavering conviction about the goodness, wisdom, and love of God. But genuine faith goes one step further. For faith to reach its full potential of bridging the gap between the material and spiritual worlds and thereby transforming our lives in the process, we must *live our faith*.

However many holy words you read,
however many you speak, what good will
they do you if you do not act on them?

– Buddha

The spiritual truths gained through faith become a reality in our lives as soon as we begin to practice them. The whole notion of *living faith* is living a life in the spirit eagerly and happily. It's living a life dedicated to the divine ideals and supreme values we so ardently profess to believe.

It's impossible to achieve spiritual harmony and divine unity through mind alone. Even though meditation and prayer are excellent ways to enhance spiritual perception and contact divinity, they are not enough by themselves. Only by acting out our faith in all sincerity can we coordinate and unite the energies of body, mind, and spirit. By acting out our faith, we *actualize* it—we make it a reality within ourselves.

Convictions about God may be arrived at through wise reasoning, but the individual becomes God-knowing only by faith, through personal experience.

– *The Urantia Book*

Living our faith is a divine privilege. It's a happy endeavor done with enthusiasm and love; it's meeting daily challenges with vigor and inspiration; it's remaining undaunted in the face of all disappointments and failures; and it's cultivating an indomitable spirit that perseveres regardless of life's difficulties and despite all worldly strife.

Hallmarks of Spirit-Born People

Spirit-born people are those who have recognized and received the indwelling Spirit of God. They have willingly and happily accepted the divine guidance of this spirit in all they think, do, and say. They are taught by the Spirit and led by the Spirit—they live Spirit-filled lives.

Being born of the Spirit is a transforming experience, but it is not always an easy one. Spiritual rebirths can be accompanied by psychological conflict because the mind is reluctant to give up its strong bond to a material, secular life.

But once we learn to free ourselves from these worldly bonds, the Spirit within us functions more effectively, transforming us into fully moral and spiritual people. And along the way, we learn to overcome our difficulties and to rise above the trivialities and petty quarrels of the world. We begin to

view our lives in a larger, more meaningful universe context.

Spirit-born people see the world and themselves with the eyes of the spirit. They work to change the world for the better, but are not troubled by world affairs, and they no longer suffer from inner conflicts and nagging doubts. They become masters of themselves by cheerfully following the guidance of the indwelling Spirit rather than imposing on themselves a life of self-denial and guilt.

Overcoming conflict and doubt begins by having a daily chat with your Spirit Teacher and by living consciously in the divine presence of God. By these means, you constructively engage those *essential spiritual forces* that help you to break through all material resistance and overcome all obstacles.

See *Recreate Yourself* below for more ways to do this.

At this time, you may not possess all the traits of a spirit-born person, but don't be discouraged. Use these qualities as a standard to be achieved, a goal to be attained. Be patient and persistent, and gradually, as you become more and more attuned to the Divine Spark within you, you will be transformed.

In order to yield the fruits of the spirit, you must be born of the spirit.

– *The Urantia Book*

Spirit-Born Traits

Those born of the spirit are:

8. Truly good
9. Gracious in all things
10. Truthful and loyal to all truth
11. Truly sincere and free of hypocrisy
12. Loving but not pampering
13. Cheerful but not blind optimists
14. Generous but not extravagant

15. Candid but always kind
16. Forgiving and forever tolerant
17. Peaceful and balanced
18. Patient and seldom in a hurry
19. Open-minded—not bound by tradition
20. Immune to disappointment and failure
21. Free from affectation—always genuine
22. Reasonable and wise
23. Practical yet spiritually minded
24. Free of moodiness, whimsy, and hysteria
25. Confident but not arrogant
26. Enthusiastic but not fanatical
27. Imaginative but always practical
28. Emotionally active but never flighty
29. Sympathetic but not sentimental
30. Courageous but not reckless
31. Prudent but never cowardly
32. Original but not eccentric
33. Pious but not sanctimonious
34. Firm but not obstinate

35. Helpful but not meddlesome
36. Merciful but just and fair
37. Calm but not indifferent
38. Strong but gentle
39. Humorous but not frivolous
40. Free of pretense and deception
41. Respectful and compassionate
42. Faithful to God but never presumptuous

Spirit-born people are honest of heart and sincere in faith. They live truthful lives and are always able to discern the word of God and all other words of truth, regardless of the source.

Recreate Yourself

Whatever we adore, idolize, or worship is what we become. By venerating the ideals of divinity, we identify with these ideals. This is the psychological process that spirit-born people use to actualize their highest values and make them a reality in their lives. It is

an invaluable means of adopting and embedding divine ideals in our hearts and minds (see *Intelligent Worship – How It Works*).

Other techniques used for this purpose include creative imagination, mindfulness, and worshipful meditation (see other chapters). These are the ways spirit-born people train their minds to revere and exalt divine ideals. This is how they recreate themselves as spiritual people who live according to the Way of God.

The evidence to all the world that you have been born of the spirit is that you sincerely love one another.

– *The Urantia Book*

Meditation, contemplation, prayer, and worship are spiritual exercises, as are all other intellectual efforts to attain extraordinary states of consciousness by means of spiritual communion—a

superconscious state associated with super-thinking.

By dwelling on super-thoughts of God, it's possible to have powerful experiences during everyday life, such as a sudden epiphany, a profound realization, or a flash of spiritual insight. This is especially the case when all powers of personality, mind, and soul focus on the Spirit within, and our true motivation is to live a life wholly dedicated to the Spirit Way.

Spirit-born people achieve these sublime states of spirit consciousness and a deep understanding of cosmic values by exercising spiritual thoughts. And they amplify these spiritual experiences whenever they act out (actualize) these values in the material world. By helping others, they contribute to the good in the world, and no goodness is ever lost in the angelic records.

A life not lived for others, is not a life.

– Mother Teresa

Spirit Identification

When we live according to the Way of God, we begin a genuine personal transformation. It's not an act of religious conversion but rather an act of *spiritual becoming*. We are, in essence, recreating ourselves in the image of God.

Granted, it may be a long journey, but it begins here and now. And although it may appear to be an unattainable goal of perfection, rest assured, there is a relative level of perfection attainable in this life. It is an achievable goal that begins with your simple faith in the power of the Spirit to transform you—to recreate you as a spirit-born person.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

As we evolve in spirit nature, we wean ourselves from our animal natures. We shift

our identity from body and mind to spirit. In the process, we learn to master our animal instincts and emotions, overcoming selfishness, anger, and vengeance. We do this by replacing our animal drives and base emotions with more praiseworthy aspirations, such as selflessness, love, respect, compassion, and forgiveness.

There is no clear-cut transition from one level of spiritual growth to the next. Instead, it's a slow transformation over time—often an unconscious one. We may crave a glorious and brilliant epiphany, but it's unlikely to occur for most of us. Nonetheless, the more we come to know God, the more assured we become that a real and vital spiritual transformation is taking place within us.

The man who moves a mountain, begins by carrying away small stones.

– Confucius

God gives each of us a precious gift—a fragment of himself to live within our thoughts. The essential God experience is no more than the daily process of identifying with this indwelling presence of divinity. This inner Divine Spark is the spiritual guide that will forever inspire you to make the right decisions in life.

Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual maturity is the result of progressive spirit identification, a feat achieved by maintaining a conscious, living connection with true spiritual forces. We strengthen ourselves by having faith that these forces are with us and all around us (because they are), and then by having faith that they hear us, see us, and help us (because they do).

God and the angels know everything about us, but our spiritual awareness relies on our willingness to consciously and openly share our thoughts, desires, and aspirations with

these celestial beings. See also *Live in the Presence of God*.

Spiritual maturity is the result of becoming spirit-born, and it all begins with our inner quest for perfection. But the proof of our spirit identification is the degree to which we manifest spiritual qualities and attitudes in our outer lives. We know we are maturing and progressing in the spirit when we begin to manifest a loving spiritual connection in all outward dealings with the people around us.

Devote your life to proving that love is the greatest thing in the world.

– Jesus of Nazareth

Your Mission in Life

God has a plan for each of us, and we can choose to accept it or reject it. Your mission in life doesn't necessarily have anything to do with your career, so don't be overly anxious about whether you should become a

teacher, electrician, or doctor. What you do in life is important, but it is not as important as *how you perform your duties and how you live your life.*

Every morning we are born again. What we do today is what matters most.

– Buddha

In every honest walk of life, no matter what occupation, we can walk the Spirit Path. We can do good, help others, participate in our communities, and build a better civilization, all the while progressing inwardly in our very personal spiritual quests.

God's plan for you is unique because *you* are unique. We all have distinct and individual experiences, different skills, and different abilities. We all have something good and original to contribute. And if you allow it, God expresses himself through you in everything that you do, making all your experiences your very own unique expressions of being Godlike. This is God's

plan for you. Discovering your mission in life is not an esoteric secret available only to a privileged few. To know what your plan is, all you need to do is submit to the Spirit within you.

Not my will, but yours, be done.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

PART II

MAKING CONTACT

Prepare Yourself

Body, Mind, and Soul

Body, mind, and soul are interconnected; they depend on each other to function and grow. Opening our minds for spirit reception and thus achieving a successful spiritual experience requires a harmonious, working relationship between these three components of personality. A healthy lifestyle is more than good physical health, it also means making a conscious effort to throw out mental trash, clean the heart, and wash away hopelessness.

A Clean Temple

The human body is a temple of the Spirit because God lives within our hearts and minds. But our reception of divine teachings is hindered if we pollute this temple (body and brain) with physical poisons. And this is true whether we are young or old, a sports athlete, or confined to a wheelchair. Almost

all religious teachers are (or were) aware of this. For example, Jesus of Nazareth refused the narcotics offered to him, even as he was dying on the cross (see Matthew 27:34).

You are the temple of God, and the spirit of
God dwells in you.

– *The Urantia Book*

On the most rudimentary level, the body and all its organs operate through electrical impulses and chemical reactions. And in a perfect world free of toxins and adverse effects, it works at maximum efficiency, requiring only good nutrition, clean air, and routine exercise.

Granted, we are substantially more than an electrochemical machine, but the spiritual forces within us and around us work more effectively when our nervous systems and body chemistry are functioning normally in a well-balanced manner. And whenever our physical, mental, and spiritual powers work together in healthy harmony, we greatly

enhance our reception of spiritual insight and divine truth.

To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.

– Buddha

The Spirit has a difficult enough time getting through to us, even when we are in a so-called normal state of mind. Most of the time, our thoughts jump around the room like a troop of wild monkeys with no apparent focus or intent. And if we choose unhealthy habits, our spiritual awareness is further impeded.

The body is the soul's house.

– Philo of Alexandria

A Clean Mind

A clean mind is a mind free of animalistic notions. We manage and direct our base instincts by teaching our minds to fully

cooperate with the more advanced moral and spiritual impulses residing in our superconscious mind. And to reach this heightened state of conscious clarity, we must clean out toxic thoughts and replace them with healthy ones.

Fears and anxieties impede our spiritual sensitivities as well as our reception of spiritual energies because such irrational emotions do not conform to a spiritual life; there is no fear or anxiety in the spirit realm. If we wish to live in harmony with spirit, we need to overcome our fears with reason, logic, and a good dose of faith in the goodness, wisdom, and love of God.

Anxiety is a fear of the future; a worry about things that might happen. And just as there are an infinite number of things that might happen, so there are an infinite number of things to worry about.

Today is the tomorrow you were so worried
about yesterday.

– Anthony Hopkins

It's always wise to prepare for the future and to devise contingency plans, but once these plans are in place, it's not productive to worry about what might happen. Our anxieties seldom contribute to the solution of a problem in any constructive way.

No spiritual force eliminates fear more effectively than divine love in all its forms and manifestations. Having faith in a divine destiny and learning to love others with the same love God offers so freely are practical ways to prevent anxiety. No matter what challenges or tragedies we may face on this world, we can learn to face them with faith, love, and understanding.

There is no fear in love.

– John 4

Anger is another mental toxin. It drains our health, contaminates our thoughts, destroys happiness, and interferes with our spiritual sensitivities. A display of anger is a sign of immaturity. Not only does it indicate a lack of self-respect, but also a lack of self-control, a lack of the capacity to love others, and a lack of spiritual growth. Dispel all anger by allowing the Spirit of Love to dominate your life.

The same is true of envy, jealousy, suspicion, impatience, hatred, and intolerance. These are feelings or emotions closely identified with our crude animalistic natures.

Whenever we yield to these self-centered and irrational emotions, we block the reception of spiritual messages and, therefore, impede the spiritual evolution of mind and soul.

Constant regrets and feelings of guilt are also impediments. While feeling sorry for our misdeeds is a sign of a healthy, average, and moral mind, it's not beneficial to overly dwell on regrets. It's difficult to advance

spiritually when our thoughts are preoccupied with the mistakes of the past. Put things in perspective by realizing that no one is perfect and that we all make mistakes at one time or another. Better yet, we can learn from our mistakes and become more spiritual in the process.

The mistakes which you fail to forget in time, will be forgotten in eternity.

– *The Urantia Book*

We remedy our mistakes first by recognizing them, coming to terms with them, correcting them, learning from them, making reparations, and then moving on in our spiritual journey.

To progress in the spirit, muster the courage and honesty you need to acknowledge the many misguided sentiments you entertain or indulge, and then change your way of thinking. Ask yourself whether your thoughts truly originate in the spirit domain

by evaluating them with divine values (see *Four Divine Values*).

An Open Mind

Having an open mind is a spiritual approach, not just because it is an attitude open to the reception of truth, but because it is a *teachable* attitude. It is also a courageous attitude because it requires courage and sincerity to consider all sides of an argument and all possible outcomes.

Headstrong opinions, ignorance, and prejudice are frames of mind that blind us to the truth of any situation. Our obstinate views about the nature of people, groups, societies, or governments may or may not have anything to do with the truth. And whenever we entertain such stubborn views, we impede our reception of new discoveries.

The chief inhibitors of growth are prejudice
and ignorance.

– *The Urantia Book*

We may get annoyed when friends, family, or world events do not meet our expectations, no matter how unrealistic they may be. But if we are completely intolerant and stubborn, and always expect people to conform to our way of thinking, the world soon becomes our enemy rather than a place to be improved.

Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.

– Alexander Pope

A Devoted Soul

We strengthen our ability to contact the Spirit of God whenever we completely devote ourselves to living a life in the spirit—the way God wants us to live. Whenever we remain enthusiastic and loyal to an all-wise and compassionate God, spiritual living is not something apart from our daily activities, instead it becomes the very essence of these activities.

Devote yourself to the Way of God and open your heart to the spiritual forces within you. Have the courage to lay your soul bare to the truth. Make a daily plan for spiritual living and set aside time each day to contemplate God, divine love, infinite goodness, eternal truth, and supreme beauty (see *Divine Meditation*).

Balance Your Self

In all things, seek balance. It's easy to overdevelop one area of our character at the expense of another, thereby impeding our spiritual progress. A balanced approach gives equal weight to physical health, intellectual development, and spiritual status.

It's good to work out at the gym, lift weights, run on the treadmill, or swim twenty lengths. It's great to stay in shape. But we should also take time for intellectual development, which means expanding our knowledge and improving our

understanding of relationships, meanings, and values.

But intellectual development can be overdone too. And when it is, we tend to overthink the simple things in life. We risk becoming arrogant, easily distracted, or prone to mood and anxiety disorders. Worst of all, when intellectual knowledge is deprived of wisdom and spiritual insight, it's difficult for the indwelling Spirit to spiritualize our thoughts. And this is why we balance our intellectual lives with good physical health and enlightened spiritual perspectives.

Along the same lines, any undue focus on spirituality at the expense of the body and mind has its own problems, such as a tendency toward fanaticism, extremism, or excessive dogmatism.

Overspiritual development tends to produce a fanatical and perverted interpretation of the spirit leadings of the divine indweller.

– *The Urantia Book*

The safest way to advance is to live a balanced and harmonious life, giving equal weight to a healthy lifestyle, average intellectual development, and progressive soul growth. By doing so, we enable the Spirit to function more efficiently on our behalf.

Spiritual Attitudes for the Soul

To contact the divine Presence within you, it helps to be on a spiritual wavelength attuned to the divine frequency of the Spirit. The more you live and think in harmony with the empowering melodies of the Spirit Way, the more spiritual you become.

Achieving this spiritual harmony requires positive, faithful, and unselfish attitudes of mind—spiritual attitudes—not just for yourself and others, but for the world at large. Changing your thinking is a powerful and practical way of getting closer to the Spirit Within.

A spiritual attitude is a mental framework, a persuasion, or an outlook that guides our actions and reactions to life. Contemplating and fostering these spiritual and moral perspectives is a simple and effective method to spiritualize our thoughts.

The attitudes of mind listed below are familiar to most of us, but our objective here

is to contemplate them in a purely spiritual context and from an expanded cosmic perspective. Spiritual thought, or right thought, as Buddha would call it, is an essential mental framework for attaining enlightenment.

Attitudes Toward Yourself

Self-Respect

A healthy dose of self-respect is vital for a successful life. But self-respect should not be confused with self-admiration or any other narcissistic tendency. Self-respect must be balanced.

Like so many virtues and attitudes, even the good ones can be taken too far. Those of us with excessive self-respect tend to be overly proud, stubborn, and arrogant, while those who lack self-respect are unlikely to reach their highest goals in life. Strongly correlated with self-respect is self-confidence, and without a measured degree of confidence, we set ourselves up for consistent failure.

It is important to examine and evaluate one's strengths and weaknesses, but too much self-examination or self-criticism can undermine self-esteem. It is not helpful to be too hard on ourselves. Take time to develop a healthy self-respect by first acknowledging that we are all prone to human frailties.

We may be searching for perfection, but it is unrealistic to think you can achieve it instantly, or even in a decade. And it is unlikely that anyone else we chance to meet is perfect. Regardless of any personal faults, understand that we are defined by our *motivations* in life, not by our present state of imperfection.

Love is the highest motivation.

– *The Urantia Book*

Spiritual living comes about whenever we allow the indwelling Spirit to help us—and when we genuinely believe that it will help us. Believe and accept that you are just as important as any other being in the entire

universe—that you truly belong—because you do!

There is an inseparable connection between your inner life—your thoughts and desires—and how you express yourself in your outer life. It is almost impossible to gain any self-respect if you cannot, or will not, love and respect others equally. By the spiritual laws of the universe, you receive what you give. Go about living your life with honor and dignity. Live up to your duties and responsibilities. Serve and respect others, and you will soon gain that self-respect you truly deserve. This is God's Way.

Determination

Even if we have a burning desire to achieve great things, it will be difficult to make much headway if we cannot muster the determination needed to persevere in the face of all obstacles.

It's only natural to desire success, but the test of our spiritual character is how well we manage failure. It is not so much whether we

win or lose, succeed or fail, as how much we learn to deal with life's situations regardless of the outcome. How we cope with failures and disappointments is the true spiritual test.

Defeat is the true mirror in which you may honestly view your real self.

– *The Urantia Book*

Our disappointments are often rooted in unrealistic expectations about ourselves, about those around us, about the world, or about God. Come to realize that, when things go “wrong” in your life, it is an opportunity to educate yourself, gain wisdom, and develop a strong character. In the process, you become inured to disappointment and adversity.

Spiritual people take whatever is thrown at them because they know that, in the great scheme of things, the most important objective is to advance, day by day, in

character and in wisdom—to become more like the Divine Spirit.

As we advance, we learn to overcome and manage adversity, we learn to solve problems, and we learn how to conduct ourselves in any situation. And all this is accomplished with determination and perseverance—both of which are fortified by our enthusiastic and undaunted faith in the love, wisdom, and goodness of God (see also *Divine Problem Solving*).

Courage

Courage is having the mental strength to withstand danger or difficulty. But this strength is itself founded on the strength of our *moral convictions*. Whenever we are thoroughly convinced of the righteousness of a cause or a belief, it's easy to find the courage to defend it.

Courage is the confidence about those things which one professes to believe.

– *The Urantia Book*

It's difficult to arouse courage when we lack moral conviction. Only by developing a keen sense of right and wrong, fairness and justice, truth and goodness, and kindness and compassion can we ever hope to have courage.

No matter what social environment or domestic adversity you were born into, having courage—unshakable conviction in the highest morals and a sublime hope for a better world—always develops a strong and noble character. Having courage means living a bold life in the spirit, one that squarely faces the many problems of everyday life.

But having courage does not mean being confrontational, nor does it imply taking unnecessary risks. Do not confuse courage with recklessness, impulsive behavior, or passionate displays of exuberance. The steel of courage is best tempered by patience, tact, and wisdom. And true wisdom embraces discretion as well as courage. ⁶⁴

Happiness

Happiness is living the truth. True happiness does not rely on things existing in the outside, or objective, world because cheerfulness originates in the inner life, in the subjective world. Wealth and possessions may give us a brief interlude of happiness and contribute to our peace of mind by providing the comforts of life. But genuine happiness—being in good spirits—is more often linked to our pursuit and achievement of worthy goals.

The highest happiness is linked with the intelligent and enthusiastic pursuit of worthy goals.

– *The Urantia Book*

Worthy goals exist in all walks of life, whether it's creating a work of art or doing well in our careers. But spiritual goals are the most rewarding of all, including our ongoing self-identification with Spirit, attaining God consciousness, achieving self-

mastery, and helping others. Pursuing worthy goals always requires some effort, and while all effort does not necessarily lead to happiness, there can be little happiness without it.

Lasting happiness comes to all who have confidence in a loving and helpful God. Your unwavering faith in the good wisdom of God will ensure your success, day by day, in your spiritual pursuits. Ultimately, happiness comes by giving up the egotistical desires of the self and living your life the Spirit Way.

Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

– *The Urantia Book*

For those who are unhappy, several research studies suggest that helping others is one of the most effective ways to overcome sadness and depression. ⁵⁶ This compassionate approach works because it takes our minds off ourselves and puts it onto others. By making a positive difference in the life of

someone else, you make a positive difference in your own.

Attitudes Toward Others

Selfless

Being selfless is more than being unselfish—it is also being self-forgetful. And a good way to achieve this attitude of mind is to help others and uphold our responsibilities to family, friends, society, and the world.

To be fair, it is not always possible or even desirable to completely forget about ourselves. It's more a matter of striking a healthy balance between the needs of the self and the needs of the soul. But whenever it comes to doing good works for others, the self is not important.

Unwarranted feelings of self-importance not only impede our spiritual reception, but they also wear us out in the process. It is both exhausting and unproductive to waste energy by being self-centered. If we wish to accomplish any meaningful goal in life, we

must learn to get ourselves out of the way by concentrating on the job at hand.

Being self-centered not only depletes your energy but also inhibits your reception of the spiritual gifts of God. You cannot be truly selfless and spiritual if you crave self-glorification. By forgetting about yourself, you open your mind to the messages of divine love and compassion forever beaming out from Paradise.

O Master, let me not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

– Francis of Assisi

There is no selfishness in God nor any of the celestial personalities. The Creator gives everything of himself, as much as we are able and willing to receive. If you wish to become a participating member in the great spiritual club of humanity, learn to forget yourself—to cooperate and help others. Indeed,

teamwork is one of the most valuable lessons to learn on this world.

One study suggests that children are naturally altruistic and cooperative in reciprocal social situations. ⁵⁷ They learn to be selfish only later in life, after adopting the misguided ideals and poor examples of others. The regrettable outcome is that fostering selfish interests in children eventually has an adverse effect on all levels of society.

Parental Love

God's love is the supreme force that draws together the entire universe of personalities. If we wish to adopt and foster any attitude at all, it should be that of love.

Love is the desire to do good to others.

– *The Urantia Book*

As mere mortals, we may not fully grasp the universal love of God, but we can easily identify and appreciate the unconditional

love that most parents have for their children. By appreciating the depth of family love, we come to know God's attitude of love.

It is this kind of universal, parental love we wish to explore, nurture, and express in our own lives. Parental love is spiritual love, divine love. By learning to love others with the same affection we show our children, we emulate God's spiritual attitude toward us.

But divine love is not a romantic love in the sense of being overly doting, dreamy, or fanciful. Instead, it is more like the love of a mature, dutiful, and wise parent who is willing to take whatever steps necessary to instill self-confidence in their children without pampering them. Wise parents prepare their children for the realities, responsibilities, and challenges of a mature, spiritual life.

The child does not always comprehend the wise and loving motives of the father's restraining discipline.

– *The Urantia Book*

Compassion

It is easy to evoke feelings of compassion and mercy when we learn to understand one another. We live in a time of rash judgments and strong opinions. But having to deal with self-assertive and vociferous individuals should not deter us from showing compassion toward them. If we want to be treated with love, respect, and understanding, we should realize that others do too.

People do not seem to realize that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character.

– *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Much of our understanding (or misunderstanding) is the result of how fully informed we are about any issue. We cannot hope to understand other people or other issues when our minds are awash with misguided prejudices or wishful thinking.

And this is true not just on a personal level but at every level of social interaction.

One of the most glaring examples of prejudice in society is evidenced by the number of people in American jails who have since been exonerated by DNA samples. As of January 2021, 375 people convicted of serious crimes have been released on new evidence. And it's a sad fact that almost 70 percent of all wrongful convictions were men from minority groups.⁵⁸ In fact, Blacks and Latinos are incarcerated at rates much higher than the White population (5.1 and 1.6, respectively).⁵⁹

A similar systemic bias exists in Canada, where more than 30 percent of inmates in Canadian prisons are Indigenous peoples, although they make up just 5 percent of the population.⁶⁰ These are just two examples of the injustices that result from prejudice and a lack of compassion.

Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.

– *Dalai Lama*

If we honestly desire to improve civilization, we need to make an effort to understand and help one another, to empathize, to be compassionate. This means considering a person's true motivations as well as the hardships and traumas they may have endured—and may still be enduring in their everyday struggles.

Forgiving

Forgiveness does not come easily to all of us. But this selfless attitude of mind is essential to our spiritual betterment. And the reason for this is that God is forgiving, just as wise and loving parents forgive their children. Forgiveness is truly divine, and if you aspire to be Godlike, to cooperate with the celestial fellowship, then learn to forgive and, eventually, to love.

Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.

– Martin Luther King Jr.

An inability to forgive is a reflection of spiritual immaturity and a failure to understand, appreciate, and love others. And again, understanding is the key. The easiest way to forgive others is to be sensitive and sympathetic to their cultures, histories, experiences, hardships, shortcomings, strengths, and skills. As the adage goes, put yourself in their shoes.

But forgiving someone does not suggest we condone their unruly behavior, nor does it mean we have to trust them. If a child lies or steals, we need to make it clear that this is unacceptable behavior. And even though our love for that child is undiminished, it may take a while for him to earn our trust again.

Just as there are physical laws in the universe, there are also spiritual laws. By forgiving others, your soul immediately becomes open to receive God's forgiveness

for your own misdeeds. God forgives, but you will be incapable of experiencing this forgiveness in your spiritual life until you actually learn to forgive others.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

– Jesus of Nazareth

A practical benefit of forgiveness is that it is important for both mental and physical health. This is something spiritual mentors have alluded to for some time, but has now been substantiated by clinical studies. A pioneer in this field was Robert Enright, who began by studying forgiveness among adolescents.⁶¹ Following this was Fred Luskin's popular work, *Forgive for Good* (2001).⁶²

Research in this field has since proliferated, and much of it confirms initial assessments. For instance, a study published in the

Annals of Behavioral Medicine in 2016 concluded that “greater forgiveness is associated with less stress and, in turn, better mental health.” ⁶³

Goodness - Helping Others

It may seem obvious that we would all greatly benefit from doing good for others, our families, and our communities, but the point can never be stressed enough.

There are many reasons why we refuse to be good or refuse to entertain good thoughts toward others. But the chief reasons are selfishness, resentment, greed, ignorance, and bigotry. If we continually think only about what is best for ourselves, our own family, ethnic group, or nation, it is difficult to bring about what is best for everyone.

Indeed, a spiritual life can best be defined by the good it does. By dedicating our lives to doing good, we live in the spirit, thereby opening our souls to receive the goodness of God. To be genuinely great in life, we must first be genuinely good in our service to

others. Even the smallest act of kindness brings joy to the angels.

Greatness and goodness simply cannot be divorced.

– *The Urantia Book*

Modesty

Modesty is the quality of being moderate in any estimation of our abilities or accomplishments. It is the ability to see ourselves within a greater context—it is recognizing our humble position in a limitless universe ruled by an eternal God.

Vanity, on the other hand, is linked to pride and egotism—being self-centered. It limits our ability to see ourselves as we truly are. Vanity is founded on our desire to have others think highly of us because of how we appear, what we can do, or the things we possess. But vanity is not a virtue. Even if your fans adore you, vanity has no value in the spirit realm, and to make life worthwhile, you need worthwhile values.

Envy goes hand in hand with vanity because vanity persists only so long as there is a receptive, envious audience. We envy others for their appearance, fame, possessions, or accomplishments. Feelings of envy are often rooted in our own low self-esteem. But envy, like vanity, does nothing to help us progress in the spirit.

Be yourself; everyone else is taken.

– Oscar Wilde

Tolerance

Being tolerant means having a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions, beliefs, and practices that differ from one's own. It means going through life without being defensive or stubborn in your views. It's the ability to make fair, unbiased judgments of opposing opinions without having to convert everyone else to your way of thinking.

[Commander Lock] “Goddamn it, Morpheus.
Not everyone believes what you believe!”
[Morpheus] “My beliefs do not require
them to.”

– *Matrix Reloaded*

Being tolerant does not mean we have to accept or agree with other people’s opinions. Nor does it imply that we should sanction unbridled liberty. In a peaceful and orderly society, it’s not reasonable to assume that people can do whatever they please, whenever they please. But regardless of how offensive we may find another person’s views or actions, this does not give us the right to vilify them. Tolerance maintains a constant attitude of love and respect.

Those who are completely intolerant of the opinions of others are usually strongly opinionated themselves. The more stubborn and intractable we become, the greater the possibility of endless conflict and misunderstandings.

The highest result of education is tolerance.

– Helen Keller

Graciousness

To be *graceful* is to display elegance in manner, movement, and speech, whereas being *gracious* is the personal quality of being kind, courteous, charming, and compassionate. Graciousness is a natural consequence of spiritual maturity and a reflection of the beauty of your inner life, which you then manifest or express as beauty in your outer life.

As we grow in soul and come to identify more with the divine way of the living Spirit, we become even more gracious, more graceful, and more beautiful. Our trust in the promises of God and our clear vision of a divine destiny fill us with confidence and peace, even in the face of life's most pressing challenges.

You can cultivate gracefulness, but graciousness is the aroma of friendliness which emanates from a love-saturated soul.

– *The Urantia Book*

Graciousness is the outcome of this sublime confidence, a confidence born of your unconditional and steadfast faith. Your gracious character, as expressed in your speech and action, is apparent to all those around you. You become more poised and composed, more charming and pleasant in manner. It is a positive indicator of your spiritual coming of age.

Sincerity

Sincerity is being honest, genuine, and truthful. It is being completely free of pretense, deceit, and hypocrisy.

It's impossible to live a truly spiritual life if we are not completely sincere. Whenever we try to impress others with affectations or pretensions, we are in fact lying about who we are. Spiritual beings live in truth; they act

and speak with sincerity, and those who wish to enter the spirit domain must be equally honest of heart.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven are:
sincerity, more sincerity, and more sincerity.

– *The Urantia Book*

Being sincere means tearing down our ostentatious and egocentric facades to appear as we really are on the stage of life. Honest people are not ashamed of themselves, regardless of their deficiencies, nor do they feel guilty for being imperfectly human. They have learned to laugh at themselves. They dare to admit their mistakes, and they correct themselves according to the Spirit Way.

Attitudes Toward God

Trust

Childlike trust is the entrance fee at heaven's door. Having complete trust in the goodness

and love of God, as well as the ministry of the angels, is a transforming attitude of mind because it enables spiritual forces to function on your behalf.

Trust opens the floodgates of spiritual wisdom and soul energies. And with increasing trust comes peace of mind and the certainty of living in a gentle and understanding universe. It changes the way we look at the world. Indeed, no religion or spiritual path can provide much personal happiness or inner peace if it does not instill a wholehearted, unwavering trust in the loving and good ways of the Eternal Spirit.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust also in me.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

God is divinely trustworthy, which inspires us to be trustworthy too. Whenever we accept duties or responsibilities, we acknowledge that others have put their trust in us to perform these duties to the best of

our ability and in an honest manner. Responsibilities to families, friends, business associates, or a public trust should be held in the highest regard. Few things are more destructive to our spiritual natures than betrayal of trust and disloyalty to friends.

Trustworthiness is the true measure of self-mastery and character development.

– *The Urantia Book*

Faith

Faith and trust go hand in hand. While trust brings us to the door of the spirit domain, faith carries us over the threshold. Exercising our faith is essential for spiritual contact and personal transformation.

Faith far transcends any mere belief or sentiment. It is believing beyond all doubt; it is an unwavering conviction—one you are willing to act on without hesitation. Genuine faith is when you are so convinced in your beliefs that you begin to live every moment of every day according to those beliefs. This

is *living faith*—the act of *living* your beliefs (see *What Is Spiritual Faith?*).

Positive faith is more than an idea or an ideal. It is not simply a mental construct. It is *an attitude of life* that far transcends any mental exercise, and it is by far the most powerful and effective approach to coordinate our lives with the Way of God.

Faith is the open door for entering into the present, perfect, and eternal love of God.

– *The Urantia Book*

When you come to believe, with all your heart and soul, that God is loving, good, and trustworthy, and you begin to live this truth, you reach beyond mind—even beyond conviction. You truly believe God’s promise of eternal life.

Your resolute faith in a magnificent, perfect, and loving Source leads you to a life in the spirit defined by modesty, courage, and wisdom. It gives you the strength to persevere no matter what the odds are, no

matter how many times you fail, no matter how many times you are disappointed.

Humility

Adopting an attitude of humility does not suggest we are weak or that we have a low opinion of ourselves. Humility is merely the quality of being humble, being free from pride and arrogance.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

– C. S. Lewis

While pride is generally considered a weakness, a certain amount of pride in our achievements is commendable. Healthy feelings of pride contribute to self-confidence and self-respect. But being overly proud of family traditions, deeds and abilities, superior intellects, or even the proud illusion of spiritual superiority, is not the Spirit Way.

God is no respecter of persons, meaning God shows no special regard for any individual or group. We may at times entertain fantasies of being special—but in the eyes of God, we will never be any more special than anyone else. No doubt, some people are more spiritually progressive and, as a result, more receptive to God's gifts. Even so, our Divine Parent loves all of us equally. If you really want to improve your status with God, learn to love and help others.

Adopt a humble state of mind. If you insist on speaking to God—the Supreme Creator of the universe of universes—as if he were your equal or, worse yet, your servant, then you are simply making a mockery of the truth. Humility and modesty are the most sensible attitudes in any approach to spiritual truth.

So long as we are on this earth, nothing matters more to us than humility.

– Teresa of Ávila

Cosmic Consciousness

Cosmic consciousness is an attitude of mind that takes us far beyond the confines of planet Earth. The entire universe, when viewed as a complex and orderly system, is called the cosmos. Cosmic consciousness, therefore, is a way of seeing ourselves (and everything else) in the context of the grand cosmos. It is an awareness of the physical universe, the spiritual universe, and all beings living in both—at least as much as we can grasp at this time.

Cosmic consciousness seeks to know God and to grasp the entire cosmos—to see the big picture. If we truly wish to discover truth, then we must be open to all possibilities, scientific and divine (see also *Meditate on Cosmic Meanings*).

Exploring cosmology (the study of the cosmos) gives meaning to our lives because, if we know something about the truth of existence, we are better equipped to define the true values of life and, therefore, to

visualize worthy goals. This cosmic awareness is one path to God consciousness.

Cosmic awareness is more than recognizing the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the universe around us. It is also the intellectual process of bringing it all together—to grasp the oneness of it all, just as Buddha and Lao Tzu did. It is a synthesis of all forms of universe reality as well as an attempt to discern cosmic relationships.

Cosmic consciousness is a working combination of scientific, moral, and spiritual insights, or intuitions, that come to each of us in varying degrees. It is understanding the interactions and relationships between three levels of reality—energy, mind, and spirit. And as you begin to grasp these relationships, you begin to see a new reality, an all-in-one reality. You begin to see that the universe is created by God, is unified in the existence of God, and functions in harmony with the will of God.

Accept and believe that you truly are a world citizen and a cosmic citizen—you are a

spiritual child of God. You belong in this grand community and, if you wish, you can become a citizen in good standing by contributing to the betterment of all.

I am not an Athenian, nor a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

– *Socrates*

The Secret of Self-Mastery

Most of us desire to change for the better. And in our quest for self-mastery, we often turn to others for support, knowledge, and understanding because we realize we can't always do it on our own. This ongoing demand for moral and spiritual guidance has given rise to hundreds of self-help books and websites dealing with mental control, developing good habits, achieving life-changing goals, and unlocking our potential for success.

Verily, verily, I say to you, he who rules his own self is greater than he who captures a city.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

We can succeed in any profession by mastering our emotions, having intellectual focus, and honing our skills. Nonetheless, career or financial success does not necessarily imply spiritual achievement.

In the God experience, success means spiritual success; growth is spiritual growth; intellectual control is spiritual control; and intellectual focus is spiritual focus. A successful life, therefore, is a life guided by the Spirit Within.

Self-mastery, to be spiritually beneficial, must be spiritually dominated. So instead of attempting to whip yourself into shape, submit yourself to what is true and right. Think less of seizing control of yourself with an iron fist, and more of embracing the Way of God with all your heart and soul.

Self-mastery is the measure of man's moral nature and the indicator of his spiritual development.

– *The Urantia Book*

Self-mastery is the art of self-control—not an act of self-denial. It's not an attempt to dominate the mind with the mind. Achieving true self-mastery comes about by actively *following the guidance* of the Divine Spirit,

all the while having complete faith that it *can and will* transform you. You need to make only one choice—to freely align all your choices with those of a higher Source. Whenever you heed spiritual direction, every choice is the right choice.

The Spirit Will Transform You

There is no need to be a slave to self-denial by keeping an incessant, self-conscious vigilance over the desires of the flesh.

Instead, learn to trust in the guidance of the Spirit within you. Rather than trying to change yourself by force of mind or by the application of fear and guilt, learn to love God's Spirit of Love. When you come to love and adore all that God is, you will discover the inner strength to live a masterful life in the spirit.

True self-mastery rests on our faith in the Spirit to accomplish what we cannot do alone. It's learning to accept and trust this loving and wise counsel. This doesn't mean that everything about our lives is

preordained or that no effort is required on our part. We can choose many different careers and many different paths to God. But on each path, there are moral and spiritual decisions to be made according to the Way of God—the way of love.

Your secret of the mastery of self is bound up with your faith in the indwelling spirit, which ever works by love.

– *The Urantia Book*

You enhance the ability of the Spirit to transform you—to spiritualize you—once you *believe it can transform you*. Come to realize that your undaunted faith in the power of God to change you actually allows God to change you (see [*What Is Spiritual Faith?*](#)).

Whenever you hesitate to accept the guidance of your Spirit Teacher, take some time to evaluate how well your choices have served you to date. If on reflection, you

realize your decisions have led you to a life of anxiety, depression, anger, grief, or any kind of mental anguish, then what do you have to lose by beginning a new, invigorated life in which you allow yourself to be guided by an all-loving and all-wise Spirit?

Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved, is that of overcoming self.

– Francis of Assisi

Self-mastery is not an effort to enforce self-righteousness on ourselves; more so, it's the free and willful act of living out our highest ideals. We reach these high ideals through spiritual insight, all of which comes to us by meditating on divine values, praying for strength and courage, and having faith in the goodness of God—the perfect, magnificent, and glorious Source of all creation.

Self-Evaluation

Self-mastery begins with our faith in the power of Spirit to transform us, but it also requires some measure of self-knowledge. If we have no idea what needs to change, then what is there to master? And if we are convinced that we are adequate enough as we are, then attaining true self-knowledge will be difficult. Such self-satisfied convictions will forever confine us to a life of mediocrity and stagnation.

To know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks. It is to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way around.

– Flannery O'Connor

Self-evaluation is not self-criticism, but it is self-critique. It entails an honest assessment of our thoughts and actions and how they impact our lives and the lives of others. We can gain some perspective by asking others how they view us and our ideas—but prepare to be humbled!

Indeed, humility is an essential state of mind to achieve true self-knowledge. Humility, sincerity, and courage are spiritual qualities that allow us to see ourselves as we truly are. And we can get to know ourselves even better when we couple these inclinations with meditation, prayer, and worship.

Any type of communion helps you to attain self-mastery because it makes you more receptive to the workings of your soul and the guidance of your inner Spirit, providing you with spiritual perspectives and the ability to conduct a more objective evaluation of your spiritual life—it is seeing yourself not only as others see you, but as the angels see you.

Know yourself as the angels know you.

– *The Urantia Book*

Self-Realization

Self-realization, or self-actualization, is an integral part of self-mastery. It is a popular

term in both Eastern philosophies and Western psychology, and is often associated with self-improvement.

One meaning of *to realize* is to become fully aware of something—to understand it clearly. But the word also means *to bring something into existence*, to make it a reality, to real-ize it. In this sense, realization is the act of making something real, whether it is a mental state or a spiritual existence.

Self-realization is, therefore, the process of making our personal potential a reality. Whenever we consider a person's potential, we often think about their physical abilities, intelligence, acquired skills, and ways to realize this potential through their careers and other endeavors in life. These are valid interpretations of self-realization.

But in the God experience, we emphasize the act of *becoming more spiritually real* because spiritual reality is the ultimate personal reality. From this perspective, the most important act of self-realization is to make our spiritual potential a reality. And,

once again, this comes about by identifying ourselves with Spirit.

The goal of human self-realization should be spiritual, not material.

– *The Urantia Book*

In Hinduism, the ultimate goal of realization is to transcend the ego to identify with *Atman* (the soul or a greater Self), which is considered the self-existent essence of being; something beyond the mind and personality. This task is accomplished by attaining self-knowledge, which is viewed as the knowledge of this greater Self. This knowledge eventually leads to *moksha*, or liberation.

In the God experience, *Atman* is represented by the inner Spirit—our God connector—while self-knowledge is equivalent to knowing God, and self-realization is the act of identifying with the nature of God, which is becoming more Godlike.

Cosmic Self-Realization

Cosmic self-realization is the realization of our full potential as cosmic citizens. It begins with our recognition that we truly are spiritual children of an eternal Creator and that we live in a friendly universe. This is a personal discovery that inevitably leads us to accept the truth that we are all spiritual sisters and brothers. This is the first step to broadening our worldview beyond the limits of community or nation. The whole world becomes our home. This is the club of humanity.

The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.

– Baha'u'llah

As members of this Earth Club, we acknowledge the world's problems as *our* problems, the world's challenges as *our* challenges, and the world's solutions as *our* solutions.

Even deeper realizations can be reached when we begin to enlarge our worldview to a universal field of vision by acknowledging an even greater club than planet Earth. This is the Universe Club—a universal spiritual club open to all who wish to join.

All members of this cosmic circle are lifelong students enrolled in a magnificent universe school pursuing divine perfection, greater knowledge, and superior skills.

Allow the Spirit to Help You

Once again, neither God nor his angels will ever interfere with our free will. Spiritual beings will never drive us along a righteous path by beating us with truncheons of fear, guilt, or shame. Instead, they entice us to follow this high moral road with carrots of love, understanding, and compassion. And if we sincerely search for this desirable path, spiritual forces are always ready and willing to clear the way.

The enlightened path of self-mastery and spiritual liberation is forever open. It is always accessible. There is no one and no thing in the entire universe that can prevent you from walking the path of love and faith—no one but yourself. You enter and follow of your own free will, not because you think you should or because you feel guilty, but because you wholeheartedly desire to.

Believe the Spirit Is Helping You

Most spiritual achievements occur unconsciously, and consequently, it may be frustrating at times to think that nothing of any import is happening, causing us to lose heart in our quest for self-mastery. This is one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome.

But our doubts and fears are the only real enemies, and we must refuse to entertain them. To succeed, we learn to put aside our troubled past and stop dwelling on apparent failures, past regrets, or being confused. Take heart in the truth that the more we

believe God is helping us, the more we are helped, regardless of our fears and failures, or whether or not we understand how it works.

If you don't feel any spiritual inspiration, you can ask for it. The spiritual powers within you and around you will do everything they can to assist you, but they can do little until you make a conscious and sincere decision to *allow* them to help you—and then have faith, *believe they are helping you*. When you truly seek wisdom and divine assistance, have no doubt, you will receive it.

Imagine, accept, and believe that God is helping you.

– A. K. Mozumdar

We use the power of faith to change ourselves and our world. By believing and trusting that the Spirit Within can bring out the best in us, we open a spiritual channel that allows it to do exactly that. We simply believe God is helping us, and then, with

complete confidence, we sit back and listen, being receptive to the spiritual energies that will transform us.

Over time and with some reflection, you will come to recognize the amazing changes within yourself. You will soon discover that your spiritual accomplishments are genuine, spontaneous, and progressive.

Make Courageous Choices

All choices, spiritual or otherwise, determine the consequences and direction of our lives. The exercise of choice is the greatest power of change we possess in our quest for self-mastery.

Every decision you make either impedes or facilitates the function of the [Spirit].

– *The Urantia Book*

Make courageous choices to cultivate your soul growth and to become more receptive to the continuous stream of spiritual forces

trying to help you. Make the daring choice to *cooperate* with your Spirit Teacher.

Be bold with life! Go out and do something worthwhile, not just for yourself, but for everyone else—do it for the world. Choose to be better. Choose the spiritual life. Choose courage over fear. Choose good over evil. Choose love over hate. Choose compassion over intolerance. Choose truth over error. Choose beauty over ugliness. Choose to follow the Spirit wherever it may lead you. These are courageous choices.

I believe that every single event in life is an opportunity to choose love over fear.

– Oprah Winfrey

Make the supreme choice of consecrating your life to the Spirit Way. Risk everything you are and everything you have for the discovery of truth, for the advancement of spirit, and for the love of God.

Tame Your Mind

Taming the mind begins by understanding that mind and consciousness are things we possess, but they do not necessarily represent who we are in entirety. The mind is a tool at our disposal. We can focus it, shape it, and direct it any way we choose (see *We Are More Than Mind*).

You can be a slave to your thoughts or the master of them. You can allow your mind to work against you, or command it to work for you. You can indulge in negative thoughts, or you can direct your thoughts toward positive, rewarding paths.

Use your mind to its fullest capacity; let it work for you. Train your mind to ponder an issue and to consider it from different perspectives. Focus your mind on the problem at hand and imagine every viable solution within the context of divine values. Then take a good rest and consider it again. Many of our problems are the consequence of making unwise, impetuous decisions,

often based on a few facts and little understanding.

Learn to separate your personality from your mind. Your personality is your true self (see *Personality and You*). It allows you to see your thoughts, observe your actions, and ponder your future in a self-conscious and objective manner. The personality *decides*—it is your source of willpower, whereas the mind is the arena in which you create, analyze, reason, and evaluate.

But the mind also generates emotions and sentiments, some of which are primitive and irrational. Recognizing the clear separation between the willpower of personality and the workings of mind allows us to choose more dispassionately, thereby avoiding the danger of becoming a slave to every whim, anxiety, and fear.

Without an awareness of personality, it's easy to fall into the illusion that we are what we think. No doubt, our thoughts affect our behavior, but it would be more accurate to say that *we are what we believe* because our

beliefs guide our thoughts, actions, and choices.

The true power of personality is that it picks and chooses which thoughts it will reject or adopt. We simply refuse to entertain any particular idea or emotion, just as we refuse to entertain notions of selfishness, envy, or jealousy. We also counter unwanted feelings by choosing to be reasonable and logical.

But the best way to nudge out unwanted thoughts is by choosing to fill our minds with divine values, spiritual objectives, and supernal ideals—to express love, compassion, and goodness. The unseen Spirit is our source and inspiration for all our moral decisions, notions of altruism, and spiritual insights.

Treat your mind as a separate entity—objectify it—give it a life of its own by speaking to it forcefully but also with kindness and respect. It is your child and your friend, not your foe. It is your mediator between the material and spiritual worlds. Any attempt to beat your mind into

submission with constant self-criticism will only undermine your feelings of self-worth.

In all your efforts, be persistent. Your mind is reluctant to give up bad habits; it doesn't like to change. It will conjure up all kinds of sophisticated arguments or stereotypical views to dissuade you.

Taming the mind, therefore, begins with our ability to discriminate between our thoughts. And it also comes from the realization that there is, in truth, a correct or divinely led method of choosing, one that is intricately bound up with our faith in the wisdom of the Paradise Spirit.

The tamed mind yields happiness.

– *The Urantia Book*

Creative Imagination

Creative imagination, or creative visualization, is an extremely effective tool for taming the mind. The power of imagination is nothing new to us. In Western culture, the most influential author on this subject was James Allen. His best-known work, *As a Man Thinketh* (1903), inspired generations of self-help books, many using visualization techniques. Other notable pioneers in this area include Prentice Mulford, Graham Wallas, A. K. Mozumdar, Ernest Holmes, and William W. Atkinson, to mention but a few.

All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts.

– James Allen

In Buddhist practice, creative imagination is equivalent to the mental technique of *bhavana*, which means *becoming*. This

technique uses imagination and visualization to bring something into existence—to develop or cultivate a trait through its contemplation. The word is often used in conjunction with another word to form a compound phrase. For example, *panna-bhavana* is the cultivation of wisdom.

According to the *Yogapedia* website, *bhavana* is “used to shape or influence the self to acquire positive characteristics or create positive change.”⁶⁵ It is a form of meditation that uses visualization to bring something into existence—similar to the process of self-realization (see *Self-Realization*).

What you think, you become. What you feel, you attract. What you imagine, you create.

– Buddha

New Age Imagination

Many popular New Age notions derive from Prentice Mulford’s 1903 publication, *Your Forces and How to Use Them*. Following

closely was W.W. Atkinson's 1906 publication, *Law of Attraction*, which is similar in principle.⁶⁶ Both are New Thought publications promoting the powers of creative imagination, drawing heavily on concepts expounded in Eastern religious texts.

Atkinson's basic premise is that thought vibrations and certain energies are drawn together by some cosmic magnetism or mental positivity that can attract those things we imagine, primarily spiritual qualities.

Both publications contain useful information but require some critical assessment.

Visualization is useful for rehearsing the mind and improving our behavior and experiences, but Atkinson's (and others') theories about attracting material things with cosmic magnetism are not entirely convincing.

Your thoughts do not create reality, but they
do create your experience.

– Alan Cohen

To their credit, many of these authors take a spiritual perspective while emphasizing a freewill means to escape the mechanistic, materialistic, and secular thinking so prevalent in the early 20th century. But with a touch of irony, the techniques offered in these works were so effective at changing behavior that others soon applied them to advance their careers and pursue wealth.

One of the first authors to see the value of these techniques for such purposes was Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). Other writers followed, such as Norman Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), David J. Schwartz, *The Magic of Thinking Big* (1959), and Joseph Murphy, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* (1963). One of the best-known inspirational speakers in the latter half of the 20th

century was Tony Robbins, *Awaken the Giant Within* (1991).

Despite the materialistic overtones of these self-help gurus, it's heartening to discover the strong spiritual undercurrent sweeping through most of their publications. To achieve success, they all appeal to a helpful and limitless Power within. Tony Robbins is quite clear about this; he consistently attributes his amazing success to "our Creator" and "God-given power." This power is the living Spirit within you.

Another influential book on this topic is *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain, first published in 1978.⁶⁷ Gawain's premise is that imagination has the power to create and attract (as in Atkinson's Law of Attraction) for individual achievement and happiness. She claims that it is not necessary to believe in any metaphysical or spiritual ideas to use the technique. Nonetheless, she gives credit to her "inner guide," even claiming that her guide is responsible for writing her book. And she also suggests this

technique is most beneficial when used for a “higher purpose.”

In creative visualization, you use your imagination to create a clear image, idea, or feeling of something you wish to manifest.

– *Shakti Gawain*

Creative imagination is a powerful tool in our spiritual quest. Human genius and spiritual insights are rooted in the creativity of imagination. Scientific theories, eureka moments, philosophical explanations, and spiritual revelations all spring from vivid imaginations. Even the progressive evolution of civilization is predicated on creative imaginings stimulated by knowledge, wisdom, and ambition.

The technique of creative imagination can be used in any walk of life. Sports psychology has used positive visualization techniques for some time. Long ago, a Sumo wrestler by the name of Onami became one of the greatest wrestlers in the world by

meditating—by imagining himself as a great wave sweeping everything before him, swallowing all in his path.

Since Onami's time, sports coaches have used similar mental techniques to great effect, producing Olympic champions along the way. Imagining ourselves as winners is the first step to winning. Racers imagine the course, the turns, the speeds, and their physical performance. These techniques go so far as to imagine what they will hear, feel, and even smell. In essence, these athletes are constructing a virtual reality in which they live the experience before actually doing it.

Creative imagination and visualization are effective, positive techniques that can be applied across all avenues of life. By imagining yourself doing something you would not usually dare to do, you prepare yourself for future adventures.

Positive Imagination

Like all tools at our disposal, creative imagination can be either a negative force or

a positive force in our lives. If we insist on harboring negative views about the world around us, or about our lives, capabilities, and fortunes, we will forever express negative views and live a negative life. If we imagine that we cannot do something, then we will not be able to do it. If we imagine failing, we will fail.

By considering a thing as impossible, you immediately draw to yourself all the elements that contribute to failure.

– W.W. Atkinson

But it is just as easy to imagine yourself succeeding. Realize that God, along with the entire spiritual universe, is positive. Positivity is a spiritual reality, whereas negativity thrives only in the errant human mind, manifesting through our misguided and malicious intents. Negativity is a consequence of *not following*, or not living, the Spirit Way.

It is always good to recognize thoughts and emotions that hamper our spiritual growth, but it is also important not to dwell on them. We begin a positive approach by imagining and contemplating the love and goodness of God, and by having unwavering faith in this love and goodness (see *What Is Spiritual Faith?*).

By venerating divine values and spiritual meanings, we push aside our negative thoughts; we crowd them out. Rather than actively fighting negative forces, we let the Spirit consume them with love.

Much, very much, of our spiritual progress is a matter of harmonizing our thoughts and behavior with spiritual thoughts and behavior. And our creative imagination is an effective tool for doing just that. It helps us to realign our thinking, making it more compatible with the truth of spiritual realities.

The positive power of creative imagination is not an illusion; it is not a self-deceptive optimism. For all of us, the experience of

reality and consciousness exists only in the mind. Therefore, imagination is an extremely effective psychological technique for raising our thoughts and experiences above the mundane level of existence, even to the heights of a spiritual state of mind.

The dramas that are enacted within, make you what you are without.

– A. K. Mozumdar

Take time during the day to imagine the highest spiritual ideals. Imagine living the perfect life in a perfect state of mind. Imagine living every moment as the Spirit wants you to live. Imagine contacting the very source of all divinity. Imagine yourself in a humble and receptive state of mind, one that trusts completely in the unconditional love, infinite wisdom, and divine goodness of God. Imagine yourself in the presence of God.

Mindfulness as Spiritual Self-Reflection

What we think of as "mindfulness" today has drifted far from its spiritual intent. Even as a practice in Western Buddhism, it has largely devolved into a secular exercise for relieving mental stress. And now, as a popular remedy in clinical psychology, it appears virtually devoid of spirituality.

In 14th-century Old English, being mindful meant "to take care, be heedful or thoughtful, be aware." For example, one might say, "Be mindful of the dangerous road." But this common meaning took on a more spiritual tone after T.W. Rhys Davids translated the word *sati* from Pali to English in 1881, a work published in Volume 11 of Max Müller's monumental collection, *The Sacred Books of the East*.⁶⁸

The word *sati* literally means "to bear in mind," or "to be aware," which is similar to the Old English meaning. But Rhys Davids,

with an eye to the Buddhist Eightfold Path, translated it as “mindful.” For instance, he translated *sammā-sati*, the seventh element of the Eightfold Path, as “right mindfulness, the watchful, active mind,” and *sato sampajāno* as “mindful and thoughtful.”

Along with this subtle change of meaning, being mindful became more than a way of thinking. It soon became a deliberate practice, forming an integral part of meditation exercises.

Clinical Mindfulness

At first, mindfulness became popular in Western culture because of its strong association with Buddhism, especially as promoted by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk.⁶⁹ And it soon gained legitimacy in medicine and psychology through the pioneering work of Herbert Benson and Miriam Klipper.⁷⁰

Not long after, Jon Kabat-Zinn, who was a student of Hanh, conducted extensive studies on mindfulness at the University of

Massachusetts, where he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979 (*Wherever You Go, There You Are*, 1994).

Hanh introduced mindfulness as a traditional Buddhist meditation technique in which practitioners are encouraged to become aware of their breathing and to focus on what they are doing in the present moment, without allowing their thoughts to influence them or to judge those thoughts. The purpose of the exercise is to become aware of thoughts and experiences in the present moment.

Hanh emphasized that mindfulness should bring us to an awareness of the interconnectedness of the self with the world around us. He saw no separation between the self and its environment. In a very real sense, he was promoting the Buddhist (and Taoist) philosophy of oneness, of belonging to a universe—cosmic consciousness.

Hanh's insight into our interconnectedness with the universe is an important realization. But the critical difference in the God

experience is the added realization that the self remains intact. Rather than being an illusion, as Hahn maintains, the self is a *personal reality* that makes a freewill choice to connect and harmonize with the universe (see *Ego, Self, and You*). And this cosmic self-realization is made possible by the presence of the Spirit Within—our personal God connector and the very source of God consciousness.

God consciousness is equivalent to the integration of the self with the universe.

– *The Urantia Book*

Benson and Kabat-Zinn, rather than emphasizing the connection between the self and the universe as Hanh did, instead focused on the strong connection between mind and body, thereby moving away from the metaphysical roots of mindfulness to develop a science of mind approach, one that promotes an awareness of physical, mental, and emotional states. They were primarily interested in physical and mental relaxation

techniques as well as using creative imagination to change behavior patterns (see *Creative Imagination*).

Psychological research with mindfulness employs a clinical approach with the intention of reducing symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety. The premise of these methods is that practitioners can, by being consciously aware of their individual thoughts, emotions, and sensations, intervene constructively whenever stressful or fearful states arise.

These clinical methods follow Buddhist tradition by being nonjudgmental and by teaching self-compassion and self-respect rather than engaging in critical self-examination. And whenever we intervene in our thoughts, we avoid criticism, guilt, or shame. This is a sensible approach.

Moral Mindfulness

But is mindfulness intended to be a simple awareness of thought that is judgment-free? Was it ever intended to be? Rhys Davids

translated the term *sati* to mean both “mindful and thoughtful.” In addition to being thoughtful, consider that in traditional Buddhism, it is essential to prepare the mind (in daily life and in meditation) using moral and ethical principles. ⁷¹

The very act of being moral or ethical necessarily entails an exercise in discretion—judgment. However, this does not imply that judgments should be unkind, overbearing, or disrespectful.

While we should avoid self-recrimination, we cannot escape the necessity of conducting a sincere moral evaluation of our thoughts, feelings, and actions—otherwise, what’s the point of any mindfulness at all? What’s the point of trying to improve ourselves by becoming aware of our thoughts, motivations, and feelings if we don’t intend to adjust and improve those thoughts and feelings? We cannot escape the fact that changing our thoughts requires some moral judgment to determine which ones we should change.

The moral values of the universe become intellectual possessions by the exercise of the three basic judgments, or choices, of the mortal mind: Self-judgment—moral choice, social-judgment—ethical choice, God-judgment—religious choice.

– *The Urantia Book*

The question is, how do we conduct a moral evaluation? To evaluate something is to measure it against our values, and in spiritual evaluations, moral and spiritual values serve as our yardsticks. Once more, we apply the four divine values—love, goodness, beauty, and truth—to any assessment of moral quality. These serve as a universal standard for comparison (see *Four Divine Values*).

Knowing the nature of God and being aware of divine values allows us to compare our thoughts and actions to truly virtuous ideals. By doing so, we gain spiritual direction and wisdom, thereby coming to know ourselves much better than we ever could with endless self-examination.

Once we have conducted a moral self-evaluation, we are not interested in constant self-absorption or overmuch self-examination. And borrowing the best from clinical mindfulness, we are not interested in harboring feelings of guilt or shame. Instead, we simply *recognize* our shortcomings and desires before turning to our Spirit Teacher for direction and support.

Another aspect of traditional mindfulness is the inclusion of *vipassana*, which is the realization of intellectual and spiritual insights by contemplating and reflecting on our mental and emotional states, the nature of being, and the state of reality.⁷² These are valid pursuits that also form a part of the God experience.

Essentially, the traditional aims of mindfulness go beyond being aware of the present, watching our thoughts, or paying attention to our breathing. It also includes self-reflection, a process in which we discriminate and think things over—we

contemplate and reflect—hence *mind-full*, or thoughtful.

To reiterate, we can never be entirely free of judgment or discretion when it comes to our thoughts. Even if we are fully aware of our character, inclinations, and views, we need some universal standard of comparison to assess these personal qualities. And this underscores the need to recognize divine values.

Mindfulness and God

As a psychological method, mindfulness is especially useful when it comes to being aware of anxious or depressive states of mind. It then directs practitioners to assess their thoughts with reason and logic, thereby either dispelling such discordant ideas or replacing them with happier reflections. Indeed, taking a rational approach is the first step in any attempt to deal with unwanted emotions or disturbing thoughts.

But attaining deeper spiritual insights requires reaching beyond the limits of

reason. Spiritual insights are inner visions, or intuitions, of divine realities and values. These provide a solid foundation for moral choice and religious living.

Reason alone can never validate the values and goodnesses of religious experience.

– *The Urantia Book*

Without a doubt, current mindfulness techniques contribute to psychological health, but they do not necessarily enhance spiritual well-being. And almost all clinical instructors of mindfulness have taken great pains to distance themselves and their techniques from their Buddhist roots, being equally as careful to avoid any connection to religion or spiritual philosophy.

Nonetheless, some advocates of the clinical approach remain spiritual at heart.

Kabat-Zinn, for instance, does not deny the spiritual experience but, in his own words, “I avoid using the word ‘spiritual’ altogether. I find it neither useful nor necessary nor

appropriate in my work...”⁷³ One reason for this, he states, is that many different connotations are attached to any understanding of spirituality.

This is a reasonable response to the faults and failings of traditional religions.

Nonetheless, in a very real sense, mindfulness has become his religion, and perhaps it is his way of contacting his inner Spirit. As he says, “Mindfulness allows everything to shine with the luminosity that the word 'spiritual' is meant to connote.”

Kabat-Zinn does not explicitly deny God either, but he feels that, rather than looking outside ourselves for help, the most important thing is to know ourselves first. As he says, “It is just that our happiness, satisfaction, and our understanding, even of God, will be no deeper than our capacity to know ourselves inwardly...”

This inward, nontheistic view of self-improvement corresponds to the Hindu notion of *moksha*—that enlightenment is reached through self-knowledge. No doubt,

knowing the true self (personality) is a part of the religious experience, but whether it takes first place on the agenda is debatable. No matter how well-intentioned Kabat-Zinn's philosophy may be, it is a theory, not necessarily a spiritual truth.

Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Carmelite nun and Christian mystic, had a different theory. She saw it the other way around—that we need to know God before we can know ourselves—a view shared by many others, past and present (*Interior Castle*, 1946).

We shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God.

– *Teresa of Ávila*

Self-knowledge, as well as our awareness of how we see the world, are important realizations that play essential roles in the God experience. But the critical difference in our God-centered approach is that the ultimate answers to happiness and

understanding are not mysteriously lodged within the human psyche or some cosmic essence, but instead reside in the very real presence of the indwelling Spirit—our God connector.

Self-knowledge means knowing more about the nature of God, and it also means knowing our true relationship to this heavenly Creator—that we are, in truth, his spiritual children.

Spirit-Led Mindfulness

The current trend to strip mindfulness of its spiritual origins goes hand-in-hand with the increasing secularism of modern society. In science and much of academia, there is a strong aversion to religion and spirituality unless both are discussed exclusively in terms of material and social benefits (or detriments).

It is, therefore, understandable that Kabat-Zinn and others desire to appear scientific and impartial regarding religion. But without considering the realities of spirit,

divine values, or spiritual achievement, we ignore the indispensable and transformative power of the Divine Presence within us, a vital influence in the progressive spiritualization of both mind and soul.

Sadly, the clinical, nontheistic approach to self-betterment doesn't stop in the clinic. Any search of the topic will bring up a ballooning number of websites promoting meditation and mindfulness. But few of these have much to do with spirituality, even those that claim to be Buddhist in philosophy. True enough, some sites maintain a positive, humanistic or humanitarian stance, but there is little indication they are spiritually motivated.

And it is unfortunate that some advocates of meditation and mindfulness, rather than serving others, have reduced their practices to nothing more than a profitable business, preying on vulnerable anxieties rather than promoting a beneficial means of spiritual insight and self-improvement. This is a further continuation of the downward,

secular, and materialist trend that Chögyam Trungpa refers to as *spiritual materialism*.⁷⁴

On the bright side, the current approach to mindfulness is a credible search for self-knowledge and helps to broaden our intellectual horizons. It even touches on the inner Spirit, as Kabat-Zinn implies. But it could be even more productive and meaningful when undertaken within a wholehearted spiritual context, one that includes a realization of the unifying quality of personality coupled with the indomitable power of the Spirit Within.

Indeed, even if we are honest, open, and humble in our approach to mindfulness, it's difficult to achieve lasting personal change by attempting to dominate the mind with the mind. Only a *spirit-led personality* can bring about lasting, positive spiritual changes.

All things are sacred in the lives of those
who are spirit led.

– *The Urantia Book*

Mindfulness is a practical way to become aware of toxic thoughts and distressing emotional states, and it is also useful for changing such harmful thoughts. But ideally, we shift our focus away from ourselves and from any unhealthy self-absorption over personal problems. Endless introspection and undue self-examination are not productive. By focusing on God's perfection and divine ideals and allowing the Spirit to transform us, we can achieve considerably more in life.

Overall, the effectiveness of mindfulness methods would improve immensely from a healthy injection of idealistic morality and a strong dose of the God experience. We could begin with Hanh's cosmic approach, in which we see ourselves as an integral part of the universe, which is undoubtedly true, and then take it one step further by accepting

that we truly belong in this universe as children of a Universal Spirit. We are spiritually endowed beings who live in a personal, peaceful, positive, friendly, and spiritual universe.

Another benefit of the God-centered approach to mindfulness is recognizing and accepting that we do not have to make it on our own. In fact, it is highly unlikely we will be able to make any significant spiritual advances in our personal betterment without the help of spirit ministry.

No one exists in spiritual isolation. We are not cosmic orphans cast aside by a heartless universe, forever abandoned to eke out a spiritual existence as best we can. We have divine parents as well as spiritual brothers and sisters who care for us and who give us all the help we ask for.

Mindfulness is a useful and productive technique for contacting the spark of God living within your mind. It helps you to be conscious of your consciousness—a high-minded state of superconsciousness. This

elevated level of consciousness enables you to reach the borderland of intimate contact with your indwelling Spirit.

The unifying power of your personality allows you to take control of your thoughts and actions by making a deliberate choice to follow the guidance of your Spirit Teacher. Make use of the presence of the Spirit, the self-reflection of your soul, and the freewill choice of your personality to take control of your mind. It is your personality and your evolving soul that enable you to be mindful, while divine values provide you with moral direction.

If you will submit to the leading of the indwelling spirit, you will be unerringly guided, step by step, life by life, through universe upon universe.

– *The Urantia Book*

Spiritual Habits for the Soul

Developing good spiritual habits is one way to contribute to your progressive God experience. By doing so, you are more inclined to have habitual spiritual responses to everyday predicaments. By fostering good habits, you can change your behavior and, more importantly, stimulate soul growth. It's an effective way to expand and enlarge your spiritual self and improve self-mastery (see *The Secret of Self-Mastery*).

Encouraging habitual responses increases the likelihood of making the right (moral) choice in challenging situations. Spiritual habits not only enhance our strength and character but also help us avoid mental conflict; they are restful, helping us conserve our spiritual energy.

Like all spiritual transitions, we let the Spirit do its work. Instead of trying to get rid of bad habits with an austere or draconian approach, it's more constructive to build

new, better habits with a faithful, positive approach.

There is nothing more dreadful than the habit of doubt.

– Buddha

Forming new habits entails a mindful process of monitoring our thoughts, behaviors, and choices to determine whether they align with our spiritual goals, desired attitudes, and divine values. It takes time and persistence, and it requires a consistent awareness of our thoughts, emotions, and biases so that we can intercept and correct undesirable thoughts or feelings. And by repeating these corrections over time, we deeply embed an improved sense of morality in our characters to the point where this better way of living becomes a very real part of us. See *Mindfulness as Spiritual Self-Reflection*.

Jeremy Dean, a psychologist and the author of *Making Habits, Breaking Habits* (2013),

claims that it takes about 21 days for repeating behavior to form a habit. Another study by the psychologist, Phillippa Lally, and her colleagues suggests that learning a new habit takes an average of 66 days before it becomes automatic. But the number of days varies, and a lot depends on the individual; some took 18 days, while others took as many as 245. ⁷⁵ The lesson here is that developing better habits is possible for everyone, but it takes persistent effort and patience, even in partnership with God.

The new habits we wish to create include both thinking habits and acting habits. These are not entirely separate in concept, as there is always some interplay between the two. Changing our thinking can change our actions, while changing our actions can affect our thinking.

Creating good habits does not necessarily mean making monumental, life-changing decisions, at least not right away. By changing the little things first, we prepare our minds for greater things later.

Habits make or break us to a far greater extent than we like to admit.

– W.W. Atkinson

The seven spiritual habits listed below are just a few suggestions. ⁷⁶ You can easily add other habits to the list, such as “to understand and love one more person today.” These are positive and constructive habits intended to focus your mind on spiritual realities and divine values.

1. Appreciate spiritual living in others.
2. Share your spiritual life with others.
3. Cultivate and promote divine values.
4. Avoid Selfishness.
5. Meditate on cosmic meanings.
6. Live in the presence of God.
7. Contact your Spirit Guide.

Appreciate Spiritual Living

You may be surprised at how much this habit can change your point of view. By making an effort to recognize the spirituality expressed in the lives of others, you become aware that spiritual living is more prevalent in society than you may have anticipated. And you acknowledge that a good number of people express spiritual ideals in their everyday lives (regardless of their beliefs).

By appreciating the spirituality of others, you realize that you are not the only one on this journey, and subsequently, you are less inclined to be self-righteous or pompous about your own state of spiritual growth.

Some see religious living as enactments of prayer or worship, or attending churches or synagogues. Others see it as posturing for meditation, practicing Hatha yoga, or chanting the Hare Krishna mantra. All of this has religious meaning, but spiritual living is also an inner journey; it is the

personal experience of seeking contact with the Spirit of God living within you.

There is no need to fret over religious rituals or ceremonies. These, too, can have meaning, but understand that God is not a petty despot always watching over you with a suspicious eye, making sure you perform some ancient ritual correctly. Spiritual living comes about simply by following the good, wise, and loving guidance of the Spirit. No rituals are required. It is a spontaneous, honest, and heartfelt commitment to a spiritual life—it is being born of the spirit.

Trusting God with perfect faith is a sign of religious living. But so is being kind and loving, courageous and enthusiastic, cheerful and considerate. Spiritual living embraces generosity, patience, and humility among many other admirable traits. In fact, all of us are spiritual to some degree or another, whether we are consciously aware of it or not (see *Spiritual Attitudes*).

Those who are truly sincere and free from affectation also express spiritual qualities.

Those who are undeterred by failure and disappointment, who forge ahead regardless of all setbacks, are living out spiritual ideals.

Religious living means being aware of spiritual realities but not being bound by tradition or dogma. Among many things, it is being enthusiastic but not fanatical, courageous but not reckless, sympathetic but not sentimental. It's living a balanced life completely dedicated to the Spirit Way.

Religious living is devoted living, and devoted living is creative living, original and spontaneous.

– *The Urantia Book*

Appreciate the spiritual qualities in others rather than being quick to judge or criticize. By doing so, you will find it much easier to love them, and you will come to understand that the celestial agencies all around us are working to improve the lives of everyone.

Share Your Spiritual Life

Sharing our spiritual experiences with kindred spirits bolsters our faith in the spiritual process, magnifies our aspirations, and strengthens our character. It is a healthy exercise because, by openly expressing our experiences and ideas to others, we avoid the dangers of social isolation, such as harboring extreme views, grudges, or resentments.

Sharing our experiences and confiding in others are also potent remedies for loneliness, self-absorption, and intolerance. Strong, intimate relationships are key to a happy and healthy spiritual life, and there is no better place to begin than with family and trusted friends.⁷⁷ Opening our hearts to others is how we deepen our love, grow in spiritual grace, and enhance our knowledge of truth.

Sharing our lives does not mean we are trying to convert others to our point of view. We are simply sharing our experiences, expecting nothing in return. And, of course,

we are willing and eager to listen to others, just as we would like them to listen to us—with respect, patience, and understanding.

Sharing your inner life is much easier and more rewarding when you talk to kindred spirits who have similar beliefs and goals. It is not helpful to try to share thoughts and experiences with people who are simply not interested.

If there are no people in your life who wish to share their spiritual longings, try going to a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple. The people you meet may not share all your beliefs or even think like you, but most of them are eager to talk about their experiences. If you don't like one place, try another until you find a few people who are willing to engage in meaningful discussion. You will soon discover you are not alone in your spiritual adventure.

You do not have to see alike or feel alike or even think alike in order spiritually to *be alike*.

– *The Urantia Book*

Cultivate Divine Values

Another rewarding habit is to become sensitive to divine values. Divine values are predicated on spiritual realities and, therefore, are synonymous with spiritual values (see *Four Divine Values*). Love is a divine value, as are goodness, truth, and beauty. Thoughtful meditation on just these four values of divinity enhances our ability to evaluate ourselves, our societies, and our nations in the context of spiritual standards.

We become sensitive to divine values by seeking them out, finding them, and then taking the time to integrate them into our daily lives. Our devotion to these higher values becomes our paramount guide for improving moral behavior.

Another thing of divine value is personality, which includes personality relationships. Personality (the uniqueness that is us) is a gift of God and, as a consequence, we all have spirit potential—the potential to be eternally real. As persons, we are all valuable, we are all entitled children of God.

Personality represents man's highest concept of human reality and divine values.

– *The Urantia Book*

Recognize the value of all personalities and appreciate that everyone has a Spirit Teacher within them. By doing so, you become more tolerant, respectful, and loving toward others. To paraphrase the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, everything non-spiritual is simply a means to an end, but every personal relationship is an end in itself.

Our initial outlooks and basic values in life were largely determined in our youth when we were easily influenced by our families, friends, acquaintances, peers, and

communities. But we can benefit spiritually by continuously reassessing our social environments in relation to our evolving values, and, if necessary, relocate to a healthier, happier milieu.

Even our choice of entertainment can greatly affect our spiritual sensitivities. This is a controversial topic, but it is hard to imagine that war games, zombie movies, and endless sci-fi dystopias can, in any way, encourage moral insights. In effect, these are disturbing states of virtual reality that cloud any sense of morality by normalizing hate, violence, and ugliness.

Take the time to cultivate your sensitivity to divine values. Express them in your life by taking a compassionate, caring attitude. Help others, discern truth, appreciate beauty, and affirm the inherent goodness of God residing in all humanity.

Avoid Selfishness

By animal nature, we are all inclined to be selfish. The main exception in this regard is the protection that most animals, particularly females, give to their offspring. The same applies to humanity, as evinced by the selfless love that wise parents, both mothers and fathers, offer freely to their children.

Selflessness is inherent in parental love.

– *The Urantia Book*

Becoming selfless requires a degree of mindfulness, which means monitoring our thoughts for self-centered notions and selfish desires. But this does not imply we should completely forget about ourselves, our material needs, or our personal quest for knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual maturity. Even so, the overriding goal of a selfless life is one of consideration, cooperation,

teamwork, altruism, and fairness. These are the hallmarks of selfless living.

How do we identify selfish motives?

Selfishness means we invariably push to the front of the line or hoard everything for ourselves. It means we live self-centered lives that ignore the needs of others, we try to take advantage of others, or we avoid our responsibilities to family, friends, business associates, and communities.

Anyone who wants to be the first, must be the last and the servant of all.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

In any human society, selfishness is neither reasonable nor ethical. Living together requires working together and respecting the rights of others. We are social animals that need each other; we do not function well in selfish isolation.

Unmitigated selfishness affects the whole of humanity. There can never be any real peace on earth or fellowship among nations when

selfishness runs rampant. Selfish interests, selfish ambition, selfish governments, and selfish nations cannot possibly advance world civilization to any meaningful degree.

While the consequences of selfishness may be communal or national, the cure is individual. To promote selfless living, learn the practical and wise value of cooperation and teamwork.

Contemplate the selfless nature of a caring God who administers the universe with love and compassion. There is no such thing as selfishness in the spirit world (see also *Selfless*).

Meditate on Cosmic Meanings

The cosmos embraces the entire universe and all that is in it, including personalities, energies, minds, and spirits. And cosmology is the study of the cosmos; it is an attempt to explain the structure and meaning of the cosmos, as well as the meaning of all things in it.

This includes all efforts to understand the physical structure of the universe, as in the studies of astronomy, physics, and geology. But it also includes any philosophy that explains (or speculates on) the creation of the universe, the existence of life, or even concepts of time.

Almost all societies have cosmological beliefs or explanations for the creation of the cosmos. The creation story in the Bible is a Christian cosmology; the creation story in the Rig Veda is a Hindu cosmology. And there are numerous stories from around the world that are similar in nature. Even the current creation theory of science, the Big Bang theory, is another creation story.

The Urantia Book reveals a completely different cosmology, going into great detail about the divine Creators of the cosmos, as well as the physical, mindal, and spiritual nature of creation and the many creatures existing within it. It also explains why we exist and gives us some idea about our eternal destiny. In doing so, it reaches far

beyond myth or even the limits of the physical sciences.

Science seeks to identify, analyze, and classify the segmented parts of the limitless cosmos. Religion grasps the idea-of-the-whole, the entire cosmos.

– *The Urantia Book*

Understanding cosmic meanings is to grasp the meaning of the whole, the parts of the whole, and the relationships among them. It is contemplating the true nature of the greater cosmos, as well as the connections and relationships between and among all things in the universe. It is also constructive to consider that the meanings we derive from the cosmos are closely tied to the depth and scope of our individual values, morality, and ethics.

Meditating on cosmic meanings includes contemplating the ideal interpersonal relationships for all who live in the cosmos, an ideal ethics guided by divine values such as goodness, truth, beauty, and love. It is a

personal attempt to view all things and experiences in the context of these values. And it is the realization of the cosmos as one creation; one magnificent system—the interconnected and unified creation of an infinite and eternal Source—the God of all creation.

A search for cosmic meaning helps us evaluate our lives within a universal frame of reference—the big picture. It is our evolving grasp of the nature of the cosmos, one created and maintained by God. Indeed, meditating on cosmic meanings is one path to God consciousness (see *God Consciousness*).

Cosmology leads to the pursuit of divine reality values—to God-consciousness.

– *The Urantia Book*

Almost all cosmological systems consider relationships of energy, mind, life, and spirit. This includes personal relationships. And by far, the most meaningful cosmic relationship

(and one we can easily understand) is the deep, personal connection we have with the divine Source of all reality—we are all spiritual children of a Spirit God.

We are all mortal, but by the grace of God, we have the potential to be immortal. And while our ultimate destiny is unknown to us, it is sufficient to say that we are destined for much greater things than we could possibly imagine at this stage of our existence.

The universe is evolving physically, intellectually, and spiritually, and God's supreme design of progressive evolution embraces the life experiences of countless beings, including all those who live on the many inhabited worlds of space.

Cosmic meanings make more sense when we grasp the reality of our cosmic citizenship; that we truly belong in this near-infinite universe. We become more aware of the reality and need for cooperative cosmic relationships—not just with other people or celestial beings, but also with a loving parental God.

When we happily accept our universe citizenship, we come to an honest recognition of our joyful obligations to God and the growing universe. It is becoming aware of cosmic duty—our duty to follow God's path.

Live in the Presence of God

Probably the most important habit of all is to foster the habit of living in the presence of God. This is a very effective mental technique because, in reality, we do live in the presence of God. More importantly, this awareness changes our way of thinking; it changes our whole attitude to the world around us.

Even though you may not be fully conscious of God's presence, you can make considerable progress by first accepting it as a truth and then by imagining that God is beside you at every moment of your life.

The secret of his [Jesus] unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God; and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship.

– *The Urantia Book*

God is eternally present within all of us, but any awareness of this presence is determined by the degree of our personal *cooperation* with the Spirit. Our ongoing relationship with God is progressive and reciprocal, always evolving—the more we live according to the Way of God, the more we *feel* his presence in our daily lives.

The Spirit of God is always with you. It observes and monitors your life, but will not participate in it if you don't want it to. By living in the presence of God, you are consciously and graciously accepting his participation in your spiritual growth. You become aware of the supernal character of a Supreme Being, which makes it easier—if not greatly desirable—to consciously share more and more of your innermost thoughts

and feelings with this magnificent and brilliant Being.

We can put our creative imagination to work by constructing an ideal super-being who exemplifies our highest ideals of love, goodness, and beauty—a God who is perfectly wise and generously supportive (see *Creative Imagination*). This brings to life the *transcendent ideal* as defined by Immanuel Kant. ⁷⁸

In brief, this is the recognition that we can never be fully cognizant of the infinite and eternal nature of God because of the limited range of our perception and intellect. The best of our conceptions could never portray the full power and glory of the Creator of the universe. Nonetheless, there exists a true God behind all our imaginings.

The point is that, with the power of creative imagination, we begin to *approximate* the true nature of an infinite and eternal God, and as we progress in the spirit, more of the truth of God's character will dawn on us. For some, it helps to imagine what God would be

like if he were human, simply because it is often easier for our minds to grasp and exemplify certain concepts and images when visualized in human form and expression.

Those who have seen me, have seen the
Father.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

You can, for instance, imagine the presence of someone you believe closely represents the loving character of God, like Jesus of Nazareth, Buddha, Teresa of Ávila, or Mother Teresa. By placing these individuals in your inner life, you can view your problems and solutions as a wise, impartial, and spiritual person would. This is not to say you should worship them. Instead, they set an example of thought and behavior that can help to bring you closer to the divine nature of your inner Spirit.

Contact Your Spirit Guide

As we become more aware of God's presence in our lives, we make a daily habit of having a chat with him —talking to the Spirit within—our God connector. Take time to consciously share your thoughts and feelings with the Creator of the universe.

Communion—our personal interaction with God—is an effective means of opening a spiritual channel to connect with spirit forces. It is a method of creating and reinforcing a direct line to our Creator—a real and dynamic spiritual connection. And in return, it becomes a conduit that provides a continuous and beneficial stream of divine ministry and spiritual energy.

Communion is simply your fellowship with God and his angels, an affinity and rapport, a close and intimate association that works to bring you into full agreement with the way of God. It is the devotional act of cooperating and uniting with the spirit phase of reality.

It is not so important that you should know about the fact of God as that you should increasingly grow in the ability to *feel* the presence of God.

– *The Urantia Book*

Every time you interact with, cooperate with, or commune with God, you come a little closer to living a truly spiritual life.

Whenever you openly and honestly share your thoughts and experiences with the Divine Presence within, you are in a state of communion. Whenever you work in partnership with God, you are having a religious experience—a God experience.

Even so, your first attempt to chat with God may feel a bit like talking to a wall. But take heart, because there is much unconscious activity going on within you. The positive power of communion releases vibrant, spiritual energies into your mind and soul, unifies your life experiences into a spiritual whole, and raises your consciousness to transcendent levels. The happy outcome of

continuous interaction with God is a personal religious transformation—being born of the spirit.

God and the angels know your innermost thoughts, your true motivations, and your true desires. But no matter what these may be, God remains a good and loving friend in whom you can wholeheartedly confide and trust. Rest assured that your communications, petitions, and veneration are heard and recognized.

Your Father knows what you need before
you ask.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

Some common ways to commune with God are meditation, contemplation, prayer, thankfulness, and worship. Whatever your views on these methods, communion, in all its forms, is a positive and powerful means of spirit contact that leads to increasingly progressive levels of spiritual living and God consciousness.

Spirit Contact Methods

Getting to know God is the beginning of spirit contact, and knowing God is simply becoming aware of the divine nature (see *God Consciousness*).

At this stage of existence, it's impossible for us to know much about the full extent of God. Nonetheless, there is much we can grasp. And all efforts to comprehend this nature, no matter how imperfect our conceptions may be, eventually lead us to improved lines of spiritual communion.

It's also important to grasp the true nature of our relationship with Deity—that God is our spirit Parent and we are his spirit children. God's attitude toward us is one of devoted, parental love, and our ideal attitude toward God is one of humble trust.

Our ability to contact Divinity depends on our spiritual receptivity, but it's also influenced by our active service to humanity.

Together, they complement and complete the supreme adventure.

To improve our spiritual receptivity, we need to set aside any preconceived notions and biases we may have about prayer and worship. Let's re-examine and re-evaluate these techniques as effective and rewarding ways to achieve spirit contact. Naturally, you should consider all methods and then use those that work best for you. These are guidelines only—there are no rigid rules.

Prayer - How It Works

Prayer is petitioning God for assistance. It's an appeal to spiritual forces for help, either for ourselves or for others. All acts of prayer imply a belief in the existence of intelligent spirit beings or entities who hear us, understand us, and help us.

In all prayer, we usually have some idea about who or what we are praying to. Some pray to God (by whatever name they choose), while others pray to a saint or a glorified human whom they believe can hear and help them. Praying for divine help is a practice found in all Judeo-Christian traditions, as well as Islam, Hinduism, and even Buddhism.

In traditional Buddhist schools, prayers are directed toward enlightened beings, deities, and saints. But some Western practitioners of Buddhism claim that Buddhist gods and deities aren't really gods at all, although with

some incongruity, they still believe these non-gods have the power to help or harm.

More secular Buddhists maintain they do not pray to, or for, anything and have no expectation that anyone is listening. Sam Littlefair of *The Lion's Roar* website (*Do Buddhists Pray?* 2017) promotes the notion that we are praying to ourselves. In his view, prayer is simply a personal aspiration to be more compassionate and wiser, drawing on the spiritual strength within us all.

No doubt, there is spiritual strength within us all—the very source of all compassion and wisdom. But Littlefair is not entirely clear about the nature of the source. Is this spiritual strength naturally inherent in the human psyche? Or is it believed to be a universal essence tapped through the mind? Indeed, what does it mean to be spiritual if we don't believe in the very Source of all spirit?

The difference in the God experience is that we have no doubt that the source of this spiritual strength is the Spirit itself, the gift

of God given to each of us. And when we pray to this Spirit for help, we are immediately filled with spiritual energies that enable us to become more compassionate and wiser.

The Psychology of Prayer

No matter what we believe, the intent of all prayer should be entirely spiritual. We are often tempted to ask for material things or profitable outcomes, but it is more advantageous and realistic to ask for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual help. Prayers for a new Mercedes or for the conquest of our enemies are not spiritual petitions. Prayers are best viewed as a way to change our mental attitudes. It's not about getting our way; it's a technique for learning God's way.

Prayer does not change God, but it changes
him who prays.

– Soren Kierkegaard

We are motivated to pray because we are aware of something greater than ourselves, something better to be achieved, and we are conscious of superior ideals and values we would like to attain. In psychological terms, prayer is a mental technique for attaining these elevated ideals and for self-realizing divine concepts and values. It is a sincere attitude of mind that reaches upward (or inward) in an attempt to grasp the most advanced concepts of Deity.

In the highest sense, enlightened prayer is the psychological process of exchanging the human will for the divine will (the Spirit Way). It's an exchange of fear for courage, hatred for love, envy for appreciation, and pessimism for optimism. It's an effort to adjust and identify our personalities with the true nature of spiritual reality.

Beliefs About Prayer

Notions about the power and intent of prayer have evolved over the millennia. In the earliest expressions of prayer, people

believed they could bargain with God and, with enough pleading and sacrifice, eventually get what they wanted, whether it was more children, more rain, or a good harvest.

But more enlightened individuals, past and present, realize that God is not a merchant of the soul. Any attempt to barter is foolish. God is perfect, replete, infinite, eternal, and changeless. He *needs* nothing from us, although he *wants* our love and commitment to live the Spirit Way.

Likewise, it is useless to try to win God's favor or to expect to put ourselves above others. As a Divine Parent, God loves each of us equally, just as the sun shines on all. A wise parent never shows favoritism to any of their children.

One outdated notion often associated with prayer is the belief that we need to suffer in order to do penance and remove all sin. Not long ago, this included acts of self-flagellation, a bloody practice that still persists in some cultures. Another was to

wear a hair shirt, or *cilice*, made of coarse animal hair and set next to bare skin so the wearer would suffer constant discomfort. In less severe practices, suffering by penance included such things as fasting, celibacy, and other forms of abstinence (see also *God and Suffering*).

In many respects, these ideas are deeply embedded in Western culture. Notions of inherent sin, divine punishment, the need to suffer, harboring guilt, or feeling unworthy of success are manifestations of self-abasement that we have come to accept as normal. But this is not God's way. If we truly walk the path of the Divine Spirit, there is no need to feel guilt of any kind.

This is not to say we should never feel a sense of repentance—a sincere expression of regret. But it's difficult to imagine a loving, merciful, Supreme Parent who would condone the self-injurious behavior of her children, regardless of past mistakes. There is no cruelty, anger, or vengeance in the domain of Spirit. *God is love.*

Beliefs about prayer have changed little over the millennia. Since the beginning of written history over 5,000 years ago, prayers have been formalized and ritualized. Priests and followers alike were taught to memorize prayers verbatim as well as magic chants, mantras, liturgies, or psalms, believing the constant repetition of standardized prayers would elicit favor from the gods.

Such beliefs stem from irrational notions about the power of the spoken word, a power believed to be embodied in magic spells and incantations. But is it reasonable to assume that an eternal, infinite, all-wise, and all-loving God is a mischievous gremlin who refuses to do anything for us until he is satisfied we have uttered a magical formula in precisely the correct way?

Ritualistic observances, such as mechanically repeating the same prayer, do not make your prayers more powerful or appealing. It is very likely God heard you the first time. There is no reason to believe that

an all-knowing Creator requires his children to incessantly repeat themselves.

If a man ... merely utters the words that come to his lips because he has learned them by heart through constant repetition, I do not call that prayer at all.

– Teresa of Ávila

Many of us resort to prayer in times of deep stress or trouble, but it's also helpful to share our lives with God when things are going well. In fact, giving sincere thanks and praying earnestly for spiritual benefits when our lives are flourishing is an effective way to establish and strengthen our channels of spiritual communication. And then, when things do not go so well, we find ourselves much better prepared.

Genuine Prayer

When you approach a good friend for a heart-to-heart chat, do you begin by reciting a monologue of drab verses over and over again? It's more likely you would open your

heart to talk about things that really matter to you, about life experiences you long to share, and things you would like to achieve. Likewise, when you chat with God, make it genuine, spontaneous, sincere, and personal.

Our prayers are unique, spontaneous, and personal. It's unrealistic to think that one traditional prayer fits all. We all come from different times and different cultures, and we all have different life experiences. Each of us has unique needs and varying levels of spiritual comprehension.

Jesus taught that effective prayer must be: ⁷⁹

- Unselfish - serving others as well as yourself.
- Intelligent - thoughtful, reasonable, and perceptive.
- Sincere - being completely honest of heart.
- Trusting - because God is good, loving, and trustworthy.
- Believing - with unwavering conviction and faith.

God and the angels want us to advance spiritually, and they give us all the spiritual tools necessary to achieve that end. We pray for the ability to identify divine values and to achieve spiritual maturity. We pray for spiritual strengths, such as perseverance, courage, tranquility, tolerance, and patience. And we pray for a greater appreciation of faith or spiritual insight. We can even ask for direction in our daily affairs.

But just as important as praying for yourself is asking God to help others, whether it's family, friends, or strangers. Praying for others is selfless and considerate, but it also helps you—it changes you. It's good to pray for those who love you, but if you can do the same for those who despise you, you have made considerable progress.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

Cultivate unselfish prayer by learning to pray in the plural. The Lord's Prayer is a good example of this: "give *us* this day our daily bread." Try converting all your petitions to include others. Change "God, give *me* strength" to "God, give *us* strength." This is a powerful technique, and you will notice the difference.

Realistic Prayer

We can pray for greater wisdom, a deeper appreciation of goodness, a greater sense of spiritual beauty, and further revelations of truth. All of this is given to us freely with no conditions attached—we only have to ask for it. But we also need to be realistic with our requests. All growth takes time, and it requires personal effort. We gain little wisdom by trying to bypass the necessary experiences.

If you plan to climb a mountain peak and your five-year-old child asks to go along, do you take her? Or do you prepare her mentally and physically so that when she

comes of age, she can climb that peak herself? In God's wisdom, we may not immediately receive what we ask for, but if it is a spiritual quality, we will receive it in time.

We cannot expect God to give us everything we want and then, if we don't get it right away, stomp our feet and cry out that we no longer believe in him. Genuine prayer is mature and sincere. It is spiritual in its intent, and it is reasonable. Accordingly, the answers to our prayers appear in the context of spiritual realities and divine values.

It's easy to get discouraged because we think nothing is happening. But our prayers will change us in meaningful and lasting ways over time, especially if we have faith and confidence in the promises of God. Prayers never fail to expand our capacity for receiving spiritual wisdom and spiritual energies. Be persistent but reasonable, and always have faith in the good wisdom of God.

Pray as though everything depended on
God.

Work as though everything depended on
you.

– Augustine of Hippo

Prayer is not an excuse for inaction, nor is it a means of avoiding the challenges and difficulties of life. It's not an attempt to exempt ourselves from our responsibilities, duties, or the need to be industrious. But it is a means of dealing with all challenges in positive and effective ways. Prayer provides the mental and spiritual stamina we need to deal with contingencies, as well as the wisdom and insight to achieve the best solutions.

Benefits of Prayer

Genuine prayer is a potent spiritual stimulus and an effective means of spiritual enrichment. It deepens our sense of cosmic consciousness, shapes our attitudes, and lifts our souls to higher levels of spiritual awareness.

God answers our prayers with love, giving us an increased revelation of truth, an enhanced appreciation of beauty, and an augmented concept of goodness. In this way, prayer leads us upward and onward to superhuman and progressive spiritual values.

The ideal prayer is a form of spiritual communion which leads to intelligent worship.

– *The Urantia Book*

By maintaining sincere, unbroken communion with God through contemplation, prayer, and worship, we widen the spiritual channels through which the divine gifts of love, grace, and new life can flow into our hearts, minds, and souls.

The Spiritual Value of Thankfulness

While it is all very well to ask God for this and that, be thankful for all the spiritual help you receive at every moment of every day. Give thanks for the unceasing guidance of spirit beings and the enduring spiritual energies that allow you and all others to become all you can be.

With the continuing troubles in the world, it's easy to be cynical. But for those who think life has never been as bad as it is now, I urge you to honestly examine what human societies were like 100 years ago, or 500 years ago, or 10,000 years ago. Only a long-term view of social history can offer a balanced perspective on the spiritual progress of humanity and the evolution of civilization.

Yes, Things Are Better

A study of history and archaeology firmly attests that, from an extended perspective,

humanity is on a path of progressive evolution and enlightenment, a path that can no longer be inhibited by ignorance and fear. Thankfully, this positive and heartening trend is receiving more attention in recent literature, as seen through the works of Johan Norberg,⁸⁰ Hans Rosling,⁸¹ and Stephen Pinker.⁸²

Hans Rosling maintains that humanity is prone to the “negativity instinct,” a tendency to see the worst in things. But in almost every major category of civilization, such as education, human rights, or health care, things are much better worldwide than they were even fifty years ago. We should be thankful for the increasing well-being and goodness in the world, while keeping in mind that we still have a long way to go, and things can be much better yet.

The Positive Power of Gratitude

According to *Psychology Today*, those who are more thankful feel less pain, less stress, and sleep better. They are also less prone to

depression, have stronger immune systems, have healthier relationships, and do better in all walks of life. ⁸³

We become grateful by looking for the good rather than the bad. This includes looking for the good in all people, in society at large, and in all pressing moments. Avoid darkening your mind with cynicism, bitterness, sarcasm, and doubt—these are not spiritual attitudes. Be grateful for the little things.

Having said that, I sympathize with the many unfortunate souls who have suffered much in life and who may find it difficult to give thanks for anything. For those who feel that life has treated them unfairly, I can only draw their attention to people like Helen Keller, who overcame the challenges of being deaf and blind from childhood and went on to become one of the greatest inspirational teachers in America.

Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

– Helen Keller

Just as impressive is Nick Vujicic, a man born without arms or legs but who overcame this tremendous challenge in life, eventually emerging as one of the most touching examples of how God can work through an individual of faith to inspire and motivate a whole generation.

I'm not a religionist who believes we must suffer in order to know God—far from it. But we cannot escape the fact that many people have suffered and still do. Ideally, all people of the world should step up to help those less fortunate.

Even so, those who have suffered greatly are left with the choice of giving in and giving up, or of overcoming their challenges and becoming better for it. Along with Keller and Vujicic, there are thousands of other remarkable individuals who have overcome

tremendous difficulties in life—Christopher Reeve, Nelson Mandela, Bethany Hamilton, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ludwig van Beethoven are just a few.

The Swiss-American psychiatrist, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, was a pioneer in near-death studies. After World War II, she worked with Polish refugees and with people who had suffered in concentration camps. What amazed her most in her work was the indomitable spirit of so many people she interviewed. ⁸⁴

The most beautiful people we had known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths.

– Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

God teaches us the eternal value of adversity. The Spirit Way is to be courageous, not cringing in fear; it is stepping up to the challenges of life, not running away from them; it is acting, not procrastinating; it is

being persistent, not capricious; and it is being industrious, not indolent.

Great and noble characters are forged in adversity. Learning from our mistakes, failures, shortcomings, and life's challenges is the true test of spiritual status. Those who have the courage and sincerity to follow the guidance and inspiration of their Spirit Teacher are those who receive the spiritual gifts of wisdom and insight.

And throughout all these challenges, we are truly thankful. Never doubt or underestimate the magnificence and power of the spirit domain, which is far greater and far more glorious than we could ever possibly imagine at this time. And never doubt that every one of us can be a unique part of that good spirit.

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is 'thank you,' it will be enough.

– Meister Eckhart

Do not become jaded by the endless flow of negative media. Look for the good in others, look for the spiritual, look for the love. And give thanks.

Accept and believe that our Creator God loves us with an infinite and eternal love, because that is the truth. And give thanks.

Accept and believe that our guardian angels are helping us to advance in the spirit. They may not make our lives easy, but they work day and night to help us cultivate and expand our immortal souls. Give thanks.

After you have finished asking God for all the things you want in life for yourself and others, take a moment to thank him for what you have already received and, with faith, for what you will receive. Give thanks for the Spirit within you, the Spirit of Truth beside you, and the Holy Spirit of the angels all around you. All this guidance is there for the taking. Give thanks.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to
sing praises to the name of the Most High.

– *Psalm 92*

Thankfulness is the beginning of worship. It is the beginning of our veneration and adoration for an infinite, eternal, loving, and compassionate Creator of a Universe.

Prayer, thankfulness, worship, meditation, and contemplation are sincere expressions of our love and devotion to the higher ideals of divinity. They are all effective psychological techniques for putting ourselves in contact, or communion, with the very Source of all reality.

Intelligent Worship – How It Works

The tremendous spiritual power of worship is often underestimated. Worship rejuvenates, revitalizes, and regenerates—it literally transforms us in every way. It is by far the best way to draw on the spiritual energies and divine forces in us and all around us.

On the highest spiritual level, worship is a loving reverence for a perfect Divine Being, the Source of all reality. It is a simple but humble act of adoration and praise. It is a heartfelt love and affectionate veneration for the Infinite and Eternal Source and all that it represents.

Whatever we adore, idolize, or worship is what we become. When my daughter was young, she idolized a female pop star. She dressed like her, acted like her, and even tried to sing like her. In the process, she was

recreating herself; she was becoming the very thing she worshiped.

A spiritual transformation is no different in principle. When we idolize the beauty, goodness, and truth of a divine Creator, we become beautiful, good, and true ourselves. When we love, adore, and revere spiritual ideals, we eventually become those ideals. In every sense, *worship is divinely creative*.

Worship changes the worshiper into the image of One worshiped.

– Jack W. Hayford

By venerating the ideals of divinity, we identify with these ideals. This is the psychological process that makes them a reality in our lives.

Venerate the Source

Over the ages, people have worshiped almost anything you can imagine—stones, mountains, trees, animals, the sun, the stars, and even other people. Nature worship is

one of the earliest expressions of devotion, which is not surprising considering that early humans, immersed in their natural surroundings, relied heavily on wild animals and plants. And at the time, natural events, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, thunder, and lightning, were inexplicable. Even in the modern era, many afflictions and natural catastrophes are still attributed to acts of God.

But nature is not God, and natural disasters are not a form of divine retribution. All things in nature, like all things in the universe, are either products or by-products of the original acts of creation.

Worship, in its highest expression, focuses on the *Source of all reality*, not the manifestations of it. Nevertheless, the beauty of nature can truly inspire us to worship this divine Source.

Perfection is in nature, but nature is not perfect.

– *The Urantia Book*

Intelligent worship is most effective and truly transforming when we have a clearer picture of God's true nature. Achieving this requires a clear concept of what *divine nature* means, at least as much as is humanly possible.

This doesn't require us to envision God in any form, like an old man in the sky, but instead to imagine God's personal nature and the *ideals* of divinity. These might appear to be intangible realities, but they are in fact spiritual realities, and they give us something tangible to attain—positive spiritual thoughts.

We begin the process by drawing on our creative imaginations because it's difficult to adore or worship something you cannot imagine or conceive. See *Creative Imagination*.

Here are a few concepts of the personal nature of God:

- God is the First Personality.
- God is love and the source of all love.
- God is truth and the divine source of all truth.
- God is beautiful and the divine source of all beauty.
- God is good and the ultimate source of all goodness.
- God is your friend.

For more concepts, see *God Consciousness*.

What you are attempting to do is to discover some truth about the nature of God and then to align yourself with this truth by becoming more like God in your thoughts and deeds.

Being perfect like God may seem like a distant goal, but think of it as the spiritual ideal that beckons you forward. How much truth you realize and absorb depends on your willingness and readiness to receive God's wisdom, and it also depends on your

wholehearted conviction that a loving God *can and will reveal truth* to you.

No matter how much success you have in visualizing a perfect God, keep in mind that there actually does exist a true, infinite, eternal, and loving Universal Spirit beyond anything you can imagine. Your job is simply to know this God to the best of your ability.

Worship Links You to God

In the God experience, worship is the act of linking your superconscious mind with the Spirit of God within you. Your adoration of God is a state of mind that allows you to make a loving connection with the very Source of Light and Life, a connection that harmonizes your thoughts, feelings, and emotions with the divine nature. It is indeed the most powerful technique available to you for your spiritual transformation.

Prayer is spiritually sustaining, but worship is divinely creative.

– *The Urantia Book*

While prayer nourishes the soul and sustains us spiritually, worship is a *divinely creative manna* that literally recreates us. It is the psychological practice of uniting with God in a dynamic way, making us more like the divinity we adore (see also *Prayer - How It Works*).

A worship experience is simple and effortless. It occurs any time we contemplate and venerate the attributes and nature of God, or when we ponder and aspire to divine ideals and values. It is a devotional exercise always enhanced by imagining ourselves in the immediate presence of God, all the while having complete faith and trust in divine wisdom and goodness.

Sharing your inner life with God is the beginning of your intimate relationship with the divine Presence. And we cultivate this worshipful state of mind by attempting *to feel the presence and love of God*. In this state, we contemplate the infinity and eternity of God, we stand in awe of the magnificence, brilliance, and glory of this

majestic Spirit—the loving Source of all things.

Worship is a personal communion with that which is divinely real, with that which is the very source of reality.

– *The Urantia Book*

Worship Is Self-Less but Beneficial

In Zen meditation, practitioners not only admire the qualities of Buddhahood, but they also attempt to forget themselves in order to merge with universe consciousness, or the wisdom of Tao. This is a meaningful objective similar to that of the God experience, in which worship is the act of forgetting ourselves in order to become unified with the First Source.

Worship is the act of a part identifying itself with the Whole; the finite with the Infinite.

– *The Urantia Book*

Indeed, genuine worship is completely selfless. Unlike prayer, worship asks for nothing and expects nothing in return. We get ourselves out of the way in an act of selfless adoration, an attitude of mind in which we look up to and revere the perfection of God in all ways and all things.

Nonetheless, while an attitude of true worship is selfless, it has many rewards for the worshiper. Apart from transforming our spiritual natures, it's a source of relaxation, dissolves anxieties, eliminates mental conflicts, enhances our powers of reflection, and gives us the ability to perceive ever-deepening meanings and values. Worship fosters wisdom and courage, augments spiritual insight, and inspires the soul.

Through worship, we approach divine realities and begin to see things from a spiritual and cosmic perspective. This, in turn, fosters greater wisdom, leading to increased self-realization, cosmic consciousness, and God consciousness.

Our love for the divine is then reflected in our own lives through loving service and unselfish devotion to others. These are the acts of a spirit-born soul wholeheartedly dedicated to the love of God.

We worship God first because *he is*, then because *he is in us*, and last because *we are in him*.

– *The Urantia Book*

There is no need to worry about how we should worship or what we should say. There is no correct way to worship. More so, it's an attitude of mind—humble admiration and complete trust in a perfect God—rather than a string of words. It arises spontaneously from our hearts and souls. All we need to do is consciously *allow* the Paradise Spirit to conduct worship on our behalf. It is effortless adoration.

We could begin by imagining and admiring the truth, beauty, and love of God, and then move on to a reverence for the goodness of

God. We could also give thanks to the spiritual forces in us and all around us. Throughout it all, we have faith that, by yielding to these good powers, we cannot fail—nothing can stop us. All we have to do is try.

Worship, taught Jesus, makes one increasingly like the being who is worshiped.

– *The Urantia Book*

Meditation and Contemplation

Mind-full Meditation

Meditation isn't what it used to be. The word traces back to Indo-European languages as old as 3,500 years. Back then, it meant “to judge or estimate.” Later, in Greek, it meant “to be mindful of,” and in Latin, “to think over or reflect on.”⁸⁵ Meditation, as we will see, has long been a deliberate and thoughtful practice rather than any attempt to empty or transcend the mind.

In the 12th century, Christian mystics were using the Latin word *meditationem* to refer to the practice of spiritual contemplation, private devotions, and reverent prayer. In this mindful context, meditation had more to do with spiritual musings, thought, reflection, and study—or simply thinking things over from a God-centered perspective.

Through the study of books one seeks God;
by meditation one finds him.

– Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

In 1924, Webster's *New International Dictionary* defined "to meditate" as "to be mindful of, to contemplate, to keep the mind fixed on, to watch, to study, to muse on, to ponder." This was the classical definition of meditation, influenced by ancient Greek, Roman, Judaic, and Middle Eastern philosophies and religious practices. However, since 1924, Eastern religious concepts and practices have transformed our understanding of meditation.

Almost one hundred years later, the Merriam-Webster dictionary still includes definitions similar to the above. However, a newly emphasized definition is "to engage in mental exercise (such as concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness."

This rather vague definition is now duplicated word-for-word across hundreds of websites, magazines, and books, and is often presented as the *only* definition, while ignoring the long use of meditation in ancient Middle Eastern religions and among early Jewish and Christian mystics. Mystic meditation was (and perhaps still is) a religious practice focusing on deep thought, contemplation, reverence, and God.

This alteration (or addition) to the meaning of meditation can be traced to 19th-century European translators, who ascribed the English word *meditation* to both the Hindu practice of *dhyana* and the Buddhist practice of *bhavana*, although neither was entirely similar in concept or practice.

Nevertheless, within a few decades, ideas about meditation shifted to an Eastern focus, and the original Latin meanings and practices so prevalent in Western society, particularly in Christian mysticism, were gradually displaced.

What was lost in this conversion of meaning was the original emphasis on profound spiritual reflection, worship, and problem-solving. And while many practitioners today still think of meditation as a spiritual exercise, the critical difference is that, in almost all current models, God no longer plays a role.

The more healthful attitude of spiritual meditation is to be found in reflective worship and in the prayer of thanksgiving.

– *The Urantia Book*

Meditation, rather than being viewed as a powerful and rewarding technique for genuine spiritual progress, has been gradually transformed into a secular mental exercise intended to calm frayed nerves.

Mystic Contemplation

Contemplation is synonymous with meditation. Christians once used the two terms interchangeably, both in thought and in practice. But unlike meditation, the act of

contemplation has retained its association with Christian, Greek, and Middle Eastern mysticism.

The word *contemplation* has deep historical roots in Judeo-Christian thought and in the mystical practices of the 4th century AD. Even then, we can trace similar principles back another 700 years to the writings of Greek philosophers of the 3rd century BC, such as Plotinus.

Religionists originally conceived of contemplation as the practice of thoroughly pondering religious concepts. In principle, it's an attempt to reach deeper levels of moral and spiritual insight, especially regarding spiritual meanings and values. In some traditions, contemplation is the act or state of beholding God, or coming into union with God.

By meditation on God, by union with him,
there comes deliverance from the illusions
of evil and ultimate salvation from all
material fetters.

– *The Urantia Book*

In the 16th century, living a contemplative life of prayer received considerable attention through the works of Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross. In recent times, contemplation was popularized by Thomas Merton (1915-1968), an American Trappist monk who wrote extensively on the topic.

Throughout the Christian mystic tradition, there are various interpretations of contemplation but, in general, they emphasize an awareness of the presence of God in association with prayer (communion). Hence, contemplation is coupled with the act of listening, of being receptive to divine guidance. It's also a form of worship because it redirects the mind from the self to the contemplation of divinity.

While contemplation is often thought of as a monastic discipline, it's not necessary to practice it in isolation. Some practitioners prefer to think of contemplation as a daily state of mind in which they are aware of the presence of God while, at the same time, responding to the outside world with love and compassion.

In the classical sense, contemplation is a meditation technique, though it's not a Buddhist or Yoga meditation technique. Along with other meanings, Thomas Merton defines contemplation as the “vivid realization” that life proceeds from an “invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source.”

The Psychology of Meditation

Sandra Anderson of *Yoga International* distinguishes between contemplation and meditation by taking the view that contemplation is “a train of thought about something,” whereas meditation is said to have more to do with “training the mind to

rest in a particular focus, a practice that leads to a connection to the source of all consciousness.”⁸⁷

As you see, Anderson’s definitions are founded on the relatively new interpretation of meditation, which is itself derived from a secular Western Buddhist philosophy—a philosophy that, for the most part, excludes spiritual reflection, the inner Spirit, and God.

On the same website, Pandit Rajmani defines meditation as a science rather than a religious practice—a science used for “experiencing the center of consciousness within.”⁸⁸ While Rajmani does not specify the nature of this center beyond it being simply consciousness, his notion of a “consciousness within” aligns with our idea that *the indwelling Spirit is the center of God consciousness*.

Meditation, however, is not a science as Rajmani suggests, although a professional

psychological study of meditation would qualify as a social science.

To be clear, pure science is the study of material reality and requires factual evidence, as do the social sciences in their study of human behavior. Nonetheless, while contemplation and meditation are not scientific pursuits *per se*, they are effective *psychological techniques* for changing our way of thinking. Meditation has proven to be an effective way to relax, even to change thought patterns and brain structure when used in specific ways.

Meditation is a psychological process that loosely conforms to the so-called “science of mind” approach promoted by New Thought authors such as Ernest Holmes. But many authors who championed this “scientific” approach were not attempting to distance themselves from God. In fact, they actively embraced God and spirituality in their philosophies.

I believe in God, the Living Spirit Almighty;
one, indestructible, absolute and self-
existent Cause.

– Ernest Holmes

As a psychological method, and from a New Age or Western Buddhist perspective, meditation has an intellectual goal, which is connecting oneself to the source of all consciousness. But once again, it's not entirely clear what that source is supposed to be.

Meditating With God

Other teachers of yoga and meditation are not as vague about it. Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) claimed that human consciousness descends from cosmic consciousness, the consciousness of God beyond all creation. ⁸⁹

God is consciousness.

– Yogananda

Without a doubt, God is consciousness, just as God is love and God is energy, but we should realize this does not logically imply that consciousness is God, as some maintain. And this is true because the Divine Creator is the *Source of all things*, including consciousness. But even though consciousness itself is not spirit, it is a spiritual endowment that allows us to identify and appreciate profound values and meanings.

The most significant conceptual difference between Western contemplation and Eastern meditation is the idea that a Spirit of God lives within each of us and that God is a personal Deity with whom we can interact—a God who will lovingly guide us.

Nonetheless, some Eastern meditation techniques are especially useful for reaching a superconscious level, where we contact God Within and thereby enter a heightened state of God consciousness.

In any event, the ultimate objectives of spiritual enhancement and universal wisdom

are not so different in either the Western or Eastern traditions, although the mental exercises and religious concepts are. Several ideas overlap, and some techniques found in Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Islamic practices are shared, including creative visualization and mindfulness. The most rewarding approach is to take the best of all worlds, combining spiritual concepts and practices in a syncretic and effective way.

Let experience teach you the value of meditation and the power of intelligent reflection.

– *The Urantia Book*

Divine Meditation

Meditation is often associated with Eastern religious practices or clinical science techniques. But neither practice necessarily includes God or even spirituality (see *Meditation and Contemplation*). Divine meditation, on the other hand, restores God to the equation; it adds the essential presence of a divine Being into traditional meditation techniques.

Divine meditation is a spiritual exercise that involves contemplating and revering spiritual ideals, such as reflecting on the divine nature and attributes of God, assimilating divine values, giving thanks for the gifts of God, and praying for the spiritual uplift of humanity.

The real strength of divine meditation lies in its recognition of a Creator God as the primal source of all reality, a Supreme Source that can be contacted in the upper reaches of consciousness through sincere

worship, thoughtful prayer, and insightful contemplation.

Divine meditation is a progressive technique for contacting the Spirit Within and fostering your personal spiritual transformation. It is a practice that exchanges the mind of self for the mind of God. It is the intimate experience of sharing your inner life with the Spirit of God, all the while maintaining complete faith in the goodness of this eternal and divine Presence.

Meditation makes the contact of mind with spirit; relaxation determines the capacity for spiritual receptivity.

– *The Urantia Book*

Divine meditation is a spiritual attitude of mind—your spiritual framework of divine values and supernal goals. It is a mental exercise in which you imagine yourself thriving in a spiritual surrounding—a friendly, sympathetic, and supportive environment in which you can freely open

your heart and soul to a friendly Spirit, a wise and loving friend. It is imagining yourself in the presence of God to discuss your problems and ask for advice (see *Divine Problem Solving*).

Divine meditation serves as a reverent milieu for prayer and thanksgiving, both of which are psychological and spiritual techniques for changing our outlooks on life—our attitudes towards ourselves and the world. We begin to see ourselves in a broad, universal context, a spiritual and cosmic setting in which we actively participate and help others.

Divine meditation is reflective worship emphasizing creative imagination, deep thinking, and spiritualized thought. It is the wholehearted and unreserved worship of the beauty of God, the goodness of God, the truth of God, and the love of God—the adoration and veneration of the inconceivable power, infinity, and eternity of the Divine Source of all reality (see *Intelligent Worship – How It Works*).

Beyond East and West

The Western trend in Zen Buddhism leans toward a clinical approach to mindfulness, which is, for the most part, a secular psychological approach. This trend is a predictable transition for Zen because, although its contemporary followers search for the final beatitude—a blissful mental state called *nirvana*—they openly admit it is a godless state of mind.

But whether Buddhists consciously recognize the presence of God or not, Zen meditation techniques are effective and productive because they help us perceive the self-contained, changeless nature of God. They are a viable approach to God because there truly is a universal, spiritual energy we can draw on, as most Buddhists presume. Indeed, meditating on the Tao (God) as the primal, eternal, and vital Source of all reality is a potent way to grasp the Deity Absolute—the deep reservoir of all reality (see *Way Beyond Magic*).

But one significant difference in the God experience is the belief that this universal and infinite source of energy potential is entirely the creation of a Universal Creator—a creation that is manipulated and maintained by the absolute will of a personal and purposeful God, the Controller, the Creator, and the Upholder of all reality.

Another key departure from the Eastern approach is our belief that God manifests as a *personal spiritual being* with whom we can communicate and interact (commune). Personality is just one manifestation of God, but it is an important one. Without personality expression, it's difficult to conceive of divine love or a friendly universe, simply because cosmic energy and matter are devoid of personality and, therefore, cannot love or be friendly. See *God Is Someone*.

Mind Is the Gateway

By means of reflective, devout, and imaginative thought, the mind becomes our gateway to the spirit, not a hindrance to it. All contemplation, meditation, prayer, and worship require our reverent thought, not the absence of it.

But the words we use in spiritual thinking are not as important as our frames of mind and attitudes of soul. There are no correct words in these situations, although our choice of words (in thought and speech) can influence and direct our perceptions of spiritual realities.

Spiritual sentiments, along with focused attention, direct our thoughts to the higher reaches of the mind, a level of consciousness that connects the material world with the spirit domain. In this thoughtful state, we direct our minds to contemplate divine values, to discover more transcendent realms of spiritualized thought, and to

become conscious of the spiritual currents of celestial communication.

It is your thoughts, not your feelings, that lead you Godward.

– *The Urantia Book*

Divine meditation is a dynamic and positive spiritual approach. It's a technique used to control and direct thoughts, as well as to reflect and relax. Instead of simply becoming aware of something or trying to exclude all thought, we relax to contemplate all things spiritual while consciously *allowing* the Divine Spirit to *adjust* our thoughts—to bring them into harmony with the spirit phase of existence—to spiritualize them.

This is not a difficult task. We soon discover that divine meditation is an effortless, yet powerful, psychological strategy for contacting spirit and, in the process, we gain peace of mind, soul growth, and spiritual insight—wisdom.

During meditation, we cannot entirely escape the ego, yet we avoid being egotistical or entertaining any notion of self-importance. We choose to be selfless by not thinking too much about ourselves. The goal is to fully identify the self with the Divine Presence so that the two become as ONE. In effect, we are allowing the Spirit to express itself through our personalities, our thoughts, and our actions.

The end of life is to be like God, and the soul following God will be like him.

– Socrates

The Spirit does not seek to control our thinking but rather to internalize spiritual values. It cannot influence our thoughts against our will, but with our permission, it can improve and modify our thinking processes so that we actually think, speak, and live on behalf of God.

If toxic thoughts or evil inclinations arise, our intention is not to confront or combat

them. This only gives an open stage to things that are not of the spirit. Rather than resisting unpleasant thoughts and unwittingly giving them a life of their own, it's better to change our thinking by focusing only on what is loving, good, true, and beautiful. Ignore the rest.

In divine meditation, we control our thoughts by contemplating only divine ideals and spiritual ideas that we admire, respect, and venerate. We can then focus and channel these exalted ideals constructively by considering the many ways to express them in our spiritual lives.

Reflective worship is not only a matter of *outwardly expressing* our love and adoration for an all-wise Source, but it also opens our minds and souls to *receive* God's wisdom. We are not trying to empty our minds; instead, we are permitting the spirit to fill our minds with spiritual thoughts and spiritual goals—to be spiritually mind-full.

Keep Balanced

Divine meditation is a sane and balanced effort to reach beyond the borders of self-consciousness. We accomplish this by extending our awareness into the semi-spiritual realms of soul consciousness. If we can reach this level of perception, we are better prepared to make a concerted foray into spirit consciousness—direct contact with the divine Presence within us.

Ideally, our thoughts and feelings should flow freely in spiritually liberated but controlled channels of creative imagination. This means that we not only monitor our thoughts, ensuring they are pure in intent, but that we also imagine divine ideals.

Before we begin with this powerful and effective approach, there are a few caveats to keep in mind. We are not trying to induce a trance-like state or some imagined state of bliss. We also wish to avoid fanatical notions, entertaining visions, or interpreting dreams. These are open to endless

speculation and distract us from the sober but thrilling realities of our God experience.

We should also avoid prolonged social isolation. Keep on track, but keep balanced by sharing your thoughts and experiences with others of similar mind—kindred spirits. Sharing your spiritual journey helps you to put things in perspective and contributes to a sense of balance between your inner and outer lives.

Set the Stage

Ideally, we can meditate, pray, or worship anywhere at any time. But to get the most from our exercises, it helps to remove ourselves from the rush of life and the worries of the day. Choose quiet surroundings where there is little chance of being disturbed.

There are hundreds of books and websites offering instructions on how to meditate. These are not elaborated on here, but it is helpful to review some of them and adopt

the techniques that best suit you. Just keep in mind we are taking a God-centered approach rather than trying to empty our thoughts.

Eastern meditation practices are particularly useful for relaxing the body and mind, and for focusing on a specific objective. The real difference in the God experience is that you are focusing on the divine Source of all things and filling your mind with spiritual realities, divine values, cosmic awareness, and God consciousness. This is the divine meditation method..

Surroundings

It is always good to appreciate the value of beauty in meditation and contemplation. Beauty arouses our highest spiritual emotions. We can then employ these inspirations in our intelligent and reasonable efforts to commune with God.

We find beauty in the flora of nature, whether an emerald forest, a public park, or your backyard garden. Even in stark

environments, there is a unique and simple beauty—the saguaro cacti of an American desert, the tropical mangroves of Costa Rica, or the Arctic tundra of the Canadian North. A time of sunset or sunrise is conducive to divine meditation, as is gazing on the panorama of the starry realms. There are many rewarding ways to enjoy nature's beauty.

If your meditation and worship must be confined to a building or a room, create a place of warm, simple beauty, adorned with modest, tasteful works of art inspired by nature. Design your setting to inspire happiness, reverence, and holiness.

Relaxation

One of the classic Buddhist meditation techniques is to focus on the breath. This is the simple practice of consciously taking control of our breathing, keeping it slow, deep, and even. This is a good way to begin, as it takes our minds off worries and anxieties.

Also consider *progressive muscle relaxation*, also known as a “body scan.” It’s an extremely beneficial technique proven effective by several research studies.⁹⁰ It may take a little practice at first, but after a while, it will come naturally.

Progressive muscle relaxation takes advantage of the fact that the body affects the mind, and the mind affects the body. By relaxing the body, you relax the mind. We are often unaware of how much we tense our muscles in reaction to stress or anxiety.

We begin these exercises by consciously tensing our muscles or muscle groups and holding the tension for a brief period (5 to 10 seconds). By continually tensing and relaxing, we become acutely aware of the difference between the two states, realizing we are in control of our muscle tension and, by extension, our thoughts.

We could begin with our toes by briefly tensing every muscle before completely relaxing. Now do the same thing with different muscle groups, tensing and

releasing as we move from the toes to the top of the head. After doing this a few times, we become more acutely aware of our body tensions, relaxing in the process. This is a proven method for taking control of body and mind.

But once we take control of our breathing and muscle tension, there is little need to spend more time on this. By now, we should have reached a state of physical and mental relaxation, ready to begin the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey that brings us a little closer to the Spirit Within.

Focus On Divinity

Now is the time to focus our attention on spiritual qualities and let the Spirit carry us away. Instruct your mind to dwell only on thoughts that are divine in origin. Focus on one spiritual concept at a time, such as God's love or God's goodness.

As you look around in your mind, become aware of your opinions, settled ideas, and prejudices. These thoughts impede all efforts

of the Spirit, preventing it from sharing with you the loving and inspiring messages beaming out from the divine Source of all things.

Whenever you identify inhibiting thoughts, don't dwell on them—just clear them out of the way with divine values and a consciousness of God. Remain open-minded. Give up your cherished ideas about the way the world should be. By all means, change the world if you can, but for now, just accept it for what it is.

During meditation, you may encounter startling thoughts or experience intense emotions. Take care to scrutinize these. Recognize every thought and experience for what it is, and not for what you imagine or wish it to be. Balance your thoughts and emotions with sincere self-critique while having the courage to accept new spiritual realities.

Meditation Exercises

There are no rules or set procedures for divine meditation, except for the obvious fact that you are attempting to contemplate all things of a divine or spiritual nature for the purpose of spiritual awareness, spiritual insight, and divine wisdom. It's a method of subjecting yourself to the consciousness of contact with Divinity.

The whole point of meditation is to change yourself—to progress in all aspects of God consciousness, spiritual enhancement, cosmic knowledge, and experiential wisdom—to become a better person, not just for yourself but for everyone else, for the benefit of your family, your community, all humanity, and the entire universe.

Begin by using your creative imagination (see *Creative Imagination*). Reach up to a high state of consciousness by being aware that you are aware. Have faith that the Spirit is trying to impart love and wisdom to you, and trust that contact is easier when you are

purely motivated and sincere of heart. Be humble and open-minded as you stand at the doorway to the spirit world, and then summon the courage to knock.

Knock and the door will be opened to you.

– *Jesus of Nazareth*

In all these exercises, take your time. Meditate on just one topic or one line of thought each day. Rushing through spiritual concepts seldom yields positive or lasting results. It takes time to fully realize and embed new truths.

Meditating on a thought doesn't mean saying it over and over in a mindless fashion. Instead, it is reflecting on a concept from different perspectives, especially moral and spiritual perspectives. It means contemplating, or probing, a subject of interest with an eye to divine values and spiritual meanings. And it means using your imagination to evoke the presence of God in

order to recreate yourself as a new being—as a truthful, good, and gracious being.

Take about an hour each day to contemplate various aspects of divinity and, after six days, use the seventh day to actively help others. Your degree of contact with spirit depends not just on your meditation and worship exercises but also on how much you share your love and compassion in everyday life.

The weekly exercises below are only suggestions. Be open and receptive. The best responses are spiritually spontaneous, individual, and unique. But until you reach that point, you may need a more structured approach.

Week One: Contemplate the Attributes of God

Personal attributes include things like height and weight, skills and abilities, and specific jobs people do. When it comes to God's attributes, we think of his infinity, eternity, and power.

We begin by contemplating these and other attributes of God. Spend one day thinking about just one aspect. And, by all means, add more as your spiritual inspiration and insights guide you.

Day One—Imagine God as the *Primal Source* of all reality. Without God, there would be no reality. Imagine a self-existent Divine Creator who always existed before anything else was created. Imagine One God who is all there is, the infinite and eternal I AM.

Day Two—Imagine God being everywhere, living in all space, encompassing all space, yet beyond all space and the creator of all space. Envision God literally and eternally present in the universe of universes. Stretch your mind beyond space to embrace the *infinity* of the First Source and Center.

Day Three—Imagine the eternity of God, the one who is beyond all time, yet encompasses all time, lives in all time, and is the creator of all time. To God, there is no past, present, or future—all time is present

at any given moment. ⁹¹ The eternal God is never-beginning and never-ending. Go beyond time by accepting the *eternity* of Spirit.

Day Four—Imagine the infinite, eternal, and *absolute power* of a majestic God, the supreme preserver, the controller, and the upholder of all universes and all reality—a Power that maintains the entire universe with unlimited force and complete sovereignty.

Day Five—Imagine God as the ultimate and *absolute spirit*, an all-wise, all-present, and all-powerful Deity of Creation, a divine controller, a brilliant light at the Paradise center of all reality, bonding and uniting the entire universe wisely and effortlessly.

Day Six—Imagine God as the *First Life*, the source of life, the pattern of life, and the purpose of life. Visualize the unlimited Spirit of All Creation as the divine source of all mind, all consciousness, and all personality.

Day Seven—Do something good for someone.

Week Two: Contemplate the Nature of God

A person's nature is often perceived as their character or qualities—such as whether they are kind or cruel, respectful or rude, selfless or selfish. Take a week to contemplate the divine nature of God.

Day One—Imagine God as the spiritual *epitome of love*, the divine source of all love—a selfless, self-forgetting, compassionate, and wise love. Freely accept this perfect, infinite, and eternal love that is freely given to all who wish to receive it. Be Godlike—love others with parental love.

Day Two—Imagine God as the *ultimate good* and the source of all goodness—the eternal, divine goodness of a replete and perfect existence. Accept this eternal goodness into your heart and your life. Be Godlike—be good.

Day Three—Imagine God as infinite and *eternal beauty* and the source of all beauty. Discern the beauty of the universe, the beauty of goodness, the beauty of truth, the beauty of grace, and the beauty of harmony in a spiritual life. Be Godlike—be beautiful.

Day Four—Imagine God as *divine truth* and the source of all truth—a living, eternal truth. Accept the Spirit of Truth into your heart, and let it live in your thoughts and actions. Allow truth to grow and flourish in your soul. Be Godlike—be truthful.

Day Five—Imagine God as *compassionate*, fair, and helpful—the natural and divine expression of goodness and love. Accept that God is forever patient, understanding, forgiving, and always considerate of our challenges and tribulations. Be Godlike—understand and forgive.

Day Six—Imagine God as the source of all *divine wisdom*—an infinite, eternal wisdom—a perfection of truth and knowledge. Envision supreme wisdom, a wisdom conditioned by God's love,

goodness, and compassion. Be Godlike—be wise..

Day Seven—Help someone who wants and needs your help.

Week Three: Contemplate Cosmic Meanings

Day One—Imagine *love* as the divine glue that forever binds the universe. Envision God's love as the greatest of all spirit realities, the only true, infinite, and eternal power throughout the entire universe. Imagine the power of love pervading your entire being and the entire cosmos.

Day Two—Imagine yourself becoming like the true nature of God and thereby becoming Godlike in all that you say and do. Imagine yourself achieving spiritual maturity, enhanced insight, and the highest ideals. Visualize yourself as a *spirit child of God* and a citizen of the cosmos.

Day Three—Imagine all things material, intellectual, and spiritual working in complete *harmony* in the great scheme of

universe progression. Visualize divine beauty, intellectual truth, and spiritual goodness as integrated and unified realities throughout the cosmos.

Day Four—Imagine the gift of *eternal life*. Picture the endless exploration of the wonders of an almost infinite universe. Imagine astonishing and thrilling adventures throughout the countless worlds of space. It is yours for the taking—follow your Spirit Guide and become an active member in a friendly universe.

Day Five—Imagine the unique and personal contributions you can make to the positive and eternal progress of the universe and all celestial beings. Contemplate your spiritual *privileges and duties* as a spiritual child of a loving Universal Father.

Day Six—Imagine you belong in a friendly, helpful, and loving universe. Imagine yourself as a real *cosmic citizen*, completely loyal to the will of Divinity, completely loved and cherished by a universe Mother Spirit and all her angels.

Day Seven—Fulfill your duties to family and friends.

Week Four: Contemplate the Presence of God

Day One—Imagine the loving *Spirit of God* living within you—seeing what you see, hearing what you hear, listening to your thoughts, aware of your motivations and desires, waiting patiently for your wholehearted love and devotion.

Day Two—Imagine a friendly God living beside you. Visualize the *Spirit of Truth* walking beside you throughout all your daily adventures. Ask this spirit to show you the truth in all situations and then listen (feel) for a spiritual response. Live a truthful life.

Day Three—Imagine the *Holy Spirit* all around you. Visualize your guardian angels, who are always with you, helping you see things in a spiritual light and make spiritual decisions. Feel these loving angels with you now and love them in return.

Day Four—Imagine God's Spirit living in all people. Acknowledge and respect the *Divine Presence* within everyone. When you speak to others, speak to their Spirit as well. Honor the light in all people by valuing them as you value yourself. Respect others, understand others, love others.

Day Five—Imagine *God is helping you to become a spiritual being*. Believe he wants you to succeed and is actually helping you right now. Picture yourself becoming more spiritual at this very moment. Believe and accept this truth. Feel your spiritual transformation.

Day Six—Consciously *share your inner life with God*. Share your hopes and aspirations, your fears and anxieties, your happiness and devotions, your love and adoration. Be sincere and open. Listen for, and feel, the divine response.

Day Seven—Share your goodness, truth, and beauty with all others as you live in the presence of God.

Week Five: The Benefit of Prayer

Prayer is most effective when it's sincere and spontaneous (see *Prayer - How It Works*).

But it's impossible and impractical to come up with prayers that suit everyone, since our individual stages of growth vary so much.

Nonetheless, here are some samples you may find helpful.

Day One—Pray for the *strength and courage* to be loyal to the divine will. Pray for the courage to face anyone and anything, knowing there is no fear in love. Pray for the resolve and fortitude needed to face the challenges of life.

Day Two—Pray for *honesty of mind*. Pray to become genuine and trustworthy to yourself, to others, and to God. Pray to be forever loyal in your duties and responsibilities, and pray for the ability to speak with sincerity and candor.

Day Three—Pray that we all learn *tolerance and forgiveness*, patience and understanding, tactfulness and resilience.

Pray for compassion, love, kindness, fairness, and benevolence.

Day Four—Pray for *personal wisdom*, divine wisdom, and cosmic wisdom. Pray for all people to be wise in their actions and speech. Pray for truth, knowledge, and understanding.

Day Five—Pray for *faith* to sustain you and all others in the spiritual journey. Have faith in each other. Pray to remove all doubt and replace it with undying faith and loyalty in the wisdom, goodness, and love of God.

Day Six—Pray for a desire to *love and help others*. Pray to be selfless. Pray for those who love you as well as those who despise you. Pray for the welfare of others. Pray for solutions to your problems.

Day Seven—Work for the spiritual advancement of others.

Week Six: The Value of Gratitude

Day One—Give thanks for all the good things in your life. Give thanks for all the

good things in the world. Realize that, over the long term, the world is getting better and give thanks.

Day Two—Give thanks to all those who have helped you through life. Give thanks to your family and friends. Give thanks to all those good people who work for peace and harmony, beauty and nature, goodness and truth.

Day Three—Give thanks to your guardian angels who are so near to you and who watch over you. Thank them for their diligent and persistent work toward your spiritual growth and eternal life.

Day Four—Give thanks to the Spirit of Truth who walks beside you, always helping you to discern the truth and to act rightly on all occasions. Listen to the Spirit's comforting voice saying, "This is the way," and give thanks.

Day Five—Give thanks to the Spirit of God living within you. Be thankful for this precious gift that is the secret of your

spiritual success and eternal life. Accept and believe this Spirit is always working to spiritualize your mind, and give thanks.

Day Six—Give thanks to the infinite, eternal God, the center and source of all reality. Give thanks to the all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving Creator of the Universe. Know that God is good, perfect, holy, and glorious, and give thanks.

Day Seven—Go out into the world to give thanks.

Week Seven: The Power of Worship

Like prayer, worship is a unique and individual experience (see *Worship – How It Works*). Some like to worship with music, while others prefer the quiet solitude of beautiful surroundings. Worship is best when it's spontaneous and sincere—when it springs from your heart. The words you use are not as important as your frame of mind. Here are some examples:

Day One—Worship and venerate the First Source of all reality, the Divine Cause of all

causes. Glorify the Eternal One who resides at the center of all reality, who pervades all reality, who is all reality. Feel and adore the divine presence of God.

Day Two—Worship the gracious, almighty, and all-pervading power of God. The only true power in the entire universe is the absolute power of God. Feel and revere this infinite and universal power working for the good of the entire universe.

Day Three—Worship the majesty, glory, and infinity of a Creator God. Adore the eternal greatness and perfection of this almighty presence. Feel and revere the superior, matchless, and boundless Being who lives within you and is all around you.

Day Four—Worship and revere the Infinite Source of all life, all consciousness, all mind, and all experience. Feel and revere the Spirit of Life within you and around you. Worship the beautiful Source of a beautiful life.

Day Five—Worship and admire the goodness of a benevolent and compassionate

God. Feel and worship the presence of his divine goodness. Have faith that, no matter what hardships you face in life, God has a good, loving, and divine plan for you.

Day Six—Worship and adore the unconditional, divine love of God. Feel the Creator's true affection for you and love him in return. Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Feel and revere this heavenly love.

Day Seven—Learn to understand and love one more person today.

Week Eight: Transform Yourself

Day One—Open your mind to the spiritual power and divine energy emanating from the Spirit within you. Allow your Spirit to recharge and refresh your body, mind, and soul with spiritual energy. Ride this wave of divine energy, breaking through all resistance.

Day Two—Imagine harmonizing your physical, mental, and spiritual powers with

the Divine Presence. Let them all work together as one force wholly dedicated to doing God's will. Balance yourself in all things, giving equal weight to spiritual growth in body, mind, and soul.

Day Three—With joy and eagerness, fully cooperate with your Spirit Teacher. Imagine yourself coordinating and consecrating all your thoughts, words, and deeds with the Holy Presence. Imagine yourself making courageous decisions to do and to be whatever it takes.

Day Four—Imagine yourself embracing a spirit-led life by consciously choosing the divine realities of truth, beauty, and goodness. Visualize yourself living out these values through expressions of love, compassion, and ministry to others.

Day Five—Envision yourself as a child of God and happily accept that you truly belong in a greater universe guided by love and compassion. Joyfully accept your cosmic citizenship and recognize your spiritual

obligation to the continuing, progressive evolution of the universe.

Day Six—Allow the Divine Spirit to show you the real motive, the final aim, and the eternal purpose of your life's struggle. Allow the Spirit to fight with you and for you. Allow the Spirit of Truth to recreate you as a spiritual being.

Day Seven—Give thanks to all the spiritual forces within you and around you. Receive their loving guidance and pass it on to others.

Meditative Reflections

I hope these exercises have helped you feel a little closer to divinity and inspired you to become more God-conscious. By now, you have probably developed a technique that works best for you. This is great, but don't get stuck on just one method or one way of thinking. Be spontaneous in spirit and always probe within yourself for greater

truths, enhanced values, and spiritual meanings.

Throughout these meditations, keep in mind that real progress entails outwardly expressing your spiritual transformation through love and compassion for your fellow beings. You can sincerely evaluate your personal success by the degree to which you manifest a spiritual nature, one marked by loving service, unselfish devotion, enlightened honesty, unfailing goodness, forgiving tolerance, and enduring peace. ⁹²

Divine meditation not only brings you closer to God but is also useful for solving life's problems, a topic explored in the next chapter.

Let experience teach you the value of meditation and the power of intelligent reflection.

– *The Urantia Book*

Divine Problem Solving

The anxiety we feel when faced with the challenges of everyday life is partly due to our inability to solve problems effectively. But if we take the time to find a quiet place to think about our difficulties in a reasonable and spiritual way, we will find practical and moral solutions. Even the most serious problems in life can be managed and remedied when considered from a spiritual perspective.

Problem-solving abilities are learned skills. Many of us were never taught critical thinking skills, either at home or at school. Exceptions might include science- or math-oriented problems, skills that are helpful in some instances but do not necessarily provide the wisdom needed to solve life's dilemmas.

All life is problem solving.

– Karl Popper

The Problem with Problems

The practical problem-solving skills we acquire are often work-related, as we face a myriad of technical and social problems to overcome. These skills and experiences are helpful to some degree, but we may find them limited to specific areas.

For most of us, the real problems of life arise with family, partners, friends, acquaintances, and social organizations. Some of the more serious issues include moral dilemmas, relationship troubles, difficulties with children, or money problems.

A religious life helps us overcome these problems, but, in a bit of a paradox, new difficulties often arise as we develop a stronger sense of morality and duty, which can lead to periods of frustration, uncertainty, and doubt. Moving forward from a material-based life to a more meaningful spirit-based life can be a difficult transition.

Realistically, we cannot expect our troubles to disappear. No matter how much we pray, things can always go wrong because, in addition to accidents and illness, we live on a world with imperfect people, some more so than others. And as long as people are cruel and selfish, or grasp at money and power, there will always be trouble.

We can, however, resolve many problems simply by changing our perspectives and principles. Emotions, such as anger, envy, and selfishness, are impediments to solving any predicament, but two of our worst enemies are fear and doubt. Fears and doubts inhibit our ability to seek a solution because the inner Spirit cannot penetrate a mind riddled with senseless fear or faithless doubt.

Set your mind at work to solve its problems;
teach your intellect to work for you; refuse
longer to be dominated by fear like an
unthinking animal.

– *The Urantia Book*

We can counter our fears by recognizing that *fear is not part of the spiritual life.*

Whenever we entertain or indulge our fears, we effectively block out spiritual messages. To remedy this, we bring our fears into the open where we can examine them in a reasonable and balanced manner and from a loving perspective. And when we do so, we will most often find them unsubstantiated and pointless.

Doubt stems from a lack of faith, and whenever we lose faith in the good counsel of our Spirit Guide, we deny the truth of God's love, goodness, and beauty. The unwavering faith we need to succeed has nothing to do with the doctrines of organized religions. Instead, it is our personal faith in the spiritual forces that are always working to spiritualize and transform us (see *What Is Spiritual Faith?*).

Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty
of mortal living.

– *The Urantia Book*

Impatience is another impediment to solving our difficulties. It doesn't help to hurry through life or rush events. Take time to make plans and realize that plans take time to mature. God guides the universe along a path of orderly progression and balanced evolution in which the future is built on the foundations of the past.

Overcome your impatience by understanding the nature of change.

Whether it is biological, mental, or spiritual, change takes time and progresses one step at a time. It is an unconscious process best recognized and evaluated only in retrospect, and with deep reflection.

Teach yourself to rise above the trivial episodes, base desires, and selfish pursuits of daily life by viewing the world from an enlarged perspective, a cosmic perspective; realize that God has a positive plan for your future and the future of the world. He has a greater purpose for you—if you so desire.

Finding the best solutions to problems requires changing the way we look at life, at

humanity, the cosmos, spirituality, and God. It requires an open mind receptive to spirit realities and fresh discoveries; it requires faith in the goodness and wisdom of God to guide us in the right direction; and it requires the recognition that we truly are privileged children of God, a privilege that entails our willful acceptance of the responsibilities and duties rooted in spiritual living and cosmic consciousness.

What Is Divine Problem Solving?

Divine problem-solving is a method of finding practical and moral solutions through communion, which means sharing your difficulties, thoughts, desires, and aspirations with the Spirit of God within you. Problem-solving works best with meditation and reflection (see *Divine Meditation*).

The advantage of this method is that you begin to see your problems more objectively by imagining how God and the angels would view them. It is looking at a problematic

situation from a detached viewpoint and then evaluating it with spiritual values set within a cosmological context—the bigger picture.

The effectiveness of this technique is conditioned and limited only by our understanding of divine values and the nature of God (see *God Consciousness*). We use this understanding to visualize and create a divine persona, or presence, who is impartial, enlightened, idealistic, all-wise, and glorious. We then imagine this divine Being offering us spiritual advice for our personal and moral difficulties.

This may appear to be play-acting, which it is. But what you are imagining is real. This is a mental process that brings your mind closer to the truth of the nature of God, as well as the truth about the nature of your relationship with that Divine Creator.

God and his assistants are always here to help you, but this doesn't exempt you from acting. You are the one who must learn to think and organize your thoughts. It is up to

you to learn how to focus your mind on a particular problem, break it down into salient factors, approach it from different angles, and finally assess it. Spiritual forces are here to guide you and inspire you, but they can't make the journey for you. It requires effort on your part, but it is always an honest and praiseworthy personal achievement.

Continuous effort – not strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking our potential.

– Winston Churchill

Divine problem-solving makes use of the combined powers of prayer, worship, and reflective meditation. These tried-and-tested spiritual practices not only recharge your soul and transform you spiritually but are also extremely useful for finding practical solutions to everyday problems (see *Spirit Contact Methods*).

Benefits of Divine Problem-Solving

Divine problem-solving works not only because it promotes wisdom and insight, but also because it taps into spiritual energy. It is a way to deepen our understanding of our supreme purpose in life, helping us adjust to the constant changes in all life's predicaments. It helps us grow gracefully and mature in spirit, and it makes us more aware of what is spiritually worthwhile.

Examining our problems using meditative techniques is relaxing and renewing. It provides the moral and spiritual insights needed to motivate us and to give us the courage to face whatever life brings. Take heart that any form of communion with the Divine Source will strengthen your growing conviction that you are a child of God. Knowing this is the beginning of wisdom.

Finding Solutions

As you begin, keep in mind that the best motivation is the desire for truth, no matter where it may lead you. Solving problems is

not just about changing the course of life events; it is also about changing your frame of mind in order to develop beneficial, spiritual responses to everyday life.

To solve problems effectively, it is best to adopt an attitude of mind that is unselfish, believing, humble, sincere, and trustful. Free your mind from conceit, envy, arrogance, and prejudice. Come to realize that these harmful dispositions affect your problem-solving abilities. Can you ever hope to approach any truth if you are unwilling to let go of your biases and bigotries?

The solution of life problems requires
courage and sincerity.

– *The Urantia Book*

Accept and believe that God has already given you all you need to approach him—a clear mind and a Divine Guide. Have the courage to face life's realities and realize you need to act. Instead of complaining about the present, regretting the past, or fearing

the future, do something about it. But also recognize there are some things you cannot change, although you can always adapt.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

– Reinhold Niebuhr

Allow the Spirit to guide your decisions with love, truth, beauty, and goodness. Learn to evaluate every solution in light of these divine realities. When we live by these guiding principles, we soon begin to express wisdom, love, compassion, and service to those around us.

The ideal relationship is to treat others with the love and kindness of a divinely motivated parent, no matter the circumstances.

A Problem-Solving Method

Divine problem solving requires reason, logic, compassion, honesty, and spiritual insight. And it requires thinking things through while sticking to the Spirit Path. Solutions often come to light whenever we make an honest attempt to understand and evaluate problems or people. But it also means understanding ourselves and our motivations, as well as the motivations of others.

Being too quick to find fault with others is not helpful. Whenever we consider all circumstances related to the problem at hand, we may discover that those we blame for our troubles may have had considerable difficulty and trouble in their lives. We have to ask whether their circumstances put them in an impossible situation. What were (or are) their true motivations for action? To evaluate your actions, see *Making a Moral Evaluation*

Solving problems is best approached as a meditative exercise. Try engaging and contemplating the nine-step process below. During the entire process, imagine yourself in the presence of God and your guardian angels (because you are). You will discover that visualizing your spiritual audience keeps you balanced, alert, and inspired!

A Nine-Step Process

1. What's the problem?
2. What's the real problem?
3. How serious is the problem?
4. Are you part of the problem?
5. Can you accept unwanted solutions?
6. Engage in divine meditation.
7. Allow the Spirit to take you wherever it may lead.
8. Forget your problem for three days.
9. Re-evaluate the problem.

1. What's the problem?

Begin by writing down your problem in one short paragraph. This is one of the best ways to clarify your thoughts. In your initial assessment, what is your desired, or ideal, solution to the problem? Why? What are some possible long-term consequences of this solution?

Consider the whole story behind the problem, such as any events leading up to the difficulty; the people involved, and the roles they play; the people you think should be involved, and the roles you think they should play in any solution. Can you control the roles of others? What role do you imagine for yourself in the solution to your dilemma?

2. What's the real problem?

Take the problem you defined in Step 1 and narrow it down to the crux of the problem. Separate causes from effects. In other words, distinguish between the *symptoms* of the

problem and the *causes* of the problem.

Write it down.

For example, if your quandary is to solve poverty in your community, separate the consequences of poverty from the causes of poverty. Can you identify root causes?

3. How serious is the problem?

Is this a serious problem? Why? What dire consequences do you foresee if this difficulty is not resolved to your satisfaction? Is it a priority to live a good life?

You may feel, for instance, that your spouse or partner is not doing enough to support the household. Is this really the case? Or do you just see the situation from your own point of view while disregarding or discrediting the work of others? Is this something that can be openly discussed, or are there underlying resentments relevant to a deeper problem?

4. Are you part of the problem?

To solve problems successfully, you must first acknowledge the possibility that *you* might be the fundamental problem. It's difficult to find lasting solutions if you believe everyone else is at fault. Do you have any biases that could affect the best solution to the problem? Do you harbor any prejudices, selfish desires, or engage in personality conflicts? What is your real motivation?

You may think your point of view is the only correct one, or that your actions are the only appropriate actions. We often adopt the ideals and lessons of our parents and peers without taking the time to critically assess these views, let alone their consequences.

Are your emotions in check? Do you entertain notions of revenge, greed, anger, envy, or lust? Are you being self-centered? Is your intent pure? Even if you know your actions are immoral, such as telling a lie to help others, do you still consider them justified? Why?

5. Can you accept unwanted solutions?

Can you come to terms with the truth? Are you ready to accept the best solution, even if it conflicts with your initial assessment or desires? Many of us, once taking the wrong road, will persist even when we know it's wrong. Do you have the courage and sincerity to admit you were wrong, to accept the truth, and to change course?

The wise course in life is to act in
consonance with the spirit of truth.

– Zoroaster

Consider alternate solutions. How would you define or describe the best alternative? Take time to study how you evaluate any particular situation. What are your criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong? What values do you feel are being violated?

6. Engage in divine meditation.

Once you have considered your problem from these various perspectives, lay it all out

before God and the angels. Think it through and pray for wisdom and insight to see the most effective solution, pray for the welfare of *everyone* involved, and pray for all to receive spiritual insight, energy, and guidance.

Meditate on the long-term consequences of your decisions. How do you expect things to play out? Is your decision the best for all parties involved? Is it moral and spiritual? See *Four Divine Values*.

7. Allow the Spirit to take you wherever it may lead.

Have faith in the wisdom and goodness of God and trust his Spirit to guide you. Adopt an attitude of worshipful contemplation and, afterwards, be still and listen to your inner voice—feel the presence.

Avoid rushing through and making rash decisions. Be patient—have faith that a solution will present itself. This is not necessarily an overnight process. Even if you experience immediate calm, your

deliberations could take some time. If a thought comes to mind or you feel divine inspiration, write it down before you forget it. Later, you can use it when you re-evaluate your main difficulty.

8. Forget your problem for three days.

After considering your problem, put it aside for about three days. Forget your difficulties and fretful thoughts for this period. Take a few days to engage in some enjoyable recreation, relaxation, or leisure activity that takes your mind completely off your problems. Let the Spirit Guide and your superconscious mind do their work without interference.

9. Re-evaluate the problem.

Review and re-evaluate your difficulty. Go over the steps again to see if you have changed your thinking or opinions in any way. Commit yourself wholeheartedly to spiritual insight, reason, wisdom, peace, love, and truth. And have the courage to go wherever the Spirit may take you.

The greatest of all methods of problem solving I have learned from Jesus, your Master. I refer to that which he so consistently practices, and which he has so faithfully taught you, the isolation of worshipful meditation.

– *Rodan of Alexandria*

Final Thoughts

The God experience is a personal and unique spiritual adventure, ongoing and progressive. Our individual experiences vary considerably. Much depends on the extent of our personal enlightenment and the degree to which we willingly receive the spiritual energy and revealed truth so freely offered by a loving Creator Spirit.

There may be limits as to what we can achieve on this world, but most of us seldom approach those limits. Fortunately, with a little effort, we can move ever closer to God consciousness, perfection of purpose, a gracious demeanor, loving attitudes, self-mastery, and cosmic consciousness. And all this is attainable simply by communing with our inner Spirit and going out into the world to serve others with love.

Starting out is easy. When we recognize and accept our divine potential and the existence of our spiritual selves, we realize we are truly

privileged children of a caring God. And the only attitude we need to bring all this spiritual ministry into our lives is one of complete faith and trust in the love, wisdom, and goodness of God. All else will follow.

Believers must increasingly learn how to step aside from the rush of life... while they refresh the soul, inspire the mind, and renew the spirit by worshipful communion.

– *The Urantia Book*

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