Chapter 5 - Theological or Philosophical Spirituality

> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

People create God(s) and spiritual constructs of the universe after their own imaginings or ideas. You could even say "after their own image." Sometimes a person or social group believes in a mental construct of reality that involves a divine being, beings or hierarchy of spirits, but belief in a god, goddess or other spirit entity is not required. I define philosophical spirituality when the reality construct is non-theistic – does not involve a deity, and theological spirituality when one or more deities are included in a particular model of ultimate truth.

Whether you believe that God created the human mind or that it evolved, history is replete with the intellectual search to understand, define and categorize the realm of the spiritual. I believe that this philosophical or theological aspect of spiritual searching is the natural response of a mind designed to search out all matters of this universe as well as to survive the day-to-day challenges that each of us meet in our own bubbles of artificial reality.

Theological and philosophical spirituality came into existence as people tried to understand, explain and control the natural or pneumagenic spirituality that they observed and/or experienced. The academic products of this process range from Greek gods that run off with beautiful young virgins to theories concerning the mystical balance of spiritual powers required to achieve one of the various expressions of existential bliss. They include rituals, liturgies, and dogmas as well as the religious activities of worship, education, organization and management.

All rational and disciplined thought about spirituality (theology or philosophy) is constructed upon the foundation of humanity's common and unique experiences of natural spirituality. It is the individualized process of rational examination that has introduced all of the religious and philosophical interpretations of reality, spirituality or the purpose for life - especially human life. Whereas religion is a subjective approach that focuses human feelings and acts towards the divine, theology and philosophy attempt an objective and systematic approach to the matter that is disciplined by reason. Religions arise from theological innovation that motivates a social expression for the human duties to God and fellow man.

Considering the separation of cultures by geography, time and language, an amazing degree of underlying similarity exists in human philosophical structure. Certain common problems and observations must be addressed as well as how each impacts a person or a human society. Some examples are:

- the questions of good and evil,
- faith and fear,
- the make-up of human nature,
- the existence of the metaphysical dimension,
- the existence and nature of God, gods or other spirit beings like angels and demons
- and how all of this relates to the human experience we call life.

The ideal goal of the search is to harmonize our humanly fabricated concepts of spiritual reality with what truly exists. While the ultimate outcome seems to be beyond the scope of this lifetime, we can at least make progress in reducing the number and degree of our misperceptions in the meantime. In other words, we should seek to minimize the artificiality of our individual reality constructs and better manage our inner doubts and fears.

The Sacredness of Life

Religious taboos often concern the sacred. They encourage people to behave, if not think, along lines of moralistic ideals that do not necessarily bring immediate social or economic advantage to their practitioners. The result provides a sense of purpose for life larger than an individual as well as expressing a collective purpose for a socially defined group of people, because religion is practiced by groups and not individuals.

The concept of the sacred communicates and transfers a culture's collective wisdom about life from generation to generation. Such wisdom not only deals with human relationships, but also with how a human being and groups of people should live responsibly towards the natural environment. Proper interaction with a society's environment in the natural world was essential for its continued survival. Many sacred practices and places preserve practical environmental wisdom and the spiritual resources essential to the survival of the group to whom they were sacred. Sacredness shouts, "Do not throw this out or change it at your peril! This is so important that it should be reverenced and not ignored or profanely revised."

The spiritual value of life conceived, preserved and conducted rightly lies at the core of the concept of sanctity or sacredness. This includes life lived at the natural, biological level of existence as well as in its aspects dedicated to the obviously spiritual otherness of eternity or metaphysical transcendence of the now. In philosophy and theology, cultures mentally encounter and rationally wrestle with the many paradoxes of truth. Biological life – especially human biological life - is central to sanctity, yet this holiness quakes in the face of death. All humans are mortal, and few who are psychologically sound seek to embrace that fact and accept it for the design absolute that it is. Most consciously avoid their impending deaths, which then hides their natural human fear of death within the subconscious realm of the inner most drives of self-preservation and procreation.

The thought systems of philosophy and theology labor to bring these inner fears to the light of rational thought in order to better manage or even resolve them. Thus, every philosophy or theology deals with the questions surrounding human birth and death within the context of the continuation of a culture through biological procreation and spiritual education. From these discussions come all of the ideas, theories and doctrines about life's purpose and what happens to a person (as a member/non-member of a group or society) after death.

One common paradox of human experience has been the repeated theme of a hero's sacrifice for his family, village or nation. While each person's biological life may be considered sacred, the continued sociological existence of a cultural group from generation to generation is more sacred, so that it justifies the sacrifice of many individuals when its survival is truly at stake or when its dominance over competing groups or nations is considered essential to its survival. Here in lies the conceptual root to the presumed nobility of one nation's or group's oppression of another. "If it is to be a question of us or you (plural), then let it be us alive and you suppressed, cut off from what we need, forced out or dead." On the personal level, these mortal struggles are expressed as, "Better you dead than me." Of course, the moral debate has always been whether a group's survival was truly at risk, or did members of a ruling elite use the group's the fear of potential defeat, subjugation or loss to manipulate them to oppose their competition as part of their struggle with other leaders from a different family, political party, nationality, language, race or religion.

The Role of Family

Most ancient cultures maintained a generational link beyond the boundary of death as part of its organic and chronological history of existence. Many sacred religious practices and beliefs are dedicated to maintaining and developing personal and spiritual relationships between those biologically alive in the material dimension of time with those who have passed over to the other side into the metaphysical dimension of eternity. Sometimes those ties are perceived to be very personal and direct, such as in the veneration of ancestors. Sometimes it is a step removed, such as in the

veneration of traditional histories, values and social institutions. Ancestor worship is a good specific example as is the veneration of dead spiritual and political leaders. In diluted format, honoring "ancestors" – literal or social - provides the framework for all non-familial teacher-disciple relationships: sometimes one's descendant is not a biological offspring but a sociocultural or religious disciple. This is because group membership is as much or more a matter of culture as it is of biology.

These cross-boundary spiritual relationships play a fundamental role in the family's survival function as life's central social institution. It is not just a matter of biological survival, but one of cultural continuation with all of its fundamental values of universal humanness and specific social identity. The structure and function of a human family functionally serves many survival purposes at multiple levels. The make-up of its structure directly impacts those sociocultural functions whether one considers the education of succeeding generations or the day-to-day economic survival and social power of a society.

It is not just a matter of its present leaders but also one of future leaders. It is not just a matter of what values are given lip service in a society's (superficial) public pronouncements (propaganda) but also one of its laws, norms, customs practiced in the daily interaction of its members. It is not just an issue of what is practiced but also one of the depth and breadth of specific values' and/or behaviors' prevalence in the social fabric and whether those cultural essentials are healthy enough to continue forward in time and thereby perpetuate a continued social existence in and relevance to the family of humanity. No wonder societies debate the laws and norms that culturally define the concept of family. It has always been one of the most important social issues and a concern of governments.

Since death is very personal as well as universal life experience or event, it is not surprising that the border between the sacred and profane fuzzes considerably whenever death is the focus of attention. Our memories are individually and collectively compounded by theological belief systems about life after death. First, they directly confront and psychologically manage our greatest inner fear, the root of all fears, the fear of death. Also, they work together in the hearts of the living to keep alive now what has passed beyond material temporality – the time boundary set by the point of death. Hence, the concept of the sacred or holy is often applied to personal as well as collective memories, persons and places.

Holiness or sanctity is functionally alien to the psychospiritual consciousness exhibited by modern, secular material civilization because something that is sacred has no price. It points in the direction of an absolute instead of a relative value that can be bartered. Relationships based upon beneficial exchange dominate the natural order of the biological and social environments. Sacredness hints that there is a higher level of relationship beyond conditional exchange, which we refer to today as unconditional love.

Furthermore, the concept of priceless life interferes with the modern libertarian approach to personal identity rooted in the dictum, "Do what thou wilt," which presumes no thought for others except as how they may satisfy some ego based and/or emotional need of the one who "does no harm." At least to the perpetrator of a self-defined willful act usually contemplates getting some personal advantage and not injury form what he or she does. Of course, suicide is an exception to this generality that indicates both psychological and social distress. If life is truly priceless, then the value of one life cannot be compared with, or exchanged for, that of another - when only based on human reasoning.

Extend this principle to a broader context, and one could conclude that healthcare should not be run purely as a business. The whole medical industrial complex poses unique challenges to modern society that are complicated by our social lack of spiritual understanding as discussed below. A more spiritually balanced culture would be able to more quickly and fairly come to some consensus on a society's approach to healthcare issues.

No individual is ethically in the position to value his or her priceless life over the priceless life of another – whether that is the life of a single person or the collective lives of society as a whole. Convenience and preference are unacceptable parameters for behavior. This ethical

paradox calls out for some kind of divine direction from an outside third party authority that draws its wisdom from the spiritual realm. This is a rational response that ascribes eternity with the ability to fathom the fathomless: only the timeless can make just decisions about the priceless. Herein lies the crucial importance of sacredness: no society or culture will endure without it.

Building on the hypothesis that the concepts and rules of the sacred are essential for long-term group survival, we can now understand another phenomenon – martyrdom. Martyrs suffer and die for sacred causes. Individuals sacrifice themselves so that those of a particular aspect of the sacred may survive and prosper in the face of threatening persons, populations or unseen spiritual powers.

Necessary suffering, patience and daily sacrifices endured for a greater cause are not values promoted by western secular culture; consequently, Americans and Europeans seeking such spiritual values are more easily manipulated than those living in a culture of balanced spiritual context. Because natural spirituality has been so completely compromised by materialism in modern western civilization, its members are more easily misled as to what is a bona fide spiritual sacrifice or a genuinely spiritual martyrdom. The deceived martyr's artificial reality of spiritual or patriotic sacrifice is simply a delusion that really leads to the degradation, death and destruction of one's family, nation, culture and religion as well as (perhaps) some few of the targeted enemy.

The Spirituality of Survival

Note that I have again associated spirituality with mortal survival. This principle remains true whether applied to the individual or to the culture's pool of social genes used to define its way of life. Spirituality is definitely linked to a better life now as well as to concerns about eternity or an afterlife. These are the two primary aspects of spirituality:

1. that which is applied directly to natural, biological life and

2. that which concerns the supernatural or metaphysical life – especially distinct in nature after death.

Many people and religions embrace some kind of overlap between the two. For them, the natural world and biological science coexist with the supernatural and spiritual. These two aspects of spirituality provide opportunities for growth as well as potential for confusion and divisive interaction.

The natural life aspects provide a practical philosophical and social meeting ground for people from different cultures who share a globe, business or marketplace in common, because we are essentially alike biologically. Our biological functions and needs are universal, which is the reason that they form the central repertoire for mass audience comedy and an international reverence for medical science and healthcare institutions. Humor derived from biological functions and common desires or experiences works commercially because it appeals to a market broad enough to support it financially. Disease mostly knows no racial, social or cultural boundaries; so many international medical relief organizations exist. Our universal biological survival needs drive the environmental movements as well. In these cases, the subject matter is immediately comprehensible, becoming either funny or motivational as the context mandates.

Of course, personal variations are emphasized in our commonality, but that is because they are linked to our identity creation process, which is a matter of personal choice. Human nature is predisposed to picking and choosing its personal interpretation of spiritual values. In these modern times of global communication this trend has manifested itself in the growth in the number of "spiritual" individualists who do not participate in a religious community as well as the increasing appearance of syncretistic religious communities that borrow and recombine religious traditions and beliefs from different, and sometimes opposing, philosophic or religious traditions. One example is the incorporation of yoga and eastern meditation techniques into personal prayer by Christians. Not surprisingly, these behavioral practices are usually followed by incorporating some degree of eastern philosophy or religious teachings into the doctrinal beliefs of the yoga or meditation practicing Christian.

Role and status of medical care in modern society presents us with another one of those spiritual paradoxes. The following comments are not given in a supercilious or overtly critical attitude. The medical industry is very complex and the delivery of quality medical care is a definite challenge that many sincere people devote their lives to. Nonetheless, the truth is that people are mortal and the ready availability of quality care minimizes the immediacy of mortality; therefore, good medical care in some measure facilitates secular avoidance of the spiritual issues presented by universal mortality. Death avoidance does not eliminate the fear of death. If anything, it pushes it further beneath the surface of interactive public and personal consciousness.

The huge scope of demand presented to the medical industrial complex forces it to objectify and commodify the human body in order to efficient deliver quality medical products and services. In other words, the human body must be treated as a biomechanical system of life functions in order to conduct research experiments to find either partial or complete remedies to the problems of sickness and infirmity. It would be financially less efficient to do otherwise. Yet, almost all participants realize at some level that real people are the subjects of these experiments or that the medical condition being treated is potentially life threatening. From the outside, I infer that the human face of medicine is most often administered through the initiative and grace of concerned practitioners who may or may not receive much corporate support for their personal commitment to compassion. Without the indirect spiritual mediation of these persons, the health care industry would be considerably less effective than it is. Unfortunately, I sense that these decent people are sometimes unconscionably used by a corporate system that is being driven by greed's competitive necessity to survive.

The primary spiritual danger here is that medical success has the potential to encourage the avoidance of that most essential spiritual challenge – mortality. I believe that the fear of death lies at the heart of human nature's drive for self-preservation. Most "instinctive" reactions people have to life come from the transcendent principle of protecting life and limb. In balance, this is good. It is essential for day-to-day function. However, my focus here is on the bigger questions of life – what is it and what happens at death, which is what any search for spirituality addresses.

The scientific advances in medical products and the institutionalized delivery of therapeutic services by the healthcare industry have enabled modern civilization to increasingly finesse publicly the spiritual consequences of death. By focusing on the body's physical health and medical repair, secular society has become profane and continues to intensify in its profanity in a manner that trends increasingly out of balance when it comes to life's sanctity. I do not contend that everyone should be a spiritual adept, nun, mystic or religious professional. A balanced society needs all kinds of people engaged in all types of economic and sociocultural pursuits. My concern is for the overall healthy balance of a society, which is necessarily made up of many individual balancing acts, yours and mine.

The evidence for my concerned contention is found in the medical money trail. Just follow the money and note who also follows the money and how it is regarded by our culture. From the perspective of monetary value, the bulk of charity is directed towards medical care. It is the most respected form of public charity along with educational institutions. The public relations impact made by either of these two charitable efforts is further enhanced if the largesse seemingly benefits the poor among us. While decidedly noble and good, these efforts are sourced in humanity, in our material capabilities to deliver and invest physical wealth in biomechanical repair systems of the fleshly machines called bodies. The medical professionals, from doctors on up and down, are the administering priests and priestesses of biological life enhancement, preservation and disease cure. The gold standard of responsible citizenship is to give offerings to this secular material religion.

Surprising that I use these terms? It should not be. From the days of ancient Greece, western civilization has treated medical care as a divine occupation, and it should be because it deals in life, mortal life. That is qualification sufficient to warrant religious classification; however, it also points out its competitive role, too. That is part of the paradox because all of this advanced medical knowledge can be used to distort the natural balance as well, thus violating the sanctity of life in the name of preserving it.

The modern medical industrial complex profitably contributes to the creation of the huge artificial reality held by billions that medical care is primarily a biophysical exercise. Admittedly, there is a growing sense that health is more than scientific medicine. Partly this has come about because of strained financial budgets. There simply will never be enough money to solve the many healthcare issues humanity faces, and that is because of the inexorable progress towards death made every day by all of us.

The draw to death is an incomprehensible spiritual power drain that affects all of our political, social and economic systems. It is balanced only by the preponderant momentum of life's essential attribute of being lived right now. Every living organism is designed with built-in mechanisms oriented to live now, to survive instead of to die. In humans, there is a choice involved. We can choose to die or to live. This unique power of human beings gives us moral obligations and considerations. It is a primary indicator for spiritual potential beyond this present mortal existence, yet we are indeed mortal.

This fact of our mortality. This admission that, do our best as we may, that we are not able on our own to naturally live forever is a must requirement to advance significantly in any search for spiritual meaning and power or to transcend the physical into the metaphysical beyond eternity. Many people have purposefully left planned legacies of their mortal lives in the form of artwork, charitable foundations, books and educational institutions as well as through the transient glory of public service and memory in the minds and hearts of others, "a grateful nation."

But the growth in medical science has perhaps best pandered to our unbalanced desires for self-perpetuated, self-empowered immortality. Businesses exist to freeze those with the money in hopes of reviving them later when the biomedical body can be more completely repaired. Movie scripts and novels abound with body bio-machines of robotic or human intelligence. We would not find these concepts expressed in literature and the electronic media if it were not for the enabling culture of high priestly medicine. The great advances in modern medical science fuel the artificial reality fantasies of purchased eternal life or a self-assisted life of temporal immortality. Indeed, every medical institution or organization may be evaluated using the Life-Death Continuum of gray justice based on how well it contributes to spiritual growth. Its balance in the life force is the most objective transcultural measure of that.

Anyone accepting or living the illusion of the false hope seemingly given by medical science will not be capable of psychospiritually advancing beyond mortal existence. They will not transcend the present temporal material existence of human life because they refuse to go through the only door into immortality, which is death. Accepting the inevitable reality of death forces a person to become honest with himself or herself. This self-honesty is essential to spiritual growth, which is impossible without it. It is a key component rationalizing the philosophic and theological pursuit of spiritual answers to physical death, and it is the key fulcrum of faith over fear.

Conflict and Peace

When we approach the metaphysical dimension of spirituality, we inevitably encounter significant differences between the teachings and belief systems of different cultures and faiths. Historically these differences have combined to supply reasons and excuses for violent conflict, including the massive acts of inhumanity to man defined as war or genocide. Over the course of history and ethnography, spiritual differences have been linked to an incomprehensibly vast amount of human suffering around the world.

There are a number of explanations for man's inhumanity to man. Many of them are valuable to understanding the nature of conflict. Without entering into a deep discussion of this issue, I tend to believe that, most of the time, the religious issues cited are purposefully utilized to motivate the masses to do the bidding for some member of the competing elite club of rulers. Religious differences were used to mask political struggles for economic advantage. Once conflict is engaged, a social entity's objectives range across various levels of survival to dominance within aspired limits or even to

global supremacy. Overlying the struggle for physical survival in the ethno-cultural identities of the parties in conflict. These identities are inseparable from their languages, music, norms, values and histories and provide a group's collective strength for the struggle.

In the past, any lasting peace between warring societies only came about or was maintained through outright dominance of the victor over and/or assimilation of the loser. Since strife begins over the material things desired or needed, these contests for power advantage, or even survival, usually result in a rearranging of the competing groups' access to and use of the things fought over. The ending balance of power between the contestants is reflected in how the contested material resources are divided up between the various allies and antagonists when the conflict comes to a negotiated close – though many issues may remain and the struggle may flair up again at a later date. If the conflict process produces frequent adjustments, then the conflict will be less violent and injuries less severe. Rigidity in the adjustment of the balance of power leads to sharp jolts in the relationship between the competing groups much as locked tectonic plates lead to massively destructive earthquakes.

Governments have attempted to enforce peace between warring peoples through strategies that mix a combination of military force and economic consequences only to fail repeatedly. Usually this has been because the motivations of those enjoying temporary dominance have been exclusively one-sided or at least heavily skewed towards their own interests. Peace achieved in this manner only lasts as long as the balance of power that it reflects continues in rough approximation of its structure at establishment. If the balance of power shifts beyond the threshold of a new conflict's perceived cost, then war will rekindle until the new balance of power is reached. In the meantime people suffer and die for various perceived reasons and causes.

Theoretically, it is possible for peace to arrive on a platform of a forgiveness that forgets the past in order to forge a new future for both sides, but this latter option is humanly next to impossible. Several humanitarian foundations attempt to forge the peace of forgiveness through education and cultural exchange - learning about one another, building bridges one person, one family, one small group at a time. If it would work on a large enough scope, then peace would already have been established. Despite its rational appeal, practicality and real though limited success, peace through education and cultural exchange does not seem to prevent mass conflicts in the face of a perceived necessity for economic or sociocultural survival.

Why? Why is it that such a rational solution based on sentiments such as "forgive and forget," "that's in the past, be realistic and look ahead" or "as the brotherhood of man, we all share this same country or planet" fail to do the job?

Peace Requires a Spiritual Solution

The reason that humanity has failed to achieve peace between peoples is that the solution is a spiritual one that must be executed at the metaphysical level and not a philosophical, theological or social one. Neither can the natural spirituality most of us experience in life forge peace beyond the members of an identity group co-engaged in its promotion and practice. Publishing pictures that depict spaceship earth as seen from the moon or social movements to save the rain forest will not lastingly join human hearts in peace - regardless of all the well-meaning sacrifices, good intentions, thoughts of good will and generous behaviors undertaken. The reason peace cannot be humanly achieved is because lasting peace is a gestalt state of grace unearned or deserved that is imparted from the metaphysical dimension upon mortals. Peace can never be the product of material works, such as the rational thought models or effective humanitarian programs that lie within the positive capabilities of natural spirituality.

If pure goodness resides in the metaphysical realm, then peace or justice can only come to earth by the transfer of that transcendently good spiritual power of peace and love from the heavenly dimension to the earthly. Obviously, such a transfer has been withheld from above or impeded by

some kind of spiritual opposition at work in the material dimension. A more complete explanation of what I think is happening comes in chapter 6.

While the material dimension presents naturally occurring barriers or limits to spiritual insights and gifts, human cultures often add to them. Our humanly created theologies often complicate spiritual enlightenment and growth – sometimes even as they seek access to the advantages and blessings of spiritual power. But these two factors alone are not sufficient to account for evil on earth or to explain why peace is so elusive. Logically, opposing or competing spiritual forces and/or beings of some kind must be actively intercepting or preventing the transfer of heavenly bounties of peace, plenty and unconditional love.

The above conclusions extend from the almost universal observation that there are two kinds of spirit forces and/or beings at work on earth – one for good and the other for evil. From the natural perspective of biological life, most ancient wisdom sees these opposing forces as being different aspects of one balanced spirit manifested as darkness and light. Just as light exists in seen and unseen frequencies within the electromagnetic spectrum, so they believe that the invisible spirits and spiritual forces existing beyond normal sensory perception compete in the material dimension from the "other side." They see these opposing camps as good and evil spirits operating off of the same power source, which is the life force discussed above. Both of them "come from" the unseen or metaphysical universe even though many belief systems do not divide the metaphysical and physical dimensions of reality. I believe that these commonly held concepts are incomplete.

Theology and philosophy often arise to define this basic observation with doctrines explaining the paradoxical truth of apparent spiritual duality. Different belief systems have settled upon different approaches to the supernatural phenomena that the natural human mind can grasp. Each one uniquely combines mortal human experiences from the biological, social and spiritual environments to synthesize a cultural construct of perceived reality. The principle of spiritual duality is the foundational challenge to humanity that has inspired the development of most theological and philosophical works seeking to explain spirituality. It is the scholarly, thoughtful attempt to understand and define ultimate reality or truth through reason, study and logic. These efforts may be found in many fields of study such as astrophysics, psychology and many social sciences.

Competing Spiritual Forces

The existence of extremes in good and evil severely challenge the secular materialistic perspective because science provides no possibility for such spiritual contingencies. At this point it is enough to recognize that there are a small number of often highly intelligent people who believe that the scientific method will eventually, if not already, provide an answer from the physical universe for every question or mystery humans experience tangibly or perceptively. My objective does not focus on convincing the materialist that he or she must entertain the existence of a spiritual ultimate reality. For them, death itself is a sufficient ultimate reality to inspire a spiritual response of some kind; however, for billions of other people the existence of a spiritual ultimate reality is self-evident.

The paradoxical nature of spiritual truth is probably best understood in its gestalt opposition as a whole, but humans, especially those from western cultures, like to break stuff down through systematic analysis. This is not wrong. It simply leads to conclusions just as incomplete as the conclusions implied by those who do not try to analyze the spiritual paradox of good and evil. My observations of humanity convince me that everyone has analyzed this challenge to some extent. Although the majority of us have absorbed most of our spiritual understanding subconsciously from our sociocultural environments, I grant that some formal education in spiritual matters is often endured, if not enjoyed, by us as children.

The paradox of spiritual duality offers us five avenues of analytic resolution:

1. Good and evil are a circular continuum of one spiritual force possessing both dark (evil) and light (good) sides. The differentiation between good and evil is illusory because neither can

exist except in contrast to the other. Life is a process of learning spiritual discernment between these opposing poles of one force found present within each person and/or other living being. A mature spirituality balances life/light against death/darkness to positive outcome. Since natural life is a messy gray, no choice is perfect: each one is a mixture of good evil. Wisdom is learning to consistently choose a mixture that is more good than evil.

2. Good and evil represent two distinctly separate competing spiritual forces. Good spirit beings, often called angels, and evil spirit beings, often called demons, are locked in a spiritual battle over humanity. Depending on the tradition, these competing spirits interact with this world on a continuum of indirect to directness. In other words they intervene in the affairs of humans indirectly through their influence of people or directly through the performance of miracles, which are metaphysical forces acting in the physical universe. Miracles usually suspend the laws of nature to some outcome that cannot be explained scientifically. Miracles may either enhance human efforts to ensure victory over an opponent, or they may be autonomous events that unilaterally intervene to change some aspect of material reality.

3. The third option combines the above two explanations in varying proportions.

4. The fourth option rejects both or either #1 or #2 as evidence/explanation for spiritual reality yet provides for the possibility of another spiritual reality ineffable to scientific examination. In other words, neither one nor both options exist as expressions of a metaphysical dimension. The phenomena experienced used as proof for both #1 and #2 can be explained naturally by physical science. Yet, there may be a God, a prime mover or spiritual reality of some kind that exists beyond the material universe of time and space, or at least a metaphysical reality operating at energies beyond the speed of light that humans may never be able to measure directly. A considerable amount of research has been done using mathematical theory in the realm of astrophysics that postulates multiple dimensions or universes, for example.

5. The fifth option accepts one or both options #1 and #2 to varying degrees and maintains the existence of an additional spiritual reality such as God or a Holy Spirit different from the spiritual force typified by the circular continuum of good and evil.

Most of the world's spiritual traditions take approaches #1 through #3. Many scientifically oriented deists and agnostics would find themselves in broad agreement with the fourth approach. Though these people have never composed a large percentage of the general population, they have been a very influential in the development of human history and culture. Usually deists and agnostics remain within the broad cultural faith of their birth, but they "push the envelope" of their birth religion's perspectives on spiritual reality.

The fifth option includes many denominations or religions of the Judeo-Christian-Moslem traditions. Most commonly, their approach embraces option #2. They believe in angels and demons plus a divinely supreme being called God, who is incorruptible by evil. Some conceive of God as a remote Creator so holy that he is unapproachable. Others trump God's holiness with his divine love for a righteous humanity so that a human's spiritual reward in the afterlife is to dwell in his close presence. To others, the holy deity may be thought of as a formless spirit or power beyond comprehension.

Life Force Confused in the West

For the most part, the concept of the life force is not given distinct treatment in Christian theology. Jewish teachings on the issues of soul, spirit, breath and body are more developed due to their methodology of study in the original Hebrew. Christian theology focuses on the Greek New Testament, which is built upon the Hebrew Bible and may rightly be considered a commentary on it. Due to the cultural alienation between Judaism and Christianity from the end of the first century and into the fourth century AD, Christian theology has tended to rely more on Greek philosophy than Hebrew midrash or commentary.

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Thus, the focus of western thought, including most Jewish religious practice, has been upon the soul rather than the spirit. The spirit has been loosely and imprecisely conceived of in public consciousness. Given its intangibility, one should not be too critical of any imprecision in the definition of the spirit as distinct from the soul or the Holy Spirit. Since Hebrew itself is a language largely defined by context, I am not surprised that the Greek translation of Hebrew thinking continues that sense of imprecision through using the qualities of the Greek language's more scientifically precise linguistic construct to communicate the implied contextual message or concept of the original Hebrew phrases. All of the authors of the New Testament were Jewish or proselyte Gentiles (Luke).

The primary misunderstanding and danger inherent in this spiritual confusion lie in the increased possibility for deception. Confusion as to the identity and role of the spirit in mortal life primarily leads to a misunderstanding of human nature, including the degradation and/or neglect of the body, and a loss of valuable insights concerning the spiritual purpose(s) for humankind. In other words, confusion over the role(s) and nature of the spirit or life force complicate the search for spirituality as well as inhibit one's ability to deal with the very real obstacles thrown up in the path of one's search. This latter fact is true whether the obstacles are self-imposed or interjected by opposing human or spirit beings as discussed in the next chapter.

For some, anything spiritual is good. For others, anything spiritual except my kind of spiritual is evil and dangerous. From my perspective, truth is once again a paradox: it is at once more complex and more simple than either of those two views. Accepting the insights from the East for the moment, understand that the good and evil mix of the life force may easily give the impression of the one spiritual force being two different spirits – one good and one evil. Many theologies feature a battle of good against evil as spiritual forces and/or beings on both sides compete with or battle against each other. This is also the case for all elemental or natural spiritual forces, which are best managed through dynamic balance towards a resonance of healthy life.

Healthy life means a healthy body and personality, who participates in human relationships that are at least both socially and economically balanced in respectful reciprocity. Anyone seeking to manipulate elemental forces to fulfill personal power goals (or client-purchased outcomes) – whether to good or evil purpose - will pay the price in their own being that comes from the inevitable rebalancing of the life force. On the other hand, biological life is a good thing, and it is impossible without the life force, so its presence and operation should not be automatically considered evil, as some might be biased by their theology to conclude. Healing therapies that focus on re-balancing a person's psychobiological systems are usually safe and not avoided by those ignorant and fearful of anything to do with the life force. The natural and automatic byproduct of good psychobiological treatment is a healthier life that positively rebalances a person's life force, whether one is aware of its existence or not. It just takes place without specific awareness of the fact.

I want to repeat two important principles here from chapter 4 about the role of the life force in human healing. First, the goal of a healthy balance of the life force at any present moment should ideally fall on the life side of absolute balance in order to offset the immediate experience of mortality, which is the long-term entropic loss of energy towards death in the grand cycle of life. Otherwise, we could not enjoy life or grow spiritually. Secondly, treatments strictly focused on manipulating the life force are not always safe or purely therapeutic. My operating rule based on observation and rational analysis is that beneficial treatments for a person's life force consist of exposure to the massive presence of naturally balanced spiritual forces. Of course, this rule does not apply to chiropractic care, which seeks to restore the body's structural harmony, nor does it apply to nutritional or herbal programs that seek to re-balance body chemistry. Such treatments take an indirect approach to rebalancing spiritual forces by treating the biological factors causing or contributing to the problem. They do not attempt a direct rebalancing through the addition of positive life force energy.

I do not recommend treatments based on the direct boosts of life force energy from some external source of power. Often the patient will experience some kind of psychospiritual high from the purchased direct mediation of spiritual power or the induced spiritual highs from chemical or other bio-

sensual over stimulation. Rather than seek a spiritual treatment, or series of treatments, that adds a quick boost or rush of life force power from someone or something else to offset one's present maladies, one should take the more patient options of exposing imbalanced spiritual energies to a more massive and healthier living system, like taking a hike through the mountains or contemplating a waterfall.

Under receptive mental attitudes, a patient's biological illness, deriving from a damaged (unbalanced) life force, will harmonize or gradually become aligned like a tuning fork to its healthy environment. This is a more systems approach of healing the whole person in order to solve a specific bodily ache, pain or illness. The experience most have had in that regard is time spent in Nature. In such circumstances, a person's spiritual energies draw off of the operating surplus found in all healthy, positively inclined natural environments within the natural tolerances found there. Not only does this require the passing of time, it also requires one's conscious interaction with his or her specific environment. Part of the treatment comes from not abusing the source or interface of this natural spiritual energy. It may be something as simple as watering the flowers in the yard or as dramatic as white water rafting, and it could be a more intentional treatment, too. You must be the judge of that. I think the next two chapters will help.

So, how has human nature been affected by the spiritual options discussed above? Down through time, the underlying nature of human moral inclination has been considered good, evil or a mix of the two. Over the millennia, spiritual teachers have offered a number of explanations why humans are the way they are. To sort it all out, I focus on the issue of identity formation in chapter 9, where I address the basic questions of, "Who am I? Why am I here?" Or less personally, "What is the purpose for human life?"

Going back to the basics, none of us asked to be born, nor did we somehow request to be born to certain parents, with certain body types or with a particular spiritual inclination. Modern science wants to place more and more of these options in the hands of future parents, for a price, but even in that case any person born would not have asked for this experience of consciousness we call life. He or she just arrives and then must deal with the environment in which their lives become conscious. In fact, so many regret being born that they spend their lives trying to escape their consciousness with drugs or the single-minded devotion to distracting lifestyles of busy-ness. Many desperately pursue edgy risks that thrilly stimulate the body and brain biologically enough to generate or force a materialistic spiritual experience of a high from the abuse of psychochemicals or drugs.

Human Nature

How one looks at the basic nature of human beings is vital to understanding theology and philosophy because each option presents a unique set of problems and solutions. This perspective heavily influences a person's ideas concerning what life is all about and how he or she treats other people, from one's family to the nondescript world citizen on the other side of the planet. More personally, it influences the decisions we make in creating our own identity.

Determining the innate nature of humanity is perhaps the area of spirituality that is best examined materially. We have elaborate, though somewhat flawed, historical records from the past millions, and then we have the present billions of fellow inhabitants of our planet. We can investigate how people have lived and live today within the context of hundreds of social cultures and subcultures. There is more objective information upon which we can make a value judgment in regards to human nature than just about any other aspect of spirituality.

So, now it is up to you! What is good? What is evil? Ooops. We return to the problem of objectivity. The problem really is not all that difficult. The non-objective, default choice made for each of us is that everything is relative to our own experience; however, we are usually educated differently, so conflicts exist over values both within societies and between them. Humans inherit different cultural value systems. Also, individuals choose differently within those systems, emphasizing a unique set of values

and behaviors within their birth cultures. Rarely, they may even choose a new cultural identity. In any case, the differences between us derive from the acceptance of disagreements in the place of agreeing on an acceptable third party authority. This authority could be a respected person (spiritual elder), social institution or a written and/or unwritten pattern of behavior values present in your social context.

Here we have a "which came first, the chicken or the egg" situation. Depending on the standard of good and evil chosen, the spiritual moral evaluation of human nature changes. If people are basically good, then evil is externally imposed upon us. Good people are judged by a rather tolerant standard or definition of good that only considers egregious cruelty, rebellion, lies and theft or senseless destruction as evil. This approach to human nature encourages a pride that denies the need for spiritual transformation.

Similarly, those who consider human nature to be basically evil must have a relatively broad definition of evil or a very narrow definition of good. Because decent, honest, hard-working citizens are then classified as having an evil human nature with this approach, which poses its own problem: either their naturally inherent evil must some how be repressed by educational conditioning (with perhaps little spiritual potential for "salvation" or future spiritual benefit) or the definition of "evil" is so broad that it encompasses what most would accept as relatively good. Regardless of official religious doctrine, many people feel this way about themselves. They are afraid to love or be loved because inside they consider themselves unworthy or evil.

Thus, the most clearly distinct standard for good and evil will be developed by those who believe in a balanced proposal for a human nature that is a mixture of good and evil, either of which has a naturally even potential of being chosen. Of course, environmental factors influence the degree of freedom in any choice, but with this option people have the freest wills and the most responsibility for their choices of thought and behavior. The human being in this scenario is an active partner in the development and outcome of spiritual reality. Fatalistic scenarios are severely restricted by the potential for human decision to exercise power upon material reality.

The focus of our discussion now shifts to the question of which is the truest standard of good and evil when viewed from the metaphysical perspective of ultimate reality. In the Judeo-Christian-Muslim family of traditions this means from God's perspective. There are competing theologies which interpret competing holy books. The existence and use of holy books span just about every major religious tradition worldwide, so there are literally hundreds of holy books and thousands of theological approaches to them. Which is right?

Is there a correct one? Or do they all fall short of the ultimate truth, some more than others? A thorough discussion to reach the answer to these questions is beyond the scope of any one book. Of course, I have my own biases, which I will share later, but a discussion of some broad principles will give you valuable tools that can help you continue your personal search for spirituality.

Purpose for Human Life

Regardless of which perspective on human nature is chosen, most systems of spiritual thought believe that human beings are universally evaluated according to an objective standard of good and evil. Someone or something must do this evaluation impartially, objectively and accurately in regard to the actual standards of truth and justice as they exist in the ultimate metaphysical reality. The universal spiritual goal of the human being is to learn how to live now that will best prepare for and influence what comes after death. In other words, we should choose more right thing(s) or way(s) than wrong one(s) from the perspective of ultimate reality without neglecting the practical necessities of everyday life.

Most theological and philosophical systems anticipate that the majority of people will fall woefully short in the achievement of their life purposes; therefore, they provide for a means of correction and spiritual improvement. In most eastern religions, *karma* automatically keeps score of all deviations

from and fulfillments of the right practice of life according to *dharma,* the proper way of life as defined by the relevant culture. One is endlessly reincarnated forward or backward along the spiritual path until reaching the perfection of ejection from the endless cycle of rebirth into the whole fullness or vast emptiness of eternity, depending on the teacher followed.

Reincarnation teaches that every soul is an unseen and unrecognized divinity or god. People need to be enlightened to this reality through proper teaching, meditation and right living. The process of enlightenment removes the illusions of sin and the material or bodily separation from the holy. Thus, purification is accomplished by applied spiritual discipline during one's mortal life, which is fatalistically predetermined in its environmental birth setting to provide the suitable judgment for past lives and the perfect school for your present spiritual growth requirements. In other words, your present life is believed to present you with the necessary lessons required to advance spiritually towards the ultimate reality. The key concept is to accept your true nature as part of the holy eternal bliss of universal wholeness or emptiness. In eastern spiritual traditions, a successful spiritual search usually results in losing one's individual identity as it is absorbed or incorporated into an evolving oneness of allness or nothingness, a blissful non-existence.

Some approaches regard present conscious life as the totality of one's experience, so that it is literally what you make of it now. At death there is oblivion or rebirth in another body. Your birth context is simply a matter of chance. As unfair as that may seem, that is reality or truth according to this theory, often defined as a kind of existentialism or existence-life. The existentialist perspective holds the potential for a person to reconstruct actual life experiences into something significantly different from what another might consider or perceive to be the case. Hence what might be a boring life of hard suffering to some is a blessing to another because it offers opportunity for spiritual transformation or growth.

Divine Judgment

According to the biblical traditions and in Islam, God is judge. He judges all humanity at or after death. There are variations on this primary principle. Jesus, as the Son of God, has been given the job of judging humanity in Christian and some Islamic theologies. Sometimes balance scales upon which good and bad deeds are placed figure in the judgment process. The standard used is the holy book of the faith as defined by it. So the Quran is used by Allah according to Islam, and the Bible according to Christians and Jews. There are also biblical references to a Book of Life, which operates as the entry log of God's grace. Your name in this book provides entry into a blessed life eternal in spite of human shortcomings. How your name gets there varies according to the denomination's theology. In Christianity it requires some form of "faith in Christ."

Heaven or paradise is the abode of the righteous souls who pass judgment. Hell is the place or state of fiery or frozen fiery torment in separation from the divine presence. It is the destination of those who fall short of God's standard or grace – the sinners. Some theologies relegate the damned soul to an eternity in torment. Other teachings provide for an adjustment to the duration and intensity of the torment according to the severity of the sins: once the spiritual impurities are blast-furnaced out, one may be accepted into paradise.

Still others believe that sinners will burn until destroyed, their consciousness ended. The length and duration of this temporal torment is usually proportionate to the degree of evil committed during the damned soul's life on earth. Some populate Hell with Satan and demons, which actively punish the sinners' souls in addition to the environmental suffering. Others simply subject these fallen angels to the same process of punishment as the sinners.

Now I return to one of the more interesting aspects of life's purpose and judgment: the formation of one's personal and eternal identities. It gets right down to the very nature of life and definition of its creative potential. All of the factors described above contribute to the anticipated identity outcomes as defined by various theologies-philosophies. The various sets of factors work together in systemic

harmony. This is not to say that the various theological systems are perfect or true depictions of ultimate reality just because they are logically formulated. My point is that there is a rational consistency of functional purpose in how the sets of variables are grouped.

I mentioned above that the eastern approach to ultimate identity terminates the mortally material separation and unique personal identity when a human graduates to ultimate spiritual reality. A variation on this theme is found in some branches of Wicca and the New Age, where the life force shaped by our personal experiences in the flesh flows into or returns to the cyclical totality of nature. In this pantheistic belief system, the whole is a composite of energy and matter together with a spirit that is charged positive and negative, light and dark, good and evil. Within the rhythm of changing time distinctly patterned sets of matter and spirit are expressed biologically in plant and animal beings as well as humans. At death these are re-absorbed and recast in a continuous process. All is connected; there is no real difference between life and death.

The Judeo-Christian-Islamic theological mega-tradition retains individual, personal identity after death. Individuals are recognizable in the afterlife. Friends and family expect to associate in paradise – usually with a perfect harmony not experienced in this life. In other words people continue on pretty much as the same characters but cleaned up a bit. Then, there are the exceptional ones that shine gloriously in a revealed magnificence not visible in this life. These are the truly holy ones or saints, teachers and gurus.

Identity Transformation

Now then, what does this have to do with identity formation? A great deal. There are two main theories or approaches that try to explain why a person is who he or she is. I sense here another paradox in truth. Similar to the debate over whether one's personality is more influenced by genetics or by social and biological environment, so the eternal personality or identity is determined by two influences:

1. miraculous transformation or change of nature by God's sovereign gift or grace and
2. the character created by our life's choices from birth to death, the cumulative consequence of our behavioral record of deeds - good and bad.

Spiritual transformation or change of nature innately differs from possession or a spiritual walk-in. Worldwide there is a long history of "lending" one's body to spirit beings. The lender goes by many titles: priest, priestess, medium, host, shaman or channel. The description of the incoming spirit varies, too. It could claim to be the soul of a dead human, a god, an angel, a demon or even the consciousness from an earlier life lived. In each of these cases, the identity of the host has been replaced by that of the spiritual presence possessing the body. Possession is not simply the effects of mass hysteria experienced in a religious mob or rock concert, though there may be spiritual powers at work in both of them that result in the actual possession of one or more people open to it.

When people 'wake up" to what they have been doing to themselves and their loved ones, they do open the mental and emotional doors to the possibility for positive change and growth towards becoming a whole, healthy person. But spiritual transformation is not simply the putting on of new behavior patterns, which is the second manner of identity formation mentioned above. It is not the psychological resolution of internal conflict into a new purpose for life or humble admittance of personal problems or weaknesses so that they can be dealt with. It is not the outcome of the therapeutic treatment of drug abuse, either, although they are all good things to see in a person.

Behavioral success is at best only an improvement in the management of one's human nature; it is not the change of or transformation of one's naturally inherent human nature. That is a miracle claimed by Christianity by the indwelling of God through the Holy Spirit. It is God's sovereign gift from the other side and not something that can be found and obtained unilaterally by any human without some sort of divine intervention.

A change of human nature is a very different phenomenon from a person gaining increased spiritual powers through the manipulation of the life force of focused natural spirituality. The mystical powers of witches, sorcerers and other magi are merely the enhancement or augmentation of the natural forces to boost their existing powers found within a person from birth. They realize a growth in power by securing external sources such as other people, sacrificial blood rituals, sacred places or objects. Granted that this additional spiritual power is often understood to be drawn from outside of the practitioner's body, but it is still the same essence naturally found within and characterized as being the life essence of both good and evil bound together inseparably. In Digital spirituality, a genuine spiritual transformation of human nature changes the internal spiritual source: it requires a different spirit – one that comes from outside of the material universe.

Important! The potential for spiritual transformation is not the same as inherent capability. There are limits to what is possible from the powers of natural spirituality available to humans on their own, but understanding the mysteries and limitations of the life force (spirit of life) can and often does lead us to the threshold or gateway to the heaven, angels, God and the Holy Spirit from beyond. This is the point at which theology and philosophy expand their discussion and extrapolations of principles observed and experienced on earth in light of the revered sacred books of each particular religion or philosophical path. It is a worthy mental exercise of reason that yields valuable insights, though few travel it.

While one may theoretically travel by philosophic imagination or dream sleep into the spiritual realm beyond mortal reality, it is not naturally possible to enter that realm without supernatural assistance until death. Just as light cannot exceed its speed, so Sidharta Gautama, the Buddha, could not exceed a meditational nirvana and live. He could not enter the ultimate nothingness of the nirvana of his teachings of ultimate reality without ceasing to be present in the here and now. He would sit on the threshold and then return.

True, there is a special sensation of happiness or natural peace possible as the threshold is approached, but that point cannot be passed on human strength alone short of death. Neither does any person born of flesh naturally have eternal life inherent, a divine spark from above sufficiently powerful to enable a transition from mortal to metaphysical body and metaphysical spirit. For that we need outside help. We require spiritual contact with and intercession by those from the heavenly dimension to enable our passage. To inherent eternity, to enter the higher levels of spirituality from beyond the natural universe, we need a way, a door or a mediator.

Above and beyond the natural spirituality that celebrates the multidimensional miracle of life, above and beyond the philosophers' and theologians' speculations and rationalizations about the nature of life and its continuation or existence in an eternity of some kind of alternate dimension(s), humans search for personal contact with the source of all life. We search for a spirituality beyond our natural birthright capacity. We reach for the God Concept and hope to connect with a gracious and beneficial spirituality powered from outside the natural realm. From time immemorial, we humans have sought to encounter a spirituality from the other side beyond the speed of light. We have yearned for the spiritual experiences generated by beings dwelling in the realm of eternity. Pneumagenic spirituality is what I call what happens when humans experience genuine spiritual encounters.