

The Courage of Uncertainty

A Jewish View of:

The continuing
Evolution of Faith in the
Fields of Religion
and Science

and

the Causes of and Answer to
Fundamentalism and Intolerance
in Religion and Atheism

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*Science and Religion are opposed
But only in the sense that thumb and
forefinger are opposed
Using both, one can grasp anything*

Religion



Science

*Quotation attributed to
Sir Cyril Burt - Educational Psychologist*

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1. Introduction

The great tragedy in the minds of dogmatic exponents of both religious and science throughout the ages, is their insistence on absolute certainty that they are the possessors of the 'Truth'. It has manifested itself as the two sides of a 'Bad Penny': Atheism on the one hand and Religious Fundamentalism on the other, which between them have bedevilled the relationship between many exponents of science and of religion, between members of different religions, and thus has caused intolerance, wars and genocide.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks remarked in a recent book (See "Suggestions for further reading"):

"Faith is the courage to live with uncertainty.

It is not the absence of doubt, but the ability to recognise doubt, live with it, and still take the risk of commitment."

In the field of science, a recent example is the 50 year wait that Peter Higgs endured after theorising the existence of a fundamental particle that he called the Boson. He confessed that he had grave doubts that his theory was valid, but his faith was justified when the Large Hadron Collider experiment finally demonstrated its existence in 2012.

Charles Darwin's concept of the evolution of species, and the brilliant way in which he proved his theory, needs to be matched by an understanding of the parallel nature of evolution in religious and scientific consciousness within the Mind of Man. To the atheist mind, the failures of Religions too frequently have been justified by examples, and the benefits ignored. It is tragic that Religion has been brought into disrepute, and become a target for mockery, because of too many incidents of dogma and inquisitions, of having been hi-jacked by nationalism and sectarian power politics, causing it to be used as an excuse for war and even genocide. There are also elements of superstition in the minds of some believers, but the opponents of Religion have made of this an absurd generalisation. There is no real incompatibility between authentic Religion and Reason, but from the 18th century onwards, Rationalists made Reason into a 'god' and 'worshipped' it.

Genuine interfaith dialogue has brought new mutual respect between faiths. There is much evidence that nowadays, as in the better

moments of the past, Religions have profited by the cross-fertilisation of ideas and the diffusion of cultures. This has furthered the realisation that new Faiths (and younger branches of old Faiths), developing out of their predecessors, do not necessarily supersede the latter, but stimulate their evolution and development so that they still retain their validity and purpose. The understanding of this is an essential element in the development of religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue.

At the Cradle of Science and Religion lies Mystery”

Albert Einstein - Physicist and Mathematician

The ‘Mystery at the Cradle of Science and Religion’ is veiled from us by what an anonymous 14th century English Christian mystic was inspired to call ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’. If we try to tear through the ‘veils’ too precipitously, we could be mentally or spiritually destroyed. So we have to accept the ‘Courage and Wisdom of Uncertainty’ and have faith that, as we evolve spiritually, the ‘veils’ will gradually fall away, one by one, in their own time and way. The ‘Mystery’ is Nameless. So we call our idea of the Transcendent Dimension of Being by many Names, and those that we choose are our metaphors for ‘That’ which is unutterably beyond ‘Name’. The Hindu genius called it ‘Neti Neti’ - ‘Not This, Not That’. In the Christian tradition, particularly in the Eastern Orthodox but to a lesser extent in the Western tradition, it is known as the ‘Negative Way’, and it is also found in Eastern philosophies such as Daoism. Judaism calls it ‘AYiN’ – NoThing.

Both Religion and Science depend upon ‘Models of Reality’ that are provisional but evolving? This booklet is intended to show that the two disciplines each have their unique contribution and that biological evolution and spiritual evolution can progress hand in hand?

2. The Two Sides of a 'Bad Penny'

Two opposing phenomena are observable in society today that should give great concern to the followers of authentic religion.

The first is the growth of Creationism, Religious Triumphalism and Atavism, all of which are the products of the extreme manifestations of Religious Fundamentalism. They are one side of the 'Bad Penny' referred to previously, and the result of what has been termed the 'Heresy of Literalism' in education. In many ways the educational situation and the polarisation is worse in the USA than here, but even in the United Kingdom it has had some dangerous effects on Political Correctness and Education.

Taking first the Creationists: They interpret the great Myths of the Bible as being literally true. For example, they seriously believe that 'the Universe was created in six days, and on the seventh day, God rested'. Even when faced with the evidence of scientists, some of these still say 'that God created all the fossilised skeletons that the palaeontologists discover in one of those days'. Creationists demand that these beliefs should be taught in the schoolroom as though they were scientific truth.

Religious triumphalists are a much more serious concern, for not only do they present themselves as the only true believers, but some adopt the worst forms of nationalist sentiments, combined with the intolerance towards those of different beliefs, that caused the crusades of history and the terrorism of today,

Atavism is the extreme case of this. It is a reversion back to ancient myths and past times of national supremacy. It was seen in Naziism, in which the old Pagan Nordic legends of Wotan and Thor were combined with the worst forms of nationalism and replayed with horrifying consequences. It is to be regretted that it is seen even today in the 'Temple Mount' cult in Judaism, happily rejected by the vast majority of Jews both within and outside Israel. This seeks to rebuild the Temple on the site where the Dome of the Rock and the El Aqsa Mosques now stand, and destroy the latter. It is also seen in Islam amongst extreme Islamicists movements who seek the restoration of the Caliphate over all nations once Moslem, and the universal application of Sharia Law.

Atheists observe these irrational beliefs and, quite rightly, reject them. However, those Atheists who are intolerant or ignorant then go on to generalise and tar all religious belief with the same brush,

confusing it with superstition and demonstrating their total misunderstanding as to what really is the true nature and scope of Religion.

There have been many definitions of 'Atheism'. To the Romans, the Jews and Christians were atheists because they rejected belief in the Roman pantheon of Gods. To the Greeks, Socrates was an atheist for that same reason. Many Religious triumphalists today regard anyone who does not believe in their own concept of God as an Atheist.

Some of the more militant atheists rest their case largely on what might be termed Neo-Darwinism. It must be emphasised that Darwin himself, most probably, would disown those who claim him as their own. Though reticent about his religious views, he remarked as late as 1879:

"I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God, and that generally, an Agnostic would be the more correct description of my state of mind."

Unfortunately his brilliant work on the 'Origin of Species' and on 'Evolution' was challenged and often ridiculed, totally unjustifiably, by the Creationists of his own day, thus further polarising Religion and Science in the nineteenth century.

Charles Darwin presented the concept of 'Survival of the fittest' as one factor in the long-term biological evolution of the variety of species of animals. However, there were evil offshoots of Neo-Darwinist atheism that misused this concept, and the vilest of these was Houston Chamberlain's deliberate mis-representation of this aspect of Darwin's great work by using it as justification for the pseudo science of Eugenics. Chamberlain (no relation to Neville Chamberlain) was born in Britain in the late Nineteenth century, but subsequently took German nationality. He rejected Darwin's main work on Evolution, but ripped the concept of 'Survival of the fittest' out of context to propound his own offensive and thoroughly unscientific theories of the racial superiority of the 'Aryan' race. These were taken up eagerly by his young friend and disciple Adolph Hitler, who used them as justification for the Euthanasia program against the mentally disabled, as well as the mass murder of the Jews, Slavs, homosexuals and Gypsies, all of whom he termed 'Untermenschen' - sub-human species. Most religious people of today have no problem with Darwin's theories, for they can accept Evolution as the mechanism through which Transcendence (or God) interacted

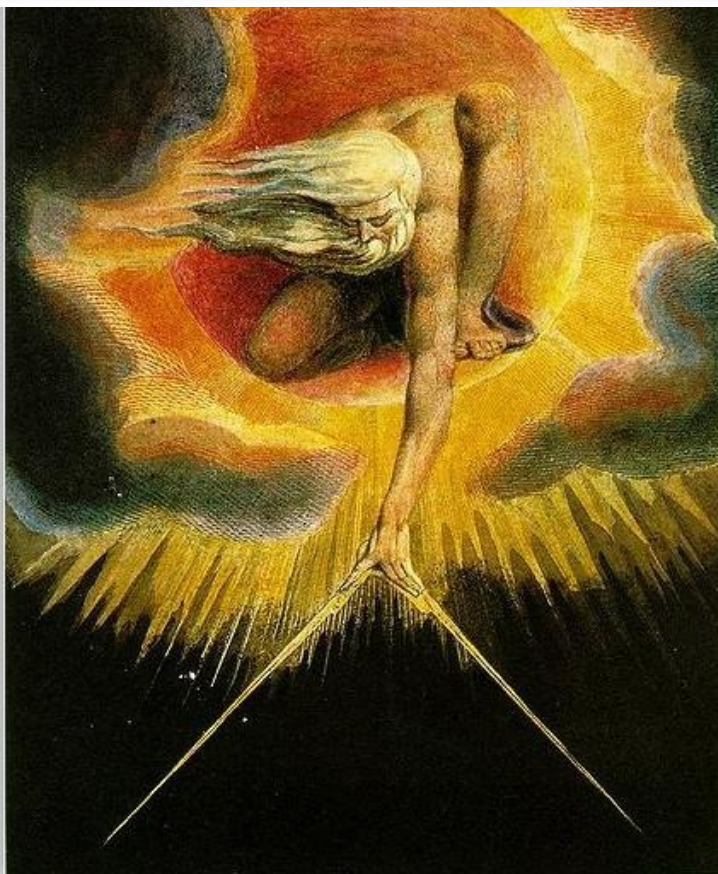
with the Universe. Eugenics, in its concept of racial purification, completely denied the religious ethic of care and compassion.

Eugenics was also taken up as a philosophy by atheists such as George Bernard Shaw, H G Wells and others in the late Victorian period who, in common with some atheists today, advocated forced euthanasia for the mentally disabled and the suppression of those races considered inferior.

It should be appreciated that when Judaism, Christianity and Islam use terms for God such as Father or Shepherd or King, they do so whilst understanding them essentially as metaphors to help personalise the relationship, whilst simultaneously recognising the essential Transcendence and Immanence of God.



Representational art, as in the iconic paintings by Michael Angelo and William Blake, which show God as the “Ancient of Days” in apparently human form, presents a problem for both the undiscerning atheist and the fundamentalist or creationist.



Judaism, together with Islam, Sikhism and the Ba’hai faith, but unlike Hinduism and many of the Christian denominations, always totally forbade such pictures and sculptures because of the danger of representing God as other than utterly Transcendent.

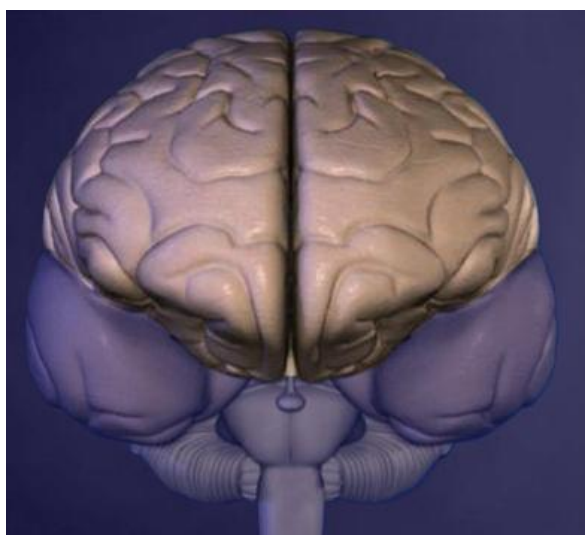
However, those faiths do recognise the fact that both

Christianity and Hinduism appreciate the warning mentioned above and use representational art only as helpful aids to worship, by providing icons as a focus for prayer and meditation, and are not idolatry in the Pagan sense of the word.

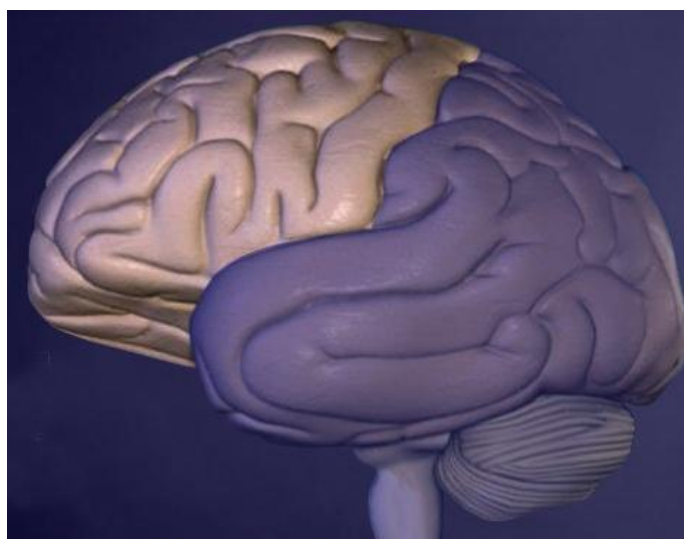
The atheist does not recognise this fact and uses such imagery to attack those religions as being idolatrous and no more than the worship of 'an old bearded Father figure in the sky'.

3. The Human Brain and Consciousness

The brain of a human being has two hemispherical lobes (chambers) which function in complementary but different ways:



The lobes from above



The lobes from the side

- The left lobe controls the right side of the body and is the transmitter of consciousness for the 'intellectual mind'. It is logical and analytical in its character, splitting things into their components. It allows us to take things apart to see how they work. It is essentially rational, often scientific, in its approach.

- The right lobe controls the left side of the body and performs the same function for the 'intuitive mind'. It is holistic and integrative in its character as contrasted with the intellectual left lobe. A famous neuroscientist called it the seat of creativity and of the soul. It helps us to put things together to see what they mean. It is essentially spiritual and synthesising in its approach. It is good at recognising patterns, at personal relationships and plays a big part in emotional

intelligence. It is poetic and musical, understanding the true meaning of Myth – the psychological drama that illustrates the archetypal forces of the Unconscious. Unfortunately, Myth has, too often, been mis-represented as ‘Falsehood’. However, in its spiritual meaning ‘Myth’ is a symbolic story or legend, used in Scripture to present a moral or wisdom teaching, but told in the form of language usually used to describe historical events. The correct understanding of Myth is important, for it stems from the archetypal consciousness of Mankind and responds to its deepest spiritual needs and aspirations.

Julian Jaynes, was a research psychologist at Princeton University. He speculated (In his seminal book, 'The origins of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind') that, until about 3,500 to 4,000 years ago, the two sides of Man's brain functioned in a somewhat different manner to that of modern 'civilised' Man. He suggested that man was conscious in a different way from that which we understand as consciousness today. Strictly speaking, the word 'bicameral' refers to a political system that has two legislative chambers. But this does describe, by analogy, how the constitution of the mind of primitive Man operates. The right lobe of the brain served in pre-historic times to receive the commands of the archetypal forces of the racial or collective unconscious. In effect it operated as 'the residence of the gods'. Instructions were transmitted from there to the left lobe, which accepted them as commands for action and obeyed them automatically without any form of intellectual assessment.

The theory is also important in understanding modern phenomena involving modification of control of their mode of consciousness: in those who have a strong psychic sensitivity to ‘extra sensory perception’, in people when in deep meditation and in those with a propensity to mediumship. It may be also relevant to understanding the involuntary mental processes of those who suffer from schizophrenia when it is coupled with strong religious delusions or hallucinations.

However, in the present context, it is particularly relevant to understanding the nature of human spiritual development; and the remarkable change in psychological processes between 4000 and 2000 years ago. Jaynes showed how, concurrent with the development of writing, Man developed his critical and intellectual facilities. This is illustrated in the development of the Hebrew scriptures and the difference between the early illiterate prophets and the later literary giants like Isaiah. It is also illustrated in the Greek experience where the

intuitive Delphic oracle gave way to the intellectual and dialectical teachings of Socrates and Aristotle.

Ancient Hebrew is unlike most languages in two respects, firstly in being written without vowels and secondly being written from right to left. It has been suggested that alphabets, which include vowels, tend to be written from left to right, whilst those that do not include vowels tend to be written from right to left. One reason often advanced for the direction of Hebrew writing is that in its distant origins it was set in stone. This meant that the letters were engraved with mallet and chisel, and thus were driven rather than drawn, as they would have been if they were written with a quill pen or brush. However, another reason has been put forward suggesting that the two phenomena (the absence of vowels, and direction) are related because of the fundamental nature of the Human brain and its consciousness.

It should be noted that the names of the Hebrew letters are somewhat similar to those of the Greek alphabet: Aleph - Alpha, Bet - Beta, etc. The main difference was that Greek has letters for vowel sounds. It is interesting to note that early Greek writing was from right to left, like Hebrew. Then it became 'snake wise', i.e: it would change direction at the end of each line. Finally, by the 5th century BC, it became written from left to right like other alphabets with vowel symbols.

When we read something written in an alphabet like English that contains vowels, each word can stand on its own. So we can use our linear sequential left hemisphere of the brain that directs rightward movement to understand it from the individual words. But in a language without vowel symbols like ancient Hebrew, the individual words cannot be understood in isolation and we can only comprehend them in the context of a sentence using the integrative and holistic right hemisphere of the brain that naturally controls leftward movement in the body. Even without the driving movement of stone cutting, it is natural for this type of brain to write from right to left. (Note that modern Hebrew uses pointings above and below the consonants as vowel sounds)

4. Science and Religion

The two disciplines have their respective functions, mirroring those of the two lobes of the brain and the consciousness they transmit.

Science is analytical and is primarily concerned with HOW the processes and events of Nature work and the mechanics of life. As a discipline it is concerned with theories and their experimental verification. It is primarily intellectual.

Religion is primarily concerned with the Meaning of life and WHY things and events SHOULD happen. Above all it concerns compassion for each and every individual, and not just humanity as a whole. It is primarily intuitive in its nature.

Science is concerned with what can be done. Religion is concerned with what should be done. For example: Science shows how embryonic research and techniques can be carried out. Religion guides medical ethics into debating what is right in that field to be done in terms of Spiritual goals. The apostle Paul taught in the New Testament, quite rightly “All things are possible but not all things are expedient”.

Religion has attempted in the past to dogmatise on Cosmology. But wiser theologians always recognised that when Scripture tells us stories telling HOW creation happened, these must be understood as Myths, that is the attempt to describe a spiritual phenomenon in seemingly historical terms. For example, the creation myth about God making the world in six days and resting on the seventh is a way of teaching that Man, created in the image of God, needs to rest once a week from all earthly matters to concentrate on spiritual concerns.

In the appendix, the scientific view of creation is compared with one Jewish mystical interpretation, and a remarkable similarity will be noted. It might be regarded as coincidence, although that particular word is not recognised in Judaism, but it neither can nor should be used to prove the validity of religion scientifically.

The one field where Science and Religion do overlap is in that branch of Psychology generally known as Transpersonal Psychology. This is manifest particularly in the work of Roberto Assagioli, Viktor Frankl and Erich Fromm in the Jewish tradition, together with that of Carl Jung in the Christian tradition. These pioneers have demonstrated that healing of the troubled mind demands a spiritual understanding.

5. The Scientific Model

In the beginning, all was darkness and black night.
God said "Let Newton be" and all was light.
It did not last, the devil, howling "Ho!"
Said "Let Einstein be", restored the status quo.

*The first two lines of this couplet are attributed to Alexander Pope,
the second to Sir John Squire.*

The different approaches of Newton and Einstein to finding a model for explaining gravity illustrate the problem that we have to face:

For Newton, gravity was a force that attracted two objects together and was instantaneous.

For Einstein, gravity was a warping of space/time due to the presence of an object. This governed its motion in relation to other objects and was propagated at the speed of light.

Newton's laws of physics were adequate for all scientific endeavours up to less than a century ago and even now remain valid in predicting the vast majority of natural phenomena and engineering calculations. However they became inadequate when it came to explaining why astronomers had discovered by experimental observation in 1919 during a solar eclipse, that large objects such as the Sun could bend the light from stars. This was something that Einstein's model predicted and explained.

Perhaps Sir Isaac Newton's greatest discovery, one that remains true for the greatest and humblest of Scientists today, was when he said:

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Einstein's model was a revolutionary advance on that of Newton. However modern scientists and mathematicians have found minor anomalies in it that have demanded improvement. The perfect model has yet to be discovered.

Science, in itself, is neither a statement of morality nor of emotion; yet scientists, being human, should and generally do concern themselves with the former and, whether they like it or not, are rarely so objective as to be free of being overcome subconsciously by the latter.

Science explores and endeavours to explain nature by devising a theoretical framework that will forecast experimental results and establish the reasons for their patterns. Its theories are valid to that extent when they correspond with nature, including both its sub-nuclear and cosmic forms.

Scientific work is not always a left lobe brain function working through logical steps from one idea to another. There are many examples of the intuitive right lobe brain spontaneously offering insights into the next step. The almost dream like experience of Kekule, who discovered the hexagon chain of Benzene whilst in an almost meditative state during a bus journey, is an example of this phenomenon.

Science also attempts to understand the Reality that underlies the world of appearances. We normally think of it in terms of the natural sciences, the speculative enquiries into the laws of physics and chemistry and biology. The aspects of reality that are of particular interest to the scientist of today, and the educated layman who follows their work with interest, include theoretical and experimental work to give us an understanding of:

- Cosmology - the creation of the universe and of time.
- Particle physics - the ultimate building blocks of energy and matter.
- Biology and Genetics - the secrets of life and evolution.
- Psychology - the nature of consciousness.

There is, however, no sharp dividing line between religion and science. The practitioners of both meet when they turn to what one might describe as the transcendental or esoteric sciences, the equally speculative disciplines of theology, metaphysics and metapsychology

which enquire into the nature of the Holy and its immanence in the world.

In the past, the field of Cosmology was claimed by the theologians and the metaphysicians as their own - one on which they could make dogmatic assertions and enforce them by the power of the Inquisition. Early scientists such as Galileo were regarded as trespassers, and persecuted for their intrusions with the full force of ecclesiastical law. Happily, with the exception of fundamentalists, religion has now recognised the supremacy of the scientific experimental technique and the boundaries are no longer a zone of warfare.

This was even truer in the field of biology where the theory of evolution is fully consistent with the thought of most modern theologians. It is where it is used to propagate the monstrosity of Eugenics that authentic religion draws the line. But fundamentalist clerics, with their belief in 'Creationism', and fundamentalist Neo-Darwinians continue to quarrel over it even today. In the USA, the war of thought is particularly bitter, and even influences what may be taught to children in schools. Sadly, the UK is not completely free of this phenomenon.

However, we still have the problem of the vast field of psychology with its conflicting materialist and spiritual theories. These debate whether the human psyche is a cybernetic machine that can be reduced to a mechanism, with consciousness no more than a product of endocrine and neurone function; or whether it has a transcendental basis and a transpersonal content where consciousness is actually the precursor of physical development.

The transpersonal aspect of psychology has its roots both in Science and Religion. Kabbalah - Jewish Mysticism, postulated a continuum of consciousness, in a series of octaves, between the Utterly Transcendent and the smallest living cell. It inspired the work of many Renaissance Christians and also that of the proponents of modern Transpersonal Psychology, particularly the Psycho-Synthesis of Roberto Assagioli.

6. Mystics and Scientists

A frequently made observation is that, on the one hand, the religious mystic, and on the other hand, the astronomer and the particle physicist, have a view of the unity of the universe that is remarkably similar.

In many cases it has been found that, if statements made by representatives of each of these disciplines are presented without signature or identification, it is very difficult to tell whether they issue from religious mystics or scientists. And so we can debate whether Albert Einstein was speaking as a mystic or as a scientist when he replied to the question of how he was inspired to discover his theory of relativity by saying that it was because he:

“was so strongly convinced of the harmony and unity of the Universe”

On another occasion he proclaimed:

The finest emotion we can endure is the mystic sensation. It is the base of all real science. He, who does not know this emotion and cannot be surprised any more, has rather died already. The knowledge that the impenetrable exists yet manifests itself in the greatest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, can be understood only in a weak and primitive form, yet this realisation is the pith of all real religion.

On the other hand, this does not mean that the statements of mystics and scientists are the same. The mystic (and the transpersonal psychologist) seeks one aspect of God - That which is expressed as supreme meaning, love, compassion, justice, peace and consciousness. The esoteric scientist (and the quantum physicist etc) seeks another aspect of God - That which is expressed as supreme creative and evolutionary energy. Yet both these aspects are but manifestations of the same underlying unity.

7. The Origins of Religion

Anthropologists have demonstrated that the religious impulse is innate in the nature of Man and that it is manifested in the most primitive communities in their awe in the face of the mysteries of life and death. In the beginning, primitive religion was centred on the magical power of ritual and the concept of binding the 'gods', that is, invoking them to fulfil human needs. Amongst some it was the belief in the "Great Spirit" – an early example of the acceptance of a transcendental dimension of Being. However, the higher religions became morality touched with emotion, as Rudolph Otto expressed it in his seminal book "The Idea of the Holy".

Morality, or the ethical, is that which constitutes the intellectual, rational, scientific and philosophical element of religion - the Law arising from the interpretation of Prophetic revelation, for living at peace with God, oneself, the community and humanity.

Emotion is the feeling of exaltation, the thrill of awe or reverence, the sense of the awful, mysterious, or to use Rudolph Otto's word, the 'Numinous'. This is the super-rational and intuitive aspect of religion that lives on, both in the hidden aspects of the human psyche and in Mythology. It embodies the Legend that illuminates the Law.

As Rudolph Otto pointed out, true religion dwells in the tension between the two, and it must accommodate both of them. We dare neglect neither. If we are to explore the growth of spirituality and the subtle connections between the psychic and the spiritual, we have to understand the history of the evolution, both of religion and of Man's consciousness, from pre-historic times.

The Primitive elements in Religion originated during the ancient pre-history of Mankind in the unsophisticated Paganism of the hunter / gatherer / shepherd people who were close to Nature and who had a powerful intuitive sense. Their Paganism was essentially Pantheistic and Tribal, they worshipped the unseen forces of nature and the flow of the seasons. They believed that through the use of the right ritual, they could conjure their 'gods' and control them to obtain favourable results with regard to fertility. This was essentially a belief in Magic that pervaded all such societies.

In the next stage of the evolutionary process, Humanity was still at the instinctive or imaginative level in which they worshipped the archetypes of the collective unconscious as though they were gods. It

was an era of myth making marked by a considerable intimacy between mankind and the archetypal 'gods'. Extra-sensory perception came naturally to them because they had not yet developed their intellectual faculties, and they were still very close to the influence of the collective unconscious. The ecstatic rituals, the use of strong rhythmic dancing and chanting, and the ritual use of those items of food and drink that are notorious for their strong hallucinogenic or psychedelic effect, were all calculated to have an effect upon people that would open them to possession by their 'gods'.

Anthropological evidence shows that this this sensitivity still persists today in the Shamans found amongst what intellectually biased 'civilised' Man patronisingly calls aboriginal or primitive people. Moreover it also persisted through the ages amongst those Western people who have a talent for sensitivity towards 'extra-sensory-perception'. However, in Britain throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, and particularly in Stuart times, those who manifested these abilities and failed to conceal them were in severe danger from the Church, which regarded them as Witches to be tortured and burnt. This was also true in many other European countries and also in North America where the trial of the Witches of Salem was a horrible example of the worst form of inquisition. Happily, today, we have taken a more enlightened attitude and the genuine talents of those who in an earlier age would have been proscribed are now understood and accepted by open-minded people.

About five thousand years ago, an entirely different and more sophisticated form of Paganism developed amongst the ancient cultures of urban Babylon and Egypt. Much later this appeared in Rome and in Greece (prior to the great reforming and highly intellectual philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle). This was essentially Polytheistic and of an entirely different nature from the Pantheism of simple tribal people. Their 'gods' were not 'gods' of Nature so much as 'gods' of Power. They included Baal and Moloch in Babylonia, where human sacrifice was its worst manifestation, Ra in Egypt, Wotan in the Norselands, Jupiter (Jove) in Rome and Zeus in pre-Socratic Greece – each accompanied with its full pantheon of 'gods' and 'goddesses' mirroring both the best and worst of human attributes.

This Polytheistic Paganism was essentially an instrument of State, used by the Emperors and Pharaohs to dominate their own people and to conquer and subjugate others. The Babylonians, Egyptians, Romans and Greeks made and worshipped the 'graven images' or idols that represented their 'gods'. At times the rulers set themselves up as 'gods'

to be worshipped. They also held the magical belief that by uttering the name of a 'god', they could conjure it to secure victory over their enemies.

But all this was about to change. About four millenia ago, the first stirrings of higher religion appeared amongst the Indian and Hebrew people with the evolution of Hinduism, Jainism and the Abrahamic revelation of the Transcendent God. This was followed by the revelations to Moses on Mount Sinai and to Zoroaster in Iran.

About two and a half millenia ago these were followed by Buddhism in India, the Philosophic traditions of Socrates and his successors in Greece, of Confucious and Lao Tse in China, together with the development of Rabbinic Judaism in Israel. From out of Judaism (together with some elements of Gnostic thought) sprang Christianity. After another six hundred years, Mohammed, inspired, according to Moslem tradition, by the archangel Gabriel and also probably influenced by the local Jewish tribes that had found refuge in Arabia, revived and fulfilled the promise made to Ishmael at the time of Abraham, and converted the Arabs from the Pagan worship of Djinns to Islam and monotheism. Six hundred years ago, Sikhism was revealed in India, and the Renaissance manifested itself in Europe.

Neither argument nor experiment can ever give unequivocal proof to others of the existence of the Holy One. Individual experiences of Transcendence, by those who were sensitive to it, were for the recipient, - to teach them to modify their thinking, their lives and their actions, and to convince others, by their example, that there were better ways of conducting themselves in relationship to their fellow beings.

But to those who are vouchsafed an experience of the Transcendent, the words of the Jewish philosopher and mystic, Martin Buber, are a salutary reminder:

*“He who knows the breath of the Spirit,
trespasses if he desires to seek power over the
Spirit or to ascertain its nature or processes.
But he is also disloyal if he fails to give thanks”.*

8 The Evolution of the Concept of God

In the ancient pagan polytheistic religions of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome and the Norselands, the gods were perceived as entities with names, created in the image of Man, and with attributes that mirrored the best and worst of those found in human beings. Each of the many aspects of natural phenomena, the wind, rain, thunder, and the power of the sea were visualised as gods, often jealously at odds with one another. They were represented by idols in semi-human, often monstrous, form.

However, the great monotheistic religions introduced the concept that God is utterly transcendent and yet immanent in the World, and recognised that He/She/It is manifested by its attributes. This is recognised (for example) in the higher elements of the Hindu Faith where the utterly Transcendent God 'Brahman', who can only be defined as 'Neti Neti' – 'Not This Not That', is immanent in every individual being as 'Atman', the indwelling Divinity. (It should be appreciated that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are essentially personifications of the archetypal attributes of Creation, Nurturing and Fulfillment. They are given these names and regarded as 'gods', essentially to be given form as icons used as a focus for worship.) Buddhism differs in that it rejects the concept of a Transcendental God but recognises God's Immanence in the Buddhi nature of the enlightened Man. In the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the God of history and ethical conduct superseded the Pagan gods of nature and all idol worship was forbidden.

One of the most fascinating and glorious aspects of humanity is its vast diversity. Every community, every single person is unique. This is seen both in race, in culture, and in religious belief. In the case of the latter, great variety is found not only between each religion, and between the sects of each religion, but also in the personal beliefs of the individual adherents of each sect. And this is how it should be, although, sadly, that is not accepted by those fundamentalists who believe that only their beliefs can be right.

A valuable clue is found within the Jewish faith in the words that open the prayer known as the Amidah – "Our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob". Why is the prayer so worded? For example, why not simplify the last bit to "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"? The rabbis answered that each of the

Patriarchs experienced God in a different way, so God had a different meaning to each of them.

What about “Our God and God of our Fathers”? – Why the distinction? “Our God” refers to that aspect of God that we meet through our own personal experience, for the experience of each one of us is unique. Just as I have no right to try and insist that my experience is more valid than yours, so is it the other way round.

What of “God of our Fathers”. This refers to the fact that we all have traditions marked out by the evolution of thought through generations of wise teachers and leaders. These great thinkers from the past, can say (as did scientists and mathematicians such as Sir Isaac Newton), “If I can see a little further than those who came before, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants”. In their book ‘Finding God – Ten Jewish responses’, Rifat Soncio and Daniel Syme trace the search for, and evolving beliefs in, God over 4000 years of Jewish thought.

The ‘Name’ of God in Judaism

There are very searching questions asked by religious thinkers regarding the Name and nature of God:

Is God an entity with attributes? - If so, then the Name of God is a **Noun**.

Or is God pure transcendental ‘Being-ness’, the super-conscious source of evolutionary consciousness? - If so, then the Name of God is a **Verb**.

Or is God the pure potential of ‘Nothingness’, the spiritual counterpart of the ‘Singularity of the cosmic scientist? - If so then the Name of God is **Nameless**.

Or is God all of these?

The Hebrew word for ‘God’ is **El**. The word ‘**Elohim**’ is its plural form. **El** is never used alone but always with a pronoun or an adjective following it, for example: ‘**Elohenu**’ – our God, or ‘**El Rachamim**’ – ‘Compassionate God’. It must be understood that the use of the word **Elohim** does not mean that the Hebrews were polytheistic and worshipped ‘gods’ as such, nor that **El** was the name of God. It meant that the **Elohim** were the attributes of God manifested in the Universe as the archetypal forms and forces. The term **El** was also used as an honorific for a Judge.

In the early history of the Hebrew Bible, Abraham met and knew God as a noun, an entity - **EL SHADDAI** – ‘The Nurturing God’, (from the root Shad meaning ‘Breast’). Many centuries later, the understanding of the utterly transcendent nature of God was revealed to Moses as the Holy One whose “Names” are not nouns but constructs of the verb ‘To be’: Firstly at the episode of the “Bush that burnt but was not consumed” where it was given as - **EHYeH ASheR EHYeH** (translated as “ I am as I shall be”). Then later as the unpronounceable **YHVH**, (a contraction of “**HaYaH, HoVeH, YiHYeH**” meaning “Was, Is, Will be” and best translated as “the Eternal One”).

After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land, the Rabbis used another noun to describe the immanent nature of God as the feminine **SHEKHINA**, meaning the Presence of the Divine Indwelling in the life of mankind.

The medieval Jewish philosopher, Yehudah Halevi, expressed the mystical yearning for God, linking the two concepts of Transcendence and Immanence in a beautiful poem beginning:

“Oh my God where shall I find You, Your place is
utterly transcendent and beyond our
comprehension,

And yet Oh my God, where shall I not find you, the
whole World is full of the Presence of your Glory”.

To **KNOW** God as distinct from **BELIEVING** in God entails becoming as **AYiN** – Nothingness – in which all thought ceases. It is found amongst the true mystics of all faiths where it is known by a multitude of names such as (in the Orient) Nirvava, Samahdi, Satori etc. it is an experience (or non-experience as it might more accurately be called) that is incommunicable. It is not so much an expansion of consciousness as a total contraction of consciousness.

As Rabbi Arthur Green puts it in his book “Your word is fire”:

“In all change and growth, the mysterious **AYiN** is present. There is an ungraspable instant in the midst of all transformation when that which is about to be transformed is no longer that which it had been until that moment, but has not yet emerged as its

transformed self. That moment belongs to the **AYiN** of God. The height of contemplative prayer and meditation is seen as such a transforming moment, but one that is marked by awareness. The worshipper is no longer himself for he is fully absorbed in that moment in the Nothingness of the Holy. In that moment of absorption, it is no longer the worshipper who speaks but rather the Holy Presence who speaks through him. In that return to the Source, the human being has reached his highest state, becoming nothing but the passive instrument for the Divine Word.”

It is the one experience that is common to the mystics of all Religions, and where all Mystics meet in mutual understanding.

Unlike material science, which denies any connection between thought and the other four dimensions, spiritual sciences, such as Kabbalah in Judaism, equate the five and regard thought as the primary element. Thus **AYiN** is not only the unconscious and primary thought within the absolute nothingness of undifferentiated being, but also the origin of the ‘Singularity’ revealed by the astronomers, for thought, as a manifestation of consciousness, is the primary form of energy.

It is a strange paradox that sometimes, in human experience, God is manifested as primordial energy, sometimes as entity, and at others as the very process of becoming. One wonders if, for example, when one speaks of God's love, does one mean that God is the foundation of love, or that God is an entity that loves, or that God is the very nature of the evolving process that is found in a loving relationship? In many ways, the last of these might make the most sense.

9. The Evolution of Judaism

Judaism began as the simple relationship between an individual and God. It was not until the time of Moses that the idea of a physical place of ritual worship and a priest-hood evolved. For many generations this was no more than a simple tabernacle to enclose the Ark of the Covenant – the container of the two Tablets of the Ten Commandments. Finally, in the time of the Kings of Israel, a Temple was built to become the cult centre in Jerusalem.

A few years ago, the Dalai Lama invited a group of Rabbis to meet him. The Chinese invaders had driven him and his followers from their

homeland, the Tibetan spiritual culture had been suppressed, and they were living in exile. How would they be able to preserve their Faith in a strange land? What lessons could the Tibetans learn from the comparable Jewish experience following the destruction of the Temple – the cult centre, and the Jewish exile from its homeland two millenia ago?

The first exile, to Babylon, at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, led to Jeremiah's exhortation to the people to have Faith and never give up Hope. Most importantly, it led to the introduction of the Synagogue to replace the Temple as a place of worship, and that of the Rabbis to replace the Priesthood. In doing so it exemplified Darwin's concept of 'Survival by adaptability'.

After the return from Babylon, following the Persian conquest of the Babylonians and the freeing of the captive Jews, the second Temple was built so that worship there could be resumed, but the Synagogues and the Rabbis continued. Then came the Roman invasion, the destruction of the second Temple and Exile. However, the Synagogues and Rabbinic Judaism remained to ensure continuity.

Two millennia ago, a Rabbi, the saintly Hillel, was asked by a Gentile to teach him the Torah while he stood on one leg. The Rabbi took him seriously and replied:

*“Whatsoever is hateful to yourself, do that not to
your neighbour.*

The rest is commentary, Go and learn”

The first line is no more than the Jewish version of the universal 'Golden Rule' common to all the Higher Religions and Philosophies. It is the second line that marks out the special contribution of Judaism.

What were these commentaries? Alongside the Written Torah, that is the Hebrew name for the Pentateuch or Five books of Moses, lay the Oral Torah that was handed down by wise men from generation to generation by word of mouth through the ages. This eventually was written down and became the Talmud, containing Halachah, the detailed laws governing ethical conduct, and Aggadah, the legends that illuminated the Halachah and might be termed the Spirit of the Law.

They were inseparable partners, for without Aggadah, Halachah would have been sterile, and without Halachah, Aggadah would have been wild fantasy. Talmud thus contained all the commentaries that brought the Torah to life and gave it relevance to every age. Throughout the subsequent centuries, further commentaries have been produced to meet new needs. Within every debate, the arguments against the final decision have been faithfully recorded, together with those in favour. (A pre-cursor to Hansard – the deliberations in the House of Commons)

The Rabbis recognised that it was necessary to present Torah and Talmud in a manner to meet the variety of levels of understanding of the populace without dazzling them. These may be summarised in ascending order of comprehension using the acronym **PaRDeS**:

P – Peshat – Plain - The literal, for children and those of limited understanding.

R – Remez – Allusion - The allegorical explanation, for the more mature who can understand that the stories have a deeper meaning than the literal.

D – Derash – Exposition. The homiletical commentary for those of more advanced intellect who can understand that the stories reveal a spiritual and ethical message.

S – Sod – Secret. The mystical teaching for those whose spirituality has a strong intuitive element to balance their intellect. This is the province of authentic Kabbalah. Aspects of its teachings formed, in modern times, the basis for the spiritual element within Transpersonal psychology.

Remez and Derash are set out in a series of commentaries written by the Rabbis of ancient times in the Talmud, Mishnah and Gemara. Sod is the province of Kabbalist writings such as the Sepher ha Zohar and the Sepher Yetzirah. Within the Christian tradition, Origen and Augustine, followed by many others until comparatively recent times, used a similar argument. In Islam, Sunni theologians used the technique of ‘fiqh’, the

four schools of Jurisprudence, and the Shia used the principles of 'taqleed, itjihad and qiyas' in a similar manner.

It is tragic that religious fundamentalists, on the one hand; and atheists (including, in particular, Neo-Darwinian fundamentalists) on the other tend to see no further than the literal acceptance of the Bible. Hence both base their hostility to each other regarding religious belief on the mistaken assumption that this is the true and only interpretation.

These levels of understanding are not only relevant to the interpretation of the scriptures for dealing with contemporary issues, but also to understanding the spiritual significance underlying those myths, archetypal legends and stories that are related in every religious tradition. The intuitive understanding of Myth and the Intellectual understanding of Reason are both essential to the appreciation of Religion in general and of Judaism in particular.

Turning first to the Intuitive aspect: It is unfortunate that neither the Creationist nor the Atheist understands the true meaning of the word 'Myth' which was discussed in depth on page 17. One fine example is the Biblical account of the wrestling match between Jacob and the Angel where the ego-centric Jacob was transformed into the Higher Self centred Israel. Another is the Hindu's Bhagavad Gita, an inspiring commentary on the existential crisis and its resolution that can inspire any of us. A more recent example is in the 19th century Jewish story that turns on one of the creation legends in the book of Genesis (Chapter 3 verse 9):

During the Tsarist pogroms in Russia, in the middle of the nineteenth century, a Rabbi was thrown into prison. His gaoler was not a religious man but he was somewhat of a philosopher. They used to discuss their different points of view. One day, the gaoler said to the Rabbi: "In your Bible it talks of Adam hiding in shame from God and God saying 'Where are you?' If your God was as omniscient as you claim, why did he need to ask". The Rabbi replied: "God knew very well where Adam was, but he was challenging Adam to consider if he, Adam, knew where he was. He was saying in effect: "Here you are, 43 years old, and do you really know where you have got to in your life". At the mention of his own age, the gaoler shuddered and went deathly

white as, for the first time, he was forced to think where he was in his life and what he had become.

This latter story illustrates how a Myth can be interpreted as parable or allegory and used to bring out a homilectical truth. There is something of 'Adam' in all of us and we are forced to answer the questions of "Who are we? Where do we stand? and, if we are religious, What is God demanding of us?" for ourselves at this moment in our life.

Turning now to the Intellect. The Rabbis of his time had the greatest respect for Socrates, the Greek intellectual reformer, who challenged the worship of the Pagan 'gods' of Olympus (just as Abraham defied the Pagan 'gods' of Babylon). He created academies, where his students were encouraged to debate, argue, and ask awkward questions for which they expected considered replies. Having spent his life teaching people to ask questions, he was condemned by the Pagan citizens of Athens for being an 'atheist' (that is denying the Pantheon of contemporary Greek gods), for corrupting the young, and encouraging them to question authority.

In Judaism, it is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow. One of the most remarkable actions of the rabbis was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own, they thanked God for it. One of the most loved Jewish rituals is the point in the service during the meal on the eve of Passover when the youngest boy asks the father, or grandfather, the meaning of the service. The reply is a complete explanation of the history of the Exodus from Egypt and what it means to be free and no longer a slave.

This is true of the whole Jewish educational system; exemplified by the story of the Father who did not ask his son what he had learnt, but instead enquired "Did you ask any good questions today". The object of Jewish education is to encourage the students to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyze and explore. For liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Of course, not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. For, in Judaism, learning is a lifelong engagement, and teaching is the highest vocation of the religious life.

10. Models of Reality

The nature of one's belief in God necessitates both accepting a model of reality and acknowledging that it can only be provisional.

Our 'world-view' is conditioned by our experience, and is reflected in the model that we create for understanding the world in which we live and of which we have a limited knowledge, whether it be scientific or religious. Yet, in a way, our openness to experience is itself conditioned by the model that we are willing to accept as valid, or by means of which our mind-set has been indoctrinated. Far too often we fall into the error of forgetting that the map is not the country, and looking at a map is not the same as experiencing the terrain.

When one regards the model of reality as if it were reality itself, rather than as a signpost, one is guilty of the sin of idolatry. This phenomenon is well known in the field of religion. We do not always recognise how often it occurs in the field of science. Scientists are less than true to themselves when they defend their theories against data that do not fit it, rather than continue the search for truth. In science there are many examples such as the question as to whether light is an electro-magnetic vibration or a particulate phenomenon composed of photons. Experiments by advocates of each viewpoint will confirm the truth of either theory against the other. And the same must be said for the practitioners of religion.

At regular intervals, there are major paradigm shifts in the history of mankind's growth in understanding. If we react with intellectual and spiritual integrity to these as they occur, we are forced to change our view of ultimate reality, whether that be from a spiritual or scientific angle. In particular, if we are to understand the complexities of human consciousness, a radical re-appraisal of our psychology and philosophy is essential in order to make comprehensible that which we call the underlying realities.

Reality eludes us, whatever our viewpoint, and when we endeavour to express our intuitions, we come up against the problem of language and our inability to articulate the unspeakable. In responding to these paradigm shifts, we are forced to create new models or analogues to give expression to our understanding, and devise theories to explain it. Thus we have to create maps, symbols and metaphors to serve as representations of Reality, onto which we then try to fit our experiences.

Materialist science can neither understand nor explore human consciousness adequately, for it regards consciousness as no more than the product of biological processes in the body. The spiritual sciences start from utterly different premises, regarding consciousness as the primary phenomenon and the biological processes as secondary. They offer keys to understanding consciousness through direct experience by using techniques of meditation. When one explores the unknown regions and contents of one's own consciousness, using meditation as a tool and practising its disciplines, the use of an effective map can be of great help, providing that it is recognised for what it is.

The essence of progress is twofold. Firstly, adapting to time and place, whilst being aware that the result of our efforts remains not necessarily more valid. Secondly, being willing to maintain old paradigms only until such time as they can no longer contain new evidence and account adequately for new experience.

If we want a visual symbol for progress, it might be that of a 'spiral staircase', where, at every half turn, we not only rise to new heights, but also stand for a moment over the historical experience of the other pole of being. Thus we come up against one of the facts of life - that objectivity is an illusion. One can neither separate the experimenter from his experiment nor the theorist from his theory. In each, the first is bound to the second by the strength of his emotional attachment, and all observation is in the end subjective. If we could be honest about this, it would save all the suffering caused by both religious and scientific dogma. For our maps, models, symbols and metaphors too easily become the idols that we worship as though they were the immutable truth, and we are too ready to castigate healthy sceptics and iconoclasts as heretics.

Those who have been conditioned to limit themselves to a rationalist 'world-view', inevitably reject, as absurd or irrational, those phenomena that transcend our normal perceptions and which their model cannot accommodate. This includes all those phenomena that come under the heading of extra-sensory-perception, ie knowing by means other than those of the five senses or of any 'intellectual' process, and it includes also all spiritual and psycho-spiritual experience.

11. Man's Coming of Age

One of the most potent metaphors for our relationship with the Divine is the love that binds parent to child. When that love is true, it is to guide the child so far and then set them free to grow rather than to be over-protective or possessive. First comes the game of hide and seek where the parent hides and the child has to learn where to find them. This teaches the child to know that the parent is always there even when hidden. Then, as the child matures, the truly loving parent will gradually withdraw their support so that the child can learn to stand on their own feet. This chapter introduces one of the teachings that apply this to the overall human situation.

The following story was written in the Talmud two millenia ago in the text Baba Mezia 59

“A number of famous rabbinical scholars disagreed with Rabbi Eliezar's views in regard to a point of ritual law. "Rabbi Eliezar said to them: 'If the law is as I think it is, then this tree shall let us know.' Whereupon the tree jumped from its place a hundred yards (others say four hundred yards). His colleagues said to him, 'One does not prove anything from a tree.' He said, 'If I am right then this brook shall let us know. ' Whereupon the brook ran upstream. His colleagues said to him, 'One does not prove anything from a brook.' He continued and said, 'If the law is as I think, then the walls of this house will tell. ' Whereupon the walls began to fall. But Rabbi Joshua shouted at the walls and said, 'If scholars argue a point of law, what business have you to fall?' So the walls fell no further out of respect for Rabbi Joshua, but out of respect for Rabbi Eliezar they did not straighten up. And that is the way they still are.

Rabbi Eliezar took up the argument again and said, 'If the law is as I think, they shall tell us from heaven'. Whereupon a voice from heaven said, 'What have you against Rabbi Eliezar, because the law is as he says'. Whereupon Rabbi Joshua got up and said, 'It is written in the Bible: The law is not in heaven'.

What does this mean? According to Rabbi Jirmijahu it means - since the Torah has been given on Mount Sinai

we no longer pay attention to voices from heaven because it is written: 'You make your decision according to the majority opinion.'

It then happened that Rabbi Nathan, one of the participants in the discussion, met the Prophet Elijah, who had taken a stroll on earth, and he asked the Prophet, 'What did God himself say when we had this discussion?'

God smiled and said:

"My children have won, my children have won".

The great Jewish philosopher/psychologist, Erich Fromm, commented on this story in his book "Psychoanalysis and Religion" in the following words:

"This story is hardly in need of comment. It emphasizes the autonomy of Man's reason with which even the supernatural voices of heaven cannot interfere.

God smiles, Man has done what God wanted him to do, he has become his own master, capable and resolved to make his own decisions by himself, according to rational democratic methods"

The fact that there is no real incompatibility between authentic Religion and Reason is emphasised by Vivekananda, one of the pioneers of Hindu revival at the beginning of the twentieth century, who wrote: -

"To get any reason out of the mass of incongruity we call human life, we have to transcend our reason, but we must do it scientifically, slowly, by regular practice, and we must cast off all superstition. We must take up the study of the super-conscious state just as any other science. On reason we must lay our foundation, we must follow reason as far as it leads; and when reason fails, reason itself will show us the way to the highest plane. Real inspiration never contradicts reason, but comes to fulfill it and to be in harmony with it".

12. The Jewish attitude to Atheism

The essence of authentic religion, as emphasised by the Prophets of ancient Israel, lies in ethical action rather than ritual behaviour or dogmatic belief.

This was emphasised in the Priestly code – Leviticus 19 v 18, in the words:

“You shalt not take vengeance nor bear any grudge,
but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

On the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, which is a day of fasting, the reading nominated for the service is taken from Isaiah 58, and includes the words:

“.....Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Holy One? Is not this the fast I look for: to release the shackles of injustice, to undo the fetters of bondage, to let the oppressed go free? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked to clothe them, and never to hide yourself from those who need you?.....”

One Rabbi, some 2000 years ago, visualised God as saying” I do not mind whether or not people believe in me, providing that they live by my Laws”. Another said “Atheism was better than Religion when one Man approached another asking for help, and the atheist reacted by immediately giving help rather than, as some self styled religious people might do, by replying “God will help you”.

However, what really constituted the worst form of Atheist in Judaism was one who regarded people (and animals) as commodities to be used rather than fellow beings like oneself, each with their own

individuality and need for compassion. On this basis, a Humanist Atheist who did not believe in God might be more Holy than a Believer who kept all the rituals, but whose ethical conduct and personal relationships were less than desirable. Indeed, such an Atheist was more Holy than a 'Believer' whose God was reduced to no more than an idol.

In the 20th century, the leading Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, expressed this most cogently in his most famous essay, I and Thou, from which the essential teaching is presented below:

“To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the two fold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination I/Thou.

The other primary word is the combination I/It; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It.

Hence the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the primary word I/Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I/It.

Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations.

Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence.

Primary words are spoken from the being.

If Thou is said, the I of the combination I/Thou is said along with it.

If It is said, the I of the combination I/It is said along with it.

The primary word I/Thou can only be spoken with the whole being.

The primary word I/It can never be spoken with the whole being.”

It must be made clear that in this quotation, the word ‘Thou’ is not used in any archaic sense, but rather to describe the specific ‘Other’, whether human or Divine, who is addressed from the heart and encountered in a very specific and authentic relationship.

We can utter one of the primary words to God and we can utter the same one to man, for our relationship with the Holy One sets the mould also for all human relationships.

God is a ‘Thou’ to encounter and not a ‘That’ to contemplate, for the way that the Holy manifests in the dimension of human history is seen as the “Eternal Thou”, whose presence hallows every truly human relationship where Self encounters Self and which gives meaning to every truly human commitment where the Self plunges into the whirlpool of life.

In uttering the I of the authentic I/Thou, we centre ourselves in our Self, and we enter into a relationship that recognises the Other as a being created like ourselves in the image of God (the Eternal Thou), with potential for spiritual growth in their own way and time, and to be met with empathy and compassion. It is from this centre also that we encounter the Holy and enter into authentic meditation. In this respect, it has a profound psychological significance, for the I and Thou relationship can be directed inwardly to the relationship between Ego and Self and is the foundation of existential therapy, which is mentioned briefly in Chapters 4 and 13.

But when we utter the I of the primary word I/It, we centre ourselves on the Ego in a relationship that reduces the other to no more than a thing to be manipulated, controlled, or possessed, and that sees the other as no more than an instrument or reflection of our own personal desires - where a spurious love is no more than a projection of selfish wants rather than a commitment of one Self to another Self. And if from that centre we address God, we reduce the idea of the Holy to no more than an archetype to be conjured or used for personal profit – an utterly bogus spirituality. It is there that the temptations of magic assail us and can lead us to destruction.

When the Hindu utters the greeting “Namaste”, he is honouring this “I and Thou” relationship very beautifully, as the expression means “The Self at my centre honours the Self at your centre”. In one of the loveliest of the Hindu Upanishads, a series of verses proclaim:

It is not for the sake of the “Other” that the “Other” is dear, but for the sake of the Self that is in the “Other”.

where the “Other” is replaced by a series of personalities in each verse.

The tragedy at the heart of the creed of ‘Certainty’, whether it be that which is professed by a Religious person or by an Atheist, is the desire, sometimes almost fanatical, to convert the ‘Other’, whom one encounters, to one’s own particular system of ‘belief’. This is a denial of the true heart of Religion – the love which sets the ‘Other’ free to ‘Be’ and to evolve in their own way and time.

13. Suffering and the Death of God

There are times when, in the event of unbearable personal suffering, we scream "Why this? Where is God in all this?". The atheist cries out “If there were an omnipotent God, how could He permit such tragedies to happen?”

The stumbling answers of some theologians not only fail to satisfy, but too often are almost obscene in their implications.

The Jewish answer is to quote the words of the Bible:

“I set before you this day, good and evil, blessing and curse.
Choose therefor the good that you may live”

If there were to be no evil in the world, then God would have made us to be as mere robots. It is part of our humanity that we are creatures with the responsibility to make intelligent choices.

The theological Job’s comforter would defend God by rationalising suffering and demanding a passive acceptance of it as God's will, with ‘pie in the sky for compensation’. But in reality, whilst it is difficult to come to terms with suffering, it can neither be passively accepted, nor can it be rationalised, nor can God be defended. All that we can do with our personal suffering is to invest it with meaning as a call for creative

action for the existential situation in which we find ourselves, whilst acknowledging that the ultimate meaning of God lies beyond our comprehension.

in the face of evil, Judaism demands, not passivity but a dedicated aggressiveness. We are permitted to question God, to challenge God, to demand an accounting from God. And this, rather than diminishing God is truly to take God seriously.

One of Elie Wiesel's teachers taught him:

“The Jew knows that he may oppose God as long as
he does so in defence of his creation”.

and Wiesel himself reminds us that:

“It is given to Man to transform divine injustice into
human justice and compassion”.

The 18th century Chassidic Rabbi Levi Yitchak of Berditchev, in his own search for Meaning, used to pray:

Master of the Universe!

I do not beg you to reveal to me the secret of your
ways

That would be too much for me - I could not bear it.

But show me one thing, show it to me ever more
clearly and more deeply.

Show me what this, which is happening to me here
and now, means to me. What it demands of me.

What it is that you, Lord of the World, are telling
me by way of it.

Oh! it is not why I suffer that I wish to know, but
only whether I suffer for your sake.

There has been much talk about the 'Death of God' in some theological circles. But what does this really mean. Martin Buber, in his book, 'The Way of Response' remarked:

“Whether or not we know it, what we really mean when we say that a god is dead is that the images of God vanish, and that therefore an image which up to now was regarded and worshipped as God, can no longer be so regarded and so worshipped. For what we call gods are nothing but images of God and must suffer the fate of such images...Time after time, the images must be broken, the iconoclasts must have their way. For the iconoclast is the soul of man which rebels against having an image that can no longer be believed in, elevated above the heads of man as a thing that demands to be worshipped”.

There was an incredible episode in the death camp of Auschwitz, witnessed and recounted later by Elie Wiesel, when God was put on trial. He tells us in his memoirs:

“Three rabbis, all erudite and pious men, decided one evening to indict God for allowing His children to be massacred. I remember: I was there, and felt like crying. But there, nobody cried. A rabbinic court of justice was set up. The trial took place over a period of several nights. Evidence was presented and witnesses were heard, and finally an unanimous verdict was reached - God was found guilty of crimes against creation and humankind. And then, after an infinity of silence, the president of the court looked at the sky and proclaimed that it was time for evening prayers. And the members of the tribunal recited them (the Ma'ariv) to their guilty God”.

Many years later, Elie Wiesel decided to write a book embodying a play based on the event, but having one character not present at the real trial. That character would be the attorney for the defence. However he had taken it out of the factual setting of Auschwitz and created a morality tale set during the Bogdan Chmielnicki pogroms of the seventeenth century.

Commenting on the play in an annexe to the book, the author, Matthew Fox, wrote:

“If what we really are is an image of God, then sin is our refusal to become that image. When humans fail at this primary task - to become Godlike, and therefore compassionate and just persons, then God dies. God fails. God gets tried for his failure. The God on trial in this play is the God made after our own image, a God of self-righteous religion, a God of violence, a God of hatred. If the play be understood in the light of our mystical tradition of letting go of all things, even of God, then everything depends on our detoxing the way that we speak and talk about God, and therefore putting on trial the gods that we worship or claim to worship. What God truly occupies our hearts? What are our true treasures? Is God implicated in the evil that humans perpetrate on one another?”

Judaism demands that man should love both God and mankind. This is the way of compassion, and it not only regulates our encounter with our fellow beings, created in the image of God, but it also defines our attitude to God.

The essence of authentic love between humans in truly spiritual terms is that it is twofold in its nature. Not only does it honour the ‘I and Thou’ relationship, but also it sets the beloved free TO BE and to grow in their own way and time. It is an unconditional acceptance of the other; and when the other is God, then true love of God means the unconditional acceptance of God as God is. But with God as with humans, it does not mean that we cannot wrestle with those whom we love, nor be angry with them at times. It means that we do not constrain God into a pre-conceived image: that we do not expect God to be loving, merciful, just or even logical. It means that we are willing to accept the paradox that God is free TO BE just as we must be free to be if we are not to be automata. This defines the Judaic love of God as distinct from the Gnostic desire to have intimate knowledge of God, or the magical desire to have power over God, or even the Philosopher's desire to understand a logical God.

There is an interesting example of a constructive response to the prayer quoted on page 37. During the 2nd World War Dr Viktor Frankl

was a slave labourer in one of the Nazi Concentration Camps, in constant danger of death in the gas chamber or from one of the epidemics of typhoid fever. By day he had to perform the heaviest of manual labour: digging, carting and moving dead bodies. But by night he developed the therapy that he had already started upon before the war, not only through choice, but also through sheer stark necessity.

The Nazis had a deliberate policy of attempting to destroy a Man's identity by stripping him, not only of his possessions and clothing, not only of his hair and dignity, but also of his name. In return he was given the cast-off clothing of a man already a victim of the gas chamber and a number was tattooed on his arm.

The moment of truth for the shattered 'number' who once upon a time, in a different life, in a different world, had been Dr. Viktor Frankl, came when the one remaining possession that he valued above all others, the manuscript that recorded all his life's work, was stripped from him along with his clothes, and he was given the rags of another.

For a moment he felt that all meaning had been ripped from his life, that there was nothing left for him to do, and then thrusting his hands into the pockets of his new rags he found a piece of crumpled paper. Carefully and curiously unfolding it, he found that it was a page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book bearing the words of the fundamental Jewish prayer (or declaration of faith) known as the 'Shema' with its challenge – “Hear O! Israel, YHVH your God is One” (which means “Harken to this O! you who wrestle with God and Man, and in that wrestling find both God and yourselves, He, who was, is and always will, be is your God and is a Unity”) and its invitation to a creative relationship with Divinity – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might”.

Faced with this prayer, Dr. Frankl might well have asked 'In what sort of God could one believe in a World full of suffering?' But the psychotherapeutic system of Logotherapy that he was developing inverted the question and posed another — 'How can we afford to deny the existence of God in a World full of suffering?' The very essence of Logotherapy is the belief that there is ultimately 'Meaning' behind suffering, that God is manifest in the Universe as 'Logos' or 'Ultimate Meaning', and that it is up to the individual to recognise his/her personal suffering as a challenge, to invest it with meaning and a drive to action.

“If there were no meaning, if this World was a mere matter of chance - a giant joke, then suffering would be unbearable. Only by accepting a doctrine of meaning can suffering be overcome”.

Meditating upon the particular incident of the prayer. Dr. Frankl realised that the destruction of his manuscript did not negate the meaning of his life. For the prayer found in his rags could only be interpreted as a command to realise his work in action, not only to maintain his own dignity and integrity as a human being, but also that of his fellow prisoners.

In his narrative, Dr. Frankl reminds us again and again that the one freedom that can never be taken away from us is our freedom to choose our attitudes in the face of our circumstances. In the death camps he found that:

'They who have a WHY to live for can bear with almost any HOW'.

'As long as one could find some personal meaning in life. As long as one could find a reason for continuing to fight on against apathy and despair - whether it be for some one or something beyond themselves.

For just so long could one retain an amazing power of endurance'.

14. *Suggestions for further reading*

The Great Partnership – God, Science and the Search for Meaning. ISBN 978-0-340-99524-2

By Jonathan Sacks, Published by Hodder and Stoughton

The Case for God ISBN 978-0-099-52403-8

By Karen Armstrong, Published by Vintage Books

I and Thou ISBN 0 567 22338 8

By Martin Buber. Published by T & T Clark

To Have or to Be BS15A2-77531B-93D9B2

By Erich Fromm. Published by Abacus

The Trial of God ISBN0-8052-1053-9

By Elie Weisel Published by Schocken

Man's Search for Meaning ISBN 0-671-023337-3

By Viktor Frankl. Published by Mass Market Paperback

Finding God ISBN 08074-0312-1

By Soncino and Rafat Published by the Union of American Hebrew congregations

APPENDIX

The Act of Creation – Where Science and the Mystical interpretation of Genesis meet

The Scientific view of Creation

The astronomers' concept of the “Big Bang”, that is now generally accepted, evolved during the last century out of the increasingly clear evidence of the “Expanding Universe”. It describes how, at one particular moment, thought to be approximately 13.7 billion years ago, all the potential matter and energy of the Universe was compacted into one infinitely dense point that was timeless, and occupied no space. This is what scientists called the ‘Singularity’. In that instant, known as Creation, both space and time were born and the ‘Singularity’ transformed its non-dimensional form into a multiplicity of dimensions to create the energy and matter of our Universe. The question “What was before this event?” is meaningless, for Creation marked the beginning of time (as well as space), a dimension that came into existence only with the metamorphosis of the ‘Singularity’.

Interestingly, the ancient Kabbalist book in the Jewish Mystical tradition - ‘Sepher ha Zohar’ - puts it thus:

“Beyond that point, nothing is known
So it is called Beginning”

There is an extended version of this theory that also fits the evidence of the ‘expanding universe’. This suggests that the expansion will eventually end and will be followed by a contraction that will finally terminate in the ‘Big Crunch’ where all the space, time, energy and matter of the Universe will be concentrated into a ‘Black Hole’. Out of this will emerge the new ‘Singularity’ that will give birth to the next act of Creation. The Hindu Scriptures contain quotations that suggest a similar conclusion – an eternally continuing Creation and Destruction of Universes. Although not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, there is the suggestion, in some of the post Biblical writings, that God made the

World and destroyed it several times before humans as we know them arrived on it.

The Jewish view of Creation

It has already been pointed out that Religion is not concerned with the **HOW** of events, so much as with their **MEANING**. However there is a Jewish view of the act of creation that is so remarkably similar to the current scientific one that it cannot be ignored.

Rabbi Isaac of Acco, in the 13th century, pointed out that the seven days of creation were not days as we understand them, but “Divine Days”. According to his calculation, the Universe was created 15.34 billion years ago. (See page 186 of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan’s seminal work on the Sefer Yetzirah for a detailed analysis). It is amazing that this calculation from eight hundred year ago should be within twelve per cent of the very recent scientific estimates of approximately 13.7 billion years.

When we open the Hebrew Bible and study Genesis Chapter 1: verse 3, we read:

“And God said: “Let there be Light”, and there was Light”.

And in the Sepher ha Zohar (the sacred book of the Kabbalists) we read:

“With the appearance of the Light, the Universe expanded.

With its concealment, all individual existence came into being.

This is the mystery of the act of Creation.

One who understands, will understand”.

It is interesting to compare the opening words of Genesis with the mathematical theories of Einstein and the observations of astronomers such as Hoyle. The English translations of the text – **Be:reshit B:ra Elohim** - generally read:

“In the Beginning, God created”

However the Hebrew original, if translated accurately word by word, reads:

“In Beginning created Elohim”

and this, to the Kabbalists, makes **Elohim** the object of creation and not, as interpreted in the usual translation, the subject. The subject is inferred. What then was the subject? The missing word has been interpreted according to the mystical tradition and led the Kabbalists to suggest that the subject is the hidden and utterly unknowable Nothingness of **AYiN**, and that the real meaning is:

“In Beginning, the Unknowable and utterly Transcendental One - **AyiN** - created those emanations from itself that were the archetypes for the Universe”.

This interpretation evolved still further within the Kabbalist tradition over many centuries. It reached its culmination in the concepts expounded by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria of Safed in the 16th century. This postulated a contraction, known as ‘**Tzimtzum**’, of the primordial energy.

Translating this into modern terminology, **Tzimtzum** is explained as follows:

“At the beginning, there was no time, no space, no eternity and no infinity. There was only the absolute nothingness of undifferentiated being that the Kabbalists called AYiN.

And within this void, the brooding transcendental consciousness of AYiN stirred and gave rise to Eyn Sof - without end - the dimension of God's infinite being, and to Eyn Sof Aur - limitless light - the dimension of God's eternity.

There was no universe - only the potential for creation. And the creative urge arose in the Consciousness of God and there was a contraction - Tzimtzum - of the Infinity and Eternity of God into itself in order to make room for the universe. From out of that contraction the act of creation was manifest as the 'Big Bang' in which Eternity gave birth to Time, Infinity gave birth to Space, the universe came into existence, and the Holy One manifested HIS/HER Presence in it.”

The Courage of Uncertainty

Insistence on the possession of 'Absolute Certainty', and the mis-interpretation of the sacred myths of scripture as though they could only be understood literally, are the two enemies of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding between the fundamentalist followers of different Religions. They are also the reason why the Atheist rejects Religion and God.

The word 'Evolution' is usually associated with Charles Darwin's work on the fauna and flora of our planet. However, as is shown, it also occurs in Human Consciousness, especially in its understanding of Science and Religion, neither of which has ceased from evolving. Indeed, there are many parallels between these two disciplines. Also, as shown in these pages, authentic Religion is about harmonising and interpreting the twin functions of Legend (Myth) and Reason – the intuitive and the intellectual approaches of the Human Mind, which are essential partners for human wholeness.

'Faith' has been defined as the Courage / Wisdom of Uncertainty that marks the open-minded follower of both Science and Religion. It is utterly different from 'Belief' which, too often, is unthinking acceptance of Dogma. In Science, it is the acceptance that there are vast areas of Nature and its Laws that we do not yet fully understand, and for which our models and formulae are as yet provisional. In Religion, it is the acceptance of that Mystery which lies beyond the 'Cloud of Unknowing' that, for want of a better expression, we call 'God', and which is both Nameless and of many Names. The evolution of Religion from pre-historic times and the approach to the acceptance of the 'Mystery' in the Jewish Faith are explored in depth.

The author has endeavoured to show that, when Neo-Darwinian Atheists reject Religion as an outmoded superstition, it is because they have made two fundamental errors. Either they have focussed on the worst abuses of Religion and its hi-jacking by Atavistic Nationalism, or they cannot see beyond the literal interpretation of the myths in Scripture. Following these, they have set up a 'Straw Image' to demolish it without any understanding of the true nature of Religious History and Faith. Whilst this booklet is written from a Jewish viewpoint, the author has not hesitated to use the wisdom of other Faiths and Philosophies to illuminate points where it is helpful to do so.