

The Oak in the Acorn

I try to read my life backward as well as forward. James Hillman, in *The Soul's Code*¹, writes “the ‘acorn theory’ ...holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived....Reading life backward enables you to see how early obsessions are the sketchy preformation of behaviors now. Reading backward means that growth is less the key biographical term than form, and that development only makes sense when it reveals a facet of the original image.” Reading backward, it seems to me, is how we both make sense of what has happened to us and confirm or refine the model that frames our belief system. Whether or not we are conscious of the process, I believe it is nevertheless one which is uniquely human, that we are driven towards the blueprint or goals we have set for each existence. Reading backward is how we create and maintain our personal, familial, and national mythology. We write and revise our story so that it suits our uniqueness. We are, therefore, not mere characters in a plotless universe, so much as we are authors writing our own destinies.

In the earlier paper for module two, the enhanced human experience autobiography, I wrote about several experiences, including my introduction to the philosophy revealed in the readings of Edgar Cayce, which have helped to discover my perspective. During the two years after I turned ten years old, I had at least four significant experiences which began to reveal “my acorn.” First, I had an experience in which I saw my reflection in a mirror and asked, “Who am I (really)?”—recognizing that the body and features I saw before me were not all I am. Second, I experienced an intense longing to know, to be wise, to *understand*. I had no idea what I wanted to know. Some time shortly after this experience, I read about Socrates and the importance of balance and moderation in a life. This made a lasting impression, for to this day, I believe that a

¹ Hillman, James. *The Soul's Code; in Search of Character and Calling*. New York: Random House, 1997 (6-7).

well-lived life looks for the mean. Our pendulum may swing wildly, but it does so to find the balance between extremes. Although I was not conscious of this until much later, it made sense to me that it may take more than one incarnation to achieve this refinement. Fourth, I experienced an early disillusionment with religion, suffered because it did not adequately explain what my experiences and innate worldview told me were true about life.

Eventually, through a variety of influences, I formed a model, a belief structure, that continues to work for me and on which I have patterned my life. I believe that whatever model we choose for ourselves, its effects should include assisting us to live harmoniously with our fellow travelers on this planet (human, animal, and the earth itself). It should honor the spiritual as well as the physical and mental aspects of man, and, further, provide a blueprint for bringing those aspects into balance. The model should be richly grounded in mythology and at the same time practical. It should be satisfying because it makes sense, i.e., it is verifiable in terms of our practical experience. It should be fair, meaning not capricious, even if we do not always understand its application in our lives. It should honor other wisdom traditions and faiths. The model should be comprehensive enough to embrace both science and religion. Ultimately, the model should help us understand our relationship to others, to nature, to science, to religion, and to God. I claim no originality for my belief system, but I will assert that I “discovered” its truth for myself and test it as I live my life. In reading my life backward, it feels to me as though I was somehow directed to become the oak in my acorn and that “arriving” at this model is part of this maturation process.

When I read *There Is a River*² by Tom Sugrue and Gina Cerminara’s *Many Mansions*³, I found explanations that made sense to me. The wheel of life, the cycle of birth, bodily death and rebirth, seemed purposeful, orderly, logical and just, and met my criteria for a belief system. The more I studied comparative religions, the more I came to see that at their cores, they are more

² Sugrue, Thomas. *There Is a River*. Virginia Beach, VA: A.R.E. Press, 1984.
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similar than they are different. When I read the selections by Aldous Huxley and Ken Wilbur on “The Perennial Philosophy” and “The Great Chain of Being” from *Paths Beyond Ego*⁴, I found a name for the belief structure that I had “discovered” through various readings and experiences accumulated over this lifetime: the Perennial Philosophy. I had earlier rejected institutionalized religion, but I also had rejected scientific rationalism, because both seemed too limited and limiting. The tug-of-war many of us face in trying to balance what seem to be polar opposite systems is reflected in this passage:

He hesitated and then he said quietly, “For a long period in my life I refuted everything in the way of faith or meaning. You might say I collected—even exulted in—every nihilistic book, thought, and person, and this is not difficult for we live in a very depersonalizing and negative age. But I realized one day that if I believed faith and God were mere illusions—puerile longings, you might say, for reassurance and immortality—then it was equally possible that the cult of meaninglessness and despair could also be illusory, no more nor less than the rage of adolescents who fail to understand. Have we proof of either? And disliking necrophilia I chose—as Pindar put it—to ‘become what I am.’”

“And that is--?”

“A man who believes in something beyond himself even when he cannot touch it.”

“What Kierkegaard calls ‘the leap of faith,’” she said, smiling.⁵

When I think of religion, I think of an institutionalized system of belief in a divine power and its associated customs, values and laws. When I think of science, I think of an institutionalized method for observing and describing the natural world, with its associated customs, values, and laws. What was missing for me was the link, the bridge, between the two. This bridge for me is spiritual vision, mysticism, attunement with the spiritual as well as the mental and physical parts of our natures, or what Walsh, in “Hidden Wisdom,” calls “the eye of contemplation.”⁶ It is this contemplative eye, along with David Bohm’s discovery that matter, as

³ Cerminara, Gina. *Many Mansions*. New York: New American Library, 1950.

⁴ *Paths Beyond Ego; The Transpersonal Vision*. New York: Putnam, 1993 (212-213; 214-222).

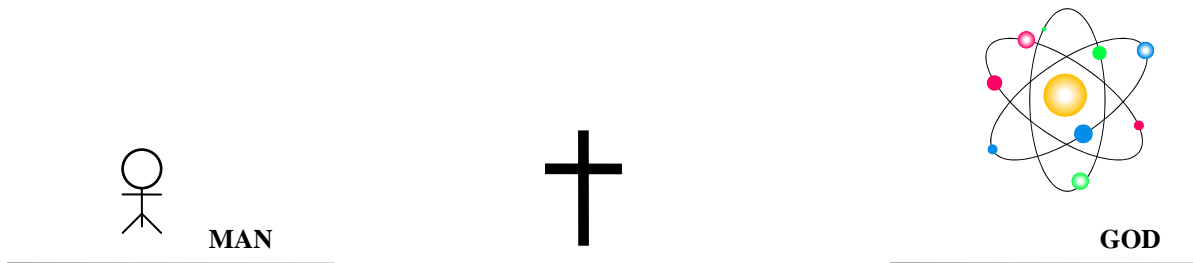
⁵ Gilman, Dorothy. *The Clairvoyant Countess*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975 (112).

⁶ *Paths Beyond Ego* (223).

a discrete reality, does not exist apart from energy, as well as the contributions of other researchers studying the effect of the observer on the observed, that have provided the conceptual foundation for the bridge between the contradictory tenets of science and religion. We have entered an era not of science *versus* religion, but science *and* religion: different methodologies for seeking truth, each with its own point of view—and accompanying limitations.

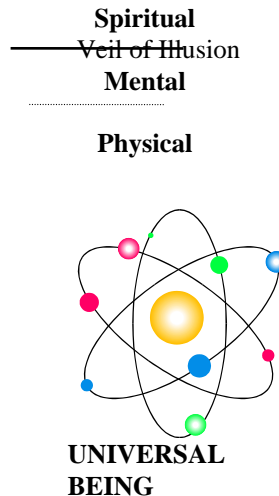
When I discuss my model with someone who has a fundamentally religious (usually Christian) orientation, generally the person feels, first, that I have raised questions which they cannot address and, second, that if they *were* to accept the model I propose that they could not continue to hold their own beliefs. What I (gently) try to show is that I am not disagreeing with the Christian model, that in fact I believe that my model embraces the Christian model—as well as the Buddhist, Muslim, and other religious belief systems. (Actually, I see all these belief systems more as application modalities for my model.) Typically, a discussion follows when I draw the Christian model and compare it with the Perennial Philosophic model (see diagrams on the next page).

Christian Model



Man is separated from God by his sins. The only bridge for Man to God is through acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal saviour, whose death on the cross expiated man's sins. The leap of faith a Christian makes is in witnessing for the Christ, and in so doing, the veil of illusion falls away and man's connection with God is established.

My Model (adapted from Edgar Cayce and the Perennial Philosophy)



Each individual entity is represented by one of the points. God permeates this universe; at the spiritual level, all is one. The illusion lies in perceiving separation. The task of one lifetime, or any other is to pierce the veil of illusion and to erode obstacles to at-onement.

The task of each model is the same: to pierce the veil of illusion and establish man's connection with the Creator. The difference between the model I accept and the Christian model is that I believe Christianity is simply a subset, a method (one among many) for achieving that end result. It is this construct which conservative religious belief opposes, since the basis of the belief is that this is the one true path to God or religious bliss. Where Christianity maintains that Jesus was God's son, I would agree, but I would not accept that Jesus was God's *only* son, since I see all of us as sons and daughters of the Creator. My model does not negate the Christian model as fundamentalists would argue; it simply makes room for other models as legitimate paths to God. Essentially, humans face a perceptual problem, and because we are finite beings, we must struggle to expand our knowing. Sensual perception alone does not adequately explain what we experience in the world. Thus, we are constantly challenged to develop the eye of contemplation, the third eye, so as to provide some juxtaposition between what we perceive with the small miracles (enhanced human experiences) we are gifted with at various times throughout our lives.

Although it does not truly explain it, I have always found the following excerpt to be a charming answer to the question, "How can God be inside us":

After sister Ursula had fallen asleep Bhanjan Singh told them stories in the kitchen. Once upon a time, he said, when God had finished making the world, he wanted to leave behind him a spark of his essence, *a promise to man of what he could become, with effort* [emphasis mine]. He looked for a place to hide this Godhead because, He explained, *what man could find too easily would never be valued by him.*

"Then you must hide the Godhead on the highest mountain peak on earth," said one of his counselors.

"God shook His head. "No, for man is an adventuresome creature and he will soon enough learn to climb the highest mountain peak."

"Hide it then, O Great One, in the depths of the earth!"

"I think not," said God, "for man will one day discover that he can dig the deepest parts of the earth."

"In the middle of the ocean then, Master?"

God shook his head. "I've given man a brain, you see, and one day he'll learn to build ships and cross the mightiest oceans."

"Where then, Master?" cried his counselors.

God smiled. "I'll hide it in the most inaccessible place of all, and the one place that man will never think to look for it. I'll hide it deep inside of man himself."

Sister Hyacinthe looked at Bhanjan Singh and smiled. "Now I know what a guru is," she said simply.⁷

Throughout my life, I have been led by my "acorn" to instructional materials in the Perennial Philosophy, which accepts the idea of the god within as well as the concept of reincarnation. (These materials have not often been the great religious texts, perhaps because these texts were not the materials from which I could learn what I needed to know.) Voltaire once observed that "it is no more surprising to be born twice than it is to be born once." This view makes particular sense now in light of discoveries in the area of quantum physics about the way electrons behave.⁸ Gilman elaborates on the theme, the godhead within us, in a mystery novel that also instructs us about the purpose of reincarnation:

Mr. Ba Sein smiled. "What a burden you people in the West place on God! In the East, in much of the world, as you no doubt realize, it is believed that we live many lives, returning to this earth again and again, bringing consequences and responsibilities with us from past lives to meet again and work through. The stream of experiences that we call 'good,' and those we call 'bad,' come to us not from God but from ourselves, from what we've been in the past and what we make of ourselves in the present. Earth is a learning ground, that's all". . . . He said in his tranquil voice, "The Buddha has said that god is like a moon reflected in a thousand bowls of water."

"That sounds rather detached."

"Does it? You in the West paint life on such a small canvas, Lady Waring. We in the East see life as a long, *long* struggle toward perfect Knowledge, a procession of souls given flesh to love, hate, kill, victimize, forgive, sow, reap, create and destroy, be sinners or saints until at last we break through our shells *to the god inside us* [emphasis mine]." He shook his head. "But only in one lifetime?"

⁷ Gilman, Dorothy. *A Nun in the Closet*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975 (72-73).

⁸ Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, introduced in 1927, basically states that there is always a theoretical limit in measuring simultaneously the position and motion of an electron. That is, if you are highly accurate at measuring position, you will be unable to accurately measure motion. The Uncertainty Principle addresses the particle-wave behavior duality of electrons, but raises many questions and is "unique and unprecedented in science" (160). The Uncertainty Principle, a natural law, tells us that there is a limit to what we can know. It further suggests the importance of the observer; that we, in fact, can determine what we observe. In the electron example, depending on whether we are measuring for motion or position will determine whether we observe the same electron's behavior as a wave or as a particle. For an excellent layman's introduction to this and other topics, see Roger S. Jones' work, *Physics for the Rest of Us*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1992.

“Procession,” she mused. “A procession in the dark, then, lighted only by a candle.”

“And the candle,” he said, “is God.”

She sighed. “So we return to God again—I’d prefer to return to my anger, Mr. Ba Sein . . . And what would I be without it when it’s all that’s fueled me?” . . .

“Emptied,” he told her gently.

“Then I would be nothing.”

“On the other hand,” he said softly as they entered the temple, “on the other hand, when a gourd is hollowed out it becomes empty and is of great use to the world *because* of its emptiness.”⁹

Ultimately, the questions surrounding any model reduce to one: How can I make it applicable in my life? Edgar Cayce, in many of his readings, stressed application as the key. As I have stated earlier, I claim no originality here; I only used the discovery method to find what works and assimilate it into my life. First, the multi-dimensional nature of man makes sense to me. Most of us feel that we are more than just the sum of our physical parts, our environment and even our heredity.¹⁰ Second, the concept of reincarnation satisfies my desire for justice. Even if it is simply “a puerile longing,” belief in reincarnation helps me to understand that I am not a victim of my life, that I am a co-creator with God, that what I sow I will eventually reap (or as a friend of mine likes to say, “Be careful what you put out in the world; it just might come back and bite you in the butt!”). Understanding that I am truly connected to the universe gives me a charitable perspective on my fellow travelers in this sojourn. I have learned a delicate trick of consciousness that balances between fully participating in the world and stepping out to observe, exercising the third eye of perception.

I believe this model is fully applicable by others as demonstrated by those throughout the centuries that have embraced it and experimented in its application in their own lives. The appeal of the wisdom revealed in Edgar Cayce’s readings (and Cayce was only one source for the

⁹ Gilman, Dorothy. *Incident at Badamya*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1989. (133-134).

¹⁰ I highly recommend James Hillman’s *The Soul’s Code* for the best description of the inchoate yearning many of us feel that ultimately takes us beyond the nature-nurture debate to an identity that is uniquely ours.

Perennial Philosophy in this century) demonstrates this interest. Cayce and others¹¹ have mapped out how we can best internalize and apply these concepts. The key, and this cannot be overstated, is that knowledge must be internalized, must be realized in the gut, before it becomes truly a part of one's being. It is one thing to state a belief; another to live it. The latter is much more difficult and requires dedication, commitment and consistency. Even then, pursuing wisdom, like pursuing happiness, is an almost fruitless endeavor, because ultimately both come to us when we stand still, develop the eye of contemplation, so that we can perceive the gifts the universe is always presenting us. As with electron behavior, the universe is full of paradoxes.

Returning to the question of why it is so difficult for us to know these things, to pierce the veil to realize the godhead within, we can see that science too struggles with the nature of reality. The Uncertainty Principle mentioned earlier teaches that the nature of reality depends on the observer. Thus, if one scientist is measuring the motion of an electron, the electron will be perceived as a wave. If another scientist were to measure the same electron for position, it would be perceived as a particle. The key is perception and both states are real. Science has verified what D. H. Lawrence once observed: "One truth does not displace another. Even apparently contradictory truths do not displace one another. Logic is far too coarse to make the subtle distinctions which life demands." And yet, merely because the struggle is difficult, does not mean we should not pursue it—because we must. Each in our own way, on our own path. God did, indeed, hide the godhead within us well.

Because we must follow our unique blueprint (to realize the oak tree in our acorn), it behooves us to help others follow theirs. We can be confident that there are no "wrong" turns, that we are part of an evolutionary and constantly unfolding process. Part of this understanding is beautifully expressed in the following passage:

¹¹One of the best guides, although the language may be a little dated now, in this regard is *Handbook to The Oak in the Acorn*
Deborah Wright
August 27, 1997
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There is but one life, and it flows through all things. When it flows through the water, it is easy to feel. As it flows through the stone it is harder for us to feel. But even as a man can shape the stone to bring beauty to life, so he can shape anything he touches to control his own fate. . . .They say that objects are created, that people are born. That is not true. . . . Nothing is created or born, nothing falls away or dies. Nor is there a form or stick that has not lived before. When all this is known to you, no man can surprise you, for when you know the forces of his life, you will know all that is needed to stand against him.¹²

If reality is a concept only for those who lack imagination, we should be mindful of the fact that science has shown, through the Uncertainty Principle, that where the meaning of life and our place in the universe is concerned, we must all make the leap of faith. That leap may take us in divergent directions. We may each be taking different modes of transportation. Ultimately, I believe, we are all moving toward the same destination—because we cannot help ourselves. This impetus is the oak in the acorn, and we can see this if we take the time to read life backwards. In the meantime, we can enjoy each phase of the journey.

how fortunate are you and i, whose home
is timelessness; we who have wandered down
from fragrant mountains of eternal now

to frolic in such mysteries as birth
and death a day (or maybe even less)

--e.e. cummings

Higher Consciousness by Ken Keyes, Jr. Coos Bay, Oregon: Love Line Books, 1975.

¹² Myers, Walter Dean. *The Legend of Tarik*. New York: Scholastic, 1981 (24).