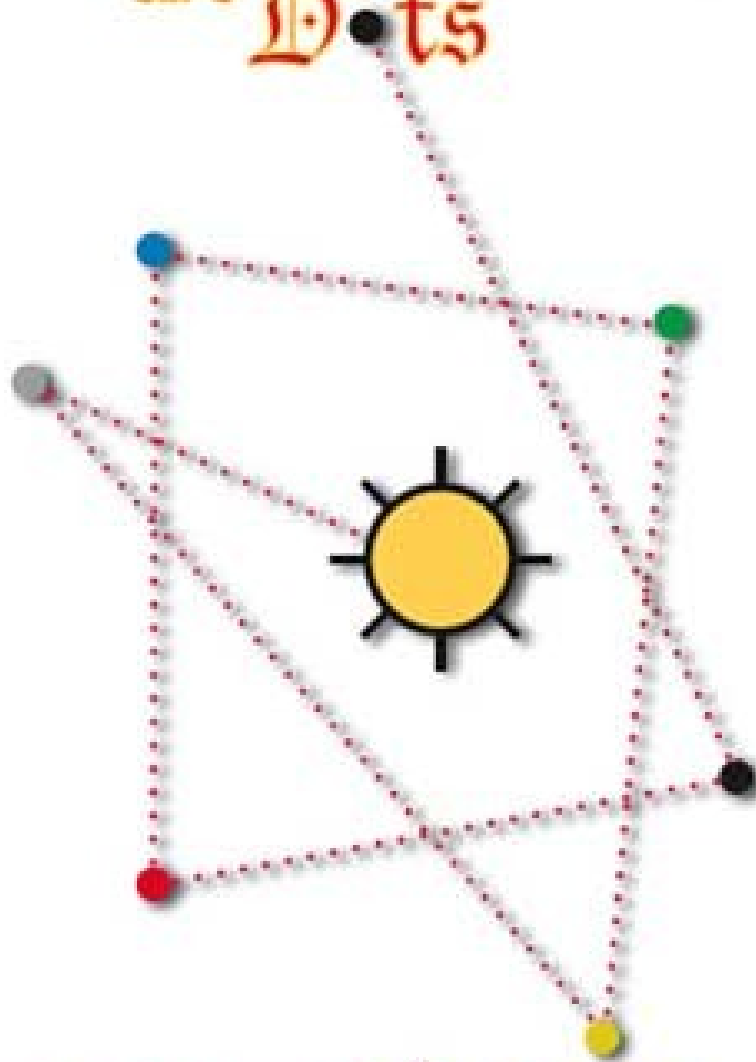


Connecting THE Dots



Map To A Buried Treasure

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CONNECTING THE DOTS



MAP TO A BURIED TREASURE

INTRODUCTION

If I see you running down the street shouting for joy, I'll know you made it through to the end of this book and have found the buried treasure. Your excitement may indeed be like that of the Greek philosopher running naked down the street overwhelmed with ecstasy on having discovered the principle of the drain. I suggest avoiding his indiscretion, but, upon finding afore mentioned hidden treasure, expect excitement far beyond discovering a law of physics. The goal of this book is to lead you to an amazing treasure that has been right under your nose all along. How tragic it is to sleepwalk through life and miss out on a discovery that would make you soar like an eagle. It's like living in dire poverty when an ocean of oil is just below the surface.

Anything of worth requires searching and digging. The seven chapters of this book mark the path through a series of seven dots/points that clue you in on the search. These chapters aim for *clear thinking* around seven pivotal issues: *imaging, self, otherness, God, neighbor, gathering and end-time*. All seven dots are interconnected and each is a crucial piece of the puzzle. The digging required is in following the logic embedded in each chapter that enables you to finally connect the dots pointing to the hidden treasure.

Much of the joy is in the hunt itself. The arena for the search is that of your own self-experience. This book, while drawing heavily on the social sciences, is not one of science, philosophy, theology or history. Rather, I use these disciplines more to *illustrate* than prove a point. For those interested in more background on an illustration drawn from science/history, I make note of a book to read. In your search, verification must rest primarily on *your own knowledge, experience and common sense/logic*. I think it is important that you understand on your own and not lean entirely on the crutch of authority. What you understand is truly your own; what is based on authority belongs to someone else. Therefore, I seek to present what is inherently evident, or easily verifiable knowledge, or what is plausible based on your own refined experience/logic. As a rule of thumb: believe as little as possible; understand as much as possible – lest faith becomes a convenient cover-up for laziness or ignorance.

The summary at the beginning of each chapter states an essential point/dot that guides the search. The detailed outline in each chapter expands on the content of the summary/dot. This format allows

for easy back reference as needed when digging further and further into the substance of the summary statement. The goal of each chapter is to make the summary/dot self-evident. When all seven summaries/dots are self-evident and connected together the treasure will emerge.

In your search you will brave a two-headed dragon that is devouring the world today. The fearsome heads are those of info-mania and social autism. The dragonhead of info-mania devours by overwhelming you with such a volume of information that you cease to process anything. Info-maniacs can't get enough info or do without the latest gizmo. Info-maniacs know more and more about less and less. Information rushes pass at near the speed of light. None gains traction. Info-mania is attention deficit disorder on steroids. The info-hound becomes disoriented and loss - never able to dig to any depth in self-experience to arrive at any understanding. I challenge info-maniacs to make it through the first chapter/dot of this book, let alone find connection of all seven dots.

The second dragonhead seeks to frighten you into the paralysis of social autism that is tantamount to self-destruction. Social autism is a withdrawing into a shell as protection against a fast changing, confusing world; it is a cancer in the body-social. Social autism leads to a reclusive, shallow life; it is a surrendering of your life to the 'experts' in lieu of doing your own homework. The seven chapters/dots of this book confront the dragon of social autism by challenging you to digest the disconnected strands of your own experience whereby you can confidently engage a wider Reality. There is no need to withdraw into a **shell** when you become responsible for yourself by constructing a coherent world through your own careful reflection, understanding and good sense.

I do not apologize for the mental gymnastics that may be needed to work through these chapters. Just as a sound body needs physical exercise, so, too, a sound mind needs challenging exercise. This book is designed for those who enjoy reflecting more than preaching or grandstanding. I begin with the assumption that you believe you are in touch with Reality and maintaining that link is of critical importance to you. I believe that assuming everyone in the world is of this same mind is the decent thing to do; name-calling or categorizing gets us nowhere.

I do apologize in advance for a certain amount of repetition. Writing this book is like a moth circling closer and closer to a light. Each of the seven chapters builds on prior chapters and each is so interrelated as to make repetition unavoidable. Skip over parts that have become obvious to you. I am sometimes repetitive because I am dealing with *beginning assumptions* rather than *ideology*. In this book I tackle a beginning assumption regarding the essence of Reality radically different from the one with which you are familiar - it is analogous to learning another language. Without you even being aware, the very language you use to express yourself is a straightjacket that forces you into an ontological mindset. Finding the treasure depends on discovering the culturally imposed limits to your thinking. Changing a beginning assumption requires a virtual rewiring of your brain in order to perceive Reality in a new way. Unconsciously we build immunity to viewing Reality in a way alien to our own. If a new view cannot be reshaped to fit the ontological assumption upon which the Western world rests, then a cultural immune system takes over and renders an alternate beginning assumption incomprehensible.

As will be discussed later in the course of connecting the dots, there have been only three *beginning assumptions* (or lenses) for viewing Reality in the history of the world. Reality is assumed to be *phenomenal, ontological or relational*; the logic germane to each view generates a very different

landscape. I will contrast all three, but will concentrate on the *relational* (religious) approach to Reality since it is the view most unfamiliar to the West. Our ontological take on Reality is inherently idolatrous. Perceiving *relation* as the core feature of Reality is the path to the amazing treasure that is as close as you are to yourself. But, insight into the relational core of Reality requires an understanding of all three mutually exclusive beginning assumptions about Reality at play in the world today.

Finding the treasure means moving beyond a one-dimensional to a three-dimensional view of Reality. A flat, one-dimensional view of Reality is myopic and threatens world survival. It underlies the war between the East and West. Today's explosion of information and ease of communication fuels the cultural clash. Worldwide terrorism and the war with Iraq are just hotspots in a colossal war of competing worldviews. Carnage of battles will spice up the media, but the real news is beyond the purview of most. The fastest gun or biggest bomb is of no value in cultural war. The conflict will end only when we understand the trilogy of competing assumptions. These three seemingly irreconcilable worldviews are not inherently in conflict, but complementary. You have a special stake in the conflict in as much as entering into a three-dimensional Reality is the only path to the priceless treasure. While the hunt is in the arena of your own self-experience, what happens at the level of self reverberates around the world.

I wish to express a special debt of gratitude to the circle of neighbors that grew to become friends in pursuing Reality as a trilogy of wonderment, technology and relation. Self-experience is not an ivory tower, but a shared experience. Knowing these neighbors as friends is to find and know myself.

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CHAPTER ONE

IMAGING

Summary: We are by definition image-makers, thus enabling us to surpass all other life forms and to become masters of our environment. Images, in turn, have become quasi-living organisms and now drive human evolution and profoundly impact all living things.

Outline of Chapter

Nature of an Image

Evolution of Imaging

Function of Imaging

Imaging, Thinking and Memory

Gestational Stages of an Image

1. General Reality
2. Specific Reality
3. Sensory/Emotion Reality
4. Intellective Reality

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Recapitulation

SIDEBARS

DEVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

SENSORY EXPERIENCE AND CERTITUDE

February 1945 Americans are poised to land on Iwo Jima from which allied air power would be able to reach mainland Japan. Iwo Jima, strategically located in the Pacific near Japan, is a tiny volcanic island consisting of a beach and a high over-hanging bluff. The Japanese moved a very large number of troops to the island with an order to defend to the death what is seen as the gateway to their homeland. The cliff overlooking the beach is heavily fortified with large guns and honeycombed with caves to make the fortress impenetrable.

Determined to capture an airfield within striking distance of Japan, the Americans land on the narrow beach. They soon discover that their equipment sinks in the soft volcanic ash. But, what is worse, they are unable even to dig a foxhole because with every scoop, surrounding ash floods back to fill in behind the material removed. The marines are so tightly packed together on the narrow beach that they are but a foot apart. The Japanese proceed to rain down a withering fire from above on the hapless soldiers. This is the most devastating and hopeless landing ever attempted in the Pacific. The Japanese military see in this landing an opportunity to deal a devastating defeat at last on the increasingly victorious allies.

Against all odds, marines inch their way up Mount Surabachi, the bluff above the beach. A company of twenty marines fights their way to the summit and there plant the American flag. The sight of that flag on the summit fills the dejected allies with such renewed determination that the tide of the battle shifts to the Americans. The Americans prevail, but at a gruesome cost. Of the twenty who raised the flag only four survive, over 6,000 marines lay dead, 17,000 wounded and virtually the entire Japanese garrison perishes.

On February 23 as the marines raise the flag on Mount Surabachi, Joe Rosenthal, a photographer, catches the moment on film. The picture captures in a split second a display of courage against all odds. That image sends a shock wave through the war-weary allied countries and becomes fixed in the American consciousness ever since. To this day, the image of these marines struggling to plant the flag on Mount Surabachi is used to call forth everything that is good and

brave in America. These marines demonstrate in one flitting moment, valor, endurance and determination in a hopeless struggle.

Raising the flag on Iwo Jima is an image that still goes to the heart of defining an American. This image could not have been staged, but needs the reality of the moment and the human spirit it reveals to be an effective image. From this image, which plays such an important role in the victory in the Pacific, the power of imaging is evident. Images not only identify who we are, but can be a matter of life or death - not only nationally but even on an individual level. Understanding of image and image making is of crucial importance as nothing else more profoundly affects our life and who we perceive ourselves to be.

Nature of an Image

Look in a mirror and you will see an image of yourself. The ability to distinguish self from image marks the beginning of a branching away of the human from all other species on the earth. Although some sub-human primates share our ability to recognize a mirror image as a self-reflection, humans specialize in image recognition, taking it far beyond a self-reflection to ever more abstract levels. When you look at your baby picture, you recognize yourself at a more abstract level than a mirror reflection - no other primate can do this. Imaging can reach far greater depths than mirror or photographic reflections. The letters making up this sentence are abstract images of sound; letters making up a word form an image of a thing/action; and letters of a sentence create an image of a concept.

We live in a world of images. The present picture you have of the Reality that surrounds you is a collage of images. (Note: I capitalize the word *Reality* throughout this book whenever referring to *general* Reality versus some immediate or *specific* reality.) Mental images are analogous to the monitor of a computer. A monitor displays the invisible workings of a computer. By the same token, your mind forms images drawn from your interaction with Reality through the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell. Your brain uses sensory stimuli to create an *image* of reality for you that may or may not accurately reflect what is going on in Reality. To use another analogy, think of sensory intake of external stimuli as analogous to the intake of food. You consume food, your stomach digests it and metabolism transforms it into your body. In an analogous way, your five senses consume external stimuli, your mind digests the stimuli and your imagination transforms the digested stimuli into an *image* that becomes a part of your body-image identity. (More discussion on the gestation of images can be found below under that heading.).

An image is the *end* product of sensory-based experience. Mental digestion leading to image creation affects your subjective presence to Reality, just as physical digestion producing bone, tissue and muscle effects corporeal presence in the physical world. Thus, just as a corporeal body provides an interface with physical reality, so, also, an image-body provides an interface with global Reality.

The more finely tuned your image making ability is, the more accurately you are able to reflect Reality. Think of a university as an image factory. It is a place where you go to refine your image making capabilities in any number of disciplines. Mastering the image-tools of a surgeon, for example, enables you to function gainfully in a specialty field of health care because your imaging skills more accurately interface with Reality than that of an untrained individual.

One image can be the basis for still other images. For example, a builder elevates a two-dimensional blueprint into a three-dimensional image in the form of a finished building. A builder must have the ability to abstract from a two-dimensional drawing an image of a three-dimensional finished product. There is virtually no limit to a progression of image-based abstractions, leaving the original sense-based experience far behind. Mathematics is an example of such abstraction. Mathematics - derived from the assumption that Reality is reified and inherently repetitive, versus an intrinsically random or magical phenomena - can lead to many highly abstract conclusions; mathematics is the core of modern science. However, even abstract reasoning (logic), as in mathematics, begins with an original sensory experience. (The book to read: *Physics for the Rest of Us*, by Roger Jones.) Thus, even the most head-splitting abstractions depend on sense-based images that attempt to *reflect* but can never capture fully Reality.

Humans are master image-makers. Where animals are subject to their environment, humans transform their environment to their own choosing through imaging. Einstein sometimes commented that he did not think in words or numbers but in images. But words in themselves are images. Words frame our thoughts. Linguistic determinists suggest that language and thought are identical; linguistic relativists allow for the possibility of thought independent of words. In either case, language or, by extension, culture form the fabric of our thought. Our view of Reality depends largely on metaphoric images. (The book to read: *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff.) Everyone creates an image of Reality - in some

more vaguely defined than in others. However brilliant or slow, our mind needs images to think as surely as we need air to breathe, sound to hear, or light to see. The *awareness* of imaging as a distinct operation of the intellect is fairly recent in history, but the *ability* to create images is as old as the human race.

Evolution of Imaging

The ability to create and exploit images gives humans a tremendous evolutionary advantage over all other life forms. It is not an exaggeration to say that the history of the human race is a history of image making. Archeologists study tools and pottery left behind by our ancient ancestors to assess the level of reflection (imaging) achieved in interacting with their environment. Creating tools such as axes, knives, scrapers and spearheads is directly related to the ability to create a mental abstraction - or *image* of a given tool. Modern science/technology owes its beginnings to the moment the first human picked up a rock and recognized it as a weapon to bring down a stronger or faster prey. However elementary the first tool was, the imaging that forms a blueprint for the tool marks the beginning of human evolution. Tools represent the earliest human endeavor to penetrate deeper into Reality by exploiting the environment more efficiently. From devising a simple stone hand-axe to landing on the moon, the process of imaging behind the tools needed differ only in image refinement but not in kind.

Early humans could not distinguish between image and Reality. Their image world is identical with what they perceive Reality to be. Cave dwellers painted pictures of animals on cave walls. It appears that the artwork, since it took place in virtually inaccessible areas, is fused with the act of hunting and less a depicting of an image for posterity. The fusion of image/Reality is most evident in ancient rituals whereby sorcerers could enter a Reality beyond that immediately accessible to the five senses – not in a *supernatural* sense, but in the sense that humans are but a surface expression of a deeper Reality. Cave art, ritual dancing and hunting in ancient times form one contiguous act.

Imaging as *distinct* from Reality occurs decidedly in the period of the Renaissance (beginning c.1300 A.D.). The Renaissance, meaning: “rebirth”, originates in Italy and has such a catastrophic impact that it jolts many into a new understanding. During this period, Europe rediscovers the ancient world of Greek philosophers. Scholars are amazed to discover that the pre-Christian world of the ancient Greeks appears to be a complete world with well-developed natural religion, political structures, social order, ethics, natural science and theoretical knowledge systems all based solely on human experience and reasoning. Even today, ancient Greeks seem far ahead of their time having proposed, among other things, an atomic theory of matter, the motion of the earth, the power of the imagination, advanced mathematical theories, metaphysics, and the ideal of a democratic form of government. Rediscovery of this ancient world stands in sharp contrast to the Judeo/Christian biblically based culture of Europe at the time.

Faced with two very distinct and viable image-worlds, scholars for the first time could stand outside the two worldviews – one based on reason and the other on revelation - and decide between the two. Some scholars begin to wonder what, if anything, Christianity adds to a highly developed Hellenistic culture stemming from human observation/reason, others wonder whether the biblically based world of Europe could be enriched using the natural, reason-based world of the Greeks. For the first time it is clear that human choice centers on *images* and only indirectly touch on Reality – the two are not the same.

The Renaissance represents one of the great cultural shocks of all times. The possibility of two valid world-views, when it is assumed only one is possible, is a watershed moment in human history. A clear choice of two world-images introduces the obvious distinction between image and Reality. Thomas Aquinas (b.1224) affirms that the world of reason and that of Biblical revelation cannot be at odds. He makes a valiant attempt to reconcile the two worlds of revelation and reason. However, because of preoccupation with trying to preserve both worlds, he does not focus on the critical issue of the *distinction* between Reality/imaging.

The divorce between *image* and *Reality* becomes painfully apparent a little more than a century later. Copernicus (b.1473) shocks the world by theorizing that the sun and not the earth is the center of the universe. Years later, Galileo (b.1564), peering through the first telescope, confirms the heliocentric theory of Copernicus. Together they unintentionally become the biggest iconoclasts of history. The Renaissance unveils the choice between the two *cultural* worlds - one biblical and the other based solely on reason - but only the well educated knew of the option. But, when clear evidence contradicted the biblical notion of the earth/humans as the center of the universe, it got everyone's attention.

A clash of images of cosmic proportions is now at hand – far sharper than the natural versus supernatural worlds introduced by the Renaissance. Now, even the uneducated public is exposed to two radically different worldviews: the biblical notion of humans as the center of a cosmos versus humans as spectators on an insignificant earth circling a distant sun. Because logic precludes adherence to two diametrically apposed views of Reality, people are forced to step back to make a choice; the resulting conflict between the two worldviews endures to this day. The cultural shock leads to divorcing human-identity from the cosmos as a whole. The book of nature replaces the book of the Bible. Having lost a central position, humans increasingly become onlookers rather than central players.

Before Copernicus, people generally could not distinguish between image and Reality in as much as dealing with an image meant dealing directly with Reality. Through thousands of years humans evolved as image-makers, but it did not become evident until modern times that humans are image-makers by definition (The book to read: *Saving the Appearances*, by Owen Barfield.). Today it would be extremely difficult or even impossible to enter into the mindset of the pre-scientific world. The pioneers of modern science irreversibly altered our psyche by forcing us to separate image from Reality. For the first time, indisputable, objective evidence contradicted the book of Genesis – neither earth nor humans are the center of the universe. Reality is to be found not *in* but *outside* humans. Science and the supernatural are on a collision course forcing a choice between two radically different and seemingly irreconcilable world images. Underlying this cultural shock is the growing realization that our image-world may or may not reflect Reality; humans awoke to the possibility of making a choice regarding two radical different assumptions about Reality *prior* to forming any images.

The world of revelation and the world of empirically verifiable facts now stand in sharp contrast. The division between the two assumptions in approaching Reality sharpens with Darwin's discovery of evolution whereby the human species is just one of many species on the face of the earth. The centuries old conflict between science and the supernatural yielded one unexpected blessings, namely, a sharp awareness that a human is, by definition, an image-maker.

Our modern tendency of framing Reality as an *internal* versus *external* world is the lasting aftershock of the earthquake that separated image and Reality. It is hard to imagine a pre-Copernican world when Reality and imaging are fused as one and the same. But, even in a scientific age, it is important to recognize that science is simply a rigorous *methodology* to probe some specific reality and cannot define ultimate Reality. A rigid revelation or observation approach to Reality ignores the fact that, while both result in disparate world images, any image produced cannot capture but only *reflects* Reality.

The separation of image from Reality is liberating. Unlike our ancestors, humans can now enter in and out of a private world of imagination at will. As history unfolds, there may come a time when a world of images totally overshadows any connection with Reality. Such a world is the reverse of pre-modern times when Reality so overshadowed imaging that imaging as such remained at an unconscious level. The new freedom brings greater responsibility.

Function of Imaging

Survival underlies all evolutionary changes, including the onset of image making. Imaging now functions as the cutting edge of human survival – we are increasingly the product of our image making. The human image-making dynamo has produced thousands of years of art, technology and cultures. Humans now bombard each other in every waking moment with countless images. The human environment is more and more image intensive and less and less tuned to nature. Image making is big business today. Search through any library or bookstore and you will find a substantial list of titles devoted to this subject.

Imaging, however, remains connected to the survival instinct and provides specificity only to satisfy survival needs. Thus, a mental image of Reality only includes a level of detail that meets an individual's particular need. A meteorologist, as an example, has a much more detailed imaging of weather conditions than a casual observer. The meteorologist's survival need of making a livelihood drives greater image making ability in discerning weather patterns. As yet another example, consider how a child learns. A child forms an image of a hot stove upon touching one – before the burning stimulus there is no need for image 'hot stove'. Sensory stimuli occasioned by exposure to Reality bring pain as well as pleasure. Our accumulated knowledge is a host of images arising from survival instincts to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. Through such stimuli, imaging ability increases along with greater awareness of surroundings.

However refined image making becomes, a felt tension between image and Reality will endure because image and Reality can never be identical. Imaging the earth as flat does not change the spherical reality of the earth. The monkey is always on our back when it comes to matching image with Reality. Human drive for survival through imaging will never cease - Reality will always be just beyond the reach of images. Our image world is not the *cause* of our knowledge but the aftermath of the gradual exposure to Reality. Exposure to Reality escalated beyond nature into the world of images when our stone-age forbearers picked up the first tool in a struggle for survival. No one knows where each new image of Reality will lead.

At the individual level, an image can be like a rock weighing one down or like the wings of an eagle. Sensory stimuli constantly flood the human psyche through senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell from which, consciously or unconsciously, the mind constructs an image of Reality. Transforming Reality into image enables a sense of the past, hopes/dreams for the future and the very concept of self-identity. Imaging leads to slavery or freedom – slavery if image *becomes* Reality, freedom if imaging is but a tool to *reflect* Reality.

Imaging is central in defining what makes the human species unique. It is not an exaggeration to say a human is an image. Long after an individual dies, the images created by the individual live on. Martin Luther King was gunned down following his call for civil rights. He lives on in his famous “I have a dream” speech calling for justice and freedom. His image-presence is not just in America, but found throughout the world wherever justice/freedom is denied.

An image may function as a tool or a weapon. An olive branch is a symbolic tool expressing peace; a burning cross is a symbolic weapon expressing racial superiority. Images are able to function as tools or weapons because humans, by definition, are image-makers and, therefore, subject to the effects of images. Once we enter that world, we vest in image the power of life and death. Images used constructively as tools or destructively as weapons can, for a time, be more potent than Reality.

All images exchanged between individuals are digested experiences of Reality. Obviously, imaging Reality may be very different from one individual to the next. For example, there is no way of discovering whether the experience of the color green is the same for everyone. Furthermore, an image communicated to a third individual rarely matches an image as it was originally received. The image communicated may not even accurately reflect the experience of the original communicator. It is impossible to know the experience of another and impossible to capture one’s own experience completely through imaging. But, imaging is all we have to connect to Reality and to one another – that is its supreme function.

Imaging, Thinking and Memory

Imaging and thinking are not the same. However, they are so intertwined that it would take the genius of an Einstein to detect the difference between the two. Einstein relates that there were moments that he felt transported beyond images to pure thought. For the rest of us lesser mortals, imaging is our life raft. Our thoughts need to be clothed in images not only for our own thinking process but also to convey our thoughts to another.

Images are like bones to a body. A human body theoretically can function without bone, but it would be the body of a jellyfish. Humans cannot think without images any more than walk without legs, breathe without air, or see without eyes. Images play a crucial role not only in communication but also how humans think about self, God, neighbor, country, world, past, present, future, values, possibilities and the myriad of other things that touch daily life.

Your mind, however, is not like a little person in your head watching a screen upon which images are projected – like watching television. You could picture in your mind another little person watching the first little person and a third little person watching the second and on ad infinitum. Which little person in the series is really you?

The brain consists of special cells, called neurons, which grow ‘wires’ to connect with other neurons. These neurons communicate with each other through releasing chemicals triggered by an electrical impulse. To represent an object, a neuron or group of neurons, stimulated by an electrical impulse, fire certain chemicals that are picked up by other neurons. This electro/chemical process is the foundation for thinking that goes on in the head. The same goes on in the brain of animals but unlike humans, they cannot transform an electro/chemical process into a conscious image. How the electro/chemical exchange can be abstracted into an image remains a mystery.

An electro/chemical pattern of a particular object may be said to be an *image* of that object. Thus, an image of a particular tree is an electro/chemical brain pattern in your head and is not a picture of a tree, as might be found in a photograph. Furthermore, it is unlikely that two persons imaging the same tree will have the same identical electro/chemical pattern because brain patterns are not like film in a camera but are neuronal connections made over time.

A brain pattern, because it interacts constantly with other brain patterns in your head, is constantly in flux. Thus, the interplay of images (brain patterns) and not Reality directly defines who you are. By reinforcing a particular brain pattern, the neuronal connections are strengthened and a sense of identity grows. Over time, these connections are modified or transformed by a multitude of closely related brain patterns. The continuous interaction of all the brain patterns is the basis of memory. Consequently, memory consists in constant neuronal interaction rather than a file to store information like a hard drive in a computer. (The book to read: *A Universe of Consciousness*, by Gerald Edelman.).

Memory (i.e., reinforced neuronal patterns) is stored images of the past. When you meet a new individual, you categorize the individual with images related to gender, age, occupation, appearance, ethnicity and a host of other images used to fix the experience of a particular individual in your memory. Without the use of stored images, we would not have a sense of self-identity, a sense of time/location or develop a relationship with others. You are at any given moment the images that make up your psyche. Persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease lose a sense of personal self-identity because cherished images of the past have been lost - neuronal connections are disrupted.

A complex pattern of neuron firings in your brain then is your particular functional image of Reality. In an effort to communicate, you attempt to convey to others your pattern of neuronal firings regarding Reality. To do this, you use images in the form of a *sign* like a gesture, a combination of signs forming a *symbol*, or through still more abstract signs like numbers or letters (such as the letters you are now reading).

Images may be of things, values or behaviors. A picture of a panda bear, for example, is an image of a specific thing, but it can also serve as an image to suggest the value of environmental awareness. A value-related image is created usually by a combination of simple *signs* to form a complex *symbol*. The American flag is one such symbol using the signs of color, star and stripe to signify important values and ideals. A behavior-related image is as simple as an arrow indicating direction, a stop sign along a highway or a green light of a traffic signal that triggers a specific response from a driver. While images are closely allied to thinking and memory, all three are very distinct.

Gestational Stages of an Image

The birth of an image, like that of an infant, is the end product of a long gestational process. We know how babies come about but less about the origins of an image. An image is the *final* product of a gestational development that devolves (unfolds) along four interdependent but distinct stages. Each step completely depends on the preceding. In the order of *devolution* these stages are: 1) general Reality, 2) specific reality, 3) sensory/emotion reality and 4) intellective reality. By way of analogy, think of the stages as soil (general Reality), flower (specific reality), smelling (sensory/emotion reality) and recognition of the flower as a rose (intellective reality) – the end product of the process. A description of each of these four stages follows.

*******SIDEBAR*******

DEVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

Devolution defines an *image* making process while evolution defines a *biological* process. *Devolution* means a gradual *unfolding* or a *pouring out*; it is a deductive process whereby what is complex unfolds becoming less complex. *Evolution* is just the reverse in that the more complex is induced from the less complex. The unfolding of Reality via imaging is *devolutionary*, i.e., a going from the more complex to the less complex – like a teacher breaking down a complex problem to simpler components. In contrast, the biological response to Reality (environment) is evolutionary whereby a lower species advances to a higher or more complex species driven by survival factors - the direction found in devolution and evolution is exactly opposite.

Imaging of Reality that is not pure fantasy is always devolutionary. The gestation of an image is devolutionary because by definition an image seeks to deduce complex Reality into simpler expressions. Even when one image seems to evolve from another, e.g., the image of a nuclear family gradually expanding to *extended* family and then to *tribe* - the imaging

process is essentially an unfolding of the deeper, hidden dimensions of a nuclear family. An image can never *evolve* from Reality – otherwise Reality and image would be synonymous. Rather, Reality *devolves* to a level of specificity needed to enter into the range of human sensory experience in order to be digested into a still simpler imaging format.

We can view the world as either devolving or evolving, depending on the perspective taken. From a devolutionary perspective, the world is a complex mystery that needs to be unfolded in simpler form to make it understandable. In contrast, from an evolutionary perspective, the world is growing in complexity, as lower life forms become more complex forms. An *evolutionary* view is readily understandable; a *devolutionary* view is not easily grasped. The conflict between religion and science over evolution owes its origin to the inability to distinguish between the two. It is easy to mistakenly view the development of culture and history as evolutionary rather than devolutionary. The distortion is a fatal error because culture/history are in the realm of image and not biology where the notion of evolution applies. A devolutionary perspective, in which the complex is reduced to the simple, is fundamental to the understanding of the gestation and birthing of an image.

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General Reality

Think of general Reality like the soil out of which a myriad of plants grow. Or, think of it as the alphabet from which all particular words are derived. There can be an infinite number of words, but all are derived from the same alphabet. Just as a word does not encompass all letters in the alphabet, so, too, no limited expression can ever encompass Reality as a whole. Human thought is a limited expression of general Reality, which exists prior to any thought and can be only *reflected* but never contained in a thought process. The fact that an infinite number of thoughts are possible points to the inexhaustibility of general Reality. The end product of thought is an *image*, which is a step that is farthest removed from general Reality. Reality and image cannot be identical any more than *self* and a *reflection* of self in a mirror can be identical. However, an image morphs into fantasy if it is not rooted in general Reality.

Specific Reality

The second stage of image gestation is that of *specific* reality. Specific reality is anything less than the whole of Reality. If general Reality were the soil, specific reality would be the flower that emerges from the soil. Because general Reality cannot be grasped as a whole, it is necessary that general Reality devolve to some level of specificity. However, specific reality is not separate from general Reality – it is like touching the whole elephant by touching the trunk. Furthermore, the total of all specific reality never adds up to the whole of Reality. General Reality is always beyond all specific expressions – a universe cannot be put into a box. There is, however, a direct connection between general Reality and specific reality. The validity of sensory and intellectual reality depends wholly on the ability to touch Reality through some specific reality.

Sensory/Emotion Reality

While *specific* reality is simply the surrounding tangible world, sensory/emotion reality is the *stimulus* of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell caused by exposure to some specific reality, for example, exposure to a specific tree produces a stimulus on the eye. Emotions are involved in the immediate pre-intellectual processing of sensory experience, for example, an emotion of awe at the sight of a giant redwood. The surrounding world mediates general Reality through specific, tangible expressions within the range of the five senses. However, the stimulus of one of the five senses is distinct from the specific reality, such as a tree that causes the stimulus. Thus, you see a tree but do not become the tree. Sensory/emotion reality is the boundary between self and the surrounding world.

Intellectual Reality

The fourth and final stage in the gestation of an image is the intellectual reality. The intellectual stage may be thought of as a digestive process. Stimuli flooding in through the five senses and flowing through the emotions are like raw material to be digested. Logic is the digestive juices for sensory stimuli. Logic evolved from the need to make sense of sensory experience and is found in both animals and humans. In humans, logic leads to the creation of image; in animals, it remains at an instinctual/behavioral level. Because our logic is image-based, the interpreting of sensory stimuli is different for each individual. Moreover, interpretation of sensory reality flows from an individual's total *framework* of reference, i.e., assumptions about Reality. For example, a child lives in a world very different from that of an adult. Within a child's framework, it is logical to sit on Santa's lap to obtain a toy; an adult doing the same would raise eyebrows.

The product of an individual's logic is an image. Logic seeks to design an image that accurately reflects the specific reality that originally stimulated sensory experience, for example, a burning sensation leads to the logic of respecting a hot stove - *stove as potentially dangerous* is the resulting image. The production of an image makes it possible to avoid being burned every time we are near a stove – the image takes the place of a specific reality, such as a hot stove, but does not burn us. Image making allows us to interact with our environment more safely and efficiently.

Logic/imaging-making opens the door to the wondrous world of culture and technology, but has important limitations. We are prisoners of our five senses. Our logic/imaging totally depends on input from sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The problem is compounded by the fact that sensory stimuli can only *reflect* specific reality – there is a chasm between the world and our sensory experience of it that cannot be bridged. Thus, logic/image-making is once removed from sensory stimuli, twice removed from specific reality and thrice removed from general Reality.

This means that we build our world on assumptions far more than we are willing to admit. All images require conscious or unconscious assumptions about Reality. Even Einstein had to make assumptions as a foundation for thinking; subsequent validation of his assumptions simply became foundational for new assumptions. We make assumption in order to get closer to Reality than what image can convey, but some assumptions more accurately reflect Reality than others.

We are conscious of the images we create, but assumptions tend to sink to a subconscious level and set a framework for our imaging making beyond the range of conscious choice. The underlying assumptions become, in effect, reality for the individual. For example, adults may frame a child's world around a Santa Claus who rewards good behavior. The freedom of the child is not in changing the Santa framework, but in the child's forming of images as to what good behavior would be pleasing to Santa.

Sensory/emotion based data, processed through logic and crystallized as image, generally reinforces assumptions. Our assumptions, in turn, become the basis for creating an image as a blueprint of *action*. Action driven by an image/blueprint reconnects us with Reality, thus closing the cycle; sensory feedback from Reality triggered by our *action* starts the cycle over again. If feedback is positive, the image/blueprint for action continues, if negative, the image is adjusted. For example, the first time a child's good behavior does not get the expected toy, the child's imaged-reality clashes with Reality; eventually, the child modifies the Santa framing of Reality with a more refined assumption. Every action is either in accordance or contrary to general Reality. If not in accordance, an action will meet resistance from Reality. When it comes to Reality, we are all using a white cane to find our way.

Discordance, such as when a Santa imaging no longer fits experience, is crucial in a learning process. Every time Reality mugs our subjective sense of reality, it is an invitation to go back to pay closer attention to sensory stimuli in order to form an assumption more in tune with Reality. Forcing Reality to fit an image only increases the intensity of the resistance from Reality – forcing an image upon Reality is the classic definition of idolatry. An adult still sitting on Santa's lap seeking rewards is an example of an unwillingness to adjust image to Reality. The interaction between image/action/Reality is simply the natural discovery process. Growth continues as long as image/action yields to Reality. Images can never become Reality but are steppingstones to Reality.

Assumptions are the limits we set for our exposure to Reality; imaging within the assumption framework defines concrete reality for an individual. You are the image you create within the 'box' of your assumptions about Reality. As long as the self-image remains connected to Reality enough to get some positive feedback, the self-image is never 'wrong' because it is the functional *self*. Assumptions that are too restrictive only mean that you are missing out on a lot – like blinders on our eyes - but a minimal self-experience is better than none at all. There can be no final and perfect self-image because image can never wholly capture Reality, as in a jar. Through imaging, you become creator of self and master of your destiny – a destiny that must be minimally in concert with Reality. Because of the creative power we have over images, it is small wonder that imaging now dominates the world; so intoxicating is imaging that it is hard to grasp that imaging only reflects rather than replaces Reality.

An individual grows through three distinct levels in framing Reality, namely, the physical, social and self-identity arenas. (The book to read: *Toward a Psychology of Being*, by Maslow.) Filling immediate needs for *physical* survival is the most fundamental framework in creating images regarding Reality. The need to *belong* drives image making at a social level. Finally, a need for self-identity is paramount once survival and belonging needs are satisfied.

Even though the framework for creating images expands through physical, social and identity levels, approaching Reality never changes. Gestation of an image (versus groundless fantasy) starts with general Reality→ specific reality→ sensory reality→ intellectual reality. The process - more an art than mastery of a skill - can be long and labor intensive, but the process can never be reversed without self-destructive consequences. As a crude analogy of how the four distinct, gestational stages interact: imagine an apple to be *general* Reality. A piece from the apple is a *specific* reality. When the piece enters your mouth it stimulates taste, size and texture producing sensory reality that reflects the whole apple. Finally, sensory reality transits into intellectual reality via a logical process akin to chewing, swallowing and digesting, ending in image forming.

We have both a *physical* and *image* body. The composite of all images we create or absorb constitutes our image-body. Whether it is your biological or image body - out of which you derive a sense of self - the sequence is the same: physical digestion comes only after biting into the apple, likewise, image formation comes only after sensory experience of some specific reality. It is important to bear in mind *how* general Reality ends up as a mental image and not just focus on the end product of *image*. Reality is far more complex than a shiny apple; image is a handle we use but is never itself Reality.

We tend to pay more attention to the end product, namely, *image* rather than the process and even less on Reality itself. This is not surprising because the body of human knowledge, representing the accumulated images of Reality, doubles with each generation and is now far beyond the capacity of any individual to process. A thoughtful person focuses on *assumptions* rather than on *images* generated by assumptions. It is impossible to process the flood of images. Understanding *how* to navigate the sea of human knowledge through sorting out assumptions insures that Reality remains the underlying goal in image making.

*******SIDEBAR*******

SENSORY EXPERIENCE AND CERTITUDE

Since there is an unbridgeable chasm between sensory experiences and physical reality, how then can we reach beyond our world of images and gain a sense of certitude? Philosophers have wrestle with this riddle for centuries. A beginning point is in the *recognition* that underlying both physical and sensory reality is Life, without which there could be no *concept* of Reality in the first place. It is reasonable to assume that growth in *certitude* comes from what brings greater depth and intensity of life, thus the deepening *experience of life* itself is the avenue for certitude. As a rule of thumb, an image conveys certitude in the measure that it enhances life. The intellect is not the primary source of certitude, but serves as the gardener to till and prune a growing experience of life – called wisdom. Life existed billions of years before brains ever evolved.

Life is not static but has infinite potential. The evolving complexity of life from a simple bacterium to the genius of Einstein reflects the potential of Life. Images either enhance or hinder Life. A clue to how good a fit an image is in reflecting Reality is often in the joy versus despair it produces. The positive/negative interaction between image and Reality is the only source of certitude. As an analogy, good food and exercise give life to the body while the opposite drains life. Like food, some images are life giving while others are life draining.

The assumption is that Life is the core of Reality and alone remains the source of certitude. The possibility of error always increases as you move down the path of general Reality→ specific reality→ sensory reality → intellectual reality, ending in image. Thus, *image* is the farthest removed from Life/Reality. Reversal of this one-way street means a deadly collision with Reality – images can never produce Reality. An increase in image refinement must go hand-in-hand with an increase in depth of life, if it is to be in sync with Reality. A true educator teaches a student *how* to absorb Reality not *what* to learn. Once a student is connected with Reality, his/her image making ability and life will expand forever accompanied with a deepening sense of certitude.

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Power of Images

Place a plank on the ground and everyone could walk it; place it over a deep chasm and imaging renders few capable of crossing on it. We are prisoners of our imaging. An image is a *tool* and, indeed, is the most potent tool at our disposal - the pen is mightier than the sword. Children are particularly vulnerable to the power of image, for example name-calling can be devastating. But images retain power throughout life. When protesters burn or trample upon the national flag,

intense passions are aroused; many are willing to lay down their life in defending it. The power of imaging is evident in such abuses as mind-control, brainwashing, misleading advertising, propaganda, video-game violence and a television culture that isolates generations and trivializes deeper human experiences. Abuse of imaging capitalizes on the phenomenon that constant repetition of images, as in brainwashing, becomes reality; a lie repeated often enough can sink into the subconscious and be accepted as truth. North Korea today is a classic example where Reality is what the state determines it to be. Victims in this society live in an image prison imposed by the government through force.

Imaging can be used to damage but also to heal and enhance abilities. Cancer patients sometimes report reduction or elimination altogether of cancerous growth by focusing imaging in a healing way on the part of the body affected – a power of positive thinking. Individuals against all hope sometimes regain their ability to walk through imaging the behavior so intensely that the body begins to respond. Olympic athletes have won gold medals not by inborn abilities alone, but through intense imaging of the performance needed to win the sought after prize. Survivors at sea or those marooned in some other inhospitable setting ascribe near superhuman endurance by focusing on images of a loved-one, family or other value related image. Experts in the martial arts use imaging to focus power in their hands or feet in feats that would leave most of us crippled for life.

At a societal level, imaging underpins all social institutions. Corporations zealously guard the reputation of their corporate logo because of the tremendous economic power at stake. The entire monetary system of the world is based on imaging in the form of paper currency. Imaging is a powerful means for transforming society, leading it on a path to war or peace. Those seeking public office are very much aware of the power of positive but especially of negative images. Elections are sometimes won or lost on one negative image. Power of images is evident not only in the images imposed by others, such as through state, school or family, but also in the self imposed images related to values and goals. Positive images can be the source of pleasure; negative images can lead to much pain. For example, bills consistently paid on time create pleasure in having an image of a good credit rating.

Imaging that creates a virtual reality is a vital tool in industry. Virtual reality enables engineers to create cars, buildings and airplanes to test suitability and performance before actual construction, thus minimizing time and cost. Virtual reality increasingly replaces live animals in medical and behavioral research. Surgeons operate hundreds of miles removed from the patient using imaging technology. Information technicians foresee the time when anything that can be imagined can be built in cyberspace and then turned into reality – a complete reversal of how we traditionally approach Reality. Virtual reality is becoming so powerful and pervasive that Reality sinks into the shadows.

Imaging may become a drug of choice to the extent that Reality will no longer be accessible to the addicted individual. Reality TV is an oxymoron – the quickest way to Reality is to turn off the television. Facing Reality often seems boring or frustrating, thus making virtual reality more appealing. There is no antidote to this addiction. The danger increases as virtual reality programs become three-dimensional and with such high level of definition that an image becomes indistinguishable from Reality. Movie producers now make extensive uses of computer generated imaging so that reality and computer imaging cannot be differentiated. Paraplegics have found great relief in the virtual reality of a cyber world. For some paraplegics, life is hell on earth. In cyberspace, a disabled individual is able to walk, run, jump and dance uninhibited. Why would such a one want to surrender freedom in cyberspace for the paralysis of Reality? Escape from Reality is very enticing not just to those with handicaps but also to many frustrated with life's challenges. Humans become aliens in their own world. Anyone finding Reality too harsh may easily be tempted to create an image-world that is more comfortable and controllable.

Creating a fantasy world disconnected from Reality can be dangerous not only to the individual but to society. Viewing the world solely in a context of sports is an example of a contrived image-world. A person addicted to sports is inclined to view wars as a contest to be won rather than a failure of diplomacy. Children play in an image world of video games in which the world is simplistically divided between the good and bad guys, and they can shoot down the bad guys hour after hour. A few youngsters, when the line between image and Reality blurs, fetch a gun to shoot down the bad guys in the form of teacher or fellow student. Perhaps because of disconnect of image from Reality, the child thinks everything will go away at the turn of switch as if nothing has occurred.

Humans now have the power to create their own reality. Thus, if an image-stream on one television channel is discomfiting, a comfort zone can be found in dozens of others; if a neighborhood is uncongenial, a car is readily available for escape; if the surrounding culture is distasteful, it is easy to withdraw and create a private world. The cost is deep dissatisfaction because an image world has replaced connection with Reality/Life. Imaged reality leaves a

nagging hollowness inside. For the first time in history, it is possible to practice idolatry in its truest sense, i.e., turning an image into Reality.

Image as a Living Organism

Images mimic life because we create them to gain a deeper hold on Life. In contrast to the instinctual drives of animals, imaging is the human way of reaching beyond an immediate life-experience to grasp Life more deeply. As a consequence, an image can have a quasi-life of its own. Like a living organism, an image is capable of reproducing, but on a different scale. Organisms are chemically bound, but images are not. Cough in a crowded theater and a few may get a cold; yell *fire* in a crowded theater and panic spreads instantly throughout the entire crowd. Images are not bound by biology and, once created, can spread independently and instantly around the world. The picture of a caisson conveying the body of the assassinated J.F. Kennedy is an instance where an image electrified the world. The collapsing twin towers of the World Trade Center created an indelible image on the world psyche. An image-based virus can spread nearly instantly throughout the computer world.

Images are as flesh and bone in making you who and what you are. Positive or negative images in the mind of a mother begin to have an influence on a fetus long before birth. Along with a mother's milk, an infant absorbs a world of images operative in a caretaker. If the surrounding image world of an infant is sterile rather than stimulating, the infant will fail to thrive even if food is adequate. The newborn will spend the first eighteen years of life absorbing the images needed to function in a wider culture beyond a family environment. It is not an exaggeration to say that an individual is a culture first and a biological entity second - it is not uncommon to find a youth absorbed in an image world effectively shutting out consciousness of biological limitations and vulnerability.

Images become most like organisms when they are automated and sink to a subconscious level. The automation of imaging at a subconscious level evolved because it proved useful for survival. If cavemen had to reconstruct strategies (imaging) underlying good hunting skills every time food was needed, humans would still be gatherers of roots and herbs rather than advance to become skilled hunters. We often make use of the automating feature of imaging. For example, if I desired to reach a particular goal, such as loss of weight, I carefully construct a plan that includes my desired weight, timetable for reaching my goal, diet needed, behavior changes and willpower level. I then attempt to automate the plan by carefully and persistently reprogram my lifestyle to reach my goal. In time, the original plan becomes so automated that it takes on a life of its own and seems like the natural thing to do. The sub-conscious program can be again raised to a conscious level. I can recall the original goal for weight loss, compare my actual behavior, and reinforcing the original image pattern through thought/choice/action. Automated images governing life provide a sense of making progress. Without automated images it would be necessary to learn to tie a shoe all over again each day.

We often make a conscious effort to turn image into virtual bone and muscle. For example, after carefully studying manuals, an amateur golfer mentally constructs the perfect swing that sends a golf ball straight down the fairway toward the green. Unfortunately, the mental and bodily swing don't immediately jive, sending the ball straight into the nearest clump of trees. A determined golfer repeats the swing numerous times until the image in the mind begins to take on bone and muscle that force the body to conform to the mental image. The body itself is in-fleshing an image of hitting a golf ball straight – mind and body are now in harmony.

The repeated swing of a golf club imprints in the body the desired image/skill. The image rather than the body now controls the swinging action in an increasingly unconscious, automated way. The golfer can now focus attention on other things such as how to spend anticipated prize money, what to have for lunch, or where to vacation with family. If later, attention is again given to the process of hitting the ball correctly, chances are the incarnated, automated image will be disrupted and the ball will become tree-bound again. We often refer to certain behaviors as habits or skills. But, habits/skills are simply automated images making it easier for us to engage in multiple tasks at the same time.

There is a down side to automated images. If automated images are bad habits or lead to task overload, there will be a price to pay. Bad habits require a difficult process of unlearning. Overload of subconscious, automated images can lead to chaos. For example, you may have a long cherished image (visualization) of yourself teaching in a classroom. This image sustains you through long grueling hours of study to earn a teaching degree needed to achieve your dream. During your college years you meet a soul mate, adding lifelong romance to a teaching career. Wedding music soon fades and children begin arriving. Self-image as a good parent now enters the picture. Children grow and take on activities and goals of their own, leading to greater parental demands and pressure to redefine the role of a parent regarding when to hang on or let go.

In the course of your life, you have created and automated images of a teacher, spouse, parent and councilor. Each of these lifestyle images has the potential of draining all energy resources. The four value-laden images independently press blindly forward in your psyche toward fulfillment in a sort of survival of the fittest struggle. You may choose to give priority to success in a teaching career with the result that the image of partner in love or ideal parent is pushed into the background. These subconscious, shunned images, instead of being supportive, may begin to produce guilt, further draining your energy.

Besides these life-style images, you often create many more competing images that require time, talent and energy to maintain. These long or short termed images may include seeing yourself as a dutiful support to aging parents, contributor to civic endeavors, devotee to religious obligations, best candidate for promotion at work, accomplished sports person, informed practitioner of a healthy life-style, and many more images that, once created, have a life of their own. Loss of control, due to conflicting and sometimes unconscious images, can lead to internal chaos and need for professional help. A counselor basically helps the individual to go back and sort through choices made that created image patterns that have become so incarnate as to be no longer subject to free will. Finding a balance among automated images frequently requires a considerable period of deprogramming and prioritizing to restore conscious choice and order.

Changing an Image

Changing an image requires the exercise of free choice because images are mental tools freely devised by self or others for some purpose. Before free choice can be exercised regarding modifying or changing an image, two preconditions must be at least minimally present. The first is an *awareness* of image as *image* and, secondly, awareness of an image's potential for an *independent* life of its own. The more an automated image sinks to a subconscious level, the more control over it diminishes and, consequently, the more power it has.

According to cognitive neuroscientists, we are conscious of only about five percent of our cognitive activity. So much of our decisions, actions, emotions and behavior depend on 95 percent of brain activity beyond conscious awareness. (The article to read: *Mysteries of the Mind*, U.S. News and World Report 2/28/05 p. 57.) It is imperative, therefore, to cultivate a continuous reassessment of thought and behavior at a conscious level. Continuous reassessment of cognitive activity is analogous to consuming good food as a means of cleansing the body of toxins. Automated images, however, may be so deeply embedded that they require major effort to raise them to a consciousness level. Becoming aware of buried images is only the first step and, perhaps, the easiest. Modifying or altering a deeply ingrained image can be a challenge of a lifetime, especially if the image has cultural roots.

The first step in gaining free choice over images is to develop a sharp *awareness* of the distinction between *Reality* and *image*. The culture in which we live is simply an accumulation of images meant to reflect Reality and was created by ourselves or passed on to us by our ancestors. In forming a culture, our ancestors drew from their immediate environment upon which they based fundamental assumptions about Reality. Radically different environments, such as desert, rainforest or arctic lands, produced very different cultures due to survival strategies needed in dealing with a specific environment. However, every element of a culture is rooted in choice of one or more of our ancestors. Furthermore, the choice made was based on a trial and error approach to Reality. The choices made accumulate to form a culture that takes on a life of its own.

Besides the ability to distinguish image from Reality, free choice requires also an awareness of the independent life an image can develop. How a fascist versus a democratic society images the role of an *individual* demonstrates how imaging can take on an independent life. In a fascist culture, individuality is sacrificed for the good of the whole; in a democracy, respect for the individual is the basis for the good of the whole. Thus, in Nazi Germany, advocating for individual human rights was the quickest route to a firing squad. Nazi Germany and America represents two radically different imaging of the individual. North versus South Korea also reflect the two fundamentally different imaging of the individual.

Cultures have many arenas of imaging. Each culture is composed of images clustering around beliefs related to politics, science, religion, economics, cosmology, education, environment, language, gender roles, family, art, amusement, technology and a host of other categories that together produce the viable image-world of a specific culture. To function within a wider culture, an individual must conform to the generally accepted cultural images. However, through our free choice we create an individual culture that may or may not include all the elements of a wider culture.

Images embedded in a general culture are by far the hardest to change because they form the ‘genetic code’ of our consciousness. Language is a cultural element that embodies underlying assumptions that can have powerful influence at a subconscious level. For example, the Russian language is romantic (i.e., relational), thus favors vagueness because imprecision is more conducive to unfolding relationship. English, by contrast, is a language of precision that tries to capture exactness and nuances of meaning. Thus, Russians have a word for *snake* that refers to the animal. If they wish to add a malevolent aspect, they need to add a qualifier to snake, such as an evil or cunning snake. The tendency in the English language, however, is to invent a new word rather than adding qualifiers, thus, instead of *cunning snake*, the word used is *serpent*. This word is more precise in conveying intended meaning. Thus, a *serpent* rather than an evil snake tempted Eve. The English language subtly forces an individual toward an image-world defined by facts, exactness, precision and meticulousness. The Russian language, in contrast, forces an individual toward a world favoring meaning, mystery, and ambiguity by leaving some of the work of communicating to the imagination – an environment in which relationship flourishes.

But, one might object, imagery buried deep in the structures of language appears to be so subtle as to have little or no influence on free choice. Why dig into language imagery that seems to have no apparent effect? Contrary to what would be expected, the subtler an image the more power it has. The romanticism built into the Russian language favors relationship at the expense of individuality. The relational/egalitarian influence inherent in the Russian language made the culture a good fit for Communism – an ideology that dominated Russia for seventy years and led to a relentless suppression of individual uniqueness and freedom. The underlying relational imagery, operating at a subconscious level, nearly brought the world to a nuclear holocaust - obviously not a trivial matter.

In contrast, images favoring precision, as in the English language, support the individual over the community. It is not surprising that competition driven Capitalism is a good fit for English speaking people. Self-reliance, entrepreneurship, personal rights and individual freedoms are paramount in the English-speaking world. Disregard of the common good as a whole in favor of uncontrolled free enterprise, however, invites an environmental holocaust.

From the above example regarding language, the need is clear that awareness is the first step toward controlling and changing images. Images buried in the fabric of a culture can be as damaging to the health of a society as a virus hidden in a human cell can be destructive of bodily health. Any image that sinks beyond conscious choice can be beneficial in the short term but, over time, can also become destructive. Circumstances change so that a solution to a problem in one era can bring serious trouble in another. There can never be a perfect image that will be valid for all times because images are only tools, not Reality.

Culture-based images define a society at a sub-conscious level and, therefore, strongly resist change. Automated culture-wide images change so slowly that few are even aware of the transformation. Occasionally, a cataclysmic event comes along that brings sudden and dramatic change. Historians point to World War II as one such event in which America lost the innocence of youth, with its nurtured image of isolation and self-sufficiency, to take on an adult role of responsibility in the world. Copernicus and Darwin radically altered deep cultural imaging.

Cultural changes may also arise from very subtle pressures. The exploding age of communication today is shifting American society away from a factory/farming base culture to a service/information-oriented world. While many may pay little attention, persons loosing their factory job are jolted into a new world through loss of livelihood. Technology related to travel and communication is leading to the blending of cultures causing many to feel left out and afraid. Rapid globalization of trade, economics, and human rights only increases the tempo.

Also, each individual may be viewed as a unique culture. The role of education is to provide understanding of and control over images. Children learn good or bad self-images from parents or from other authority figures, but do not have the experience needed to choose much less change their own self-governing images. Educators are particularly aware of the need to modify, strengthen or eliminate images that govern the lives of children. A self-image, good or bad, is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a child has a negative self-image of being a slow learner, a hopeless failure, unwanted or unlikable, the child will, in most instances, perform according to the image. A child with a positive self-image will learn easily and generally develop well socially.

An alert teacher lessens the effects of a bad self-image on a child by over-rewarding positive behavior that contradicts the child’s negative self-image and under-correcting behavior stemming from a bad self-image. If correction for

disruptive behavior originating from a child's bad self-imaging is too severe, the youngster could easily misconstrue the teacher's reaction as confirmation of self-ineptitude or worthlessness. The role of a teacher is to help students to understand the distinction between themselves and the images they have inherited, and assist them in learning to make a mature, free choice that includes taking responsibility for images that they allow to influence their lives. Thus, a child learns to pay attention to images operating at a self-forming level and then is able to grapple with images at a general cultural level.

Awareness of the wider culture develops slowly. As a child matures, difference between parental view of the world and the image world of peers become evident. This awareness is an invitation for a child to begin to exercise free choice. Some teenagers, faced with choice for the first time, over react to the adult world and rebel. The reaction can be so intense that some try to hold their world together by seeking refuge in drugs, which soon devours their ability to choose. In some cases, unable to grasp the distinction between image and Reality, belonging to a peer group becomes so idolized that any threat of exclusion risks suicide. For an immature individual, *image* and *self-identity* are the same. A mature person not only becomes aware of an image as *image* but also recognizes that he/she has the power to create or change images.

Alteration, elimination and neglect are three methods for changing a cultural image. An example of image *alteration* occurred recently when a southern state redesigned its flag. The state moved a symbol glorifying a racially biased southern confederacy from a prominent position on the state's flag to the bottom of the flag, intending to give the symbol only a historical importance. The change was designed to reduce and eventually eliminate violent behavior stemming from racial conflict. The end of World War II provides an example of image *elimination* to bring about behavior change. The victorious allies ordered the eradication of the swastika throughout Germany in an effort to purge super-race behavior promoted by the Nazi regimen. Finally, images can change gradually by simple *neglect* as when a patriarchal society gradually morphs into a participatory, egalitarian community or visa versa.

Widespread images, such as racial prejudice, often overwhelm the exercise of free choice for many. While you may feel quite helpless in changing culture-wide images, you retain the power to change a cultural image's controlling influence at an individual level. Changing often requires a long and difficult process of making a conscious choice a thousand times, if need be, until a new imaging pattern crowds out the old. A certain sense of cultural alienation may follow.

Alienation goes with the territory in becoming aware of sub-conscious images and exercising choice over these images. Inheritors of images often have long forgotten or never realized the deep-seated assumptions about Reality that ancestors had when they created an image. Gender specific roles in a particular society, for example, often stem from conditions at the time of tribal origins. Ancient survival pressures that gave priority to hunting and war may have served to foster male dominance. An image of male supremacy, once created, often endures indefinitely and may continue to control behavior within a particular culture even though the original rationalization for the behavior is long forgotten or discounted.

Changing a culturally supported image involves the difficult and sometimes unsettling task of sorting out basic assumptions about Reality made by ancestors. You begin the change process usually by modifying, eliminating or counteracting the inherited image-induced *behavior*. Once you attempt behavioral change, you will often face traumatic personal and social ramifications as a consequence. Cultural forces have a life of their own, are powerful and usually blind. A worldview of Capitalism versus Communism, fostered during the era of the Cold War, had taken on a life of its own. Stepping outside that syndrome led to severe personal and social consequences. For example, behavior protesting the Vietnam War led to imprisonment for some.

Changing images you freely choose to govern your life is far easier than modifying images embedded in your culture. Once you make a free choice, you begin by internalizing signs or symbols needed to turn your dream into actuality. For example, if you choose to become an electrical engineer, you begin focusing on finance, college selection, applications, studies and graduation - all the steps necessary to make real your initial image of being an engineer. If, in mid-course, you chose to become a lawyer, you can easily change the mental images needed to pursue the new dream. However, you may find it a lot easier changing internal images of your desired profession than raising the money to support the change.

Imaging is never static in your own life or in the wider culture. Humans use imaging as a stepping-stone to achieve a deeper sensitivity to Reality. This is what is meant by the *devolution* of image making – images become progressively more refined to more adequately reflect Reality. This is true in your own psychic development as well as in cultural

refinement. By continually refining images in the social/psychic realm, humans are able to more effectively and efficiently exploit Reality to their benefit.

We improve on image making expertise by building on skills handed down by our predecessors and by interacting with others who are also image-makers. You can see the development of image making in many fields of endeavor: in the progression from making stone tools to landing robots on distant planets, from simple social structures of small roving bands of humans to modern democratic nation states, from a few grunts to coordinate a hunt to communication through Shakespearian language. The image making ability is passed on from generation to generation making progress in reflecting Reality possible.

Resistance to Image Changing

Automated images that produce a habituated mode of behavior make life easier and more predictable. The resistance we feel at even minor changes in habitual ways of thinking or behavior stems not just from the discomfort of change but also from our evolutionary past. Our world of images is directly related to and grows out of our connection with nature in general. All living organisms are products of their environment and instinctively resist change because environment and survival are intrinsically related.

Culture mimics nature in its stiff resistance to change. A culture ‘devolves’ analogous to the physical evolution found in plants and animals. What genes are to physical evolution, images are to cultural devolution. Genes, encoded in your body, determine your height, eye and hair color, gender, race, shape of nose and countless other features of your body. The countless images that make up a culture determine the perception of Reality by a society as a whole and by each individual within a given society – the individual is the concrete expression of a particular culture. Just as we draw our genes from a biological pool of genes, we draw subconscious images from a cultural pool of images. Your self-identity reflects the image world of your culture. Struggle for survival drives resistance to change in nature, culture and self-imaging.

To illustrate how a cultural element may be analogous to a gene that determines who we are, suppose Congress did away with Christmas. I would guess voters would sooner do away with Congress. All the cultural ‘genetic’ elements of bells, lights, hymns, cribs, reindeer, presents, decorated trees, star, wise men and so on are deeply embedded in our cultural persona. Or, to make it personal, suppose graduations from high school were to be eliminated. That long past event of graduation represents coming of age. Fifty years after high school people still gather to celebrate the occasion. We forget how deep cultural genes go. Just as we can trace the evolution of genes in our physical body, we can trace the devolution of cultural genes that go to make up our perception of Reality and individual persona.

Genes provide for rock-solid stability but also, strangely, serve as the arena of change. For example, a few aquatic animals survived by developing lungs when a pond or lake evaporated. These survivors passed on the adaptation to offspring. Genetic codes are revised to meet survival needs in a changing environment. In catastrophic changes only a few in a species survive to pass on altered genes.

The same can be said at a culture/psyche level, some traumatic event or circumstance intervenes to bring about change, especially in elements deemed fundamental to our lives. For example, an individual may retain the cultural element of racial prejudice as an operative image until forced to change by disruptive civil rights marches, riots or an act of Congress. Your image world provides you with both self-identity and livelihood. Images, like genes, go to your very core, accordingly, it is not surprising that there is a natural, inborn resistance to change and adjustment comes slowly and often painfully.

Recapitulation

Rather than rely on speed, agility, tooth or claw, humans evolved as image-makers. With image making comes freedom of choice and growing awareness of imaging as quite distinct from the Reality reflected. Awareness of the distinction between Reality and image not only fosters a free choice but also greater awareness of the effects an image produces. Animals, because they cannot make a Reality/image distinction, are driven only by instinct and are unaware of behavioral consequences. All of us, however, begin life surviving by instinct. Human infants, like many animals, instinctively cling and suckle. Newborns cannot distinguish form or color needed to create images. Humans require many years of dependency on parents to allow time for brain development necessary for mastering the world of image making. The large size of a newborns head, causing much difficulty in birthing, is due to the child’s destiny as an

image-maker. Freedom of choice is not a birthright. The challenge of a lifetime is to attain the ability to distinguish image from Reality and forcing imaging, by deliberate choice, to be bridge not barrier between self and Reality.

Imaging can be a tool to leverage Reality as well as a means to escape from Reality. The information age today rain down such a deluge of new images that a sense of continuity and security derived from a stable and familiar world are being washed away. Each generation produces more information than all previous generations combined. Travel, television and the Internet are rapidly dispelling national boundaries and blending cultures. No generation before has faced such as onslaught of information/images.

Survival means paying attention not so much to *what* the images are that flood the airways, but to *how* a healthy mind processes images. A health mind develops a keen sense of the assumption made about Reality from which a given image is derived – images disconnected from Reality are like harmful pollutants. (The three basic assumptions about Reality that produce three radically different image streams will be discussed in a later chapter.) Recognizing clearly the beginning assumption about Reality underlying an image stream enables free choice needed for selecting, evaluating, modifying, rejecting, accepting, ignoring or questioning images shooting by at near the speed of light. A sense of Reality, however minimally defined, is the basis for a beginning assumption and a sense of self-identity. Images in a fast moving world must be made to serve and not obstruct a growing sense of self-identity in the context of Reality.

Ingrained images can easily decrease or eliminate altogether an individual's power of choice. Specialists in the field of science, religion, politics and other fields of expertise run the danger of refining imaging within a narrow field of inquiry to such a degree that the images become the Reality they are meant to reflect – this is the classic definition of idolatry. We are all artists with varying skills in providing insight into Reality. An artist/scientist/theoretician can reveal or expose a bit of Reality through images, but can never plumb its depth. Images not only reflect Reality but also mirror a growing sense of self. Images reveal as much about the self as they do about Reality.

CHAPTER TWO

SELF

Summary: As image-makers humans reign supreme over all the earth, but we are far more than the images we create. Self-identity emerges from the ongoing tension between our raw experience of life and the images we create to define that experience.

Self-Experience versus Self-Image

Origin of Self in Psychological Anthropology

Consciousness of Consciousness

Pattern

Imaging

Reification

Cause/Effect

Reasoning

Self/Object

Self/All/else

Self/Other-Selves

Self/Other-Self

Self in History

Psychology as the Science of Self

Self and Modern Science

Recapitulation

SIDEBAR

SELF AS A CULTURAL DIVIDE

A young woman, cold and exhausted from a long day at her job, stands waiting for a bus that would take her home to a much needed rest. When the bus arrives, she wearily climbs aboard, pays her fare and sinks into the nearest vacant seat. A short time later, a man boards the bus and, as he looks for a seat, is irritated that all the front seats are occupied. The young woman knows that the law requires that she vacate her seat and move to the back of the bus so that the white man could sit down. Feeling the aches from an exhausting day, the young woman refuses to relinquish her seat. A commotion follows prompting the bus driver to call the police to arrest and remove the young woman from the bus.

Rosa Parks, the exhausted young woman, is torn between a *self-image* of a black woman denigrated by racial laws and a *self-experience* that is at the core of every human. She elects *self-experience* over *self-image* that implies equality with all humans. Yielding her seat would be a surrender of her dignity as a self. Acting on *self-experience* in lieu of *self-image* as a black woman sparks a revolution that reverberates around the world to this day. The dignity of self prior to a *self-image* that is formed out of racial, social and economic status sets the foundation for civil rights as a cornerstone of a new society.

Self-Experience versus Self-Image

Self-image and self-experience are not the same. Self-image often is so overwhelming that any notion of self-experience as a distinct reality is simply buried. The difference between the two is enormous. Self-experience is the direct link to Reality; self-image is the functional identity needed to participate in society. A child begins with a self-experience and is acculturated into a self-image. Recapturing self-experience is like recovering the innocence and wonderment of a child. Self-image can be so absorbing that, for some, self-experience virtually ceases. A dictator forms a self-image centered on power at the expense of self-experience. There is more to self than power, race, age, gender, intelligence, social status and the like. It is this deeper sense of self that prompts Rosa Parks to demand unqualified respect.

The education of youth demonstrates the contrast between self-experience and self-image. Teachers place great emphasis on self-esteem among children. What they are referring to is a sense of *self* prior to the *image* of self. Self is not like a book or computer simply waiting for the right information to be entered by some authority figure. Self is a relation that must be discovered through love and respect. Self-awareness sparks a desire within the child to delight in exploring the world. This is a continuation of the same learning process in which an infant in a secure and loving environment naturally begins exploring the surrounding world. A self treated with dignity blossoms and creates an atmosphere for others to grow in self-awareness.

Self-experience emerges from the experience of *pre-reflected* Reality, while self-image is the result of *reflected* reality. Self-experience comes prior to any expression or imaging of what constitutes a self. The purpose of self-imaging is to bring to the surface what it means to have a distinct self-experience. Self-experience is potentially unlimited because it is directly related to Reality; self-image is always circumscribed and specific because it is an image of Reality.

Self-experience is like one's face that cannot be seen directly but only indirectly as a reflection in the mirror of self-image. We can examine our self-image because it is the product of our intellect and is a composite of many images; self-experience is not a product of intellect but forms the direct link with Reality. Self-image is the waste product of a growing self-experience. Thus, self-image changes as self-experience develops. Since self-experience directly relates to Reality, an unchanging self-image is a form of idolatry – a forcing of Reality to be identical to an image. Self-experience produces self-images in order to function in society. Imaging not only gives us a role in society but also is a tool for probing deeper into self-experience as the critical connector to Reality. Regardless how deep the probe, we can never reach the depth of either self-experience or Reality.

The distinction of self as *experience* versus *image* becomes apparent in the modern crime of identity theft. Stealing the *self* of another is possible because information technology creates a self in cyberspace. Self-image consists, among other images, in social security number, birth date, driver's license, credit card and mother's birth name. Using these images, anyone can become you.

A victim of identity theft is shocked into the realization that there is a world of difference between self-experience and self-image – self-image can be stolen like a purse but self-experience cannot. Self-experience is deeper than any external expression – physical or symbolic. To put it in the imagery of grammar, self-experience can only be the *subject* of a sentence and never the object. The self, as a subject, always acts on the object in a way specified by the verb – it could never be the reverse. An object may be stolen but a subject cannot. Your self-experience derives directly from Reality not from image and is an untouchable sanctuary.

For those who have never made a distinction between an experiential and imaged self, identity theft can be tantamount to rape. The pain of financial loss is overshadowed by the shock that what is deepest, namely, a *self* can be stolen. It is as if only a shell remains. The sensation is like looking at the world around and *you* no longer exist. However, true identity comes from self-experience, while self-image is only the surface perception of self-experience - useful in defining your role or function in society. A self-image can be stolen/destroyed, but self-experience endures untouched.

Origin of Self in Psychological Anthropology

The distinction between self-*experience* versus self-*image* may be obvious today, but it was not always so. Although self-experience exists from human origins, the ability to distinguish self-experience from image develops glacially slow. Defining the depth of self-experience will always be a work in progress. Image making is the tool we need to delve into the deeper reality of a distinct self-experience. The depth of self-experience that we enjoy today is the fruit of laborious image making pursued by previous generations. There never would have been a Rosa Parks had there not been a long devolutionary process of reflecting Reality via images leading finally to the notion of a distinct self. Image is but the surface wave on the deep ocean of self-experience.

The realization that a sense of self is not a full-blown awareness in early humans has sparked a fairly new sub-discipline of Anthropology, called Evolutionary Psychology. (Note: It is more accurate to refer to the sub-discipline as *Devolutionary* Psychology, because the *brain* evolves toward complexity, but the *mind* devolves by reducing complexity to simplicity - see sidebar in previous chapter.) Physical anthropology traces the evolution of human bone structure, brain and bodily features in response to the physical environment; devolutionary psychology traces the interaction of the mind with a complex intellectual environment to reduce it to simplicity. As the human body evolved slowly, so, too, did human awareness of nature and humanity itself. The wiring of the brain increased in complexity in order for the human intellectual world to devolve toward simplicity. Coming to focus on a distinct *self* is the latest and the ultimate simplification of Reality in a long devolution of human consciousness.

It is one thing to find an ancient skull and surmise facial features, brain size, age, gender and the like, it is quite another to assess the capacity of the brain to process sensory stimuli originating from the surrounding environment. Anthropologists use artifacts, such as bones, to trace the course of human *physical* evolution. However, ancient tools, pottery, buildings and the like are artifacts that can give insight in the devolution of the human mind in as much as such artifacts reflect the mental ability of early humans for reducing a complex environment to simpler, useable elements.

Humans leave both physical as well as *mental* artifacts. For example, an artifact, such as a stone ax, reflects a growing proficiency in exploiting the environment to obtain food higher in protein; more protein leads to an increase in brain size – devolution and evolution go hand-in-hand. The ax is also evidence that the human crafting the ax had *imaging* capability; an image, or ‘blueprint’ has to precede the actual fabrication of a tool or weapon. A human is first an image-maker and only then a toolmaker. We can reconstruct intellectual artifacts of the mind only from the complexity reflected in physical artifacts. Later, when writing develops, the written document becomes a mental artifact reflecting the ancient mind. Psychological devolution is akin to an archeological digging into the human mind to trace the development of intellectual tools as reflected in physical artifacts left behind.

Through the examination of physical artifacts it is possible to identify ten intellectual tools the human mind devolved for simplifying complex Reality. These tools in the order of development are: consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all/else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. Each intellectual tool represents a new stage in reducing Reality to a simpler, more refined comprehension. Anthropologists refer to each dramatic breakthrough introducing a new stage as a *punctuated generalization*. One stage may endure for millennia, and then the universal assumption about Reality is punctuated by a new/deeper insight.

A succeeding stage is not to be thought of as superior to preceding stages but simply different - like a hammer is different from a drill. Each intellectual tool marks a refinement over the previous, thus allowing for interaction with different aspects of Reality. By way of analogy: a drill is a more refined tool than a hammer, but a drill cannot drive a nail. All intellectual tools are needed as they are interrelated and each emerged to meet a specific need. Think of the intellectual tools as increasing ability to differentiate aspects of Reality more precisely. A culture may focus on a particular stage - like a health specialist focusing on one part of the human anatomy - but it is incorrect to assume one culture is superior to another based on the stages of devolutionary psychology.

Intellective stages are like ascending a staircase. Each higher step opens up new vista of Reality not visible at a lower step. Or, growing awareness is like a moth circling closer and closer the brilliant light of Reality. Or, think of the ten stages as a series of ten boxes, beginning with a small one that is placed in a larger one, then the larger placed in still a larger, until there are ten boxes with each increasing capacity. The stages of consciousness are analogous to an increasing box size with each having greater capacity to 'contain' Reality. Each stage includes all the former but adds to Reality a dramatically new dimension. It is a devolutionary process because complex Reality increasingly becomes simplified. While experience of Reality is within the range of all, many find comfort in remaining within a smaller box to frame Reality.

We live in a world that has the three dimensions of height, width and depth. Think of each mental tool as providing insight into a new dimension of Reality. Having only two mental tools is like being confined to one or two dimensions in our three dimensional world. Physicists surmise there are seven more dimensions that are beyond human perceptual capacity. (The book to read: *Hyperspace*, by Michio Kaku.) Just as heart surgery requires more refined tools than building a house, so, too, our consciousness needs finer tools for delving deeper into Reality. Physical evolution is limited, but the devolution of human consciousness has no limit.

It is unlikely that humans were conscious of going from one level of awareness to another. However, we have the advantage of looking back at the amazing paradigmatic expansions in human consciousnesses that are now the psychological underpinnings of modern humans. The expansion of human awareness over time is analogous to adding layers of perception one upon another - as layers of an onion. Each stage includes the former but overlays a new dimension. As an example, pattern recognition is needed before the awareness of imaging and imaging is foundational for reification.

The ability to abstract a deeper insight into Reality is key to transition from one stage to another. Thus, patterns - such as changes of seasons - governed nature for millennia long before the notion of *pattern* as such arose to a conscious level. Once humans achieve a new insight into Reality, it becomes a new plateau for understanding all of Reality. For example, once *consciousness of consciousness* devolves to *pattern recognition*, pattern becomes the basis for perceiving all of Reality. Psychological anthropologists search in pre-history for tangible artifacts that would indicate when the intellective artifact of *pattern recognition* emerged in human consciousness. For example, the ancient stone hedges in England are evidence that the fabricators recognized pattern in the movement of astronomical bodies. Once there is evidence of pattern recognition found in artifacts, it means that humans could perceive pattern not just in the movement of heavenly bodies but also in change of seasons, day/night, cycle of growth and countless other patterns. At this stage of intellective development Reality is simply repetitious pattern.

Yet another example: evidence of fire in caves to cook food is the basis for concluding early humans possessed the mental artifact of *cause/effect*. Ancient humans had to have the intellective artifact of *cause/effect* in order initiate the *practice* of striking flint to produce fire. When the ability to *abstract* the notion of cause/effect as such evolved, humans entered the cause/effect *stage* of consciousness. Cause/effect then becomes the new paradigm for grappling with all of Reality.

Entering into a new stage does not guarantee a transition to the next stage of consciousness. A catastrophic event often occurs forcing a deeper penetration into Reality - we call it being mugged by Reality. This intellective 'law' mimics physical evolution. Thus, a bird does not fly because it has wings; it has wings because it flies. The catastrophic event is scarcity of food. Wings evolved because they facilitated a capturing of more food-energy. Lungs evolved from gills as animals moved from sea to land for safety or food. Human consciousness expands to capture more of Reality when a given stage of consciousness no longer meets experiential needs.

The *notion of self* occurs in the seventh stage of consciousness and is today the cutting edge of psychological devolution. Ancient humans had self-experience, but *consciousness* of a distinct self as an intellective tool occurred only in the past few thousand years. *Self* is a coalescence of Reality in its most simplified form. Unlike previous intellective tools that are functional, *self* is directly linked to undifferentiated Reality. We can get an appreciation of the discovery of self by looking carefully at each of the intellective stages and the accompanying artifacts that give evidence to the development of human consciousness. These mental artifacts reflect the psychological stair step stages of: consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all/else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. A discussion of each stage follows.

Consciousness of Consciousness

Consciousness of consciousness refers to the moment when instinct turned to wonderment. Humans still stand in awe of the universe. All living creatures follow instinct in a drive for day-to-day survival. At some point, a human ancestor broke free of survival struggle and entered the world of wonderment. In as much as wondering implies a consciousness of doing so, wondering reflects the intellectual artifact of consciousness of consciousness. Wonder is a radically new connection with Reality. Reality is both the cause and the substance of human wonder.

It may well have been the experience of death that triggered wonderment. Ancient gravesites provide artifacts - such as crude jewelry - indicating an honoring of the dead. The jewelry is a physical artifact demonstrating that the human mind had expanded beyond the mere survival instincts of animals into a realm where, obviously, immediate survival is not the issue. This expansion of awareness requires the presence of the intellectual artifact of consciousness of consciousness, i.e., a consciousness of wondering. It is fairly certain that lower primates are conscious, but it is highly unlikely that a chimpanzee, our closest relative in the primate world, is conscious of being conscious – certainly not to extent of human consciousness. Only humans bury their dead with tokens of honor. This practice presupposes a unique consciousness in humans. At the moment of conscious wondering, humans entered into the first of the ten stages in psychological devolution.

The developmental stages of an infant replay the human drama of transitioning from instinct to consciousness of consciousness. Every newborn is conscious but does not have reflected consciousness, i.e., is not conscious of being conscious. When hungry, an infant instinctively cries. The infant does not reflect internally, I'm hungry so I think I'll cry to get some food. An infant simply experiences hunger and responds. Infants that did not instinctively cry for food never survived and, consequently, did not pass on such self-destructive behavior to offspring.

We do not know exactly when an infant enters into the intellectual stage of conscious of consciousness. An infant gives evidence of transition from instinct to consciousness of consciousness when the child attaches continuity to the mother's face. At an instinctual level, an infant delights in a peek-a-boo game with the mother because when the mother hides behind a curtain, she simply disappears. A consciousness of consciousness is beginning when the child develops an awareness that the mother is still there even though she is out of sight behind a curtain. At this point a dramatic transformation from instinct to wonderment is occurring in the brain of the infant and as a result the peek-a-boo game doesn't work any more.

Consciousness of consciousness adds a new dimension to the brain while the rest of the brain still functions below a conscious level; there are parts of our brain that consciousness does not reach. Humans, similar to other primates, possess an old brain to which we have no conscious access. This part of our brain controls body temperature, blood pressure, glandular activity and other biological functions. Consciousness of consciousness simply develops a new layer in the brain overlaying the old, called the cerebral cortex.

Consciousness of consciousness has the critical function of unifying pre-reflected experience to make Reality coherent – consciousness is *unifying* since it arises from wonderment not contradiction. A human cannot function without a minimal sense of coherency. Inner consistency is the very substance of consciousness; unconsciousness is loss of coherence. Consciousness provides a level of certitude needed for action without which we would be paralyzed. A compulsion inherent in consciousness that forces cohesion within our brain has been demonstrated in people who have received injury to the left parietal lobe of their brain. Damage to the left parietal lobe results in a neuropsychological syndrome whereby an individual is able to perceive only half the world. The individual afflicted will put on the right sock, the right shoe, shave the right side of the face and put on the right glove with not the slightest clue the left side has been neglected.

Others observe this as irrational behavior. Within the framework of reference provided by the consciousness of the afflicted person, i.e., a right-sided world only, the behavior appears to be balanced and normal. Because consciousness demands coherency, in order for an afflicted individual to do anything, the mind automatically supplies in the imagination the left half of the world now beyond the perception of this individual. The individual actually experiences putting on left and right socks, shoes and gloves and shaving both sides of his face. The role of consciousness is to provide each of us a sense of unity and coherence that enables us to retain a self-experience and a feeling that we think/act logically and sensibly. Another's logic and good sense often seem to be strange simply because we fail to pay attention to the framework of reference, i.e. boundary set by consciousness in the individual.

The down side is that consciousness, which can endure only through coherency, forces the imagination to fill in the holes and, consequently, induces the illusion of always being right. Subsequent action based on an illusion simply reinforces a sense of coherency. Action, however, reconnects the individual with Reality, which provides a negative or positive feedback. Every action may be logical within the coherent consciousness of an individual, but Reality has a way of dealing with over active imaginations.

Pattern

Pattern recognition marks the first step humans took out of the world of wonderment and magic. The great pyramid of Egypt is an intellectual artifact giving evidence that a transition had occurred into the intellectual world of pattern recognition. Built about 5000 years ago, the lines of the pyramid are aligned with a star that never moves. Ancient Egyptians recognize the pattern of star movement and use pattern to define their world. While awareness of pattern is a part of human behavior from ancient times, pattern does not become a mental artifact until humans are able to abstract the notion of pattern as such. Psychological anthropology looks for physical evidence, such as the pyramids, to identify when this mental artifact first begins to appear in human behavior.

Pattern recognition is the basis for the beginning of farming and the domestication of animals. The patterned repetition of the seasons, the cycle of plant growth and the habits of animals conditioned humans to perceive pattern as a fundamental way of reflecting Reality. The exploiting of pattern in nature is a giant step for humans headed down the path of becoming professional image-makers. Awareness of pattern is the one mental artifact that gives humans a sense of the permanency of Reality even to this day. Without pattern, we would be confined to a world of mystery like Alice in wonderland.

Pattern in the mind is analogous to the underlying software that operates a computer. A programmer is able to abstract the software and examine it. It is likewise possible to abstract the notion of pattern as the operating 'software' of the mind. At this point, pattern becomes a conscious mental artifact or tool, which the mind consciously uses rather than simply relies upon as an *unconscious* operating scheme. Pattern is the operating scheme of animals as well as humans - in animals, pattern is simply instinct, in humans, pattern is the first step beyond consciousness of consciousness. Pattern recognition eventually will open the door to the world of imaging.

Imaging

While the first chapter discusses imaging, the focus here is on imaging as the third in a series of ten intellectual tools. Consciousness of consciousness reflects the wonderment of Reality generally, while imaging reflects Reality specifically. Consciousness sets the limits for imaging, while imaging both reinforces the boundaries but also sets the stage for stretching consciousness. The discrepancy between consciousness and image is a tension at the core of every vibrant psyche. Forcing an image on consciousness in order to reduce the tension transforms the psyche into a robot.

Consciousness, pattern recognition and imaging, although closely connected, are very different mental phenomena. The function of consciousness is opposite that of imaging. Unlike imaging, consciousness can never tell us what a specific object is but only what it is not. Consciousness cannot tell you what your favorite chair is but only eliminate everything else in your universe so that the only thing left is your favorite chair. But, consciousness, having eliminated everything else in the world, has no clue what a particular chair is – that is the role of imaging.

It seems to be a strange, laborious and roundabout way to function, but a computer mimics the same thing. When you save a document in your computer, the computer must first search all of its files, numbering perhaps in the hundreds, to see if there is an identical file. If an identical file is found, the computer rejects adding the file you want to save. The reason why a computer rejects a file identical to one in its memory is because it cannot know what a particular file is directly but only what it is not, i.e., the saved file is simply unlike anything in its memory. The role memory plays in a computer is analogous to the role that consciousness plays in humans. We know objects only by what they are not, even though we have the illusion of viewing an object directly as if it were isolated from the surrounding totality.

Eliminating a universe as the way to become conscious of one object is but one of many functions our brain performs below a conscious level. Another example of sub-conscious, automated brain activity is the reversal of an image made on our retina. An image of an external object passes through the lens of the eye and registers upside down and in reverse on the retina in the back of the eye. Our brain automatically and below a conscious level adjusts the image to accurately reflect the object.

If sub-conscious activity does not supply what consciousness needs to retain unity and coherence, the conscious mind draws from the imagination to supply coherence. Children, because of limited experience, make extensive use of imagination in constructing their coherent consciousness – often to the surprise and amusement of adults. In other words, consciousness *causes* mental coherency; the need for coherency in turn stimulates imaging. To maintain coherency, our consciousness effortlessly draws instantly from all our memories and experiences at a speed beyond comprehension. It is humbling to reflect that each of us constructs our sense of Reality from sensory stimuli and turn to our imagination to fill in the gaps. It is wise to wonder whether our perception of Reality is based more on imagination than on sensory experience. Automatic filling in the gaps, however, is an important achievement because it leads to creative action and environmental feedback

Observing the development of an infant gives us an insight into human consciousness and the role played by images. An observant caretaker can detect the development of pattern and image making capabilities in a growing infant. While a newborn cannot distinguish form or color, the face of its caretaker is the first pattern/image to imprint on an infant. For this reason, it is critical for child development that there be at least one consistent caretaker to ensure development of pattern recognition that will eventually lead to imaging ability.

It should be noted, however, that the infant's image of the caretaker is not *image* but *reality*. The child cannot yet distinguish internal versus external, or consciousness versus image. A child will live in an image world that is virtually indistinguishable from surrounding reality for a number of years. The Harry Potter books capitalize on this phenomenon. The first shock may come when the child finds there is no Santa Claus. Transitioning from image as identical to Reality to image as a reflection of Reality is simply the maturing process that extends through a lifetime.

Tracing the devolution of the making of an image is a lot easier than tracing the development of human consciousness. It has been argued that consciousness of the distinction between image and Reality occurred only about three thousand years ago. (See *evolution of imaging* in previous chapter.) In ancient times, humans assumed image and Reality to be identical and many still do. Pre-reflected consciousness, while forming the basis for recognizing pattern and image, will eventually lead to developing self-experience and expressing that experience via self-image. (The book to read: *Origin of Consciousness*, by Julian Jaynes.)

Pre-reflected consciousness is an important 'tool' in producing images. For example, you may decide one evening to write a very important letter on a specific matter. Much to your surprise in the morning you discover that most of the letter has already taken shape in your mind. The image of your writing an important letter had been at work in your sub-conscious mind while you slept. Imaging influences both the conscious and subconscious mind. Sleep may be the time in which useless images are swept from our mind, and useful or unifying images grow stronger. Imaging crystallizes the world around us.

Imaging enabled ancient humans to turn stone into tools and weapons. For well over a million years the technology of stone tool-making remain virtually unchanged, thus indicating how slowly imaging ability devolved. To put it in perspective, if the period of human existence is coalesced into one day, all other technology beyond that of crude stone tools used by ancient humans was invented in the last five minutes. Absence of change indicates that human ancestors were not yet proficient in abstracting and refining images. They were slow to delve into pattern reflected in nature – pattern recognition is prior to image forming. Pattern recognition is the minimal level of abstraction needed for creating a conscious image. The image, in turn, becomes a tool to recognize other patterns that may give rise to yet new images. This is a slow devolutionary process that continues today. However, crossing the line from blind instinct to pattern recognition that gave birth to imaging marks a transition from pre-human to human.

Reification

Reification of the world is an advanced form of imaging. Reification refers to the ability to image one object as distinct from another. Reification is going from a primitive view of Reality as a seamless whole to a Reality made up of isolated objects. The transition is like going from a fully lighted stage where everything stands out equally to spotlighting a single object in isolation from all else. This intellectual tool is called reification or atomization. In philosophy, reification is called *ontology* – the study of the nature of being/existence. Reification is now our subconscious view of Reality thus forming the operating system of our mind. Reification gives depth perception in an otherwise featureless Reality and marks a tremendous breakthrough in interacting with Reality.

Reification is the intellectual tool that drives the development of language. For example, the Mayan language originally used one word meaning a *metal thing* in referring to a computer, a monitor, and a printer, thus clumping them together with all metal objects. Now this language breaks down the generalized perception of metal things into distinct objects each having a more specific name, such as keyboard, software, computer and so forth. All languages evolve by further atomizing the world as new discoveries come to light. We learn a language by connecting a word/sound to a specific object.

An extended discussion of reification as a mental artifact is needed because it is the 'box' within which the Western culture operates. We are locked more into a micro/object rather than macro/global view of Reality. Because the Western mind views Reality primarily through the lens of reification, it is difficult to recognize reification as simply another mental *tool*. Thus, reification for us is not a mental *artifact* because few, if any, can conceive the world as anything but an accumulation of separate objects. To us reification is not an intellectual artifact but the operating design hardwired into our mind for dealing with Reality. Most scientists operate on the assumption that the ultimate constituent of Reality can be found by breaking down matter into ever smaller and smaller particles/objects.

In spite of the Western mindset, reification does not define Reality but is only a tool our mind uses for breaking the world into small pieces to render an overpowering world comprehensible. Reification is in the mind and not in Reality. It is like trying to understand a car by breaking it down by individual parts, component materials, and atomic/subatomic structures. The whole is unrecognizable by its parts; as a total experience, a car is more than its parts. Reality is so overwhelming that our mind approaches the world by turning the universe into an accumulation of objects that can be examined one-by-one. The explosion of technology is a direct result of the reification ability.

Atomizing Reality depends on a dynamic of *isolation* - a focusing on how one object differs from another. Reification represents a huge expansion in the arsenal of mental tools because it is a powerful instrument for stimulating differentiation in our awareness of Reality. The greater the ability to differentiate in a world of objects, the more precise consciousness of Reality becomes. Differentiation means the ability to see an object as distinct from an ever-widening universe of objects. Education is simply honing the ability to differentiate at an ever more precise level. We are often reminded not to use such words as: *never, everywhere, always, everyone, forever* and the like. Frequent use of generalizations reveals an uneducated individual who is unable to differentiate. Differentiation is the holy grail of modern science and a sign of a well-educated individual in the Western world.

Cause/Effect

Reification that distinguishes one object from another opens the door to an awareness of relation *between* objects. Patterned or repeated interaction between two objects leads to expectation that there is a *relation* between the objects. Expected repetition is the definition of the intellectual artifact: cause/effect. If a plant grows when exposed to sunlight, then from observation it can be assumed that the sun *causes* the *effect* of plant growth. If smoke always arises from a fire, a cause/effect relation between fire and smoke eventually becomes evident.

Awareness of pattern has to come before there can be a notion of cause/effect. There can be patterns that are not obviously governed by cause/effect such as the seasonal changes or lightening strikes, but there cannot be cause/effect without pattern. Cause/effect is a new, more penetrating stage of human consciousness beyond simple pattern recognition. For millennia, humans could not detect cause/effect as a relation inherent in pattern. The devolution of tool making, progressing through stone, bronze and iron phases, provides a physical record that ancient humans were slowly becoming aware of the proficiency of one material over another, thus showing a growing awareness that one material causes better effects than another.

Cause/effect does not become an intellectual artifact until it is recognized as a distinct mental tool among other intellectual tools. This recognition occurred about three to four thousand years ago, thus spawning the world of philosophy. Eventually, the intellectual tools of reification and cause/effect gave birth to modern science. The essence of modern science is in discerning cause/effect between one object and another to find how *nature* works, versus simply a philosophical description of how the *mind* works. Scientists, using cause/effect as a mental *tool*, began to explore subtle patterned relations hidden in nature as the path for unraveling Reality. For the scientist, cause/effect through experimental testing is the key to new discoveries.

Reasoning

Reasoning is cause/effect taken to another level of abstraction. Thus, it is *reasonable* to expect that the sun will rise in the east because that has been the *pattern*. There is no clear cause/effect relation, but because the pattern is constant it becomes the basis of reasoning. Modern science may discover underlying cause for the sun to rise in the east upon further investigation of the orbiting of the earth around the sun. However, constant pattern without obvious cause/effect relation gave birth to the more abstract intellectual artifact of reasoning.

Reasoning eventually led to the abstract world of mathematics. Ancient Greeks believe that mathematics is the key to unlocking the mysteries of Reality. Although mathematics may be an extremely refined form of reasoning, mathematics has its root origin in the mental artifacts of reification and cause/effect. Mathematics may yield abstract universals, but reasoning as an *intellectual tool* is rooted in human sensory experience of Reality. What is reasonable in one culture may be irrational in another. Pure reasoning is a philosophical notion, but in reality there exists only *bounded* reasoning – our sensory experience and underlying assumptions establish the perimeters of reasoning. For example, if a child has never experienced love, the behavior of an older brother attracted to a young woman seems bazaar. Logic comes only after experience, not before. Everyone, even a child, is perfectly logical, but the logic is within the individual's framework of reference determined by experience/knowledge.

Reasoning was operational long before humans were able to abstract the notion of reasoning as such. It is inaccurate to speak of a human as a rational animal because humans were image-makers long before a consciousness of rationality developed. Reasoning dramatically expanded human perception of Reality. Medieval philosophers began defining reason as an abstraction. However, Copernicus, Newton, Darwin and Einstein are giants in applying reason to observed patterns in nature leading to a search for the cause/effects that give depth to these patterns.

The five stages, namely, pattern, imaging, reification, cause/effect and reasoning are the operating systems of the modern mind. However, these refinements in awareness do not constitute Reality but are tools of the mind to illuminate Reality beyond simple wonderment. Our inability to distinguish them, as *only* intellectual tools, indicates that they have not yet reached the status of *artifact* in psychological devolution. For the most part, pattern, imaging, reification, cause/effect and reasoning are the mental *operating systems* that actually frame Western consciousness.

Self/Object

Awareness of a cause/effect relation *between* objects opens the door to the notion of *relation* as a reality *independent* of objects. The stage is set for sensing a *self* that is still a quasi object among objects but as a phenomenon *independent* of objects. A minimal self-experience independent from surrounding objects raises the issue of the *relation* of self to other objects. In time, *self* simply becomes that *relation*. A sensing of a *distinct* self is the greatest breakthrough since humans first became conscious of consciousness.

Hitherto humans have been able to frame Reality based on three radically different and mutual exclusive assumptions: the first assumes Reality to be simply an undifferentiated phenomenon - like wonder/magic, the second assumes Reality is reified consisting in a collection of myriad of beings/objects, and the last assumes Reality is a dichotomous relation of *self* versus all else not the self. A distinct *self* in effect doubles the universe – the universe as a total phenomenon distinct from self and a self as a conscious inverse of the universe. A hitherto one-dimensional universe takes on a new, reflective dimension.

The awareness of a *distinct* self occurred within the past few thousand years. The initial experience of a distinct self devolved through four stages: self as an object among objects, self versus all-objects, self versus other-selves, and self versus an *other*-self. At some future date all four of these stages may become intellectual artifacts, i.e., we will see them as mental tools useful in probing deeper into Reality.

The seventh stage in devolutionary psychology is a perception of a distinct self, but as just one of the many objects is the world. Self-experience is objectified because the body is obviously an object. The body places self in time, place and circumstance to be reckoned with by the rest of the world. At this stage, self and body are virtually identical and connected in the cause/effect web of countless other objects. While some subconsciously think of self as an object, others consciously think of humans as *only* objects among the many things in the world – the notion of *self* is simply an illusion. While we are but one species in biological evolution, the level of consciousness dividing humans varies greatly. Both individuals and whole cultures can be pegged to a specific level along the ten stages of intellectual tool use – for some a distinct *self* has not yet surfaced in consciousness. I have discussed the first six of the intellectual stages above. The last four need considerable explanation since we are still at the dawn when the first human awoke to a sense of a distinct self.

*****SIDEBAR*****

SELF AS A CULTURAL DIVIDE

The seventh stage, i.e., the stage in which a distinct *self* emerges in devolutionary psychology, is like a continental divide between the East and the West. We see the consequence of the divergence today in the West's favoring of science/technology and the East favoring of religion/morality - science originates in the West, religion in the East. The East explores the world through the lens of a *relational* self-experience, while the West explores the world through the lens of *being/object*, i.e., a viewing the stuff of the universe as composed of particles/*objects*.

In the West, *self* and *individual* are synonymous, because both refer to the same physical object/body; in the East, *self* is not individualized, but is a relation formed directly through an experience of pre-reflected Reality in time and place. Radically different understanding of *self* - as an *individual* versus a *relational experience* - forms a near unbridgeable chasm between the West and the East. Communication between the two cultures is extremely difficult because, while self as a *relation* is central to Eastern culture, the West subconsciously assumes *individual* and *self* to be synonymous, thus effectively transforming *self* into a tangible object. Reification of self results in making *self* a pejorative word in the West, as in being selfish, loner, individualistic and reclusive. *Reification* of self is idolatrous and diametrically opposed to the *relational* culture of the East. The two radically different worldviews foster an undercurrent of hostility to this day.

The two fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of Reality - as *object* versus *relation* - produce two vastly different landscapes. The method of knowing for the object-oriented West is by *version* (nothing but the facts); in the East, the method of knowing is by *inversion* (how a fact relates to the whole). While *self* is simply a version of an isolate *being/individual* in the West, in the East, self is an experiential inversion of all/else that is not self. In other words: the East begins with the whole in seeking an understanding of the part; the West begins with the part in seeking an understanding of the whole. Thus, the Western method favors *seeing* concrete objects, while the Eastern favors *listening* for context. *Seeing* depends on light *particles* (photons) to function; *hearing* depends on sound *waves* to function – the division reflects the particle/wave composition of the universe in modern physics. *Seeing* generates an *image* that filters Reality, while *hearing* generates an *experience* that touches Reality. *Seeing* an object requires aloofness in that the object must be of some distance from the observer; *hearing* touches Reality more directly because it is experientially imminent and involving. The East and West are not in competition but simply provide two radically different ways of framing Reality.

Religion emerges from Eastern culture and is alien to Western patterns of thought because the concepts of *self* are radically different. Where the East sees the devolution of self, the West sees the evolution of living beings. The relation-oriented East does not fit a being/ontological-oriented West. A Greek philosopher, Socrates, who is perhaps most influential in creating the Western mode of thought, frames Reality only in the context of *being*. He speaks of a Supreme Being as a more true being than the world around us. To Socrates, we are only a shadow of true being, yearning to become a truer being – like Pinocchio yearning to become a real boy. However, *being* does not admit to degrees; a Supreme Being cannot be any more a true being than you or I. There is no such thing as gradation in *being* - it would be like being partially pregnant. *Being* pertains to the fact of *existence*, nothing more and nothing less. The world of *relation* goes beyond a *being/existence* framing.

The seventh stage of psychological devolution enters a new paradigm that goes beyond an ontological (*being*-oriented) to a relational assumption regarding the nature of Reality. Confusion arises when an unwarranted assumption is made that *being* and *real* mean the same; this confusion is a fundamental error rendering the East beyond the comprehension of the West. The West assumes something is real because it has being; the East assumes something is a being because it is real. *Being* pertains to existence only; *real* assumes existence and carries with it a connotation of relation, e.g., real to whom? It is important to note that our ability to understand anything always is in *relational* terms, never as simply *being*. Our sense of certitude is through relation, e.g., the certitude derived from mathematical relations, and not in *being* as such. *Being* is a product of reification – the fourth intellectual tool discussed above.

A culture centered on being/object is inherently competitive and reactionary; a culture centered on relation is inherently religious and response oriented. While *being* is philosophical, *real* is a relational concept upon which modern psychology is founded. *Being* is a static model; *real* is a dynamic model. Thus, the fundamental dynamic of the West is investigative versus dialogue in the East. Dialogue is central because of the implied dichotomy of self versus all that is not self. The ontological orientation of the West implies a static perception of Reality that translates into categories of body/soul, exterior/interior, matter/spirit, natural/supernatural and the like. The East finds it much more important to seek what is real in a concrete experience of the world. All the major religions of the world come from the East. The East bypasses the problem of existence/non-existence by assuming what is found to be real is indistinguishable from self-experience. Thus, *being* is not something *outside* self but at the very core of self.

Because the West has not expanded beyond the sixth intellectual stage of psychological devolution, it is confined to the box of reification that centers solely on verification of existence, e.g., does a Supreme Being exist? In the seventh stage and beyond, the focus changes from what exists to what is *real*, based on the assumption what is real also exists. Existence alone says very little; seeking what is real forces the consciousness beyond *object* into the realm of *relation*.

Pattern, imaging, reification, cause/effect and reasoning are the intellectual tools used to build Western culture and led to great advances in science and technology. In contrast, self/object, self/all/else, self/other-selves and self/other-self are the intellectual tools of the East. The West with vastly superior technology easily subdued Iraq, but the war spurred a cultural conflict beyond the intellectual tools of the United States – a ‘teenage’ culture only two hundred years old going against one 5000 years old. A relational-East versus an ontological-West confrontation is a war the West is ill prepared to wage. In this war, guns and bombs are of no use.

Modern science and religion will eventually find common ground because, unlike philosophy, *relation* not *being* is the true underlying force driving science. Einstein is among the first to prove that the world is not full of things existing as independent beings. What we observe as an object is actually a form of energy. He is first to realize that energy and matter are the same. And, of course, no one really knows what energy is - we only wish we had more of it. Einstein liked to muse about the optical *delusion* we all have in our conditioning to see the world as an accumulating of isolated things in lieu of a complex relation. The key issue is that our ability to understand depends totally on *relation*, never on the philosophical notion of *being/existence* alone. Thus, West and East, science and religion will eventually merge in searching out relation that is real rather than illusion, leaving to philosophers the unsolvable quandary of the existence of objects independent and outside of self.

Equating *being* as identical to *real* is at the root of the conflict not only between religion and science but also among religious groups. Philosophers and theologians refer to a metaphysical/supernatural realm of being above and beyond the natural level. This sort of imaging is not very helpful because the focus is on *beings* in two separate worlds. It would be far more challenging to explore the meaning of self in the context of Reality.

When we view Reality relationally, as a *con physical* or *connatural* arena for self-experience, there is no need to divide Reality into the dual universes of the natural and supernatural. Reality, to be relevant, must be in the range of human experience – a supernatural world is by definition removed from human experience. Thus, Reality is a necessary corollary of self-experience; otherwise, *self* is simply an image in cyberspace. Reality is manifest in and through the physical world even though Reality always extends beyond our immediate experience of the world around us. Achieving the ability to differentiate self as a *relation* from self as an isolated *individual* is the key for eventually linking the West and the East. But, due to radically different emphasis on relation versus object, both cultures now talk past each other. The West, in its need to reify Reality, sees religion as moral rightness between isolated individuals. In contrast, the East is caught up in a search for the self as the relational core of Reality.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Self/All/else

The next stage in the refinement of self-experience arose with the awareness of self as relationally distinct from all else that is not self – now an obvious and logical dichotomy. What marks this stage is the progression from a self as an object among many objects to a self as the *inverse* of all else that is not the self. This stage in devolutionary psychology implies the ability of perceiving Reality as *coalescing* into a *singularity*. *Self* arises as the consciousness at the core of such a singularity. A conscious self becomes the polar opposite of all that is not the self - a conscious self is the inversion of all else. This inversion not only *defines* the self but also *unifies* an otherwise featureless and incomprehensible Reality. In other words: consciousness of self is a *unifying vortex for bringing order out of chaos*. Recall from previous discussion that *consciousness* requires coherency. Each intellectual stages of self/object→ self/all/else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self will induce greater coherency into the perception of self-experience vis-à-vis Reality.

At this stage, Reality ceases to be an accumulation of myriad beings/objects and becomes a *relation* between self versus all that is not self. The dichotomy is between self and nature. The *relation* between self and all that is not self now becomes the crucial question. Because all/else is the polar opposite of self, all/else is the basis for understanding self – all else is as a mirror reflecting self in a verse/inverse relationship. Thus, understanding the universe is as important as understanding the self because they are inescapably linked as polar opposites. A watershed in human consciousness has been reached: a dynamic *relationship* between self versus all/else replaces a static framing of Reality as an accumulation of isolated *objects*. Defining the relation between self/Reality is still the cutting edge of psychological devolution.

Consciousness of self as a *relation* emerged in the East, but a *functional* awareness of self arose in the West, especially in the form of property ownership. Ownership expresses a functional sense of self but does not address what constitutes the essence of self. Claim of ownership to a specific piece of property assumes consciousness of an isolated individual holding title to property. Early settlers were able to buy Manhattan Island from the Indians with a few beads because the Indian culture had no notion of individuality/ownership. Ownership implies the reification of the world whereby division of the world into separate parcels is possible. Property becomes an extension of the individual. Individual property right is fundamental to understanding subsequent Western history – wars are fought over property to this day.

Self/Other-Selves

Self is the vortex for coalescing all else into a unified and distinct consciousness, as mentioned above. Since human *bonding*, in the form of family/band/tribe proved critical for survival, awareness of a distinct self naturally emerged in the context of the coalescence of self vis-à-vis other selves forming a family/tribal bond – this is the self/other-selves stage of psychological devolution. The devolution of bonding through the social structures of family, band, tribe, kingdom, state, nation, international alliances and global entities – the subject of Social Psychology – reflect over time the refinement and depth of self-experience in the context of human bonding. Our concept of *member* is a functional expression of this intellectual artifact. Whenever we think of self as a *member* of any group, we are using the box of self/other-selves in a functional way in defining self-experience.

Self/Other-Self

Self-experience is the driving force of human devolution beginning with the seventh stage and reaches its greatest depth at the tenth stage in a relation of *self* versus *other-self*. At this stage, *self* is the very core of Reality – in other words: all of Reality is in essence an expression of self. The concept of the human race grew from a perception of self and not self from the human race. The social devolution of family→ tribe→ kingdom→ state→ nation→ global entities are devolution of self - *self* is not a product of these social institutions. Nor is self a product of all/else. Self-experience is the developing vortex by which all/else comes into a unified and distinct whole – all/else defines self just as self defines all/else as they form a verse/inverse relation. Each of the last four stages is a further refinement on the notion of self, ending in recognition that only another self can fully define self.

Self/other-self is the summit of human consciousness because it represents a stage beyond the reach of imaging. As discussed in the first chapter, imaging is the scaffold of consciousness. When the relation reaches the level of self/other-self, all imaging crumbles. At this stage, the *all/else* in the self/*all-else* relation *also* becomes a conscious *self*, thus crossing a new threshold. In the ninth stage of self/other-selves, the dichotomy is self versus group; in the tenth stage, it is between self and other-self, i.e., the *all/else* in a self/*all-else* relation also coalesces into a *self*. At this stage of psychological devolution, self-experience is simply complementary to *all/else* coalesced into a unified consciousness as a distinct *other* self. Self/self is simply beyond imaging because Reality redundantly coalesces in and through the encounter of one self with another – the relation is between two subjects rather than subject/object. The *relation* between the two selves is the ultimate framing of Reality.

The emergence of a second self as complementary to self is an outgrowth of self/other-selves. In other words: the *other-selves* in the equation gradually morph into a single, unified and distinct *self* out of multiple selves. Self vis-à-vis other-self is the largest arena ever discovered for expressing the depth of Reality. Reality in effect is a face-to-face bipolar relation. Self and other-self are conceivable only as *subjects* and never as *objects* and, therefore, can never be directly examined or analyzed, i.e., you cannot see your own face directly. The only ‘image’ possible of self is another self. Self/other-self can never become an artifact in the sense of being a tool used to expose Reality, as is the case with the other nine intellective-artifacts discussed above. Self/other-self is the ‘operating design’ for total consciousness.

We get a better understanding of the tenth stage in human consciousness by observing its effects in human behavior. The tenth level of consciousness underlies the impulse of Rosa Parks in choosing the dignity of self as a reality deeper than membership in the Black race. Gender and race express a group-consciousness that is characteristic of the ninth stage of devolutionary psychology. However, membership in a group falls short in defining a deeper self-experience – just as smoke/heat fall short in revealing the fire that produces it. Where the psychological artifacts of self/object, self/*all-else* and self/other-selves retain some semblance of reification, self/other-self is relational pure and simple – at this stage, self-experience is like a sponge soaking in Reality rather than a container for Reality. An awakening to the universality of self-experience is the spark that ignited the civil rights movement of the sixties.

Monogamous marriage reflects the tenth stage of devolutionary psychology. Monogamy is when two individuals freely choose each other based on absolute equality whereby two distinct selves become as one. An espousal relation is perhaps the only way to concretely image the *self/other-self* stage of psychological devolution. In this relation, one spouse derives a sense of self-experience in the through the other. In an espousal relation, it is difficult to know where self-experience leaves off and the self-experience of the other begin.

Self-experience reaches fullest expression only in the context of another self. The selves in marriage are polar opposites and the communal universe of *all/else* between the spouses concretely defines the relation between them. The depth and breath of the espousal relation is like entering into the fathomless depth of Reality – marital self-experience is the cutting edge for exploring the true depth of self. Monogamy is a natural outcome in the devolution of self-experience that had progressed through the stages of self/object→ self/*all-else*→ self/other-selves. Monogamy is both ‘image’ reflecting the summit of self-experience and means for achieving a full sense of self.

Self in History

The ten stages trace the devolution of self by going from a general to a more in-depth, simplified understanding of Reality. History may be viewed as the human effort to discover the unifying principle at the core of Reality. The ancient Greeks, using the intellective tools of pattern, imaging, reification, cause-effect and reasoning, simplify the prevailing perception of Reality from an incomprehensible world of wonderment into a world of predictability. In so doing they laid the foundation of philosophy, science and technology upon which Western culture is built.

The Hellenic culture in focusing on the individual touched only on the fringes of a *self*-concept. Homer (c.750B.C.) in his two books, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – also known as the Greek Bible – makes one of the earliest attempts to portray the notion of an individual in the form of an adventurous Greek hero. Alexander the Great (356 B.C.) grows up in the Greek culture in which respect for the individual is a social value and fundamental to institutions – such as a democratic form of government. During his world conquest, he comes to realize that all humans are like him with no fundamental difference. Based on this insight, he does not enslave conquered peoples, as hitherto has been the custom, but allows subjugated people to retain their autonomy – as long as they refrain from being his enemy and pay tribute.

Before Alexander, those outside one's own tribe were considered subhuman. By introducing *individual* as a universal notion independent from tribe, Alexander discovers the underlying *concept* of the human race. Respect for the individual versus tribal *blood* becomes the key factor for coalescing all peoples into one human race. His conquests subjugates most of the then known world, spreading the Greek culture to many lands. Subsequently, the Romans conquer the Mediterranean world and absorb the Hellenistic notion of individual as a central element. Based on the concept of individual identity as more fundamental than blood ties, the Romans fight against tribal tendencies throughout their empire and bring in its place a universal rule of law to be applied equally to all. The Roman Empire is the first non-tribal social organization. Roman citizenship is by birth but can also be earned by anyone. The notion of a free citizen under the law fosters throughout the world the idea of individuality as a reality independent of political boundaries or blood ties. In Roman society, even a woman is regarded as an individual able to choose marriage partners, own property and receive inheritance.

Respect for the individual is the key element for understanding the developing culture of the West following the collapse of the Roman Empire. The rise of city charters, business related guilds, and confraternity of workers in the Middle Ages represent important landmarks in social structures that are based on the individual rather than tribal affiliation. An evolving awareness of equality as an individual lies at the root of the Magna Carta in England, the French and the American Revolutions.

The history of the arts clearly shows a growing awareness of individuality, especial in the history of music. In Medieval times, artists compose music to honor the Deity or some earthly power figure. Composers never dream of signing their name to a composition; any expression of individuality is deemed boastful and proud. The sole purpose of music is to honor the Deity or acknowledge a position of power. About 900 years ago, individuality begins to penetrate the music world prompting composers to sign their name to their works for the first time. Composers begin to realize that music flows from experience rather than some outside power source and could be used to express and develop their own sensations and emotions. This tendency caught on and brought forth an explosive expression of human emotions throughout Western Europe during the Romantic era. As an illustration, contrast ancient Gregorian chant with a composition by Beethoven for the large range of emotions expressed.

From Medieval times, individuation grows in intensity and is still being played out on the world stage as the underlying plot. Modern developments such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism are harsh reactions to the emerging centrality of individual as cornerstone of social awareness and structure. A growing consciousness of individuation underlies the collapse of Communism. For seventy years, the Soviet Union used every religious, educational, political and economic device imaginable to stamp out the individual in order to form a totalitarian state – like worker ants in a giant colony.

Capitalism is the opposite extreme of Communism. Communism suppresses the individual to reach the universal, while Capitalism suppresses the universal to reach the individual. Both fail to recognize the distinction between *individual* and *self* – *individual* is only the *functional* expression of *self* and does not equate with self-experience. As we shall see in later chapters, social institutions based on self-experience are radically different and far more refined than those based on individual. The tenth stage of intellectual development requires holding as constants self and all/else that is not self without favoring self over all/else or all/else over self - both are on a par, fitting like hand in glove. Subordination is impossible because the relation of self/all-else is dichotomous with one side defining the other. Error arises by mistakenly equating *individual* with *self*.

Both Communism and totalitarian Capitalism focus on individual but fail to grasp the deeper reality of self as foundational to social intercourse and endeavor. By ignoring the devolution of *self* as the ongoing struggle to mirror Reality, both systems presume a right to wantonly exploit both the natural and human environment. Any system that ignores self-experience as pivotal is a plunging backward in time. The concept of *self* as the unifying vortex of Reality is the greatest discovery in human history. In the context of human evolution as a whole, the discovery occurred only in the last few minutes. We are just beginning to reflect on self-experience as the most refined tool ever devised for probing Reality.

Psychology as the Science of Self

Psychology, a discipline that had explosive development in the past century, is the science of self – hence the word: *psyche* (self) and *ology* (examination). The self of psychology is not to be confused with the philosophical notion of an isolate *individual*, but is a probing into self-experience through observation of behavior. Self is a relation and, therefore, cannot be directly observed under a microscope; the next best thing is to observe *behavior* as a reflection of how self is being experienced.

Ancient philosophers thought ontologically and thus assume self (soul) and body to be two separate beings. They were concerned about how these two beings interacted with each other to make one individual different from another. They believed that all things, including the human body, to be composed of four elements, namely, fire, air, water and earth. Hypocrites (400 B.C.) concludes that the difference of one individual from another depends on the amount of each element in the body. For example, differences occur because one individual has more air, another more fire in their bodily makeup. A preponderance of fire, air, water or earth produces one of four corresponding behavioral traits, namely, sanguine, melancholic, choleric and phlegmatic. This is the first attempt to understand self by reducing self to traits due to the physical composition of the human body.

Because self can be known only indirectly, it is not surprising that different approaches are used to provide insight into self-experience. There are today three major schools in psychology. The leaders of the three schools of thought are: Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner and Carl Rogers. While self-experience is implicit in all three, they differ in the mental tools they bring to bear in trying to understand self-experience. The Western bias for reification prompts them to atomize otherwise generalize human *behavior* in order to gain insight into the nature of self-experience. Each school then devises therapies based on the mental artifacts used for insight into self/behavior to correct for deviations from the norm.

Sigmund Freud (b.1856) uses the first three of the intellectual tools (i.e., consciousness-of-consciousness, pattern and imaging) to explain human behavior. He calls the world below consciousness the *id* and consciousness-of-consciousness the *ego*. *Pattern*, according to Freud, has access to both the subconscious world in the form of dreams as well as the conscious world in the form of behavioral traits. Freud designates the third mental artifact, namely, *imaging* as the *superego*. *Superego* refers to the expected image-world that culture or society imposes upon the ego. The subconscious/id is more in tune with nature, i.e., to subconscious experience of Reality. *Pattern* recognition is the link between the subconscious and the conscious ego. The *ego* has the role of mediating compromise between pattern and the overpowering *superego* formed by the world of images. Sigmund Freud is a pioneer in psychology and has had such profound effect that his designations of sub-consciousness, consciousness and image, as *id*, *ego* and *superego* respectively, have permanently entered the English language and are now mental tools/artifacts used extensively in understanding the self.

B.F. Skinner (1953) is fascinated with the mental artifact: cause/effect. This mental tool is crucial to both philosophy and the physical sciences. By using cause/effect as the critical tool to explain human behavior, he elevates psychology from a soft to a hard science – a science that could provide exact predictability. He experiments extensively with pigeons and finds that he could manipulate their behavior by rewarding a desired behavior with food and punish an undesirable performance with no food or an electric shock. The intellectual tool of cause/effect is embedded in the use of reward/punishment to produce a desired behavior. The conclusion from these scientifically conducted experiments is that if science could only expose the underlying complex array of causes, human behavior is predictable and manageable. Human behavior is merely effect - humans simply respond to reward/punishment in a cause/effect relation. Thus, he concludes, reward/punishment is the ultimate determinate of human behavior.

B.F. Skinner's views are widely accepted because he tries to follow rigorously the scientific method used in the physical sciences. In line with Skinner's thinking, governments today use taxation as a cause to produce a desired effect/behavior, for example, taxing of cigarettes reduces their use and improves health. However, both the Freudian and Skinnerian schools of thought tend to reduce self to simply behavior in order to make self subject to scientific examination. Framing self as behavior – however complex – is a subtle way of reifying the self. As a consequence, self is *identical* to behavior. Their theories throw interesting insights into human social behavior. They fail to address self as a distinct reality that is not captured but only reflected by behavior.

Carl Rogers (1959) enters the rarified stratosphere of a *self* that is defined as a particular *relation* to Reality. Central to his analysis are the mental artifacts: self/all/else and self/other-selves. For want of more precise imaging of self, he focuses on *meaning* as key to an insight into what constitutes a self-experience - *meaning* subsequently influences behavior. Maslow (1970) traces *meaning* as it is concretized in and through pursuing a hierarchy of physical, social and self-identity needs. In this school of thought, meaning constitutes self-experience and is the subliminal drive behind self-imaging. While Rogers looks closer at self than does Freud or Skinner, he still depends on behavior for validation.

Thus, Sigmund Freud defines self as a subconscious/conscious drive, B.F. Skinner as programmable potential, and Karl Rogers as a reservoir of value. These scientists have done extensive research and produced numerous volumes all wrestling with the meaning of self. Psychology gains some respectability as a science by focusing on observable behavior. Behavior, however, is an effect; the underlying cause is self – a vast world yet to be explored.

Psychology has profound impact on the world. It is easy to assume that self-experience was always the epicenter for delving into Reality. Self is such a universally accepted concept today that it is hard to imagine a society lacking awareness of self. But, it took millennia to recognize growing self-awareness as the driving force of history. It is interesting to note that the Japanese language has no native word for *self*. Individuation is not a priority in the history of a land-locked people. Some tribal countries today still reject the notion of self outright or as of little importance compared to preserving tribal bonds. Afghanistan, under the Taliban, is such a country. In that society, women cannot hold jobs, be educated or show their face in public. A need to develop a clear sense of self has intensified during the past fifty years. World War II, spawned by Nazism/Fascism, represents a colossal struggle between negations of self through blind obedience on the one hand, and growing needs to affirm self-identity as the core of individual freedom and responsibility on the other. Self is the cornerstone upon which a creative human society is built. The meaning of self is still a work in progress.

Self and Modern Science

Atomization of Reality forms the box within which the culture of the West still operates; it is virtually impossible for the Western mind to view Reality as anything other than ontological. However, our philosophical view of a reified world is under siege by modern science. Although born in an atomized world, science is pushing the envelope beyond the *ontological* to the *relational* perception of Reality.

The brave new world of modern science touches everyone, especially when the subject is the human body. We draw our self-experience and self-identity fundamentally from our physical body as an object. A newborn is immediately classified by gender, race, weight and size - a body-based identity that will endure for life. However, a deeper understanding of the human body is undermining the assumption that self and body form a single reality. Geneticists, physicists, biologists and astronomers are changing deeply embedded assumptions about the body and, consequently, are impacting on the very notion of self. When the body becomes less and less of a stable 'object' the very sense of self comes under siege.

Geneticists speak of a post-human era when there is such power over the body through the manipulation of genes that the new world created and the old will bear little resemblance. It is already a given that we don't even own our body. There is a gold rush in progress to lay claim to every human gene as a piece of individually owned property. Nearly every gene that produces some part of the body is patented or soon will be. As technology improves, the owner will be able to decide the future for every gene and buy and sell it like a piece of real estate. This development drives a wedge between self-experience and body.

Futurists see a time when it will be possible to program the human genome – the blueprint of the human body - like a technician can program a computer. Power to tinker with the genetic blueprint means ability to produce designer bodies, growth of replacement parts or super intelligent beings. When carbon-based life is eventually made compatible with silicon-based computers, human and machine will merge - totally transforming notions of body and identity. The limited human mind will be supplemented with artificial intelligence creating godlike capacity. Furthermore, human cloning brings still more confusion in sorting out what constitutes self.

Geneticists graft human genes into the genetic code of pigs to make organs taken from pigs less likely to be rejected when transplanted into human subjects. While this crossover from human-to-animal may be disturbing to some, a crossover from animal-to-human is Orwellian. The notion of self has been reserved for humans alone, but when animal/human genes merge, where is the line between self and non-self?

The blurring of what constitutes a human-self is currently a burning issue before U.S. courts. A patent to combine human and animal genes to produce what is called a chimera is now before the patent office of the United States. The patent office has been stalling because of vast implications in such a venture. The technology is clearly available now to do so, but it would be like an atom bomb to traditional self-perception. Are we ready to deal with an organism that is part animal and human? What are the social implications? Chimeras could be produced with only enough intelligence to perform menial tasks. Sub-classes could form as a class of slaves that are neither human nor animal. Court action is now pending to force the patent office to act. The issue will eventually land on the desk of the Supreme Court. The Court will be forced to define what constitutes a human self.

Physicists have their own perspective on the human body – the same body from which we draw a sense of self and a clear sense where we belong in the world. The human body as well as all the other objects that make up the world is not as solid and tangible as we assume. The closer physicists look at solid objects, the more difficult it becomes to identify what *solid* means - especially when considering Einstein's discovery that matter and energy are the same. Large objects are composed of ever-smaller objects, like atoms and quarks and, smaller still, energy strings. (The book to read: *The Elegant Universe*, by Brian Greene.) Physicists now tell us that the infinitesimally small objects making up our body are so tiny that 99.999% of our body is pure empty space. The true mystery for physicists is why reification even occurs at all – why are there such things as objects, however small? How is it even possible to touch our body given that what is 'solid' in our body occupies only .0001% of its space? It is still a mystery in science. What we experience as 'touching' is energy radiating from an infinitesimally tiny particle resisting another particle moving into its space. A correct view of your body is that it is 99.999% *resistance* and only .0001% 'solid' material. From this combination we draw a sense of self.

Physicists are not through toying with our illusions about our body as a static/stable object. The tiny particles making up our body are moving at near the speed of light. Moreover, sub-atomic particles can be both a wave and a particle under different circumstances. For example, depending on the interest of an observer, the photons producing light can be particles or waves of energy. It is a bit unnerving to our mind, hardwired as it is into a reified view of Reality, to realize that the *choice* of the observer determines whether matter is a particle or a wave. Thus, the *observer* becomes an essential part of what is observed. Physicists demonstrate that there is a dynamic interaction between self-experience and the physical world.

Biologists are finding common ground with physicists by blurring the line between the human body and all living organisms. Biologists point out that a human body is simply a colony of trillions of microbes each with its own independent life but focused on maintaining the life of the whole body as a 'rainforest' for its own life. (The book to read: by Margolis.) Furthermore, over a period of seven years, the entire colony of microbes that make up one's skin-bound body has been replaced by a totally new colony. Our life and health is directly dependent on the vigor of the countless microbes that form our body and their ability to die on cue to allow for replacement. Out of this colony of microbes emerges our sense of self.

The fallout from advancing biological science is a gradual separating of *self* from *body*. It is becoming increasingly clear that self is a relation derived from the body and articulated through the body. So when you refer to your body, which body do you mean? At seventy years of age, you would have had at least ten different bodies – yet you remain the same self because *you*, as a self, are a *relation* that is articulated in and through your body. While there can be many bodies there can be only one self – it is *self* that gives permanency rather than body. .

As the self-experience changes due to changing response to Reality, so does the body change to reflect that response. Thus, growing from infant to adult entails a changing/deepening of the self-experience in relation to a wider Reality. In the growing process, the depth of response expands dramatically. The body is the medium by which self-experience relates to the physical and social environment – the body is *means* and not the *object* of self-experience. The body forms the necessary basis for the images the self creates.

It is like the story of an immigrant to America whose only possession is an ax. The descendants of the immigrant treasured the ax handed down from one generation to the next – it became an heirloom. Over the years, the ax has had four new handles and three new heads, but it is the same ax treasured by the family. The ax reflects a relationship, even though family members perceive it as an object. As water in a river flowing past a given point, so does the earth/universe flow slowly through what we image as our body. Biologists have made a great contribution in the understanding of our body by pointing out our physical connection to the earth and to every living thing. Life is a dimension of the universe that rises to the level of our self-experience. Commonly held body images, based on the notion of an isolated/static object, do not reflect this crucial relationship with the biosphere.

Astronomers find remarkable kinship with biologists. While biologists/physicists erode the foundation of self-experience based on our body as a stable/solid object, astronomers are undermining our sense of time/space that we derive from our body. Unlike the four elements of fire, air, water and earth in the time of Hypocrites, our body is composed of many elements. Astronomers have discovered that the superheated blast furnace of an exploding star, occurring long before the solar system ever evolved, is the only way the complex elements in our body could have been produced. Complex molecules from simple hydrogen molecules can form only through the unimaginable pressure found in an exploding star. Thus, our body is the remnants of a star that exploded billions of years ago – we are all star material.

We cannot form an accurate image of self/body without taking into account the evolution of the universe itself. Astronomers have discovered that following the Big Bang of fourteen billion years ago the universe in all its aspects followed the path that was most conducive to life. If masses and couplings of various subatomic particles deviated even slightly, the DNA necessary for life would be impossible. (The book to read: *Visions*, by Michio Kaku.) Thus, the life that is the organizing principle of our body cannot be isolated from the universe. In other words, you are alive because the universe is alive. (The book to read: *Vital Dust*, by Christian de Duve.) Our body, our life and, consequently, our sense of self cannot be understood except in the context of the larger picture of the universe.

Astronomers, perhaps more so than scientists from any other discipline, are forcing us to realize that perceiving our body as a solid object is only one viewpoint. A more refined understanding is to view our body as a *relation*, expressed concretely as lungs/air, stomach/food, eye/light, ear/sound, tongue/taste and so on. What is more important, lung or air, eye or light, ear or sound? Without air, lungs make no sense – one virtually defines the other. A light-sensitive cell evolved over millennia into an eye. Which is more important: a sensitive cell or light? The body is not only the immediate, physical expression of self-experience but also links self-experience to a much greater Reality. To think of a human body without thinking of the universe from which it emerged in myopic.

For a long time scientists thought the Milky Way was the only galaxy; now we know there are billions. Because atoms of our known universe take up so little space, some scientists now believe with good reason that there are other parallel universes permeating not only our universe but also our body – our body that forms an integral part of our universe. We are unaware of these universes because our consciousness is derived from the vital element inherent in our universe; parallel universes are not conducive to supporting life and, therefore, are beyond our awareness. (Confer: *Astronomy*, by Alex Philipinko, The Teaching Company.)

Recapitulation

Survival of the human race hinges more and more on understanding self. The action of an individual, such as Darwin, Edison or Einstein, can change the course of history. Today an individual with sufficient computer skills could disrupt the power grid of a nation or could acquire technology for an atomic bomb. Understanding of self or lack thereof can mean undreamed prosperity or unimaginable destruction.

Although the Western mind finds itself boxed into an ontological notion of self, modern science is leading the way to a far deeper sense of self-experience. Humans are not objects to be analyzed, but a *relation* to be realized. Expanding self-experience is a rigorous discipline as great or greater than that needed to become a superb athlete or an accomplished musician. Self-experience, like Reality, can never be fully circumscribed because they are directly connected.

The ten stages of psychological devolution represent an expanding awareness of Reality. It is nearly impossible to revert back to the mindset of a previous stage because, once entering into a new awareness, perception of Reality is drastically affected. The stages are like growing through infancy to adulthood. A child is attracted to the world of wonder and magic. The world of magic expands following the path familiar to adults of consciousness of consciousness→ imaging→ pattern→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all/else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. All of us have transitioned through some or all of these psychological stages with scant awareness of how they reflect step-by-step explosions of awareness in our ancient devolutionary past. The underlying stages of devolutionary psychology of the human mind are now as much a part of our mental structure as our genetic code is a blueprint for our flesh and bone.

The ten stages of psychological devolution advance more as a series of punctuated equilibriums rather than forming a seamless progression. Everyone is at one or another of the ten stages, and all follow the same sequence in the pursuit of Reality. Moving from one intellectual tool to the next requires proficiency in the former. Thus, *self/other-self* assumes clear awareness of *self/other-selves*. Mental artifacts are not like the evolution of bodily forms that spread biologically throughout the entire human population. Individuals or large groups/cultures vary greatly, depending on the stage of consciousness an individual/culture has achieved. Aborigines living today may still be using *pattern* to frame Reality. In the Western world, atomization is the subliminal mental tool for defining Reality. The ten stages of devolutionary psychology are analogous to a gradual bringing the lens of a camera into focus on Reality. The sharpness of focus on Reality differs for everyone.

In responding to Reality, humans were able to progress beyond mere wonderment by using mental tools. The discovery of each successive tool opened up dramatic new dimensions of Reality. These mental artifacts are now the structure of our mind like the bone is structure of our body. They become a tool/mental artifact only when someone attains the ability to distinguish them as mental devices at a conscious level, versus a mental device operating still at a subconscious level in framing Reality. For example, if reification is assumed to be the basis for conscious imaging of the world, reification is the operating system that defines Reality rather than a mental artifact used to delve into Reality. The intellectual *self/other-self* is the most refined tool ever devised for probing into the depth of Reality.

The wonderful discoveries of science today are as much about the world as they are about the self that emerges from the world. Each discovery is a further definition of the relation between self and humanity/universe. Scientists have discovered that the genetic code of all humans is virtually identical because the genes from which we derive our uniqueness are infinitesimally small in number. It is not the human body that separates, but rather self-imaging. As our consciousness expands, the focus will shift away from the body to the universal self-experience derived from the body. The body is the connection of self-experience to global humanity and an endless universe.

The issue of what defines a human self may reach the Supreme Court, but no answer will be forthcoming. Defining self-experience is not an issue for the Supreme Court because all of us are directly involved in defining self-experience – the justices are no more expert in this matter than anyone else. Self is not an object to be analyzed, but a coalescence of all/else into a unified and distinct consciousness that is celebrated as a self. The defining of self-experience has been in progress for a long time.

The discipline of psychology makes a great contribution by focusing on the self, even if the focus is on human behavior to indirectly search for self as an underlying reality. Today, the perception of being a distinct self is spreading around the world as the foundation for political, educational and economic structures. The development of democracy in the past two thousand years is directly related to the notion of self as the underlying principle upon which society is built. Developing self-experience is the driving force behind marriage and family.

Refining self-experience is now at the cutting edge of psychological devolution today as individuals continue pursuing new dimensions of Reality. Clearly, our consciousness of self has pushed us beyond group membership to a sense of a distinct self-awareness. Everyone has a functional self-image springing from authentic self-experience or a socially imposed one. Rather than passively accepting imposed images of self, maturity lies in the toil and sweat of getting in touch with self-experience to find a world beyond our wildest dreams. Failure to explore the depth of self-experience means missing out on a lot – it is like going through life sighted but with never the joy of hearing even one sound, or like living in dire poverty when just below the surface is a priceless diamond. Self is a treasure that is priceless.

CHAPTER THREE

OTHERNESS

Summary: *Otherness* refers to a dichotomous *relation* in which one side can only be defined by the opposite side – as *east* is defined only by *west*, *up* by *down*. *Self* versus *all/else not the self* is a version/inversion dichotomous relation of *otherness* in that self by definition mirrors all/else and all/else mirrors self.

Otherness Defined

Otherness as Stimulus/Response

Otherness and Imaging

Otherness and Emotions

Otherness and Science

Recapitulation

SIDEBAR

SELF/ALL-ELSE VERSUS SPIRIT/MATTER

TRANSITING FROM OBJECT TO RELATION MINDSET

RELATION VERSUS RELATIVISM

Otherness Defined

Defining *otherness* is like looking for a black cat in a dark cellar. *Otherness*, the essence of a relational perception of Reality, is so alien to the Western mind that it is for us the elusive black cat. The rest of this book endeavors to push the reader beyond our native *atomized* to a *relational* view of the world that originated in the East. *Otherness* versus object/being as the core of Reality means that Reality is a dichotomous relation in which one side is comprehensible only in the context of the other, for example, as *up* is understandable only in relation to *down*, or *inside* in relation to *outside*. Otherness, as the defining core of Reality, requires a total paradigm shift from a reified to a relational perception of the world. By way of analogy: in physics, it is like shifting our perception of the visible world as composed of particles to waves, or from solid matter to pure energy.

Otherness is the exact opposite of sameness. Sameness precludes relation; otherness is the very substance of relation. *Sameness* is inherent in *pattern* recognition - the second stage in psychological devolution. As discussed in the previous chapter, sameness inherent in pattern eventually developed into the more refined intellectual tools of: imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning. Sameness is basic to the first six stages of psychological devolution. Just as isolate being (reification) and sameness are endemic in the West, so, too, is the relation of otherness characteristic of the East, thus rendering the two cultures mutually incomprehensible. The sameness that underlies the West surfaces in such cultural forms as military organization, age/racial segmentation, ideological groupings, gangs among youth, conformity as the basis of social harmony and a host of other cultural forms fostering sameness.

The introduction of the notion of *self* in the seventh stage of devolutionary psychology radically alters the search for Reality from seeking *sameness* to delving into *otherness* - from a focus on simple *pattern* to *contrast*. Self, in contrast to all/else not the self, is the epicenter of otherness. Recall from the previous chapter that self is a unified consciousness emerging out of the coalescing of all/else that is not the self. The notion of self implicitly requires a sense of polarity (otherness) between self versus all/else not the self. The notion of self has devolved through the stages of self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self with each stage representing a significant simplification in the perception of Reality/self.

Contrast is a concrete expression of *otherness*. Contrast/otherness replaces sameness in probing deeper into Reality. The contrasting of *self* versus *all/else not the self* is now the greatest challenge in defining Reality. Juxtaposing these two worlds of self versus all/else not the self transforms an object-oriented, monopole view of Reality to a bipolar view – a hand-in-glove, version/inversion notion of Reality. Thus, the ‘hand’ of self is the version, and the ‘glove’ of all else not the self is the inversion – to know one is to know the other. A whole new world of consciousness arises by framing Reality as *relation* in lieu of isolated *object*.

Self/object, self/all-else, self/other-selves and self/other-self are contrasting intellective tools versus the first six one-dimensional tools. Becoming aware of the two-dimensional nature of Reality represents a significant advance in intellective tools in that we become *aware* of difference/otherness versus sameness as a basis for understanding the world. *Contrast* reflects how the brain actually works because even in reifying our world we subconsciously depend on contrast to distinguish one thing from another. Contrast, such as black/white, light/darkness, north/south and so forth are necessary for the mind to function. Contrast is not simply an invention of our mind but underlies the rhythm of nature. For example, the fur of an arctic hare changes in the winter to white because retaining a summertime brown would give a hungry hawk the advantage of a perfect contrast of brown against the white snow. Otherness/contrast operates subliminally both in the human mind and in nature.

Self-experience is a *contrast* rather than an isolated *object*. The very notion of self assumes that there is an all/else that is not self that stands as *otherness* to self. The 'space' between self and all/else forms a dichotomous *relation* called *otherness*. Otherness means that one side can be understood only in *contrast* to the other. The juxtaposition of self versus all/else that is not self means that, because of the dichotomous relation it introduces, the only way to know self is to know all/else that is not self – self is what remains when all/else is 'taken away'. Knowledge of self represents the ultimate consciousness because self is derived from all/else precisely as a polar opposite to self.

A notion of *self* is derived directly from an *experience* of all/else that is not the self and is not to be understood as a mere philosophical abstraction – all/else and self form a dichotomous relation and, accordingly, are mirror reflections. Self-understanding is totally dependent upon and directly proportional to understanding all/else. Stated succinctly: self is the otherness of all/else as all/else is the otherness of self. Even your own body is not yourself but a part of the *all/else* in a self/all-else dichotomy. There cannot be a *self* without there being also at the same time an *all/else* as the basis for defining a distinct self. Likewise, there cannot be an all/else without a self, from which all/else is conceivable in the first place - just as *up* is inconceivable except in contrast to *down*. The path to self-knowledge is indirect via *contrast*. Framing Reality, as a self/all-else dichotomous relation, is a formidable stretch for the Western mind conditioned as it is to atomizing Reality.

*****SIDEBAR*****

SELF/ALL-ELSE VERSUS SPIRIT/MATTER

The operating system of the Western mind requires turning Reality into objects preliminary to understanding and, accordingly, is averse to framing Reality as a relation of *otherness*. Rather than dealing with *otherness*, the West reifies otherness as a duality of objects/beings, for example, dual categories as spirit/matter, soul/body, metaphysical/physical and supernatural/natural. This imagery of reifying Reality as a duality of being invites the unnecessary conflict of thesis/antithesis as a core feature of Reality - versus the unification of Reality inherent in a *self/all-else* relation in which one side defines the other. Reification is a useful intellective tool at a *lower* stage in psychological devolution. At the seventh level introducing the notion of *self*, reification hinders understanding because it distorts a unified sense of Reality that is crucial for conceiving the very notion of self.

The imagery of having a material body and a spiritual soul is such a fundamental assumption in the West that it is important to look carefully at this deeply embedded imagery. Imaging *self* as composed of a body and a soul is a direct result of reifying self-experience. This imagery assumes self to be composed of two categories of being: one material and the other spiritual. Since body and soul are two separate beings/things, there is no essential relationship between them – they just happened to be joined like hydrogen and oxygen forming water.

Simply dividing Reality into two types of beings, namely, spirit and material, provides no foundation for further understanding beyond simple existence, because no essential relation is implied between them. Thus, a spirit being exists without necessarily any reference to material. Because our ability to understand depends on relation rather than isolated objects, a spirit world would be totally incomprehensible and, consequently, irrelevant – it would be like an impenetrable, parallel universe.

The Greek philosopher, Plato (c. 427 B.C.), is the first to emphasize the duality of being at the core of Reality by proposing that we have two distinct 'parts', namely, a body and a soul. Plato gleaned his notion of soul from Socrates. Before Socrates drank poisonous hemlock, he poured out a small amount in libation as he gave thanks to the supernatural Being for delivering his soul from his body. Plato sought to console the students of Socrates by assuring them that even after being forced by the state to commit suicide, Socrates continued to exist as a 'soul'. Plato further theorized that

souls preexisted bodies. He believed confinement in a body is a punishment for a soul that had ‘fallen’. The soul, henceforth, sought to escape from the world of a material body to return to its former state of purity.

Prior to Socrates, soul was thought to be identical with *breath* (Latin: *spiritus*), as when a mortally wounded soldier stopped breathing he was said to have given up his breath (soul). The author of Genesis uses the imagery of God’s breath to denote giving life to clay (*Adam* is the word for *earth* or *clay*). However, unlike Plato who thought of soul as an immaterial being, the Genesis author uses the ancient word “ru-ah”, meaning *breath* or *wind*, in a material sense. (Even pronouncing the Hebrew word “ru-ah” forces breath from the mouth.) In Genesis, breath is directly associated with *synergy* or *energy* needed for Life. Genesis makes no distinction between spirit and matter but only between Life (as a *unifying* principle) and non-life (as a state of *chaos*). Plato’s immateriality is a philosophical spin superimposed upon this more ancient dichotomy of unifying Life versus chaos.

For the ancients, *breath* and *Life* are identical. While breath is inseparable from life, it can easily be thought of as metaphor for Life. A metaphor/image can take on an independent life – as discussed in chapter one. The breath of Life given to Adam in Genesis is easily transformed from signifying a divine/human connection to an isolate giving of a soul. Many in the West now think of the soul as a *being* separate from the body. However, imaging Life as *breath* – a favorite image of ethereal Reality in ancient times - is an apt way of saying that human life is intimately bound with Life globally. Dual spirit/material imagery is unnecessary and an unwarranted assumption. Moreover, the closer scientists look at body/matter the less they know about what matter really is. However, philosophers understandably reify Reality as dual spirit/material in order to speculate beyond the world of the senses.

Reification of self as body/soul greatly limits the probing of Reality. The imagery of soul/body does not imply mutual opposites but simply different arenas of beings in as much as both spirit and matter can exist as separate worlds. In contrast, self/all-else form definitional opposites - one defines the other and *otherness* is the connecting link. To suggest that spirit belongs to the supernatural realm and cannot be defined is less than satisfying. A self/all-else dichotomy implies dynamic interaction; soul/body dichotomy implies static isolation.

While the goal of greater understanding is plausible, creating a parallel world through reification leads to viewing the body as unworthy of the spirit and even as the source of evil - as a door to temptation and sin. By extension, escape from the world becomes important because matter entails limitation and sin. Death is the moment when the soul is finally freed from the prison of the body and able to enter the bliss of another universe. Reification leads to the parallel worlds: the city of God and the city of man. This imagery implies either two universes on a collision course or an ontological irrelevance between the two. .

The underlying error of a dual universe is assuming that image and Reality are identical. *Spirit* is an image and *matter* is an image, but neither constitutes Reality. These images are useful only to the extent they are able to reflect Reality. There are more refined images to mirror Reality, such as a self/all-else dichotomy. At the *self/all-else* stage of psychological devolution, the core of Reality is not *being* but *relation*. There is no need at this advanced level to create two parallel universes. Self and Reality are definable through a dynamic contrast of *otherness*.

Dividing the world into spirit and material categories fills the need we have for sameness in sorting through the world of Reality. Even the very effort of pigeonholing beings uses the ‘relationship’ of *similarity* as the basis for categorizing. We gain little if our sole purpose is simply dividing the world into aggregates of the same. Shifting the focus from *being* to *relation* expands self-experience beyond a clash between a spirit and material world.

In the self/all-else relation, the body is the primary expression of self and not an isolated phenomenon or object. The body is the self in that it is the medium of articulation for the self. The body is the primary level for experiencing the *otherness* that constitutes self. The body is the initial unfolding of self. We begin with the body in seeking the self not by escaping from the body, as Plato would have it. The body, as the primary experience of Reality, is both substance and environment of self and is not to be seen as a ‘container’ of self.

The body is the primary concretization of the relation *self* vis-à-vis Reality. For the Western mind, this is an awkward way of thinking, but mastery of a new mental tool takes time and effort. Mastery of the mental artifact - *self/all-else* - is an absolutely critical first step in entering the world of *relation* within which a concept of self emerges. In this seismic shift in awareness, self is no longer *outside* the process, as in trying to save one’s ‘soul’ from its captivity in the body. Rather, a search for self sets out as a body defining self in time and place in a dynamic relation with Reality. The limit

of the search is Reality itself; the perception of body expands along with the understanding of Reality that it reflects. From this perspective, the body is the first down payment of unlimited possibilities. The body is summit achievement and integral part of the universe.

The challenge is to delve into the meaning of *body* (versus *spirit*) as the arena for finding self/Reality. The very concept of *self* implies a dynamic of inclusion as the basis of relating to Reality; the notion of *individual* (versus *self*) leads to a dynamic of exclusion based on an atomizing mindset. A self-experience of inclusion uses the more refined intellectual tool of self/all-else; a self-experience of exclusion, as implied in the notion of *individual*, uses the cruder intellectual tool of reification. The exclusivity of *individual* identity leads to a fortress world; the inclusiveness of *self*-identity leads to a world of discovery. Because inclusion/exclusion is a dichotomous relation, as is east/west, it is impossible to face both ways simultaneously. Exclusion, as a *modus operandi*, leads to fear because the notion of *individual* implicitly means an isolated being that is to be preserved versus alien beings. Inclusion, as a *modus operandi*, leads to the thrill of discovery in the arena of *otherness* inviting unlimited self-discovery – self-discovery ‘spirituality’ is to be found in such a mindset.

***** END SIDEBAR*****

Otherness as Stimulus/Response

The dichotomous relation of *action/reaction* or *stimulus/response* concretizes *otherness* in both a theoretical and practical realm. If we assume Reality to be a relation rather than a collage of countless objects, then the challenge is defining the *nature* of that relation in a tangible way. Physicists pose the relation of action/reaction as a basic law of nature – every action produces an equal reaction, as when the ‘action’ of fire is applied to water the ‘reaction’ of steam is produced. Given the unending wars in human history, the same action/reaction law of physics seems to be a lens into human behavior as well.

However, when applying the relational action/reaction law of physics to human behavior a new element is being introduced, namely, the notion of a conscious *self* – a factor not found in the fire/steam example of action/reaction. When the notion of *self* is added to the mix, the relation of action/reaction is more appropriately defined as a stimulus/response relation - *stimulus* refers to an action that creates a reaction in the form of sensory *response*. Thus, action/reaction translates into stimulus/response when interfacing with a consciousness self.

The same law of physics governs both the animate and inanimate worlds. Thus, when the ‘action’ of fire is applied to a human as stimulus, the reaction takes the form of a *conscious response* that may or may not produce ‘steam’. The elevation of action/reaction into stimulus/response gives a critical insight into the underlying relationship between the animate and inanimate world – there is not a dual set of laws governing the inanimate and animate worlds, rather, *consciousness* is simply being introduced.

Thus, Reality, as a *conscious/animate* world, is a dichotomous relation of *stimulus* versus *response*. Adding the notion of *self* to stimulus/response simply signifies stimulus and/or response have the added quality of a *unified* consciousness. Otherness is the ‘gap’ between stimulus and response because they are exact opposites since one side defines the other and neither can exist conceptually without the other. This deeper insight into Reality yields important corollaries: human self-experience is *always* response because the human self is *defined* as a conscious *response* to the stimuli embodied in all-else/Reality; secondly, stimulus *always* precedes response because Reality logically precedes a response to it. Thus, the very notion of the human self is identified as *response* to the myriad stimuli embedded in the world of people and nature/universe. The importance of the human self as identical to *response* will become apparent in the following chapters detailing the history of self-awareness. The issue here is to appreciate *otherness* versus static *being* as an alternate and legitimate insight into the core of Reality and that *otherness* is concretely conceivable as an inanimate action/reaction or animate stimulus/response relation.

Being/non-being is the arena of philosophy. Self-experience is not a philosophical notion and does not emerge outside or along side of Reality. Self-experience is the elevating of Reality from an inanimate to an animate/conscious level. At the nucleus of Reality is a self/all-else *dichotomous* relation – one defines the other just as *hot* is understandable only in relation to *cold*. The human self-experience is the response side of Reality, just as all/else is the stimulus side of Reality – two sides of the same coin. The human self - the inverse of the universal stimulus defined as all/else - is all/else coming into consciousness as *response*.

Thus, human self-experience is not static, as would be the case if *self* were a *being*, but a dynamic interaction with *all/else* by which self develops increasingly as *conscious* response. Because self cannot be experienced except in a

relation to all/else, self-experience is not just *response* but, at the same time, is an experience of *otherness*. The self you experience can only be a growing *response of otherness* within a universe of stimuli. This statement is of the utmost importance because it goes to the core of self-identity. A human self can only *respond* to Reality and cannot be conceptualized apart from Reality – response cannot be separated from the world of stimuli as one side defines the other. For every action there is reaction – the human *self* is the reaction of response to the action of Reality as stimulus - only elevated to the level of consciousness.

Since the identity of self is *response* vis-à-vis the *stimulus* of all/else, it follows that in such a stimulus/response dichotomy there can be only *one* human self. Multiple human selves imply reifying *self* as object versus self as a relation. Due to our penchant of atomizing Reality, we equate *self* and *individual* as identical and *self-experience* and *self-image* as identical. However, individual and self, image and experience are very different concepts - there can be many individuals but only one self, or many images but only one self-experience. The possibility of only one *relational self* is alien to the Western way of framing Reality. You have not shifted from an ontological to a relational grasp of Reality until it is obvious that there can be but *one* human self. I shall return to this issue in future chapters when expanding on the relational insight into Reality. Human self, by definition, is simply conscious *response*. *Response* is a universal relation when juxtaposed to the universal *stimulus* embedded in all/else that is not self.

By way of analogy: a law of nature dictates that all living organisms within the *same exact niche* are the same species. By the same token, if self is *response* as opposed *stimulus*, then response found anywhere constitutes but *one* human self. This means that the human race and the universe itself, is so far as they are viewed as *response*, are expressions of your self-experience. This necessarily follows from the nature of a dichotomous relation such as stimulus/response. Thus, just as stimulus encompasses all/else that is not response, so, too, self as response encompasses all/else that is not stimulus. There cannot be a multiplicity of selves any more than there can be a multiplicity of all/else – one is a mirror reflection of the other.

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TRANSITION FROM OBJECT TO RELATION MINDSET

Needless to say, a concept of a relational-self encompassing humanity/universe is counterintuitive to the atomized Western mind. Breaking the world into ever-smaller objects through science and technology has produced such prosperity that it is no wonder that the intellectual tool of reification is assumed to be the ultimate insight into Reality. The West often looks down on the East as an inferior culture because of its backwardness regarding technology. However, a far larger world lies beyond atomizing, but a sea change in awareness is needed to reframe Reality in the larger ‘box’ of a self/all-else dichotomous relation.

It is well worthwhile mastering the mental tool of a self/all-else dichotomy, as it will open up vast new vistas on Reality. Whether we perceive Reality as isolated objects/beings or as a stimulus/response dichotomous relation, Reality remains unchanged. What changes is our ability to penetrate Reality with not just one but two very powerful intellectual tools. As human society becomes more complex, the need to devolve better tools in dealing with Reality is increasingly obvious. Amid the countless marvels wrought by advanced technology, *self* is moving to center stage and can be defined only by more refined intellectual tools.

The question often arises: Who am I? The Western mind in answering this question is preconditioned to imaging self as an individual among individuals whose behavior is subject to comparative analysis. The complete answer can never be found in behavior alone, using the *non-relational* tools of pattern, imaging, reification, cause/effect or reasoning. The relational tool of self/all-else, embodying a dichotomous view of Reality as action/reaction (stimulus/response), entails a profoundly new insight into the essence of self beyond behavior. A relational sense of self will always be counterintuitive to a mindset hardwired to processing Reality as myriad objects however large or infinitesimally small.

In a wider perspective, atomizing is counterintuitive. A self/all-else perception of Reality is, in point of fact, the experiential refinement that separated the human from the animal, sending humans down the path of consciousness-of-consciousness and on through the ten stages of psychological devolution. Consciousness-of-consciousness seminally contains self-experience. It took millennia before it became evident that self-experience is the underlying insight that gave birth to consciousness-of-consciousness in the first place.

The stimulus/response dynamic is reflected in nature. For millions of years living organisms have reacted ('responded') to their environment. Eyes, ears, hands, feet and brains may be viewed as the direct result of an increasingly efficient 'response' to environmental stimuli. All living forms evolve in an *action/reaction* framework, but the human-self advanced to a conscious *stimulus/response* level of devolution. The legacy of billions of years of environmental 'response' is at the core of self as a growing *conscious* response to the stimulus of the world/universe.

A relational sense of Reality is a return to our origin. The hubris of Western power and superiority makes it supremely difficult to understand let alone enter into a radically different perception of Reality. The observation that reification is only one of a number of mental artifacts is so important and so hard to get use to that I will be touching on it throughout this book. The self/all-else framing of Reality is an intellective tool that is far more sophisticated and productive than mental tools developed before it. Other mental artifacts are not discounted, but each mental tool has its own function and limitations. Confusion arises because the effects of intellective tools often blend, making it difficult to distinguish one stage of psychological devolution from another. For example, an entity may be both object and relation simultaneously: a flag is an object but also represents a country. Culturally we are programmed to view a flag as an object, but its sole purpose is to make our relation to country visible.

Differentiation is the hallmark of an educated mind. We may focus on images as quasi-objects that allow our mind to function; however, the underlying operational system of the mind is relational and not ontological. Changing from a thing versus relation orientation to Reality does not require adopting new ideas or theories, but simply requires a deeper awareness of human origin and how the brain functions. At a conscious level, we focus on things rather than relation because concrete, tangible objects give us a sense of certitude, assurance, comfort, validity and physical identity in the world. It is like a child who focuses on a gift and does not yet see the relation of the giver in the gift – a gift is both object and relation. Subliminally, the brain perceives Reality only as relation. Even the thought of an object implies a relation between thought and object.

Atomizing Reality nurtures certitude, but relational Reality nurtures authenticity – a sense of connection between self and Reality. When the tool of reification alone is used to form a notion of self, self becomes isolated from Reality, thus introducing a fear of being wrong about Reality. Self, as a sense of *otherness*, is a growing sensitivity to Reality by focusing not on right/wrong but authentic/inauthentic response. Self, when based on an authentic struggle to define Reality, is a work of art; it is as a composer drawing from a deep sense of Reality to create music.

Authenticity is the reward of *otherness*-orientation. It is akin to the spontaneity of a child freely exploring the emerging experience of life. Social pressures often destroy spontaneity by forcing conformity based on the certitude derived from reifying Reality – a reality known only by 'experts' and often used to intimidate others. Touching Reality at a deeper level requires nurturing an authentic self-experience. Self as *otherness* requires dialogue with human community and nature to deepen a self-experience that is in tune with Reality. Dialogue engages the core of the self as response to a world of stimuli.

In a world where isolated, tangible things are the building blocks of our conscious thinking, a transition into a nebulous world of *otherness* as the core of Reality is challenging. It may help to observe that an object, such as a flower, is a living organism that cannot exist in isolation but is in a complex relation with all that surrounds it. A flower is associated with stem, leaf, root, soil, sun, rain, temperature and so on. This is not to suggest foregoing a common sense experience of viewing the world as a collage of things, but to stretch our mind to see the world of relation that make a hodgepodge of objects understandable at a much deeper and more exciting level.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Otherness and Imaging

While human self-*experience* can be defined only as *response*, self-*imaging* is a combination of *reaction* and response – the same action/reaction governing the inanimate world but now elevated to the level of conscious *response*. For example, a slap on the back brings the *reaction* of pain that is transformed into *response* when imaged as a greeting from a friend. Self-imaging is a limited expression of self-experience in as much as self-experience is close to undifferentiated consciousness. Self-imaging is like the bubbles in a boiling pot rising to the top to let off steam; Reality is the fire under the pot producing the conscious response of self-experience that in turn produces the bubbles/images. Human self-experience can only be response because self directly interfaces the *otherness* of Reality; self-imaging is a combination of reaction and response because imaging is only indirectly connected to Reality.

The ability to grasp *otherness* is the spark that sets a human apart from animals. This spark, in turn, ignites the fire that leads to image making. Image making is the intellectual tool devised precisely to give definition and form to the undifferentiated experience of *otherness*. (The discussion of self-experience and self-imaging in the second chapter applies here.) Self-experience is the experience of *otherness*. Devolutionary psychology is a history of refining self-experience/otherness through image-making and all the other intellectual tools.

While image making identifies the human as unique among all other species of the world, an underlying sense of *otherness* more precisely defines what uniquely makes a human. Researchers have demonstrated how the experience of otherness marks the turning point when humans begin to branch off from other primates. Social scientists have noted a remarkable sameness between human and chimpanzee infants when raised together. Although both enjoy scribbling on a paper, an important transformation occurs within the human child. In their scribbling, both make lines, circles and dots on the paper. The human child and the chimpanzee occasionally draw a circle around two dots. At some point, a human child makes a connection between the circle with two dots and the face of a caregiver. The child subconsciously is recognizing the otherness of the caregiver from self via an image on the paper. The chimpanzee can never cross the threshold of otherness with image as a springboard. Maturity occurs when a reversal takes place, namely, otherness becomes the stimulus for image, rather than image the gateway to otherness.

A chimpanzee may continue to have a rudimentary self-experience, but the experience of otherness and the image making to define otherness, sets the human infant on a very different path of development from that of the chimpanzee. Once image making begins, the self-*experience* of the child begins to transit into a self-*image*. Image making is a lifelong tool used to bring to the surface a more accurate expression of self-experience/otherness. A child grows to become acculturated into a world of images created by ancestors struggling with self-experience, out of which a child seeks to define his/her own self-experience.

A human can abstract from the world of images (culture) a self-image and use the self-image to function in the world as teacher, doctor, lawyer and the like. Even though we are image-makers and function in the world via images, humans are rooted in the *otherness* of nature, as are all animals. Human attachment to pets reflects our otherness identity with them. The big difference is that humans are able to become conscious of otherness/self-experience while animals are not. We may project our sense of otherness on favorite pets to give them quasi-human status, but what is being projected is our own self-experience.

It is easy for humans to be so taken up in the technology of image making that a sense of otherness vanishes or, even worse, is considered an illusion. Otherness is the raw material out of which images are abstracted and to which images must reconnect for validity. Without a sense of otherness, we live in a fantasy world or are slavishly bound to empty ideology. While it is true that a sense of self begins with image making, for example, as a drawing of a circle with two dots, it is also true that self is more than an image. A mature adult has the ability to maintain a sense of otherness apart from an image-based self. A chimpanzee grows to adulthood never able to abstract *self* as *otherness* to the surrounding Reality.

While the notion of otherness is fairly simple so that even a child has an inborn sense of its meaning, the more one tries to analyze or explain what otherness is, the more stretched out our mind becomes. Simply put: otherness is the substance of a relation. It is the space between east and west, up and down. The space is unlimited because there is no end to the polarity such as, for example, up or down. Each end of a relation defines the other, thus there would be no *east* without a *west* to define it, or *up* without a *down*. A thought can be formed about one end of a relation only by using the otherness of the opposite end – when you think of *up* you do so by defining it at a subliminal level as the opposite of *down*. Neither side of a relation is comprehensible without the other. Thus, otherness defines the connection between two poles of a dichotomous relation. Otherness connects the two universes: self-experience and all/else that is not self.

The opposite of otherness is a monopole perception of Reality wherein consciousness of a *distinct* self is an illusion or fanciful dreaming. However, even the ability to wonder about the validity of a distinct self vis-à-vis all/else requires some vague awareness of otherness as a mental tool to even frame such an issue. *Otherness*, not *self*, is the fundamental issue – self arises from otherness and not the reverse. The greater the awareness of otherness, the greater is the sense of self. Perhaps our most pronounced *experience* of otherness is in marriage when there is equality between the two parties. If one party forces the other into sameness, marriage as a bipolar relation diminishes and a sense of otherness with it. Sameness undermines the self-experience of both parties. Marriage requires the dynamic relation of *otherness* between equals.

As image-maker, self is a responder to the stimulus of Reality and never its creator. Recognizing that there can be but one human self and not multiple selves entails grasping *otherness* as the void between self and all-else/Reality. Or, to put it in another way: there is only *self* and *otherness*. The entire universe cannot contain the self; however, the universe is the necessary context for a self-experience because self is always the otherness of all-else/universe. An experience of a distinct self is the first step toward putting a face on Reality.

Imaging is the tool used to make tangible the otherness inherent in self-experience - thus producing a self-image. Because self-experience is a relation, imaging is necessary to concretize an understanding of that relation in specific time, place and circumstance. However refined images may be, images cannot adequately reflect self-experience or Reality. If we can create an image, we can also examine, modify or change it. Images are tools for refining response to Reality. Self-image is a working blueprint in constructing Reality in time and place. Self-image is not a prison but a tool for unlocking the depth of self-experience.

One more observation is important: an image is not a being, object or thing, but a *relation* made visible. An image is the mental tool used to connect self with Reality and Reality with self. The *relation* between self/Reality is the core issue rather than self or Reality. Philosophically speaking, there is no way to verify an objective 'being' outside sensory experience. It is for this reason that a being/non-being or existence/non-existence framing of Reality is a cat chasing its tail. In contrast, self as an experience of otherness opens to boundless Reality.

Otherness and Emotions

Ancients, believing the seat of intelligence to be the heart, sought wisdom in the form of emotional intelligence. As the mental tool of imaging spread, the center of intelligence gradually shifted upward to the head. However, the intelligence of the heart will forever be the fire that stokes the mind because the emotions more directly interface Reality than the intellect; sensation/emotion concretizes self-experience vis-à-vis Reality.

Emotions are the sensory-based expression of *otherness* because of their immediate connection to Reality. Sensation/emotion is food to be digested by the mind and transformed into image. They range both in the negative as well as in a positive direction – between reactions of paralyzing fear to response of exhilarating joy. The range of emotions measures the levels of response. Thus, a sense of self increases in the presence of joy and decreases in the presence of fear. Emotions are rooted more in self-experience than in self-image. When self-image overwhelms self-experience, emotions tend to dry up because self is disconnected from an interface with the otherness of Reality.

Developing a sense of otherness is in effect developing refinement in experiencing emotions. Emotions play a central role in providing a sense of otherness because we draw from emotions in forming a conscious self and they color how we respond to the stimuli of Reality. It is near impossible to grasp otherness on a purely intellectual level. The deepest sense of self is through emotion. Emotions had evolved long before humans arrived on the scene. Emotions are an important connector between self-experience and animals, and, possibly, plant life. However, using the tool of self-imaging, humans have refined emotions far beyond that found in other life forms.

Scientists have found that emotions are far more central to our self-experience than imaging or intelligence. Neurophysicists find that the neuronal activity in the thalamocortical area of the brain, where emotions are processed, is *ten* times more active than the prefrontal cortex where thoughts are fashioned. This finding would help to explain why emotions override good judgment leading to violent behavior, such as in road rage. The far higher rate of neuronal activity related to emotions may also serve as a barrier to the introduction of new ideas, especially those ideas that would lead to fundamental change. Thus, emotion is the gatekeeper of learning. Effective communication requires emotional connection before information can flow – as any parent well knows.

New neuronal connections in the brain that are needed to form a new thought pattern require a great deal of reinforcement and emotional support. The reinforcement is through repeated connections along the same neuronal links giving substance to a particular thought. When the new neuronal links are strong enough, it becomes possible to override neuronal activity of emotions opposed to change. However, the normal path for learning is through emotional experience followed by intellectual reinforcement - intellectual comprehension depends more than we realize on emotion in pursuit of Reality.

Otherness and Science

Otherness as the crucial insight into Reality is not new. Pythagoras (497 B.C.) maintains that all visible matter is simply a manifestation of underlying relation. Moreover, the harmonious contrast at the core of Reality is independent of our thoughts or even our ability to fully appreciate. He points to our innate need for harmony as evidence. Thus, we experience joy listening to a master violinist and pain when junior takes the first lesson. Notes on a music scale, like mathematics, have a certain harmony at a level of Reality that resists distortions. Because the otherness of Reality permeates our self-experience, we react with pain when this innate drive for harmonious relation is disturbed. According to Pythagoras, all Reality embodies a rhythm of harmonious relation – music simply reveals this hidden relational nature.

Modern science takes its cue from Pythagoras. Rather than trying to prove what Reality is directly, modern science strives to prove what Reality is not. The classic scientific model is to amass seemingly unrelated data through observation and experimentation, then develop a theory that would explain how the data might be related and, finally, try to prove a stated relational theory wrong by further experimentation. This scientific method insures that Reality always retains a certain *otherness* – Reality always lies beyond human observation and experimentation because a theory can only indirectly reflect Reality. Thus, the scientific view is that all human knowledge is theory to be disproved by either logic or experimentation. The inability to disprove a theory is the scientific way for pushing back the darkness beyond human knowledge, but the limit of knowledge will never be reached.

The scientific approach to Reality clearly embodies the notion of *otherness*. There is an obvious otherness between the *investigator* and the *surrounding world to be investigated*. In this dichotomy, the investigator is clearly distinct from the Reality investigated and, therefore, can only indirectly theorize about Reality. An arena framed as investigator/investigated is one of *otherness* and, consequently, only connections and contrasts rather than isolated objects will be the substance of human knowledge. In order to find pattern and establish predictability, science focuses on the interconnectedness of nature/universe that unifies Reality; findings will reflect on the investigator as well. For example, evolution, a centerpiece for defining the connection of all living things including the interconnectedness of life to the universe itself, reflects back on the origin of investigator as well. Probing Reality not only as a world of many things, but also as a world of connections requires reframing Reality as a dynamic, meaningful and exciting world of relation with otherness at the core of Reality.

Modern science is still at the beginning stage in theorizing about the myriad relationships manifest in humanity, nature, matter and the universe. The ultimate relation, between the *self* of the investigator vis-à-vis the *all/else not the self*, remains a distant frontier still beyond the reach of science. While there are countless relations making up the fabric of the universe, *self* is integral to all the relational stuff of the universe. Searching for a unifying factor drives the scientist to ceaselessly probe Reality. When the investigator finally discovers that all Reality coalesces into a unified consciousness, *self*-discovery will emerge; it is within the self that consciousness of this ultimate coalition resides.

Seeking the ultimate unifying factor at the core of Reality is in effect seeking self-identity. Self is the inverse of all/else and *otherness* is the very 'substance' between self/all-else. Every nuance of relation discovered is a new insight into self. Self, like Reality, is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic unfolding where self expands and deepens as self more perfectly reflects Reality. Science tries to fill in the blanks between self-experience and Reality. In the end, both ends of this polarity will emerge with greater brilliance. Modern science slowly is eroding the foundation of body as an isolated material object upon which self-image rests. It is increasingly apparent that an authentic self-experience must be derived from otherness, which constitutes the fundamental relation between self/universe. Reality comes into focus in and through self-experience; by the same token, self becomes as indefinable as Reality itself. The otherness joining self with all/else is the arena where truth will emerge.

*****SIDEBAR*****

RELATION VERSUS RELATIVISM

Relativism is a theory that truth and morality depend solely on circumstances. What is true/false or right/wrong is different for everyone and changes when circumstances change - there is no objective Reality. Framing Reality as a dichotomous relation is often confused with *relativism*. There are only three mutually exclusive ways to frame Reality: as phenomenon (wonderment), beings (objects) or relation. All three are legitimate beginning assumptions and are utilized by millions today to gain insight into Reality. The Far East prefers phenomenon, the West focuses on being, and

the Near East on relation. Relation provides an important insight into the nature of Reality, but does not imply that Reality is relative and changes for each observer; what changes is the observer, not Reality.

A *relational* assumption about Reality means that *nothing* can be understood in *isolation*. Our ability to know depends on our ability to perceive relationship. A relationship, once discovered, is the same for everyone and potentially can be discovered by everyone. Thus, east does not exist until one discovers west – the relationship is the reality and open for everyone to discover. Moreover, the east/west relationship will be the same for everyone. Relational knowledge is called faith, in contrast to technical knowledge derived from science. There is no connection between a relation-based Reality and relativism beyond the use of a word that is subject to a double meaning.

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Recapitulation

The dynamic, interactive polarity between self and Reality creates a tension in which self-experience is a conscious synthesis. Consciousness requires that everyone create a sense of reality in time and place that may or may not reflect Reality. Learning is through trial and error; life itself provides feedback. The ultimate criterion for truth/morality is the enhancement of life; life increases the more Reality is accurately reflected because Reality is vested with Life. Decreasing life indicates the response to Reality needs modification; increasing life indicates response is more in tune with Reality. In this constant interaction between self/Reality, a sense of self emerges. In the context of this interaction, self is clearly exposed as a relation and not as an object.

In the polarity of a dichotomous relation one side defines the other without being the other. Thus, it is impossible to reflect on self-experience directly because self is knowable only as a reflection of Reality (i.e., all/else not the self) and can never be the Reality reflected. It also follows that Reality can be known only by knowing the self in as much as the human self is defined as response to Reality. We think of the evolution of our body, but often neglect to realize that self-experience also is devolving. Unlike the body, self is fathomless because self is the otherness of Reality. The psychic core of self-experience is a sense of *otherness* because both Reality and self are emerging as mirror reflections from which both derive an identity – the one as *stimulus* and the other as *response*. Every human discovery throws light on Reality from which self-experience blossoms. The next chapter traces the dawning awareness that the *all/else*, in the dichotomous relation of self/*all-else*, is also a *self* – self and the self vested in all-else form complementary selves with opposite identities: one as *response* and the other as *initiative*.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD

Summary: Abraham's insight into his as a distinct life introduces the bipolarity that forms the core of religion, in lieu of the monopoly world of proto-religion. A bipolar world consists in a distinct human self as mirror reflection of a distinct divine Self; history is the unfolding of the relation (religion) between the two selves.

Outline of Chapter

God-imaging

Monopole Era: Proto-Religion – (250,000 B.C. – 2000 B.C.)

Concept

Background

Prototypes: Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism)

Context of Religion

Bipolar Era: Religion – (2000 B.C. – Present)

Vital Epoch (2000 B.C.– 1350 B.C.)

Origin

Six Characteristics of Religion

Coalitional Epoch (1350 B.C. – 1200 B.C.)

Tribal Epoch (1200 B.C. – 1 A.D.)

Beginnings

Maturation

Espousal Epoch (1 A.D. – Present)

Background

Beginnings

Salient Features

Communion

Beloved-ness

Meekness

Peace

Word Made Flesh

Flesh Made Word

The Word Dwelling in Our Midst

Recapitulation

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CALL/RESPONSE

DIVINE REVELATION

EVOLUTION IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

PLATONIC VERSUS HEBRAIC PERSON

ANGELS AND DREAMS

PRAYER, UNITY AND FREEDOM

RELIGIOUS VERSUS WESTERN NOTIONS OF SIN

ESPOUSAL RELIGION AS A NEW WORLD ORDER

FRIENDSHIP AS CATALYST OF DIVINE PRESENCE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT IMAGERY

God-imaging

In a news report, Nahrin, an Afghan woman, sat rocking back and forth on the rubble of her home moaning, “Oh, my children. Oh, my children.” An earthquake had destroyed her house, killed her four children, 800 other villagers and left 100,000 homeless. For years war had ravished her town; men were forced to flee and live in the mountains. A long drought had reduced the area to a dust bowl. Now an earthquake had struck, “I don’t know what God wants....” the distraught mother moans. The Afghan woman’s reaction to total devastation reflects an image of a demanding God who punishes for unknown offenses. Subliminal God-imaging governs the way humans react to life’s events. Chances are that the woman only vaguely, if at all, realizes that her image of God is that of a capricious taskmaster.

The plight of this woman is reminiscent of Job in the Old Testament. Job, after losing health, family, flock and field, is reduced to a state of abject misery. His wife taunts him, urging him to curse God and end his life. But Job’s response is to bless God. The God-image driving Job’s wife is one of a capricious despot with no mercy. Cursing and suicide are a natural reaction to such a God-image. In contrast, Job’s God-imaging is that of a lender who gives and takes back, based on the lender’s choice. This spin on imaging God leads to the response of blessing the generous lender for the temporary enjoyment of unearned goods.

As discussed in the first chapter, humans depend on images to mediate Reality. Consequently, God, at the core of Reality, is knowable only indirectly. We create images to define Reality for ourselves. Some images express Reality/God more profoundly and accurately than others. Thus, the above stories assume three underlying images of God differing in depth, namely, as taskmaster (Afghan woman), despot (Job’s wife) and lender (Job). Each image is a subconscious template for a particular behavior. Images, however, reveal the image-maker more than Reality.

Images are like artifacts in an archeological dig. Images give an insight into the level of psychological devolution attained by the image-maker. For example, all three God-images mentioned above assume a unified divine consciousness behind Reality. In each of the stories, the divine agent is making a choice. This imagery is far more refined than a blind, fatalistic view of Reality. Imaging Reality as vested with divine consciousness requires profound insight that took millennia to devolve.

Divine consciousness at the core of Reality also implies a nascent sense of a distinct self. The three image-makers above are clearly struggling within the context of the seventh stage in devolutionary psychology. The notion of self introduces bipolarity in the perception of Reality. The first six mental artifacts (consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning) differ only incrementally from one to the next because they assume Reality to be monopole – self is not an essential factor. A distinct self is central to the last four mental artifacts, i.e., self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. These last four intellectual stages involve a whole new order of magnitude over the previous six because a monopole Reality becomes bipolar: as a self versus all that is not self.

A sense of a distinct self versus all/else, surfacing four thousand years ago, marks the beginning of religion. As mentioned, the notion of a distinct self implies bipolarity in the perception of Reality. The monopole God-centrism of proto-religion shifts to the bipolar relation between self and Reality. (Note: The self/Reality relation is generally referred to as religion – taken from the Latin word for relation, i.e., *religio*). Religion explores the dichotomous relation of self versus all/else not the self. A sense of self, defined as a unified consciousness, implicitly implies the coalescing of all/else not the self as the basis of self-experience. It is just a matter of time before a sense of self as the opposite of all/else necessitates the positing of a complimentary self to the all/else by which self is defined in the first place. The history of religion is a growing awareness of the coalescing of Reality from which emerges both a human and divine self as mirror opposites.

Religion is the gradual unfolding of a conscious human-self juxtaposed to the divine Self. Separating the two selves in this relation is the void of otherness, i.e., one self defines the other by being precisely the opposite. Thus, the Self of God is defined by all/else that is not the divine Self; likewise, the human self is defined by all/else that is not the human self. The all/else is the otherness between the divine and human selves and expresses the dynamic interaction between the two selves. Since the divine/human self implicitly reflects all/else - but with polar opposite identities of initiative/response - it follows that the divine/human selves are mutually reflective.

The consciousness of a distinct self versus all/else changes a monopoly sense of Reality into a bipolar world. The monopoly view of Reality, extending back to human origins, is called the proto-religion era. Religion develops out of proto-religion. The critical element that distinguishes the two eras is the introduction of a distinct self. Reality transits from a monopoly, unfathomable mystery to a concrete bipolar relation between the self and all/else. A transition from proto-religion to religion represents a sea change in devolutionary psychology – the focus shifts from God as unfathomable mystery to self as unfathomable relation.

The divine Self derives identity as Action/Call, while the human self derives identity as reaction/response. Religion, defined as a dichotomous relation between Call/response, changes the core of Reality from static being to otherness - as discussed in the previous chapter. As in all dichotomous relations, one side defines the other. The self-imaging of God and the human self-imaging go hand-in-glove as in a verse/inverse relation. A seminal human self-experience logically precedes a complementary divine Self. A growing insight into the divine Self-experience depends on a growing insight into human self-experience. Thus, the emergence in history of the divine Self depends on an emerging human-self. In practice, you become a self in the same measure you are able to ascribe divine Selfhood to all/else not yourself – like in a marriage whereby you become a self by ascribing the dignity of self to your spouse. In Reality, however, the divine Self is the initiator/source and the human self the responder/reflection of the unified consciousness that defines self.

The Bible chronicles two thousand years of exploring Reality as a Call/response relation. It is divided into the old relation (Old Testament) and the new relation (New Testament). Scriptural writings provide an excellent record illustrating psychological devolution through the stages: self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. My approach to Scripture will be as a psychological anthropologist extracting from fossil record, as it were, evidence of human growth in self-awareness. The Bible provides the history of how a self/all-else relation eventually morphs into self/other-selves, which in turn becomes self/other-self. The four mental artifacts reflected in Scripture, unlike the previous six stages in devolutionary psychology, frames Reality as a relation of stimulus/response in which the notion of self is central.

This chapter looks first at the monopoly era of proto-religion out of which the bipolar era of religion emerges; secondly, I examine religion as it develops through vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal epochs. Each epoch brings a deeper insight into the divine/human self-imaging. The divine Self-image develops as the inverse of human self-image. Once human consciousness makes a quantum leap into the seventh stage of devolutionary psychology - the stage introducing the notion of a unified and distinct self - divine Incarnation is inevitable. When divine initiative and human response reaches the full divine Self/other-self level of consciousness, the two selves become mirror reflections as polar opposites – the essence of the Incarnation.

Monopoly Era - Proto-Religion (250,000 – 2000 B.C)

Concept

Proto-religion is a view of Reality in which self-experience is at best irrelevant and at worse a hindrance. Proto-religion is monopoly because there is no need to define a distinct self-experience as opposed to Reality. In this view, being rather than relation is central. The introduction of self-experience turns the spotlight on the relation (religion) between self/Reality rather than directly on Reality. A proto-relational outlook is a world of wonder, mystery, miracles and magic. In a proto-relational psyche, the world is an absorbing, unbound phenomenon that is just there. Entering into a proto-religious world is through ritual and wonderment. The story of Alice in Wonderland is an allegory of such a world.

In proto-religion, Reality is a seamless whole that resists differentiation. However, driven by the need to survive, humans gradually begin to introduce differentiation as a means of exploiting the surrounding world. The six psychological stages, namely, consciousness-of-consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning, represent the movement of human awareness out of a world of sheer magic and wonder into one of increasing differentiation. The notion of relation is implied and develops with each successive stage, but not until the seventh stage - self-as-object - does relation take center stage in the forming of a self. The period prior to the self/object stage of devolutionary psychology is the era of proto-religion.

Background

The importance of the proto-religion era cannot be exaggerated. While religion began only about four thousand years ago, proto-religion dates back to human origins. Homo sapiens began about 250,000 years ago, but human-like fossils can be found dating back a million or more years. Pre-historic humans not only evolved larger brains but a larger view of their world. Only gradually over time do humans learn to introduce differentiation in their experience of Reality. The discovery process continues to the present day, reaching now into the subatomic world.

For ancient humans, Reality and the life that they struggle to preserve are one and the same - a struggle shared with all plants and animals. Since moment-to-moment survival is paramount in ancient times, there is no distinction between global Life and specific life. In the world of proto-religion, human life is but an aspect of global Life. Humans survived more by instinct than forethought. It is hard for us to imagine a human psyche nearly identical to the instinctive survival drive of all animals. But, for more than a million years, Reality/Life for animal and anthropoid meant finding what is needed to survive the day.

In a hand-to-mouth environment, in which group cooperation is needed for survival, any individuation would be detrimental. Human life, nature and Life globally blend together to form the quintessence of Reality. The closest we have today that gives some notion of this pre-individuation world is in the culture of isolated aborigines still living in a stone-age ethos where suppression of individuation is critical for survival of the group. Early humans obviously had individual lives, but abstracting a sense of a distinct self as a mental image separate from Life as a whole had no functional purpose.

The desperate struggle to simply survive is conducive to viewing Reality as simply Life. Hence Deity takes on the image as the Source of Life. All subsequent divine imaging directly stems from the ancient assumption of Reality as identical to Life. Humans reinforce the deification of Life when, in times of danger, they seek ways to actively affirm Life using a variety of images. These images take the form of worship, rituals, monuments, sacrifices, beliefs and story telling. Although they are image-makers, proto-religious people are not aware of these activities as images or distinct from the Reality these rituals are designed to reinforce.

Looking back at ancient people we would be inclined to think of them as pantheists. However, at the proto-religion stage, humans are absorbed into undifferentiated Reality - a notion of self has not yet devolved. Citing proto-religious consciousness of ancient humans as pantheistic is an anachronism. Ancient humans simply could not distinguish their lives as separate from Life as a whole.

Prototypes (Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism)

The ancient traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism are prototypes of religion in that they establish the baseline from which religion develops. These traditions, aimed at sensing Reality prior to the stage of consciousness-of-consciousness, give birth to rich image streams in the form of ritual, practice and beliefs. Common to all three traditions is a monopoly assumption of Reality. Shintoism, Hinduism and Buddhism are proto-religions because they seek to grasp Reality/Life prior to the emergence of a distinct self upon which the concept of relation is based. The sole focus of these image streams is on Life in its primal expression, as experienced even before the development of consciousness-of-consciousness, pattern recognition, imaging and all the other intellectual tools that devolved. Proto-religion is the world of pre-reflected consciousness – once consciousness/imaging enters, the water gets muddy. A proto-religion strives for a consciousness that is identical with that of Reality/Life itself. The intoxicating experience of unmediated Life makes any sense of a distinct self evaporate like fog in the rising sun.

The three major Proto-religions, which stem from the human mindset that exists at the dawn of human consciousness, are the oldest image streams based on equating Life with Reality. They differ principally on the level of emphasis given to a suppression of a distinct self-experience. The reaction to a distinct self ranges from a neutral stance in Shintoism, passive resistance in Hinduism and aggressive suppression in Buddhism.

Shintoism is a lot like the proto-religion of Native Americans. Both of these proto-religions focus on the animation of nature. Every object is a manifestation of some aspect of Life. For example, in Native American imagery, after the killing of an animal for food, amends are made to the Life displayed in all of nature that is specifically manifested in the prey animal. In so doing, proper order is restored. Life as a whole is sacred and to be viewed with awe and wonderment.

A Hindu focuses more on the attractive element of Life and seeks to surrender to Life through a gradual renunciation of individuation - perceived as alienation from pure Life. Reincarnation represents success or failure to achieve assimilation into Life in a previous lifetime. Success means returning in a higher form of Life, while failure means returning in a lower form, such as that of an animal. Successive reincarnations ideally mark progress toward an eventual assimilation into the mystery of Life. In this image stream, animals, particularly the cow for its life sustaining potential, are revered as being both directly connected to Life and a concrete expression of Life.

Buddhism views Life as a challenging demand. Buddhism, like Hinduism, assumes the goal of someday being wholly absorbed into Life, but the image stream is quite different. Buddhists seek to enter Life through gradual enlightenment brought about by the suppression of earthbound desires in the self. Yearnings, arising from human desires, only darken the mind to the pure light of Reality/Life. Gradual elimination of shortsighted desires opens the mind to pure consciousness and Life.

It is unlikely that there exists today a proto-religion in its original form. What began, as a unique assumption about Reality, tends to absorb images and ideas from a multitude of sources that are gradually fashioned into an ongoing, living tradition that may sometime obscure the original insight. The above brief descriptions of proto-religions refer only to the point of origin and not to the rich image streams that subsequently developed.

Context of Religion

Religion is proto-religion with an added dimension. Developing self-experience within the context of proto-religion is the essence of religion. The challenge is to find a self-experience that does not eliminate or diminish Reality. Religion simply means attaining a dynamic equilibrium between self-experience and Reality as the exact polar opposite. More specifically, religion is a dichotomous parity of stimulus/response – with stimulus identified as the initiative characteristic of the divine component and response to initiative the essence of a human component. Proto-religion, in contrast, does not focus on a need for distinct human-self, but seeks assimilation into a seamless divine Reality – a monopole view of Reality.

Note: Because proto-religion and religion are so interconnected, we loosely refer to proto-religions as simply religions. But it is very important to keep in mind that proto-religion has its origin prior to a focus on a distinct self-experience – the hallmark of religion. The opposite of religion is proto-religion just like the opposite of marriage is the state of being single. Marriage, like religion, is a bipolar world while being single, like proto-religion, is a monopole world. To speak of religions of the world and include proto-religions, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, is like mixing apples and oranges. Religion is focused on relation, proto-religion on ontology – the nature of being. We give witness to a relation but seek to explain the nature of being – two very different dynamics. Proto-religion and religion are two distinct ways of framing Reality – one mono-polar and the other bipolar. The veracity and validity of any given tradition or varieties within a given tradition are entirely separate issues.

Ritual more than anything else connects religion with proto-religion. Ritual is at the core of proto-religion, but diminishes in importance as religion devolves through four epochs. In the proto-religion era, ritual is central because it affords a direct connection with the source of Life. Through specific rituals, humans make the sun to shine, the crops grow, the hunt successful and all the other outcomes that preserve and foster Life. By way of analogy, when we pay the electric bill, the lights stay on. The same type of direct quid pro quo exists in the ancient mind between Life globally and their experience of life; the maintenance of both depend on ritual sacrifice. When they perform a ritual dance, rain comes. If rain does not come, it means the ritual is not done properly or is insufficient. Eventually rain comes. The coming of rain proves the need and efficacy of the ritual offerings. Thus begins a tradition of prescribed rituals and beliefs that grow over time.

In proto-religion, ritual is a tool for making Life more controllable and predicable. Humans grow in an understanding of a Deity based on the feedback displayed in nature following rituals and sacrifices. The number and quality of sacrifices gradually increase depending on desired outcomes. The guiding rule is: if the danger is removed, the sacrifice is adequate; if the danger persists, the inadequacy of the sacrifice becomes the obvious reason. Regardless of the outcome of the ritual/sacrifice, the proposition is self-validating.

Gradually, the quality of the sacrifice increases until it becomes, in a still primitive stage of proto-religion, the ultimate offering, namely, human sacrifice – usually taking the form of killing an infant. What greater or more perfect sacrifice can there be than the offering of an innocent child? The death of a beloved child is the greatest affirmation of Life possible and is a quid pro quo for conceiving many more children.

Eventually the practice of Life-affirming killing focuses on the firstborn male as the first fruits of the womb. Primitive societies force upon other members the practice of infant sacrifice in order to prosper Life for the whole group. Archeologists have found gravesites in the Middle East filled with infant bones, lending credence to this ancient practice. Even early Greeks practice human sacrifice - the Greek general, Agamemnon, sacrifices his daughter to ensure favorable winds for his trip to Troy.

Today, we are horrified at the thought of human sacrifice. However, revolting as it is, infant sacrifice continues even today among some primitive tribes. For example, in the Mingi tribe of Ethiopia, the elders forcibly take infants from the mother's arms to offer in sacrifice as a way of insuring prosperity for the tribe, to ward off sickness or other calamities. The offering of life to insure continuity of Life is the logic behind human sacrifice.

For many, human sacrifice is still central to religious practice, although the understanding of it has drastically changed. Tithing the fruit of one's labor has its roots in proto-religion as a way of ensuring continued prosperity. However, taking issue with human sacrifice marks the beginning of religion – the emergence of a distinct self-experience renders killing a human a contradiction. As religion develops, ritual sacrifice decreases because control and predictability are less and less important in the development of a relation.

Bipolar Era: Religion – (2000 B.C. – Present)

Proto-religion is Theo-centric, while religion is geo-centric. A Theo-centric approach to Reality entails probing the unfathomable mystery of Life; a geo-centric perspective entails probing self-experience as a concrete reflection of the divine Self. Theo-centrism implies a monopole world; geo-centrism implies a bipolar universe of the divine and human self with one side reflecting and defining the other. In proto-religion, divinity overshadows humanity, while in religion humanity reflects divinity. Proto-religion is ethereal, while religion is incarnate. Proto-religion centers on primal Action (version), while religion centers on reaction (inversion). By way of analogy, think of proto-religion as a focus on the universe as the divine, infinitesimally small Point before the Big Bang, think of religion as exploring the world after the Big Bang when the universe expands into three-dimensional space. The expansion of the universe is an expansion of the world of self, thus giving dimensions to the divine/human relation hidden in the condensed divine Point prior to the Big Bang.

We view the inanimate world as governed by the law of physics that dictates for every action there is a reaction. Religion, by introducing the notion of distinct selves (divine and human), elevates the inanimate world governed by the action/reaction law of physics to an animate, conscious stimulus/response relation. Action→ Stimulus→ Call incarnates one side of the relation, complemented by reaction→ sensation→ response from the other side. The history of religion is an account of the gradual incarnation of both the divine and human selves. The physical world governed by the law of physics and elevated to a Call/response dichotomy, is the arena for concretizing the unfolding relation between the two parties.

Both proto-religion and religion begin on the assumption that God/Reality is beyond comprehension - like the all-embracing infinitesimal Point, as mentioned above. The difference is in the path chosen to enter into the divine Mystery. Proto-religion seeks to know God directly by suppressing self; religion seeks to know God indirectly by expanding self to encompass the earth in order to reflect the divine Self. The level of response can range from no conscious response, as in reaction, to a conscious response equal to the divine stimulus embodied in and through the earth/humanity.

The history of religion cites four quantum leaps in response that have occurred to date. Each of these breakthroughs adds greater specificity and depth to conscious response and forms the basis for dividing the history of religion into four epochs. These epochs are: the vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal levels of response to divine Stimulus/Call. The four refinements in response correspond to the four stages in devolutionary psychology discussed in chapter two, namely, self/object (vital)→ self/all-else (coalitional)→ self/other-selves (tribal)→ self/other-self (espousal). The devolution of religion follows the same pattern. To put it more succinctly: religion is relational depth psychology defined as faith.

Stages of growth in human self-awareness reflect the history of religion. Infancy is the stage for sensing a distinct and autonomous life (vital level of self), childhood explores a wider world (coalitional level of self), adolescence is a time for identifying with peers as other-selves (tribal level of self), and adulthood is a one-on-one relation with another self (espousal level of self). The devolution of religion, following the same four-step stages of maturity over a period of two thousand years, reflects the gradual maturing of the human race as a whole. The maturing of the human race as a whole is repeated again in and through the maturing stages of each individual.

Central to the maturing process is increasing specificity and depth of self-experience. The Bible traces the development of self-experience leading up its deepest espousal expression occurring two thousand years ago. Scriptures provide the artifacts of written records to map out the emergence of the intellectual tools: self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. Each epoch brings with it a deeper insight in the Stimulus/response relation and each change the direction of the divine/human imaging streams. A discussion of each epoch follows.

Vital Epoch of Religion (2000 B.C.– 1350 B.C.)

Description

While proto-religion is a contemplation of Life, religion is a contemplation of a distinct life vis-à-vis Life globally. The vital epoch begins by framing Reality in the relational context of distinct life versus Life globally. In this epoch, the notion of self is articulated only as a distinct life or, as defined in the seventh stage of devolutionary psychology, as a conscious reality among all observable realities/objects. Self-experience in this epoch is simply having a sense of life distinct from the vast sea of Life manifested in all of nature. Staking a hold on possessing a distinct life in a wondrous world filled with Life begins a relational (religious) insight into Reality.

It is important to note that the dichotomy is between a distinct-life versus Life globally, and not a distinct life versus many other lives. Because we are limited by the ontological bias of Western culture, we assume that religion includes the notion of many distinct lives. Atomizing life into many lives is a philosophical not a religious perspective. The very possibility of a distinct life vis-à-vis Life globally is the essence of religion. The positing of such a possibility is what introduces polarity into Reality. Religion seeks to define the resulting relation between distinct life/Life and never distinct life/other-lives. At the vital stage of religion there are only two possible parties: a distinct life and Life globally.

Origin

Human sacrifice is about as old as the human race. The assumption behind this behavior is that continuity of global Life requires a response in kind. The brutal demands of day-to-day survival in a primitive world make the raw experience of Life as the only reality. The grip on life is so tenuous that the initial response to Life is simply one of affirmation of Life by offering a life. In a human sacrifice mindset, there is as yet no awareness of a distinct life versus Life generally.

Gradually, humans attain a minimal level of independence by controlling their environment through intellectual tools such as pattern-recognition, imaging, reification, cause/effect and reasoning, leading to such developments as farming and herding. With a better hold on life, it is not hard to imagine that a segment of the human population soon begin to balk at the practice of killing a loved one as insurance of abundant harvest or posterity. Those especially who did not receive more children after killing the firstborn may well have begun to have second thoughts on the direct connection between ritual sacrifice and enhanced fertility.

The distastefulness of human sacrifice spurs the birth of religion. Aversion to human sacrifice along with a growing sense of control over food source, thereby fostering a sense of a future, stimulates the first attempt to develop an awareness of a life distinct from Life as a whole. However, in the cultural context of the time where killing the firstborn is the only guarantee for the continuance of global Life, entertaining a notion of preserving the firstborn would have been tantamount to a death sentence for the offender. Nevertheless, opposition to killing one's own child likely gains momentum. Refusing to end the life of a firstborn implies disjunction between global Life and its expression as a human life.

A human life vis-à-vis Life globally introduces a duality. The issue it raises is one of defining the relation (religion) between a distinct life versus Life. Going from a monopole to a bipolar perception of Reality would seem to have minuscule consequences. Quite to the contrary, it is one of the greatest leaps in human consciousness throughout all history. This transition introduces religion, leading eventually to an increasingly sharper distinction between the human and the divine. Thus, religion is defined as the gradual clarification of the relation between distinct life and Life globally. The focus of proto-religion on the divine as absorbing all life reverses to focus on how a distinct life absorbs the divine, global Life.

The opposition to human sacrifice is the catalyst for expanding from the sixth to the seventh intellectual stage of psychological devolution - from reasoning to a sense of self as an object, i.e., a distinct life as a reality versus the surrounding world of Reality. The story about Abraham (c. 2000 B.C) provides dramatic evidence of the transition (Genesis: 12). Abraham is the father of religion because he is first to sense a distinct life in the universe of Life that surrounds him. He seeks to preserve his distinct life even though he envisions doing so through his offspring. Whether Abraham is one individual or a personification of a trend that finally broke through like civil rights in the 60s is not the point here. What is important to note is that self/object is the intellectual tool that is absolutely required for a story that frames Reality as a bipolar interaction between the divine and human agent.

The divine/human interaction is both touching and revealing. The divine Agent promises to Abraham offspring as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Making a promise is in sharp contrast to the prevailing assumption of an automatic return from proper sacrifice of fruits taken from field, flock or family. A promise removes the assumption of an automatic quid pro quo and implies separate deliberations on the part of two parties. The divine Call, the first party, is the Initiator of the relation (religion) and Abraham, the second party, is the responder to initiative.

Abraham marks the beginning of approaching Reality with equal emphasis on Deity and a distinct human life. The story immediately gives the key identities of the two parties in the dichotomous relation as: divine Initiator/Call versus human reaction/response. To underscore the identity of divine Call as Initiator, the writer observes that Abraham is childless and his wife, Sarah, is old. Nevertheless, the divine Agent makes their union fruitful and Isaac is born. The divine initiative is further reflected in the promise of a countless posterity made to Abraham. Understanding these two identities and the underlying relation is the crux of religion. The relation between the two is not one of opposition but cooperation in which a distinct life is to be preserved forever. Henceforth, the Bible is the unfolding story of Abraham as response incarnating divine Call, thus reversing the God-fixation of proto-religion.

Call/response at this stage is only in the context of preserving life and only seminally implies the notion of two distinct, conscious selves. The notion of divine/human selves develops slowly. However, the dichotomy of Call/response is central to the very concept of religion from the beginning. The Call/response theme begins in Genesis with the initiative of divine Call to Adam and Adam responding by rising from the earth with the breath (Call) of God. Thus, Genesis begins by defining Reality as the divine Call/response relation. The divine/human link is direct in that the divine breath enters Adam as the source of Life, and Adam is the earth responding to the divine Breath as a distinct life. The story of Adam embodies the most ancient of religious creeds among humans. The imagery of Call/response is of the utmost importance because all of Scriptures simply give depth and definition to this relation.

*******SIDEBAR*******

CALL/RESPONSE

The word God implies the ontological notion of Supreme Being and as such is philosophical in origin. Consequently, the word has taken on so many meanings today that it has limited value in communication. The rest of this book is about religion as the divine/human relation, rather than directly about God or humans. The same is true about the Bible in that it does not focus directly on God or humans, but tries to frame Reality as a dichotomous relation of divine Call/response. The codependent divine/human identity as Call/response is graphically brought out in the anecdote of David's response to divine Call (1Samual 3:3-10). Both Call and response are inherently relational and are far more suited than reified or functional imagery of God or the human agent for identifying the two parties of religion.

In the West, most people prefer the philosophical word God to designate the divine entity because of our ontological versus relational bias. The word God emphasizes divine existence as a Supreme Being, or picks up on some functional imagery such as Creator/Father. In a religious perspective of Reality, relation and not existence is central. Neither party can be defined directly. Israelites reflect this in their refusal to use a name signifying the nature of the Deity and in the refusal to identify themselves except simply as the chosen – ‘chosen’ is the incarnate expression of Call. Scriptures simply refers to the divine side of the relation as Call and the human side as response. The Old Testament frequently uses the word Adonai, meaning Lord or simply the One calling, thereby bringing out the Call/response relational essence of religion.

The word God is an image focusing on being, whereas Call implies relation. It is a serious mistake to assume the philosophical word God that we use in the West is identical to the notion of divinity portrayed in Scripture. The First Commandment explicitly defines the divine Agent as a Call out of slavery and condemns any other imaging. It should be noted also that creating an image defining the human self is just as idolatrous as one defining the divine Self; image can only reflect and never define divinity or self. Relationally perceiving the divinity, as Call, and self, as response, will gradually clear your mind of static, circumscribed images of Deity/self, like a cleansing laxative. Referring to divinity or self as a being implies limit and is a subtle form of idolatry.

Divine Call is the closest we can come to conceptualizing the divine Self, and response is the closest to conceiving a human self. Call/response is a favored designation of the divine/human relation precisely because it infers openness and resists final definition of either party. Thus, the biblical Deity is simply identified by the act of calling: as the Call of Abraham, Moses, the Chosen People, and the prophets, and so on through all of Scriptures; the human party, in contrast, is defined by response that is all over the map but deepens over time.

The relation of Call/response is ongoing and dynamic. Divine Call/response implies a relation that requires negotiated adjustments on both sides on an ongoing basis – this is the nature of relation as, for example, in marriage. Call/response is the core of Reality. In this view, the physical world expresses the presence of divine Call in the here and now. Response, as either expressed by nature as such or in the emerging consciousness of a human self at the core of nature, counterbalances divine Call. Thus, the universe is a definitional, bipolar relation of Call/response. Through Call the divine Self is revealed, and through response the human self is revealed. The relation is not static but a dynamic struggle to be in cynic.

Call/response implies an ongoing divine/human dialogue simultaneously at the physical, sensory, emotional and intellectual levels. Modern God imaging is often too narrowly focused on the intellectual, emotional or purely functional level. For example, God imaging in the form of a transcendental, metaphysical or supernatural Being appeals primarily to the mind; imagery of God as Father, Savior and Shepherd appeal to the senses/emotions; and, power images as Creator, Almighty, King, and Lord play to a purely functional role.

Only the Call/response designation captures the dance with Life choreographed through the four epochs of religion. Call/response embodies a relation that is dynamic, eminent and timeless, thus it conveys far more accurately the relation between the divine and human self. Over time, the understanding of divine Call and human response becomes more refined. However, even a child can grasp the meaning of Call/response, at least at the level of an inviting call to a birthday party and responding with acceptance.

Designation of God as Call is not as a vague, formless, transcendent, blind force, but as an inviting divine Self from whom our sense of self is derived and visa versa. Call embodies the initiative defining divine identity in a Call/response relation. Initiative is not like gas in an engine, but is the gifting of the divine Self as in a marriage. The divine Self-gift is the basis for equality between the divine and human selves. The Call/response bipolarity is key in separating religion from monopole proto-religion.

When bipolarity is the very essence of Reality, deliberation, dialogue and consensus at an increasingly conscious level become the ongoing dynamic between the two parties. This relation, called religion, takes the form of contracts, agreements, covenants and other tools used to add specificity to a relation. In proto-religion, there is no need for agreements because there is only one all encompassing divine Party. Religion requires that two parties come to an agreement – a fascinating new imaging stream for defining Reality. The entire Old Testament is framed as two parties in a dynamic interaction seeking agreement.

For those who think ontologically of the universe as an entity created by God and is now quite apart from God, Call/response involves a paradigmatic shift in thinking. It entails a transit from the sixth to the seventh stage in devolutionary psychology – a stepping out of the reification ‘box’. The entire universe concretizes at one and the same time both Call and response and is embedded with infinite possibilities. The history of religion is one of defining, adjusting and fine-tuning the divine/human relation that forms the core of Reality.

Both Call and response are universals. This means that defining Reality as a Call/response relation infers that there can be only one human self and one divine Self – each defining the other – like east versus west. The logic is clear enough, but difficult for a Western mind conditioned to viewing Reality through the lens of reification. In a bipolar perception of Reality, there can be only two possible selves: one human self with an identity of response, as opposed to the divine Self with an identity of Call. Since self is a relation (e.g., like east/west) and not a standalone object, self is invisible and should be thought of in the realm of total physical, sensory, emotional and intellectual experience. (See the discussion of self-experience versus self-image in chapter two.) While we all have differing self-images, our experience of self is as universal response that develops throughout human history. Central to the Old Testament is a universal tribal experience; central to the New is the universality of self-experience.

The visible world is the interface between the divine/human selves and the means of self-expression for both in a Call/response relation. The universe is the connection between distinct divine/human selves but does not fully express either. The universe is not the self – that would be pantheism – but the expression of an ongoing relation between two distinct selves. Thus the world is not static, but the ongoing interaction between the divine and human self. If you think of your body as a medium of expressing self then, by extending the notion of body beyond the skin, the universe is the body of both the human and the divine self – the one possesses the same body as response and the other as Initiator.

Abraham begins the dichotomous view of Reality by framing the world as his response to an inviting Call. His distinct life, which seminally includes a sense of self, is extended into descendants as numerous as the stars. At the same time, his descendants not only continue his identity of response but also embody an ongoing manifestation of the divine Call/Promise. The self of Abraham - alone before the divine Self in a dichotomous relation of Call/response - is eternal precisely because the descendants are an ongoing revelation of the self of Abraham and the Self of divine Call. Self is a relation that can never be captured by image or history. Religion is the movement of a humanity-self toward the divine Self – Scripture is simply a diary of the divine/human courtship.

Throughout the rest of this book I shall use the biblical designation of Call in lieu of God, and response (i.e., reaction raised to a conscious level) as the human identity complementing Call. It will take some getting use to because our Western mind operates through atomizing Reality. We are more comfortable with the ontological word God than the relational word Call. Using the word God automatically frames Reality philosophically; using Call automatically frames Reality relationally. You may mentally switch God in places where I use Call, but be mindful that by doing so you are substituting a Western philosophical notion of Deity in lieu of the biblical understanding. By referring to God as Call, I hope to recapture the Hebraic reverence of maintaining the openness inherent in divinity by eschewing a divine name or label. Applying a defining name or image to Deity is a subtle form of idolatry. The relational expression of Call/response implies setting out on a journey of discovery rather than a goal reached. Religion is delving into the divine/human relation, not a placing of divinity or humanity under a microscope.

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Six Characteristics of Religion

The biblical Call/response dichotomy implies six salient characteristics defining the nature of the divine/human relation. These characteristics are: incarnate, intentional, obedient, knowable, response-centric and free. All aspects of the relation are not immediately obvious from the start but become evident as the epochs of religion unfold. In as much as these characteristics are at least seminally present at the vital stage of religion, an in-depth discussion of each characteristic is in order.

1. Incarnate

Incarnate means that the flesh is the tangible substance of the Call/response relation. The flesh embodies both Call and response. The flesh (in a wider sense including the universe) is the interface between the divine and the human self. Thus, the identity of the human self is simply response in and through the flesh and the identity of the divine Self is Call in and through the flesh. Our tendency to divide the world into a dual universe of spirit/matter or soul/body is ontological and not relational/religious. Incarnate means the flesh concretizes at a primary level both response and Call – all interaction is in and through the flesh/world. In proto-religion, the divine absorbs the human; in religion, one side does not absorb the other but form mirror reflections. In one perspective, flesh is response by which the human self is present; in another perspective, flesh is the manifestation of Call by which the divine Self is present.

Thus, the divine/human interaction in a Call/response framework can only take place in and through the flesh. It is for this reason that religion is first and foremost incarnate (in-fleshed) in nature. A human responds to life through the flesh even as divine Call to life comes through the flesh. Abraham's life had to endure in the flesh or not at all. Religion, conceptually, demands flesh as a point of demarcation between the divine and human – otherwise Call and response would become identical. The flesh is the medium of both Call and response. The incarnate nature of religion insures that religion does not degenerate into philosophy or ideology. Religion, by definition, can never be an escape from the flesh/world – escape from the flesh is a divorce from Call.

As religion develops through the second, third and fourth epochs, its incarnate nature becomes more and more explicit. What is important is to recognize that Hebrew tradition stems from the conviction that Call is in the range of human experience even before images are created to express a rudimentary experience of divine Call. Divine Call becomes increasingly incarnate over time through Chosen People, tribal bonding, sacred writing and, finally, divine Incarnation in the flesh. Religion when stripped of the incarnate factor ceases to be bipolar and degenerates into idolatry. Christ does not mark the end of divine incarnation but heralds its depth as reaching human flesh. Flesh embodies the divine Self as Call and the human self as response.

2.Intent

Religion is delving into the intent of the divine and human selves involved in the mutual relation (religion). Intent actually defines the divine Self as well as the human self. In a relation, you are your intent. In the West we are wont to think of the universe as a manifestation of divine intelligence and evidence of the existence of a Creator. This is philosophical and not religious imaging. The Bible is about defining concretely the divine/human mutual intent and not the abstract notion of existence. Self, whether divine or human, is a relation and, therefore, not amenable to epistemology. In proto-religion's monopoly perception of Reality, intent is irrelevant; in the bipolarity of religion, intent is everything. Intent implies relation, i.e., divine versus human intent. Prior to Abraham, divine manifestation in nature is a one-way street – humans are simply a part of nature. Religion begins when a human becomes conscious of intent as such, thereby implicitly acknowledging a sense of self.

The unfolding of intent is in effect a defining of the relation between two parties and also reveals the self of each party. Intent is more fundamental to religion than creed and ritual because it is at the essence of divine/human intercourse. Divine intent unfolds as Call, and human intent unfolds as response. From a global perspective: the divine intent as Call takes concrete form in and through the universe, inviting a counter human intent in response. Religion is an ongoing dialogue between the divine and the human global intent unfolding as an ever-quickening universe.

Mutual intent implies consciousness, deliberation, choice, feedback, clarification, direction and finality. Intent devolves, deepens, probes, intensifies, clashes, and develops. The implications of this new awareness is so great that even today it is hard to grasp a universe that is, at its core, a dialogue unfolding divine/human intent. Once Reality is viewed as a relation rather than merely as an accumulation of objects, a dynamic interaction of intent logically follows. Conscious intent in the human-self interfaces the conscious intent in the divine Self. For example, the raw materials in tree embody the intent of divine Call and the arranging of wood in building a house reflects human intent. The house is a religious act in that it represents the divine/human intercourse via raw materials and the use made of them.

Intent is the foundation upon which a sense of self-history is built. It is also the beginning of linear history in a wider sense, i.e., history is the playing out of mutual intent. Once Abraham recognizes two parties at the core of Reality instead of just an all-encompassing Deity, the unfolding of a mutual relation develops through time. The entire Old Testament records the history of two parties coming to a mutually satisfying agreement – like two quarrelsome lovers. The hub of that story is the clarification of intent in the two locked in a relentless struggle.

History begins with divine intent in the form of a promise to Abraham. The divine promise matches Abraham's own intent of preserving his life through numerous descendants. Henceforth, the future is not to be simply a blind, hand-to-mouth struggle for survival, but the result of deliberate and mutual unfolding of divine/human intent around the issue of life. Abraham is the first to envision Life - hitherto amorphously perceived - as having deliberate intent, expressed as the divine promise. As a result, Reality changes from the divine monologue to a developing of a human/divine dialogue that deepens over time.

Intent means conceiving self-identity as a relation versus an isolated being. Think of intent in the context of marriage - intent is the gift of self, whereas the will to marry expressed at a ceremony is but the surface manifestation of unseen intent. Intent in a marriage means mutual self-gift, likewise, divine intent means a gift of the divine Self. Religion centers on intent rather than will, whether the intent is that of the divine or human self. A focus on will leads to the assumption that the divine plan for everyone has been worked out in advance - we need simply to paint by the numbers. The modern notion of a 'divine plan' is not the same as divine intent. History is not like viewing yesterday's ballgame, but the interchange and gradual clarification of the intent of two parties locked in a reciprocal relation of Action/reaction, Call/response. It is important to remember that the process is one of induction, not deduction - every response triggers adjustment to Call, just as each Call solicits adjustment to response.

Viewing creation eons ago as an expression of the divine will rather than a manifestation of ongoing divine intent is philosophical not religious imagery.

It is impossible to be alive and not have intent. Intent is the reactor core of life. Intent may be so deeply embedded that it is difficult to dredge up the underlying intent behind our thoughts and actions. Intent can be as subtle as the instinctive drive for survival. Intent is the hidden author of concept, will, design and action. Think of intent as a web. All the strands of the web are tied into intent that forms the center. When a new concept or experience touches the web, alarm sounds. The new is somehow integrated into the fabric of the web or is insulated so as not to affect the web. The strands of intent hold our life together. Disruption of this webbing puts at risk the deepest assumptions regarding Reality and the meaning of Life. It is not an exaggeration to say that intent is self-identity at the deepest level. It is also true that the intent one ascribes to divine Call not only says much about an individual but also is the best indicator of an individual's future.

The stories found in the Bible celebrate the divine, conscious intent at the very core of Reality/Life. The story of divine initiative in forming the earth, moon, stars, plants, birds and animals highlights the intent of Call protracted over six days to emphasize deliberate intent. A special intent goes into the making of Adam and Eve. The consequence of rejecting divine intentional initiative is illustrated in Adam's rejection of divine partnership by eating of the tree of knowledge, whereby he could go it alone without divine input. The story of constructing the tower of Babel (Genesis: 11) is another case at point. The Babel story depicts humans attempting to build their city based solely on human intent and ignoring divine intent as a crucial element. Detached from the divine intent embedded in Reality, humans turn on each other with conflicting human intent. These stories capture the fundamental creed carried all through Scriptures, namely, that Reality is a dichotomous relation between divine/human agents and nature first and foremost manifests divine Call's intent and invites a human intent in response. Human response is not to be as a maverick, but must be conjoined with the Reality of divine intent manifested in nature. Order in the world requires divine/human negotiation and is not one-sided, whether divine or human.

The story of Noah (Genesis: 6) and the flood adds to the understanding of divine intent the additional notion of respect/deference as foundational for developing a moral code. The moral code of mutual respect applies to both the divine and human signatories to the agreement. The rainbow reaching from the earth to heaven is an apt symbol of an agreement finally reached, namely, divine and human intent are forever locked together in mutual respect as in an eternal dance with divine Call taking the lead. This moral code of mutual respect is in sharp contrast to proto-religion, in which natural events are unilateral acts of the Deity rewarding or punishing human behavior as appropriate. The rainbow covenant with Noah signifies that natural events henceforth imply neither reward nor punishment.

Ascribing Call with intent to an otherwise amorphous Life phenomenon is a profound new insight into Reality. That Call would make a promise before sacrifice is offered is a watershed moment in history – a passage from proto-religion to religion. The closest parallel is when humans gained control over fire. For thousands of years humans observed fire and behaved like all animals fleeing for their lives when lightening ignited forest fires. Humans must have observed sparks fly when one stone happened to hit against another. It took a genius millennia ago to make a connection between sparks from flint stones and fire from a lightening strike. That insight is the basis of all future development in human civilization to this day. Intentional fire is the tool that not only transforms the world but also the image-maker who first put spark and fire together. Fire beautifully symbolizes divine/human intent and the respect needed – the hand starts the fire, but fire has potential beyond human control. That mutual divine/human intent can develop over time in an atmosphere of mutual respect is still beyond comprehension.

Once humans imaged Life with conscious intent, peace left the earth. Everyone to this day has their own spin on divine intent and, of course, divine intent is on our side. A cursory review of history bears witness to the chaos and bloodshed associated with defining divine intent. It is well to remember that intent was first found in humans and later applied to divine Call. Solution to the chaos may not be solely in trying to decipher divine intent as it is in searching for human intent at an increasingly deeper level. Without a doubt, and to the surprise of everyone, when the deepest human intent is exposed, it may well turn out to be identical to the divine intent.

Ascribing mutual intent as the defining core of Reality means having to head down the path of discerning what that intent is. The ancient Greek philosophers assumed the mind to be the gateway to divine intent, while Abraham sought intent in the preserving of life, rather than in the intellectual explaining of it. A true revelation of the divine Self as well as that of the human self is in the uncovering of mutual intent that intensifies life. For two to tango, the intent of both is equally important and must be revealed. Divine intent and human intent must be linked because the validity of both is at stake. The intent of the divine Self and the human self may not be in harmony but they cannot be separated, nor can the intent of the human self be separated from all humanity. Humanity is the intent of divine Call and, to avoid a trip off into fantasyland, a human intent must be defined only in the context of humanity. When the intent of all humanity is revealed, the intent of Call likewise will be revealed.

3. Obedient

A third characteristic of religion, along with incarnate and intent features, is obedience. Obedience comes from a Latin word having a root meaning of willingness to listen. Religion, initiated by Abraham, is a relation between two parties in which both parties are bound by obedience to one another, i.e., a willingness to listen. Thus, the divine/human relation incarnates in the flesh, reveals mutual intent, and develops through mutual listening – a recipe for a perfect marriage.

Obedience versus subservience is the hallmark of religion. Subservience implicitly negates a self-based relation and is more suited to proto-religion. Subservience reflects a master/servant relation; obedience implies two parties listening with some basis of equality. The basis of equality is inherent in the divine initiative of inviting that does not force response. Subservience implies a cause/effect relation. For example, sacrificing children is the means for preserving the life of family, flock and field – like priming a pump to get water. In contrast, obedience implies a give-and-take relation based on a willingness of both parties to listen and neither resorting to force or manipulation.

The story of Abraham reflects the important shift from subservience to obedience. Recall the circumstances: Abraham lives at a time when everyone is expected to kill the firstborn. Isaac, whom Abraham loved as his own life, is a firstborn and, consequently, needs to be sacrificed to maintain the cycle of Life; failure to do so means disaster would soon engulf the whole community. However, his wife is old, making further offspring impossible. Failure of subservience to a long established custom would bring from the community dire consequences for Abraham and his family. On the other hand, yielding to the community pressure would be tantamount to ending his life.

Given this cultural ethos, the story relates that when Isaac grows up to become a boy, divine Call commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son. The writer of the story cleverly changes a knee-jerk, unquestioned subservience to custom by introducing a deliberative divine command as basis for human sacrifice. In so doing, the author is subtly implying that there is divine intent behind the blind forces of nature. Hitherto, absolute subservience is required to continue the cycle of Life. What is expected to be automatic is now being imaged as a deliberative command - a radically new insight.

If a longstanding custom is elevated to a command, the further implication is that a command can be changed. Humans change commands freely; by inference, divine Call can also change commands. Command and intent are not the same because intent exists prior to a specific command that serves only as a clue to the intent that lies hidden. The story is a literary device of giving and withdrawing of a command in order to introduce the subtler notion of Call having deliberate intent to preserve life – the life of Abraham via Isaac. The true objective is in revealing divine intent.

Based on a previous divine promise for numerous descendants, Abraham responsively listens with great pain and makes preparation to kill his son as an act of sacrifice. At the last moment divine Call rescinds the command and renews the promise of numerous descendants. By withdrawing the command, the writer is signifying that human sacrifice does not reflect the intent of divine Call. Negation of human sacrifice is a first step in a series that unfold through biblical history delving ever deeper into the hidden divine intent. To the amazement of his contemporaries, Abraham prospers after having broken an ancient taboo - Life and Creation do not end but go on. The prosperity of Abraham is in itself proof to the accuracy in discerning the intent of Call. Thus, the continuity of Abraham's life in Isaac and beyond Isaac to countless descendants demonstrates the intent of divine Call to prosper human life – human life and divine intent become synonymous.

The biblical author portrays not just Abraham's obedience, but also divine Call's obedience to Abraham, i.e., Call's willingness to listen to the grief of Abraham, thus implying Call's readiness to change. The obedience of Call means taking into account Abraham's response to the divine initiative. Obedience, implying the mutual listening of two parties with diverse intent, implies negotiation and agreement. The agreement leads to mutual commitment rather than blind subservience on the part of either party. Neither party is to be manipulated or managed. Abraham listens to Call and divine Call listens to the plea of Abraham.

The story introduces a totally new worldview: listening (obedience) is at the heart of Life/Reality. The account of Abraham has the jarring new insight, namely, that the emergence of a distinct self implies negotiation and listening. For Abraham, the true sacrifice is in his willingness to listen (be obedient). It is this disposition of listening that made the sacrifice of a lamb in lieu of Isaac acceptable.

Abraham radically changes the notion of sacrifice. In proto-religion, sacrifice means a subservient plunging into the sacred via animal or human sacrifice as a way of being absorbed into the mystery of Life. Abraham changes the notion of sacrifice to one of drawing near through listening. For Abraham, Life demands a cultivated listening, not self-immolation. Listening creates both the divine and a human self. Listening is response in its deepest meaning, touching on the very identity of the human self and, therefore, is the sacrifice (a plunging into the sacred) most pleasing to divine Call.

In practice, this insight means that we communicate by listening. At a subconscious level, a human is in effect a listening universe; at a conscious level, listening gradually incarnates the human self into the universe. It is through this incarnating process that true sacrifice is being offered to divine Call. The more a conscious self-identity emerges from the subconscious as a listening universe obedient to Call, the more Call becomes obedient to the human self. This is the insight behind the imagery used in the story of Abraham. The legacy of Abraham is that we approach Reality through mutual listening and not subservience or manipulation.

4. Knowable

Many assume religion entails great mysteries beyond human knowledge. However, religion is simply the Latin word for relation. Religion, by definition, is an examination of and development of a relation. Faith is simply relational versus technical/ideological knowledge. There can be no relation unless both parties are mutually knowable. The story of Abraham conveys above all else that divine intent is knowable, just as human intent is knowable. Intent is the substance of a relation. All of Scripture is framed as a discourse between the divine and human self with the assumption that the intent of both will come to light.

Religion is an advance over proto-religion as day is over night. Proto-religion centers on the incomprehensibility of Reality/Truth; religion centers on the know ability of relation between Call/response at a gut level. Humanity/universe reflects divine Call and at the same time constitutes response in and through which a human self emerges. In proto-religion, the divine mystery is unknowable because there is no self in which intent can form. In religion, the focus is not on Deity but the relation between mutual selves – like in a marriage. Religion, by definition, is a relation between two distinct selves: a human self and the divine Self. The divine Self takes the initiative, implied in Call; the human self develops as response. The relation Call/response drives the negotiation of mutual intent. Divine Call is knowable in the same way that you are able to know your own intent because the divine and human intent are inseparably bound in religion. But, knowing your own intent may take a lifetime.

Divine Call and human response, having unlimited potential, are knowable only by mutual interaction. The human self grows as the experience of life deepens because the divine initiating Call is recognizable as a quickening of Life. Sarah, Abraham's wife, in her old age felt life quicken within her as she conceived Isaac in accordance with the promise of divine Call. The Sarah story underscores the divine identity as Initiator, the incarnate nature of religion, and the life quickening aspect of religion. In the story the quickening is in the form of a pregnancy, but this is symbolic of the quickening of life vested in the self. Response is not a 'spiritual' exercise, but the making our own the enabling response already inherent via divine Call in the very fabric of the universe. In so doing, a deeper sense of self emerges by subsuming the quickened life of the universe. However, divine Call can only invite our freely given response since use of force transforms response into subservience.

Emotions and intellect play a 'digestive' role in human self-discovery, but the quickening of Life is the key to the manifestation of the divine Self. Life admits to varying degrees of intensity – from a lowly amoeba, to the genius of an Einstein, from the despair of the Afghan women above, to the ecstasy of Job returning to health. Scripture frames the deepening knowledge of the divine Self as a growing intensity of Life through the four epochs of religion, namely, through the vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal epochs. Each epoch represents a dramatic expansion in the intensity of human life precisely because it increasingly reflects the divine Self – the better the human mirror, the better the divine reflection.

In keeping with the legacy of Abraham, the increase in the quality of human life is in itself the knowledge of divine Call. As response to Life becomes more refined, Call does not change, rather human self-experience becomes more vitalized and explicit. The human self emerges into the presence of the divine Self. In religion, the divine and human self incarnate through mutual listening. Breathing into Adam communicates the divine, shared Life. But, Adam fails to listen – a response needed for Life to increase. Disobedience (failure to listen) is a paradise lost - the Paradise lost is not of a luscious garden of pleasure but of the divine Caller within.

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DIVINE REVELATION

The quickening of life constituting divine revelation is new to many. We often think of divine revelation as episodic in the past, but it is continuous. Scripture is filled with rich images depicting episodic divine revelations, but the episodes are surface manifestation of ongoing divine Call. Dynamic images of Call include fire, clouds, thunder/lightening, mountaintop, earthquakes, wind, breath and so on. Methods of communication include angels, dreams, visions, miracles, prophets and the like. But, episodic divine manifestations include underlying quickening of life that is key to the authenticity of the message. Life can increase extensively as in the case of Abraham in his descendants, or intensively as portrayed in Moses as spokesman of Call.

Thus, the veracity of divine revelation is in the quickening of Life rather than like receiving a message over a telephone. Many derive a great deal of comfort in viewing the Bible/Koran as word-for-word dictation of the Deity. However, divine revelation is precisely in the quickening of Life and not solely in image creation – image is the final product of a quickened life, not its cause. Sensation, emotion and intellect are the three sources of human knowledge. But, all human knowledge begins in sensory experience and ends up as an image-world representing a highly processed form of Reality. Thus, divine communication must first filter through the sensory/emotion and intellectual experience of the messenger, the messenger needs to be recognized as inspired, and the message is again filtered through the ear of the listener – already three steps removed from the original divine communication. Words, such as found in the Bible/Koran, are the most abstract images possible and extremely prone to misinterpretation and language drift. Recall from the first chapter that we cannot get to Reality through images. Rather, images are the product of a struggle to define Reality. All words are idols unless a reader measures them against human experience through which they were filtered originally and upon which they depend to be comprehensible by another party.

Religion, versus the Theo-centrism of proto-religion, requires the defining of a distinct self. A sense of self-experience that reflects a greater responsiveness to Life is the acid test of divine revelation. Religious history is in essence the divine/human interaction of sorting through intent by which the divine and human selves are revealed. Intent is the working definition of both the divine and human self. To infer divine intent and then conclude that the intent of Call is unknowable within the range of human experience makes little sense. Why posit divine intent/selfhood in the first place? The ancient proto-religion of amorphous Reality/Life, where human intent is irrelevant, would make more sense.

Although not recognized for a long time, self-experience – the defining of intent - has always been the basis of divine communication. For example, our accepting the Ten Commandments as direct divine dicta simplifies life. However, most of the Ten Commandments existed long before Moses. Divine Call's intent has been embedded in human experience from the beginning. Some individuals listen better than others, but when enough listen, the divine intent becomes loud and clear. Moses becomes the spokesman who defines human bonding succinctly through the Ten Commandments. Likewise, it is very likely that there was a growing resistance to killing the firstborn of the family long before Abraham came along. The resistance reaches critical mass at the time of Abraham and is justified as divine communication to Abraham.

Divine revelation has not ended. A growing convergence of human awareness is demonstrated in our day in the civil rights movement of the '60s. Martin Luther King does not start the movement toward civil rights, but is the needed spark that set the world on fire. He draws his divine inspiration (intent) from the hearts of humans, not from a heavenly thunderbolt or a secret rendezvous with a Deity. Fantasizing how divine/human communication occurs help, but it can also hurt religion. Divine communication converges on human self-experience. Everyone has access to the intent of Call in the deepest recesses of his/her own heart.

The reader may find it helpful to read the story of Abraham, keeping in mind that the entire Old and New Testaments hinge on this event. Even if Abraham is not an actual historical figure, he represents the culmination and personification of the struggle through thousands of years over the issue of human sacrifice as a means for preserving Life and creation. Collapsing time into the event of a single individual is a way of preserving ancestral memories in ancient times when writing is unknown. A shift to a deliberative, divine intent by Abraham as an essential modifier of Reality does not happen suddenly, even though the story gives that impression. Abraham represents a crystallization of a long developing insight into divine/human relation. An evolving self-experience and quickening of life is central to revelatory history.

The Bible along with other inspired writings endure because many have found in them something to which they can relate at a radical level of self-experience, however vaguely defined. Appealing to direct communication from Call does not eliminate the filtering effect of the human factor. Even if divine intent is conveyed in a given writing, it does not follow that the writing is the only source of divine revelation. One could easily argue that nature, since it is in itself a direct revelation of Call's intent, is a better conveyor of divine intent than inspired words because words are, unlike nature, only abstract symbols/images. But, for nature or word to convey the intent of Call, a listening self-experience is needed.

Revelation is always aimed at revealing intent whether the intent is embedded in nature, human bonding or in self-experience. Everyone has intent, including divine Call. Applying intent to Reality had to come before revelation - otherwise the reason for revelation is eliminated. Defining divine as well as human intent is the game of life in which everyone has a part. It is hard to know one's own intent let alone that of divine Call or other humans. As mentioned previously regarding a precondition for consciousness, our imagination supplies specifics about intent automatically to fill in holes of ignorance regarding Call's or another's intent. Consciousness always demands that our world makes sense.

Intent defines both the divine as well as a human self. Biblical writers report the back and forth dialogue between divine Call and Abraham, but the advance from darkness into light happened wholly as Abraham's growth in consciousness. This event, which occurs in the heart of one man, may seem melodramatic to us centuries removed, but it is a dramatic new breakthrough that changes the imagery of the divine Force of nature into the divine Call in partnership with a human agent. Because divine/human intent is central, history itself by unfolding human intent embodies an element of divine revelation.

In summary: divine/human revelation is the gradual discernment of mutual intent. Divine Call is within the range of human experience, otherwise divine Call is totally unknowable and irrelevant to human existence. Knowing Call is the same as discerning divine intent. Because religion is a dichotomous relation between a human and divine Self, revelation is continuous and ongoing. A prophet is simply one who through listening is more tuned into relational intelligence. A sudden, out of the blue divine revelation that is disconnected from human experience is a literary device sometimes used by biblical authors to achieve maximum effect. Such literary tools do not negate the ongoing divine/human interaction of Call/response.

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5. Response-centric

Religion is response-centric; proto-religion is Theo-centric. Theo-centrism has been around over a million years, but a response-centric perception of Reality originated only a few thousand years ago, beginning with Abraham. The emergence of a human self-identity as response in a Call/response relation is precisely what produces a bipolar (religious) perception of Reality. The universe from the very beginning embodies response to Call. The human self is the response of the universe elevated to a conscious level; as response, the human self is not apart from, but is the vortex of nature. The deepening of conscious response necessarily entails a mirror reflection of divine Call.

Recall the discussion in chapter two about the distinction between self-experience and self-image. Human self-experience, when juxtaposed to Call, is universal and has infinite potential. In religion, versus proto-religion, the object of faith is always self-experience in that an enhanced self-experience can occur only through faith, i.e., relational intelligence/knowledge. Faith requires the courage to expand self-experience beyond self-image to new dimensions. The enhancing of self-experience can be stimulated by prophetic insight into human experience found to ring true and only secondarily from abstract theological or philosophical speculation. The catch 22 is that I must first experience who I am before knowing who I am – faith is the door to that experience, i.e., you must enter a relation to know what relation is.

Self is definable only by all/else that is not the self. Thus to know self is to know all/else. All/else is the otherness from which both the divine and human selves draw identity as a self. Only a distinct human self reveals Call in a depth worthy of divine Call. In a bipolar relation where one side defines the other, the human self is the glory of the divine Self, just as the divine Self is the glory of the human self. Abraham begins the venture of defining a distinct life as opposed to and as necessary complement of all/else – a whole new take on Reality. Expanding self-experience is a journey of faith precisely because the divine/human selves are mutually reflecting.

Response exposes reaction and indifference. You can imagine the reactions of Abraham's contemporaries when he informs them that he has received the divine message to spare his firstborn. They would have no idea what he is talking about. Abraham's receiving a divine message introduces a duality that is both incomprehensible and frightening because it implies loss of control over Nature through sacrifice. His contemporaries could not distinguish humans from Nature, let alone from the divine Agent. The genius of Abraham is in perceiving his life as distinct from a global Life, turning proto-religion into a full-fledged divine/human reciprocal relation. In the proto-religious mindset of his contemporaries, Abraham would be an atheist endangering the entire community. Responding to divine Call not only exposes non-response/indifference of those who cannot fathom a distinct life but also generates fierce reaction. Abraham is forced to flee to another land. His descendants, the Chosen People – an image that frames Reality as a mutual relation of divine Chooser versus willingness-to-be-chosen - continue to wander the face of the earth to this day because of the legacy of Abraham.

6. Freedom

A sixth characteristic of the Call/response relation is freedom. Freedom here refers to the necessary environment for self to emerge that goes far beyond any functional notion of freedom. The universe embodies the divine Call enticing response. What characterizes the relation between the divine Self, as Call, and the human self, as response, is the radical freedom from which both must spring. It is unlikely that Abraham grasped all the implications of his free response to the divine initiative. Radical freedom that lies at the very essence of self-creation takes millennia to surface in human consciousness.

The First Commandment defines the identity of Call as one of "leading out of slavery". Freedom, seminally present in the divine choosing of Abraham and his free choice to listen, extends also to the descendants of Abraham. A vertical freedom between Call and Abraham becomes a horizontal, tribal freedom among the descendants of Abraham. The notion of freedom/choice is a key factor in religion because it stands in sharp contrast to proto-religion in which human choice interferes with divine mystery. Setting the stage leading up to conscious choice is a constant theme in Scriptures. The imagery of Chosen People simply highlights free choice as the essence of a relation/religion. A free choice involves risks, but results in a deeper revelation of intent of both parties in a relation. Note that freedom and free choice are discovered as divine attributes and only by implication do they become human attributes. Freedom and choice form the necessary environment for nurturing intent in the unfolding divine/human self-interaction.

In summary: incarnate, intentional, obedient, knowable, response-centric and free are the essential characteristics of religion, i.e., a relational versus ontological view of Reality. Without these elements a bipolar view of Reality would be pure fantasy. In the mono-polarity of proto-religion, none of these characteristics would apply. The six essential elements of religion are seminally contained in the story of Abraham. It will take many centuries to tease out the full implications of a direct divine/human relation. The Theo-centrism of proto-religion leads to response-centric religion like dawn leads to the full light of day. In religion, the human self is the precious jewel reflecting the brilliance of the divine Self – the more facets this jewel has the more sparkling the divine Self becomes.

Coalitional Epoch of Religion (1350 B.C. – 1200 B.C.)

This epoch begins with the insight that Reality coalesces into a unified whole. An analogous experience is that of an astronaut seeing the earth as a whole for the first time. The importance of a seamless Reality coalescing into a unified whole cannot be exaggerated. Not only is it foundational for religion but also it is fundamental to modern science. Coalescence of the universe into a dense point prior to the Big Bang, the origin of life from a single source, and the universality of physical laws are basic to modern science. Consciousness itself is defined as the coalescing of experience into a unified whole. The opposite of coalescence is a perception of Reality as a random phenomenon, as magic, or as an accumulation of unrelated things. Abraham, by envisioning his as a distinct life versus global Life, could not have done so without implicitly recognizing the cohesiveness of Life globally as a context of his own.

The Pharaoh Akhenaten (1353 B.C.) takes the next critical step in the devolution of religion. He is the first in history to explicitly recognize that Reality is not a random phenomenon or universe of isolated objects, but coalesces into a unified whole centering on the divine consciousness. Thus, the notion that there can be one and only one Deity begins with him. This insight of Akhenaten is among the most profound in history in that it lays the foundation for the eventual definition of self as a coalescing of Reality into a unified consciousness. (The book to read: *Gods of Ancient Egypt*, by Barbara Watterson.)

Akhenaten's genius is in realizing that there can be but one divine consciousness; Abraham's genius is in realizing his life as distinct from global Life. These two discoveries establish the polarity inherent in religion and lead directly to the development of the divine and human self as a dichotomous relation. While Abraham's focus is on a distinct human life, Akhenaten's sole focus is on the world as a manifestation of a living, divine consciousness. He sees himself as the point of divine coalescence and, accordingly, adds 'aten' to his name (Aten is the Egyptian name for Deity). He chooses as his image the sun because the sun appears to be the center and source of all Life.

The historical moment is conducive for coalescing the universe into him as the incarnation of the divine. At the time, Egypt is a dominant world power both politically and culturally. Coalescing Reality into the divine Pharaoh puts a focus to the sprawling Egyptian realm. The oneness of Reality reflects the oneness of his empire. He errs in regard to his divinity, but he is not mistaken in recognizing that Reality coalesces into a unified whole – otherwise consciousness would be impossible.

The coalescence of Reality is a monumental contribution Egypt makes to religion, but of equal importance is Egypt's emphasis on the incarnate nature of divinity. Coalescing Reality into a unified whole infers the incarnate nature of religion. The Egyptian mythology of a unified Reality is inherently in and through the earth - in sharp contrast to the parallel universes of spirit/matter characteristic of Western mythology. The religious concept of both the divine and human self derives in and through the earth - with the earth as interface between the divine Agent, as Call, and a distinct human agent, as response.

Undoubtedly, the mysterious overflow of the Nile fertilizing the valley each year contributes heavily to a mythology of Egypt that is completely at odds with that found in the West. Ancient Egyptians are not privy to the rains in Central Africa that causes the flooding. The people in the Nile valley simply observe the river mysteriously rising and flooding their fields that subsequently respond with vibrant life. For the Egyptians, incarnation means divinity coming not down from above as in Western myth, but from the earth. The assumption that the earth is the only link to Life/Reality prompts the Egyptians to mummify beloved humans and animals by the millions. They believe that if the material remains cease to exist, the deceased would pass from existence forever. Because the earth is the sole link to Life/Reality, preserving material remains of the human or animal is crucial. The earth as the epicenter for eventually coalescing a sense of self - whether divine or human - is of critical importance because it is the underlying assumption of the Bible. The incarnate principle of religion derived from Egypt is the context of the divine Incarnation centuries later.

The self of the pharaoh not only epitomizes the oneness of the Deity but also concretizes divine intent in and through the pharaoh's decree. Thus, the pharaoh incarnates all of Reality – a conscious vortex of both human and divine Life. A coalescence of Reality into a unified and distinct divine consciousness leads directly to viewing the world as a manifestation of divine intent. Akhenaten anticipates by thousands of years the modern discovery that consciousness, by definition, is the result of a subconscious need for unifying the whole. The world for each of us varies in size, but each world no matter how large or small necessarily forms a unified whole as a precondition for consciousness. The universe of Akhenaten's empire, including the sun, moon and stars, is the substance for the coalescence of all Reality into one divine consciousness.

NOTE: The coalescing of Reality into a unified, conscious whole is directly opposite the Western culture bias for atomizing Reality. We inherit the underlying ontology of Greek culture and, consequently, tend to equate religion with ideology/beliefs. Agnosticism is a logical outcome of Hellenic epistemology. The Greeks are perfectly logical in concluding that there are many deities. Ask any ten people in the West their notion of Deity and there will be ten different answers; ask the same ten which way is east or which direction is up, and there will be unanimity. This example illustrates the difference between an ontological and relational culture. Each individual will have a different notion of Deity because the Western mind requires reifying as a step to understanding – we use the intellectual tool of reification in forming a notion of Deity and, accordingly, there will be as many deities as there are individuals. A coalescing of Reality into a unified whole is a relational exercise that is not amenable to atomizing. The consequence of different cultural lens in viewing Reality is monumental. Even though we profess belief in one Deity, we are culturally forced into a polytheistic mindset. In a reifying culture such as ours, the only logical path to unity is through power – the greatest intellect, largest number, biggest church, loudest voice and the like. Polytheism is the logic of an atomized culture, just as monotheism is the logic of a relational culture. Understanding Akhenaten's coalescence of Reality into a unified consciousness and the biblical history based on it requires a bicultural psyche - like having to master two languages, or like switching a computer to a totally new operating system.

Tribal Epoch (1200 B.C. – 1 A.D.)

The tribal epoch of religion begins around 1200 B.C. when Akhenaten's coalescence of Reality is applied as the organizing principle of human bonding. It is at this time in social evolution that the notion of tribe and tribal bonding begin to emerge as a potent social phenomenon for preserving, promoting and enriching human life. Extending Akhenaten's vision of the divine unifying principle at the core of nature into human bonding activity is a logical development. Thus, coalescence shifts from the divine pharaoh as the epicenter of empire to divine/human tribal bonding. Numerous benefits accruing to tribal bonding give ample evidence of divine intent

The story of Moses reflects a jump into the ninth - self/other-selves - stage of awareness. Recall the ten stages of human psychological devolution: consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning → self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. The distinct life insight of Abraham reflects the self/object level, while the coalescence insight of Akhenaten embodies the self/all-else stage. Moses inaugurates the tribal epoch of religion by combining both insights. The distinct life of Abraham translates into distinct tribal life and the coalescing notion taken from Akhenaten's vision of Reality translates into divinity as the bonding Source.

Beginnings

The enslavement of Abraham's descendants precipitates a crisis that sets the stage for the next epoch of religion. Recall the general outline of the story leading to the disastrous bondage as told in the book of Exodus. Isaac has a son, Jacob, whose name is later changed to Israel (meaning one who struggles with divine Call). Jacob, in turn, has twelve sons. The offspring of these twelve sons become the tribe of Israel. The Israelites prosper for many years until the time of a great famine. In order to survive it becomes necessary for the Israelites to seek refuge in the land of Egypt. There they prosper once again to the envy and chagrin of the pharaoh and the Egyptian people. In one of the first recorded ethnic cleansings in history, the Egyptians strip the Israelites of their property, order the killing of male children and subject the rest to slavery. The lot of the descendants of Abraham is unbearable. To save one infant boy, a mother places him in a basket and sets the basket to float down a river. An Egyptian princess finds and adopts the boy, giving him an Egyptian name, Moses. He is then raised and educated in ancient Egyptian mythology in the household of the pharaoh.

Moses discovers his Hebrew origin and, growing up in the pharaoh's household, would have been exposed to Akhenaten's insight into a unified Reality – the basis for monotheism. Moses hears the cries of his people – a pleading reminiscent of the cry of Abraham for the life of Isaac. And, like Abraham before him, Moses recognizes the divine Call that is obedient (listens) to human misery. While Abraham saw divine intent as the basis for preserving the life of Isaac, Moses extends divine intent to human bonding as the basis for preserving the life of a people. The distinct life of Abraham expands to the distinct life of a people.

The historical moment is right because the notion of tribe is just beginning to emerge in human social consciousness. Moses links Akhenaten's insight of Reality, i.e., as a universe fused into a unified divine consciousness, with tribal bonding. Thus, tribal bond rather than the pharaoh is the new epicenter of divine presence; divine power shifts from pharaoh to tribal cohesion. The unification of a tribe incarnates divine presence but also expresses concretely divine intent.

As Abraham marks the beginning of the vital epoch of religion, 800 years later, Moses marks the inception of the tribal epoch. In each case there is a great crisis. Humans rarely expand their awareness without an intervening catastrophe - large or small. The custom of killing the firstborn gets Abraham's attention; the enslaving and killing of Abraham's descendants gets Moses' attention.

Moses, standing before the pharaoh, demands that his people be set free – a necessary precondition for nurturing tribal bonding - thus highlighting the sixth essential element of religion, namely, freedom. Tribal religion is the transforming of human bondage (subservience) into human bonding (obedience/listening). The new tribal imagery, centering on the notion of freedom, uses the word choice to emphasize the element of freedom. Thus, the new imagery is divine Call choosing a people and the people choosing in return by forming a tribe.

It is of great importance to note that the Hebrew understanding of freedom is unique in all history because it is linked to tribal identity. Throughout history freedom has a functional spin as simply escape from oppression. Hebrews sought escape from the oppressive rule of the pharaoh in order to search for self-identity as a tribe. The Israelites believe that the presence of Call in their midst comes about precisely through free response to tribal bonding; freedom is the direct result of divine governance. Thus freedom to bond is fundamental in defining divine presence through the subsequent unfolding of Hebrew history – diminishing of freedom is tantamount to a loss of their divine Chief and tribal identity.

Through Moses, the generalized divine Call of Abraham becomes a specific choosing of a people as the coalescing epicenter of Reality. The coalescence of Reality into a Chosen People implies the complementary presence of the divine Chief as the Source of unification. Although implied in Call, divine Chief imagery clearly identifies the nature of Call as one of initiative – an initiative that specifically leads the way to freedom and does so through human bonding. Thus the tribe of Israel becomes the Chosen People setting out on a journey to find freedom as the hallmark of divine presence. Henceforth, developing tribal bonding is the core not only of the history of Israel but also now the history of Call. Thus, Israel incarnates divine Call.

The designation of Chosen People means that the tribal blood-bond expresses the divine kinship equal to that of tribal members among themselves. All members in the tribe are conjoined in and through the tribal Chief to become a single response. Because of the divine tribal presence, the notion of a distinct self, seminally present in Abraham, becomes more explicit in the form of a tribal-self. Tribe formation is the first attempt to define the much deeper concept of self. But it will take another thousand years for a full understanding that chosen tribe coalesces into chosen self as the true coalescing epicenter of divine/human presence.

The imagery that writers use in portraying the initiative of the divine Chief on behalf of the intended (chosen) people is the richest to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. Divine Call appears to Moses in a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. Life and fire are strongly connected in ancient times. Fire consumes everything, but life springs anew from the ashes. Divine Call is the Fire/Life within nature. Life found in nature is tranquil and serene, while fire is proactive and vigorous. A burning bush beautifully reflects the changing of divine Call-imaging from a walk in the park, found in the vital epoch of religion, to a proactive, vigorous divine Chieftain characteristic of the tribal epoch of religion.

Moses' request for Call's name reflects the new proactive imagery as well as a more direct human response. The divine name is tantamount to exchange of marriage vows between the Deity and a people – the name goes to the very nature of both. The reply given to Moses is a name indicating a proactive and abiding presence of divine Call upon which Moses could rely. Changing from a generalized divine presence to one that is specific and active is a recurring theme. For example, divine initiative is demonstrated by choosing Moses who, subsequently, acknowledges this initiative by protesting his inadequacy as a spokesman, but he still accepts partnership. Divine Call is proactive as the divine Chieftain by sending plagues, one more grievous than the former, to affect freedom for the Israelites. Divine Call opens the Reed Sea to allow the Chosen People to cross on dry land but afterwards closes it, drowning pharaoh's pursuing army. Images of manna from heaven, water from a rock, leading as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, all display divine initiative as a proactive, tribal Chief leading a people out of bondage.

Moses leads the Chosen People into the desert where the central event of the Old Testament takes place. High on a mountain, Moses and divine Call negotiate the terms that will define the parameters for the presence of Call in and through tribal bonds. Mountain, clouds and thunder are the awesome and traditional images of the presence of divine Call. When Moses ascends the mountain into a cloud to negotiate with divine Call, he embodies in himself the whole tribe of Israel. The overwhelming image is one of forming the divine/human covenant in which Call chooses a people and proposes terms for joining the tribe as Chief; by responding to the terms, tribal bonds in effect become progressive divine incarnation. The rich covenant imagery of sealing an agreement between two parties clearly portrays a relational perception of Reality – a going from the monopoly outlook of proto-religion to the bipolar framework of religion. The bipolarity implicit in Abraham's view of Reality becomes explicit in the time of Moses. Henceforth, divine Call-imaging moves beyond simple vital to a more concrete tribal image in defining the core of Reality.

NOTE: The Ten Commandments, given to Moses, are tribal norms and are not to be confused with the concept of law based on nature or reason, which is prevalent in the West. Our abstract notion of law is only analogously related to tribal religion. Tribal law is incarnate and religious (relational) while Western law is abstract and individualistic. Tribal law aims to make visible the presence of Call; philosophical law seeks the rule of reason. Tribal law is analogous to rules of good health, such as diet, exercise, check-ups and the like. Tribal law begins with the assumption of communal life experience and seeks to enhance communal health. The objective of tribal law is to specifically define how human tribal behavior can bring about the presence of Call as the divine, liberating, life-giving Chief. The Ten Commandments, viewed as defining the fabric of tribal bonding, specifically aim to capture the six elements of religion: incarnate, mutual intent, obedient, knowable, response-centric and free. These six elements form the very substance of the divine/human relation.

As the covenant story unfolds in the Old Testament, the Israelites find themselves alone, isolated in a desert, the mountain thundering with the presence of Call and Moses, having been enveloped in a dense cloud, gone from sight. For a long time Moses delays his return causing the Israelites to fear for his life as well as their own. For generations they had been slaves and scattered throughout Egypt. They had no tribal identity let alone a tribal bonding worthy of divine Call's presence. Overcome with fear, they collect all the gold they possessed to make a golden bull as an idol for worship. A bull traditionally meant fertility and, therefore, is an apt image for global Life. Fear drives them to revert to a proto-religious mindset in which bull worshipping along with sacrifice is needed to maintain the cycle of Life. .

When Moses returns with specifics for the divine/human bonding inscribed on tables of stone and sees the people worshipping a bull, he rents his garments and smashes the tablets of stone in great anger. The people explain that they are afraid for their life. A direct, freely chosen bonding to the divine Chief is simply beyond their grasp. The people plead with Moses who again is obedient (listens) to the cries of his people. After beating the golden idol to dust, he returns to beseech divine Call on behalf of an unresponsive, hardhearted people. Divine Call is obedient (listens) to the pleading of Moses and withdraws a threat of destruction. .

The stage for tribal religion has now been set. The back and forth scene between the mountain Deity and the people perfectly portrays the new tribal imaging. Divine Call's obedience to the plea of Moses reflects the flexibility needed to establish mutual intent. The essence of the tribal religion is dialogue, thus replacing the monolog of proto-religion. The tablet of tribal laws received by Moses sets the parameters for ongoing interaction between the divine Chief and Chosen People. Central to the relation is freedom of both parties. By observing the covenant, the Chosen People incarnates the divine tribal Chief.

The people, following the return of Moses, enshrine the tablet of Ten Commandments as the sign of the enduring presence of their divine Chief and thus begin a dramatically new tribal image stream in religion. Whether Moses is a historical individual or a tribal movement toward freedom is not the issue. Ancient peoples preserve memories of events by focusing on meaning rather than on surface facts. What is significant is that the Old Testament chronicles a history of divine Call-imaging that expands from vital to coalitional and, now, to tribal imaging. Each advance adds greater specificity and vitality to a bipolar framing of Reality.

Tribal religion clearly changes the concept of sacrifice from a quid pro quo to a deliberate choice of forming tribal bonds as guarantor of divine presence. What happens between tribal members is the essence of sacrifice rather than the offering of a golden bull – a shift from a sacrificial object of proto-religion to a sacrificial bond. Sacrifice is now defined as the deepening and strengthening of Call's presence in and through tribal bond. The direct result of such sacrifice is the gradual unveiling of both divine and human intent. Deepening of human bonding will lead ultimately to the divine Incarnation that simultaneously brings to light divine/human mutual intent. Bonding alone reaches the deepest yearning of the human heart, and replaces the fruit/animal/human sacrifice used for manipulative or functional goals. Tribal bonding is through listening to mutual intent rather than blind subservience. Because of its inherent divine initiative, tribal bonding both reveals and releases the life energies of Call.

The image of divine Chief replaces a generalized divine Call. This new image has far reaching ramifications. It means that Call is not a blind force of nature, but is a conscious Agent with intent taking initiative in human affairs. Chief imagery means that Call is the sole source of tribal unity and guarantor of life. While Abraham perceives divine Call as the preserver of biological life (vital imaging), Moses perceives divine Call as the divine Chief preserving human tribal life. As Call took initiative on behalf of Abraham to save his life, so, now, divine Call/Chief takes initiative on behalf of the descendants of Abraham to save their collective life.

Divine Chief (versus Call) is a more incarnate image and, consequently, more effectively involves the Deity in subsequent tribal development. Moses, having return from the mountain with new tablets of stone symbolizing a mutual divine/human agreement, leads the people into the desert. To close the loop for becoming a Chosen People, it is necessary for those freed from slavery to become a choosing people. The desert is an apt environment to begin a conscious tribal identity because in such an environment survival depends on tribal bonding. Moses points to a Promise Land flowing with milk and honey as the eventual destination. While the Promise Land is ideal for nurturing the divine/human relation, the struggle to reach it will be the first test for choosing to enter a mutual divine/human partnership.

It should be noted that regardless where the intended people settled, the land would be the Promise Land by virtue of being the Chosen People. The images of a tribal Chief, Chosen People and Promise Land grow directly out of the bipolarity of religion and the incarnate characteristic of religion. Religion is not simply an intellectual exercise of 'spiritual' ideas, but the progressive unfolding of Reality as a relation between Call/response. Just as human bonding reflects the initiative of the divine Chief, so, too, the land that nurtures such bonding embodies the same divine initiative.

When the people approach the threshold of the Promise Land and behold the hostility of many who live there, they again become afraid and want to return to the security of the fleshpots in Egypt. The crisis puts the Israelites on the spot: although divinely chosen, they are not yet truly choosing in return. Faced with invading the Promise Land at the risk of their lives, they must now make a choice - a covenant demands choice of both parties. Specifically, the Israelites must rely on an invincible divine/human partnership. This is the first challenge of truly accepting a full affiliation with their divine Chief

Because of the danger, fear once again grips the Israelites and they refuse to enter the Promise Land. Moses is forced to the conclusion that the tribal cohesiveness needed for recognizing the presence and leadership of the divine Chief is woefully lacking. To strengthen their tribal faith, Moses leads the Israelites back into the desert to wander for forty years.

In the evenings, as was the custom for wandering groups, they would gather around campfires sharing stories and reflect on their experiences. The new tribal faith emerging from these desert nomads produces a richness of divine Call-imaging unsurpassed in previous human history. Much of the Bible owes its origin and content to these campfire gatherings. Stories, rituals and practice make the imaging of divine Call as tribal Chief sharper and clearer. Pitching a tent for Call in their midst signifies divine presence in the tribe, enshrining in the tent the ark containing the Ten Commandments reflects a covenant with Call, following a pillar of clouds by day and fire by night images divine leadership, eating manna gathered each morning for food and drinking water miraculously springing from a rock reflect divine ongoing intent of providing sustenance for a Chosen People. It is from these images drawn from years of wandering that the Israelites develop faith as a deep relational knowledge worthy of a choosing people.

Slowly they formulate the elements that are to define a tribal experience that is to be the archetypical identity of the human race itself (see sidebar below: Evolution in Social Psychology). The desert experience forges a connection between humans that goes beyond blood ties to a far deeper bond based on divine presence as Source of unity. For the first time in history, enduring divine presence trumps tribal blood and land as basis of social interaction. Divine presence as Source of human bonding includes free choice on the part of both the divine and human agents. The legacy of wandering for forty years in the desert is that human bonding and divine bonding are one and the same. The resulting unity is a sign of divine initiative and the divine/human choice freely given is crucial. These are the basic tenets of tribal faith. The ramifications of tribal faith are still a challenge to human comprehension.

Tribal faith envisions human cohesiveness as the incarnation of divine Call. The divine strength emanating from the divine presence in and through human bonding enables the Israelites to find courage to return to the Promise Land where their divine Chief could sustain them in freedom and abundance. The Israelites, in conquering a hostile land, pass the first test of going from a reluctant to a freely choosing people. They begin their collective task of delving more deeply into the Call/response relation - a religion learned in the desert now is the driving force of their history.

Before dispersing throughout the Promise Land, the twelve tribes of Israel erect an altar of twelve stones to signify their true tribal Bond is the enduring presence of their divine Chief. The continued presence of Call in their midst rests on preserving and strengthening their tribal bond. Due to the long isolation from all other human contact, the Israelites are in effect the human race consisting of diverse tribes forming a tribal unity that incarnates divine presence. The altar of twelve stones signifies human diversity and, when gathered to form an altar, signify the presence of Call as the bonding mortar.

*******SIDEBAR*******

EVOLUTION IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology traces the evolution of human association as humans interact with an ever-wider, more complex physical environment. The identifiable steps in the order of complexity are: family → band → tribe → kingdom → state → nation → empire → global coalition. Anthropologists hesitate to frame mental and social development as evolutionary because of the temptation to think one stage is superior or better than another. Evolution refers not to the inherent value of a people or culture, but simply to psychological complexity arising from increased population size and interaction with a more complex physical environment. A band level of organization may be a simpler life style, but may bring more satisfaction and happiness than a complex state structure fraught with stress and ulcers. In band societies today no one goes to bed hungry; in the 'developed' world thirty percent of the people go to bed hungry.

It is important to place Abraham, Moses and the Chosen People in the proper social psychological context. Tribe as such was not yet a functional reality. Tribal consciousness was just beginning to emerge. In ancient times people lived in psychologically homogeneous groups, in isolated lands and considered strangers outside the group as subhuman. Even as late as the fifteenth century, many Europeans considered the Native Americans as subhuman because they appeared different. Even later, during the time of slavery, many considered Blacks as sub-human. It is quite common to find groups looking on non-members as sub-human.

Moses does not originate tribal structure but is first to explore the experiential and cognitive implications of tribal bonding. Imaging human grouping as a tribe introduces the need for defining what a tribal relation means. Today we have a clear notion of what tribe signifies. In the time of Abraham/Moses, awareness of tribe as an evolving social institution is still very much a work in progress. People in ancient times adhere to ancestral beliefs and practices rather than to bloodlines. There was no need for tribe versus tribe awareness because most did not venture much beyond the place of birth. Ancient people may have had a vague notion of tribe as population increased, but more complex human interaction did not have practical significance and, therefore, tribe was not explored as a distinct identity.

The great contribution to social psychology made by Moses is that he explores the notion of tribe and introduces the novel notion that tribe is not land-based. Moses begins by using blood ties as the key to tribal linking. Blood ties implicitly extend beyond the immediate area in which members live. The distinction of blood versus land as the basis of tribe is critical for enticing the Israelites to leave the land of Egypt. Thus, the notion of tribe is elevated to a conscious level and lays the foundation for imagery such as Chosen People formed through divine Call.

In the social psychological context at the time of Moses, the dichotomy is between tribe/nature and not tribe/tribe. Moses forms a notion of a distinct tribe vis-à-vis nature, just as Abraham forms a notion of his distinct life versus Life globally. The genius of Moses is arriving at the notion of a distinct tribe versus nature, thus shifting the focal point of divine incarnation to tribal bonding in place of divine incarnation in an Egyptian power-center vested in the pharaoh. Thus, in the time of Moses, imagery of divine Call choosing a tribe means in effect a choosing the human race as opposed to nature, rather than as opposed to other tribes. Due to landlocked isolation, a given tribe would normally perceive itself to be the human race. The awareness of tribe versus tribe developed much later. Tribe/nature is a continuation of a similar notion in Genesis wherein Call chooses Adam and Eve as opposed to nature and places them above all plants and animals. The story of Moses is more properly understood as a leading of the entire human tribe out of bondage.

Much later in the development of social psychology the dichotomy shifts from tribe/nature to tribe/tribe, thereby changing the legacy of Moses from gathering a chosen human tribe to selecting a special tribe above other tribes. To this day, Jews are thought of as the Chosen People as opposed to other tribes who are not chosen. Tribe versus tribe distorts the original emphasis placed on a direct incarnate relation between divinity and humanity. Chosen tribe versus other tribes is at the core of social conflict centuries later. The chief priests in the time of Jesus determined that he must die to preserve the chosen tribe of Israel versus the Roman 'tribe'.

The role of the Israelites may be compared to that of Thomas Edison. Edison was a stand-in for the human race when, drawing from the work of many before him, he fashions the first light bulb that turns night into day. The Israelites, drawing from the labors of the whole human race before them, find divine presence, long hidden in nature, in human bonding, thus lighting up the meaning of history. The response of Israel to divine Call is the light of the world. Thus, the image of Chosen People simply implies the sacredness of human bonding rather than a division between the chosen and rejected. .

The Old Testament chronicles the emerging awareness of tribe as the epicenter of response and the companion notion of the divine tribal Chief as Call. Chief is not a function within the tribe, but the source of identity for the tribe. Today, we think of chief as a role or function - like chief of police. Tribal awareness not only heightens a focus on tribal Chief but also leads to a sharper focus on tribal-member. Gradually, defining the tribe takes the form of specifically profiling an ideal tribal member. Increasing focus on member eventually leads to the distinct self that marks the beginning of a New Testament.

Likewise, the image of Promise Land refers to the earth generally. Ancient tribes often had no knowledge of a world beyond the immediate. In the time of Moses, it is not uncommon to view the surrounding land as the whole earth. Because travel and communication were virtually non-existent, much like primitive tribes today living deep in rain forests, earth for ancients is the locality in which they lived. In modern times, Promise Land would include the earth globally. The chosen, in Chosen People, and promise, in Promise Land, express the free choice and incarnate nature of religion. Promise Land as opposed to other lands is a later unwarranted anachronism. A Promised Land flowing with milk/honey is opposed to barren desert not other lands. Moses/Israelites' view of the visible world as divine promise is another essential contribution to religion – it puts the divine face on nature.

The Israelites endure over time because human-bonding itself forms their tribal identity in contrast to other tribes where divine subservience alone prevailed. For the Israelites, the very bond that unites tribal members is identical to the bond uniting the tribe to its divine Chieftain. They put equal emphasis on being a Choosing People as on Chosen People. The whole of the Old Testament is framed as divine Call and humans talking back and forth. No other writings in ancient times use this familiar divine/human dialogue as a template. For the Israelites, forming a tribe is synonymous with divine intent. Thus, tribal bonding concretizes divine Call. Living in a Promise Land ties nature into the bonding mix.

The one key point to keep clearly in mind is that Moses begins a tribal image stream that not only further defines the incarnate nature of the divine/human relation but also is thought originally to define the very concept of human race as such. The legacy of the Chosen People is that of defining how divine Call is present among humans. The history of Israel is the archetypal history of the entire human race based on a relational versus an ontological perception of Reality. Moses focuses on the Israelites to concretely define humanity. He could not conceptualize the human race as composed of many tribes we do today. Such generalization emerged centuries later in the time of Alexander the Great.

***** **END SIDEBAR** *****

Maturation

For centuries the twelve tribes of Israel prosper in their tribal faith. Because tribal religion is a way of life and not merely a pursuit of an ideology, they turn to prophets steeped in their tribal experience to gain a deeper sense of divine presence and to tailor their tribal response accordingly. Eventually, the people begin to demand that a prophet appoint a king as the divine representative because episodic advice given by prophets is inadequate in dealing with a world growing in complexity.

Desire to establish a kingdom is evidence that the Israelites had moved to a new stage of social psychological awareness. A kingdom structure enables the twelve tribes scattered throughout Israel to form a tighter administrative unity allowing for more coordinated interaction with neighboring kingdoms. Moreover, the communal tribal experience as a Chosen People gains in visibility by centering on an administrative structure. The downside is that power and politics in a more complex kingdom administration inevitably leads to de-emphasizing tribal experience at a visceral level that mediates the presence of divine Call.

The prophet, Samuel, adamantly opposes selecting a king to rule over the twelve tribes. The establishment of a king would directly clash with the imagery of the divine tribal Chief as source of tribal unity. The people persist in their demand until, finally, Samuel gives in but not without dire warnings. Introduction of a king disrupts the direct tribal bonding of members as the immediate link with the divine Chief. No king can adequately and at all times mediate divine intent. The whims of a king can easily mislead the people and compromise the incarnate nature of tribal religion.

Saul, robust in stature and a powerful warrior, becomes the first king of Israel. True to Samuel's prediction, Saul, out of fear regarding the outcome of a crucial battle, turns away from tribal faith as the source of strength and seeks the advice of fortunetellers. Saul's failure stems from his illusion of being above the people rather than the embodiment of divine Call. He thereby proves unfit to be a mediator between the Israelites and the divine Chief.

Samuel rejects Saul as an adequate incarnation of the divine Chief. The downfall of Saul opens the door to the golden age of tribal religion in David who is subsequently selected as king. David is the fulfillment of tribal faith because he is obedient i.e., he listens. Saul's failure to listen – the key characteristic of the divine/human relation - sets the stage for gaining new insight into divine presence as communion rather than power exercised from above.

The story of David is perhaps one of the most charming in all of Scriptures (1Kings: 16). One day Samuel appears at the door of Isai with a message that divine Call has chosen one of his sons to be the next king of Israel. Isai proudly presents Eliab, tall, strong, handsome and fit for a king, but Samuel rejects him. Isai presents the next oldest, Abinadab, who also has the demeanor of a great warrior, again Samuel refuses to anoint this son as king. Isai calls Samma and, one by one, all seven sons any one of which displayed characteristics befitting a king, but Samuel rejects each. Isai becomes irritated and must have felt that Samuel is mistaken. Samuel presses Isai, insisting that he must have another son. Isai finally concedes that the youngest son lives in the hills pasturing sheep, but he amounts to nothing compared to his brothers.

Perhaps out of shame of David's frailness, Isai had sent David from his house to live among his sheep charged with a responsibility of gathering the flock together to ensure safety from wild animals and thieves, and to lead them to the best grazing areas. A shepherd, unable to leave the flock in a world without fences, is wont to live in the fields alone and, as time passes, is often considered no longer really belonging to the family. Siblings, supported by the income from the family's sheep, are able to pursue other callings. People of that time considered shepherding the lowest occupation, perhaps comparable today to the untouchables of India. David, the youngest of Isai's sons, is one such individual who completely drops from his father's radar screen. Upon Samuel's insistence that David be brought to him, Isai sends for David. When David, ruddy and with gentle features walks into the room, Samuel immediately rises and pours oil over him proclaiming him the next king of Israel.

This touching story illustrates the gentleness of divine leadership by deliberately choosing the least of all as the most adequate image of divine governance. David's own father thought he would amount to nothing compared to his strong and prosperous older brothers. Human concepts of leadership and power do not match the ways of Call. The important insight of the story is that the powerful of the earth are ill equipped to detect how divine Call affects unity among humans. No one would have bet on David over his seven brothers. The powerful, exemplified by the warlike Saul and Isai's seven sons, are antithesis to the divine Chiefdom. The castoff and the gentle best reveal divine presence.

David, unlike Saul, recognizes that listening rather than raw military power as key to tribal bonding and successful governance. He is loved and remembered as the greatest of kings because he draws together the twelve tribes and achieves a measure of unity, prosperity and freedom hitherto unknown. Freedom that results from tribal unity is the unmistakable sign of divine Call's presence. Henceforth, the more a leader reflects David as liberator and unifier, the more evident would such a one reveal the presence of Call.

The tribal unity ushered in by David leads to a growing illusion that the unity of Israel is by divine right rather than the result of mutual divine/human listening. After the death of David, the political union he left nurtures a fantasy that Call must defend the Chosen People regardless of their reckless ventures. Because of such illusion, Israel enters into a war with the far more powerful Babylonians who, subsequently, destroy Jerusalem and drag its inhabitants off to Babylon as slaves (587 B.C.).

The catastrophe for the chosen tribe is unimaginable: their sacred temple is destroyed, unity broken, freedom lost and faith shattered. They are torn from the intended (promise) land that incarnates their link to their divine Chief and to one another. The presence of their divine Chief is dramatically disrupted and seemingly beyond reach. Under these circumstances, Israel should have been a footnote in history - when fortunes go bad for other tribes they simply fade away.

Israel does not fade from the scene, but undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis unparalleled in history. A tribal religion, hitherto localized in Palestine, mutates into a universal religion. The emphasis on divine presence, hitherto based on sharing tribal blood and on choice of the tribe as a whole, shifts to a choice by each tribal member against all odds. The divine/human partnership devolves clearly from tribe to member level. A general tribe to member devolution is a critical step leading to the divine Incarnation centuries later.

The Babylonian Captivity is the catastrophic event that turns the Israelites away from kings and back to prophets for guidance. Isaiah, the prophet of the Exile, reaffirms the divine image as Chief of a Chosen People who will again lead the people to unity and freedom. However, Isaiah, looking beyond the freedom of Moses and the unity of David, guides the aspirations of the people to a new depth of freedom/unity vested in a messiah. The messianic vision arises from the new focus on member rather than on the tribe as a whole. Unlike the fickleness of tribal unity, the messiah will be faithful because it will be centered on a one-on-one relation. The messiah will fulfill the legacy of Moses and David by introducing freedom/unity that will be the unmistakable sign of divine presence to the entire world.

The inevitability of messianic incarnation gradually becomes central to the unfolding tribal life of the Israelites. Furthermore, the messianic vision restores the understanding of their origin as a stand-in for the human race – thus reverting back to tribe/nature rather than tribe/tribes framework. For the Israelites, unlike Western mythology of a Deity coming down from heaven, the messiah arises from tribal bonding leading to the bonding among all humanity. The coming messiah is to be a world figure. The historical bonding of the Israelites forms the template for a universal divine/human bond. Israel is an incubator, so to speak, for the full revelation of both divinity and humanity with unity/freedom as the defining core of the relation.

The Babylonian Captivity provides the needed stimulus for a messianic vision. The political structure wrought through a king having been shattered, the Israelites, during the dark days of the Exile, gather in homes in small groups to reconstruct their tribal faith. Those learned in covenant law become leaders of these gatherings. They teach the despairing people their ancient traditions and rekindle hope of a coming redemption. These home-centered gatherings become known as synagogues (a word meaning to bring together again).

The synagogue is the key sociological invention that turns a land-bound, tribal religion into a world religion. Through the synagogue, the Israelites come to realize that divine Call-bonding goes beyond tribal blood, a Promise Land and even a temple. In exile, their bonding together reaches a much deeper level than anything they had hitherto known. The new and deeper understanding enables the Israelites to recognize that their tribal Chief is present wherever they gather.

The direct linking of human/divine bonding regardless of place and circumstance represents a huge expansion of awareness. When the Persians defeat the Babylonians (539 B.C.) and free the Israelites, they have a very different mindset about returning than what they had when led away as slaves. Many feel no need to return but, using the newly instituted forum of synagogue, feel free to pursue their tribal faith detached from a specified land. The descendants of Judah alone choose to return.

The returning Israelites are acutely aware of Samuel's dire warnings of the inherent consequences of trying to place a king as intermediate between themselves and their tribal Chief. No king can bring about true tribal unity, but only a superficial, political unity at best. Divine Call is in and through tribal bonds, not in the ambitions of a king and court – a regal organization cannot adequately express that Reality.

In place of a monarchy, the Jews elect a direct tribal contact with their divine Chief as in the days of Abraham and Moses. In the renewal of the covenant, they resolve to respond with an intensity equal to the divine Call. To symbolize this new resolve, they rebuild the temple and turn to the priests and those learned in their tribal law to guide them in forming a unity of such depth that the presence of their divine Chief would be assured. The important legacy of the Captivity is a clear sense of equal partnership of Call/response, not just as a tribe collectively, but at member level.

In their zeal to respond at member level, a virtual explosion of laws follows governing the minutia of everyday life. They enshrine the tribal law in the temple, in their homes and attach scrolls of the tribal law to their forehead as a constant reminder. They severely punish even the least violation of their tribal law. A neglect or violation by a member undermines tribal unity/freedom and is at root blasphemous because it jeopardizes divine presence as the Bond forming a people.

Emphasis has clearly shifted from being a Chosen People to being a choosing people. This subtle shift in emphasis is an important step toward the espousal epoch of religion that follows. The Jews imagine that they finally have it right. The response of every member through a crushing body of laws and purifications to insure divine presence places their allegiance to the divine Chieftain beyond question. They imagine that conformity of every thought, word and action to tribal law would herald the long awaited messiah.

Unfortunately, they still do not get it right. The scrupulous observance of tribal law nurtures a conviction that no foreign power should dominate a messianic oriented people. This conviction leads to rebellion (in 70 A.D.) against the powerful Roman army that had come to dominate the world. The Romans destroy Jerusalem once again and lead away as slaves the Chosen People. Where is their divine Chief? How can divine Call allow this to happen? They had redoubled their effort to observe the tribal Law, but to no avail. Were they deluding themselves for the past thousand years? Is the tribal bond between them really the presence of divine Call? If so, why do enemies so easily destroy them in spite of their devotion to tribal bonds? Where is this long awaited messiah?

As in the days of the Babylonian Captivity, the domineering power of the Roman army provides the catalyst for reexamination of the divine/human covenant. The rebuilding of the temple, restoration of the priesthood and the proliferation of tribal laws had given no guarantee of divine presence. Obviously, the divine intent goes deeper than a Chief/tribe relation. Just as a monopole proto-religion gave way to Abraham's bipolar insight into Reality, and just as Abraham's sense of a distinct life eventually coalesced into Akhenaten's notion of a unified consciousness, and just as a unified divine consciousness concretized as a Chosen People in the time of Moses, so, now, imagery of Chosen People has run its course.

Proliferation of tribal laws and purifications that insured tribal unity had become so pervasive and oppressive that they destroyed at a deeper level the very freedom needed for divine/human intercourse. It appears that divine Call-imaging expressed through tribal law had itself become a source of enslavement – a sad outcome of Israel's 2000 year long continuation of Abraham's listening for the hidden divine intent. Roman enslavement forces a reexamination of divine intent at a depth that images, such as Chosen People, tribal Chief, Ten Commandments and Promise Land cannot reach. History is at a point where human experience had outgrown the vital, coalitional and tribal image-worlds and needed a new vision.

NOTE: Before leaving the issue of tribal religion, it is worthy of note that Reality coalescing into one divine consciousness, envisioned by Akhenaten, is the basis for Moses' gathering a people to form a tribe and is also the centerpiece of Islam. Like Moses before him, Mohammed (570 A.D.) makes the oneness of divinity the basis for the oneness of a people. Mohammed came to recognize the damage city life and prosperity had on tribal bonds. Arab people, although for centuries having developed strong tribal bonds as a means of survival in harsh desert conditions in which they lived, became involved in world trade, grew prosperous and became less conscious of tribal bonds. The Arab people in the sixth century were faced with the same disintegration of tribal bonds as the Hebrews in the time of the Babylonian captivity. In order to bring about a gathering-together to strengthen tribal identity, Mohammed proclaims the oneness of divinity as the single great truth. He requires his followers to face several times a day in the direction of the Kaaba shrine in Mecca and in unison prostrate in prayer. The mosque (meaning to prostrate in unison as an act of submission to the divine oneness) becomes a key social institution. At least once in a lifetime, devotees must make a pilgrimage to visit the holy shrine at Mecca to bear witness to divine oneness and to reflect that oneness in tribal cohesion.

Mohammed's greatest contribution to religion is in the renewed emphasis placed on the oneness of divinity as sign and source of unity. The resulting tribal unity becomes so intense that it enables the Moslems to conquer the world. Genghis Khan later conquers the Arabs, converts to Islam and forces the religion to go beyond its Arabic beginnings to become a worldwide faith. While the West emphasizes a philosophy of religion, Judaism and Islam alone maintain focus on relational knowledge as the defining core of religion. Neither, however, has crossed the threshold from a tribal to espousal religion. Christ is the catalyst for moving beyond the ninth (self/other-selves) to the tenth (self/other-self) stage of consciousness – from tribal to espousal religion.

Espousal Epoch (1 A.D. – present)

Tribal religion focuses on behavior; espousal religion focuses on identity. Behavior can be faked; as exemplified in the behavior of the Pharisees; identity cannot because it is the cause not the effect of behavior. This is the deeper insight that gives birth to a new paradigm in framing the divine/human relation. In the espousal epoch, the striving to be the Chosen People morphs into assuming the identity of the Chosen Person. The tribal epoch of religion is the dating phase; the espousal epoch is the human/divine wedding itself. The espousal epoch of religion centers on the ultimate level of human consciousness - the self/other-self stage.

Espousal religion does not replace the intellectual stages of consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves, but is the final flowering – previous root, stem and leaf are genetically present in the final blossom. Or, think of the progression as a transit from the infancy of proto-religion, to adolescence in tribal religion, to maturity in an espousal relation. Each stage of growth in psychological devolution is a new step toward the ultimate bonding between two selves out of which mutual divine/human identity emerges. Behavior follows from the mutual identities involved.

Espousal religion choreographs the dance of the divine Suitor with the beloved in an eternal Call/response ballet. Just as Abraham's imaging of divinity as Life mutates into Law at a tribal level, so, now, tribal Law mutates into Love at a self-level. Thus, divine imagery progresses from Life→ Law→ Love. In the tribal epoch, the presence of the divine Chief emerges in and through the willingness of being the Chosen People; in the espousal epoch, presence of the divine Suitor emerges in and through the willingness of being the only beloved. The two identities, namely, of divine Suitor and only beloved henceforth determine behavior of both parties in the relation.

In the espousal epoch, tribe coalesces, not as a distinct human self versus other human selves, but as a distinct human self vis-à-vis the divine Self. In this dichotomous relation, the two selves come together as equals – the divine Self with an identity of Call and the human self with an identity of response. The equality is derived from the divine initiative of Self-giving as Love that does not force but inherently contains the wherewithal of response by the very nature of Love. Hence the identity as the only beloved stems from divine Call as Love thus avoiding the ups/downs of tribal religion. Permanency of the relation comes directly from divine Call in freely assuming the initiative of Suitor that does not change with the fickleness of human response. In tribal religion the status of divine Chief is conditioned to the tribal response. In espousal religion the divine Suitor identity never changes; the human self simply emerges through freely responding as the beloved.

The espousal Call/response is beyond master/servant, father/son, or even friend/friend because the relation is one of self/Other-self – the beloved becomes the mirror of the divine Lover. Tribal response of listening to the divine Chief transforms into a human self-response of listening to the divine Suitor. Two become as one in a relationship of other-self without losing the opposite identities as Call/response. Espousal bonding between the human and divine selves is the core of Reality hidden since the dawn of time. In this union the deepest intent of the divine and human heart comes to light.

Background

As discussed above, the development of synagogues during the Diaspora wherein small groups gather in homes to share and develop their tribal faith creates the environment for a new awareness. Alienated as they are from temple and Promise Land, the Israelites begin to look to themselves not just as a remnant tribe, but as individual tribal members upon whose individual choice the continuation of tribal faith depends, thus introducing a radically new perspective. The stage is set for the final step in devolutionary psychology as the locus of choice shifts from tribe to member; in the transition the tribal structure is turned on its head.

The new awareness that choice resides with the member rather than with the tribe as a whole grows to the point that only one of the twelve tribes of Israel feels a need to return to the Promise Land, when opportunity finally comes. But even the returning tribe of Judah retains the radically new insight of member-faith versus tribe-faith. It is this member-faith that links them to the other eleven tribes now dispersed throughout the world. Member-faith in lieu of tribe-faith transforms Judaism into a world religion. The center of gravity changes from mere blood descendant to a member's choice as the basis for belonging to the Chosen People of Israel.

The synagogue emphasis on member over tribe/temple sows the seed for intense conflict that surfaces four centuries after the Babylonian Captivity. The tension revolves around the seeming irreconcilable conflict of maintaining tribal unity while allowing for distinct member choice. Any tendency that suggests a tribal member has greater significance than the whole tribe is contrary to ancient tradition. Tradition requires adherence to Law for the tribe as a whole as the condition for retaining the presence of the divine Chief – member-faith over tribe-faith borders on blasphemy.

The primacy of the tribe over member frames the entire Old Testament. However, the long exile, during which the political and religious hierarchy of Israel had been demolished, left a new and deeper understanding that simply could not be eradicated. Hebrew scholars sought to resolve the conflict by proposing that the Chosen People actually coalesces into a member. This school of thought is beautifully illustrated in the book of the Old Testament called the Song of Songs, in which the tribe is imaged as a bride. A sample of that writing follows.

Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the lattice. My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise my darling, my beautiful one and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of spring has come, the cooing of doves is heard on our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards - our vineyards that are in bloom. My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the daybreaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills. (Song of Song 2:8-17)

The writer of the Song of Songs images the tribe of Israel as a maiden pursued by the divine Suitor. This imagery radically changes the chosen-tribe/Chief image to a chosen-member/Lover image. The imagery of the Song of Songs, reflecting the intimacy of newly weds, is both graphic and supremely human. The incarnate character of religion is in clear evidence.

The postexilic scholars are opening the door to a new divine Call-imaging stream with the human self rather than tribe as the epicenter for probing into Reality/Life/ Call. In the Song of Songs, the writer does not subscribe to the Greek philosophical notion of an atomized individual or one based on a body/soul, matter/spirit dichotomy. The Song of Songs reflects the Hebrew tradition of imaging divine Call as incarnate in tribal bonds, but now tribal bonding is simply the coarser version of a more refined espousal bonding.

Thus the Hebrew notion of member/self is very flesh-bound in sharp contrast to the spirit-bound imagery of the West. (See sidebar below: Platonic versus Hebraic Person.) For the Israelites, divine Call cannot be imaged apart from life, land, tribe and, now, self. Just as divine Call is the tribal Bond connecting humans, so, now, at a visceral level, the divine/human meeting is in an arena where a sense of member/self-experience arises. Just as it took over a thousand years to grasp the meaning of the divine/human tribal bond, so, too, it will take a thousand years and more to grasp the meaning of the divine/human espousal bond.

The coalescence of the entire tribe into a human self is a startling development. Coalescence into a unified human self is the counterpart of Akhenaten’s view of Reality coalescing into one divine Self. To avoid pantheism, Akhenaten’s monotheism seminally and logically requires a coalescing of Reality into one human self as a mirror opposite of the divine Self. Coalescing Reality into a human-self shifts divine bonding from between tribal members to the arena of the divine Self versus the human-self. The divine/human dialogue deepens from tribe to self-level. The Hebraic tribe matures to become the Hebraic person.

The divine/human relation thus has deepened over time, passing through vital→ coalitional→ tribal stages and, finally, reaches the divine Self/self espousal relation as its ultimate expression. Abraham’s distinct life, Akhenaten’s coalescence of Reality into a unified whole, and Moses’ coalescence into tribal identity are necessary steps to a consciousness of divine-Self/human-self nuptial. From this journey emerges the Hebraic person, i.e., the face-to-face encounter between the human and the divine selves. The arrival of the Hebraic person is the espousal stage of religion. At this stage, Abraham’s Deity-imaging as Life, and Moses’ as tribal Law, transforms into Love seeking the beloved.

*******SIDEBAR*******

PLATONIC VERSUS HEBRAIC PERSON

Only two concepts of person have emerged in human history, namely, person as a center of attribution and person as response to Call. The former is ontological and is reflecting self-awareness as a being – as in a human being; the latter is reflecting self-awareness as a relation – as a response to call. The two assumptions produce two radically different worldviews that require an extensive discussion. Following is an examination of the two concepts of person from the perspectives of: definition, comparison, history and importance.

Definition

According to Plato, person is an ontological center of attribution. Imagine how you would feel if someone used your Social Security number to rip you off posing as you. What you feel is a tearing out the center of being that makes you a person – a center that you never dreamed could be stolen because it is you. This perception of self is ontological, i.e., being oriented. Plato defines this sense of being as a center of attribution whereby you are an individual as opposed to all other individuals in the human race. Center of attribution means that the sum total of all that goes to identify you, such as name, gender, age, genetic code, accomplishments and so forth, accumulate to identify you as an individual person. Plato's notion of person as an isolated individual with a unique set of attributes is fundamental to Western culture. We think of ourselves as individual human beings and, further, as composite beings of matter/spirit or body/soul, with both elements having separate being.

In contrast to the being orientation of the Platonic world is the relation orientation of the Hebraic world. The Hebraic person is the core of Reality: viewed as a dichotomous relation between the divine Self, as Initiator, and a human self, as response. It is the interrelation of Initiator/response that constitutes chosen tribe that later becomes chosen person. The essential division is not between two individuals, but between the divine Self with an identity of Initiator/Call and a human tribe/self with an identity of response. Both response and Call are universals in that they define each other as in true with any dichotomous relation. Person arises from the juncture of the two selves.

Just as the tribal response to the call of the divine Chief forms the Hebraic tribe, so, too, the self-response to call from the divine Self forms the Hebraic person. There cannot be multiple chosen tribes or human selves in a relational perception of Reality any more than there can be multiple divine Chiefs or divine Selves. Akhenaten recognized that Reality coalesces into a unified whole, but did not envision the inherent relational duality. He saw Reality coalescing into one divine Self, thereby implying the worship of many deities inherently is idolatry. But, the opposite of the divine Self is the coalescence of Reality into one human self, thereby implying that the 'worship' of many human self-images is inherently idolatry. In a relational view of Reality, the human self is complementary to the divine Self. You cannot have one without the other – it would be like having a coin with only one side. We readily accept the notion of one divine Self, but are oblivious to its corollary of a universal human self-experience, versus multiple self-images. Unlike the Theo-centric idolatry of the past, the idolatry prevalent today is the worship of self-image as identical to self-experience.

We often fail to distinguish between self-experience and self-image. Self-experience is a universal while self-image is merely a functional tool used for interacting with society. Self, defined as a unified consciousness, admits to two and only two possible identities, namely, Call and response; there can be but one human self of response as opposed to one divine Self of Call. That there can be but one divine-Self in the relation but multiple human selves is inherently a contradiction – there cannot be one east and multiple wests. Self is a relation and not a being/object. If the universe coalesces into a unified Self, defined relationally as all/else that is not the divine Self, it stands to reason that the necessary corollary is that the universe coalescing into a unified human self - defined as all/else that is not the human self.

NOTE: This convoluted definition of self is like saying that the east is all/else that is not east and the west all/else that is not west. Opposites in a dichotomous relation, such as self/other-self or east/west, can be defined only indirectly through the opposite end of the relation. A relational mode of thought as a defining core of Reality is alien to the ontological assumption of the West. Recall that there are only three radically different operating systems (beginning assumptions) in defining Reality that have ever surfaced through history. These systems differ by their starting assumption about the nature of Reality as essentially phenomenon, object or relation. These starting assumptions produced proto-religion, philosophy/ontology and religion respectively. Phenomenon is the mental operation system of an undifferentiated environment as found in pre-history; atomization/ontology is the mental operating system of an object-rich environment, as in the West; and relation is the mental operating system of the East arising from an object-poor environment, such as a desert. Science arose in an object-rich environment, while religion arose in an object-poor environment.

Each mental operating system has vast potential but also limitations. The ideal is to achieve the ability to distinguish between the three mental operating systems in order to master a three-dimensional grasp of Reality. The three radically different beginning assumptions for viewing Reality produce dissimilar worlds analogous to the very different worlds produced by touching (phenomenon), vision (object), and hearing (relation). Religion, erroneously assumed by many to be equated with rituals, morals and beliefs, is essentially a radically different outlook/assumption than the ontological assumption found in the West or the phenomenon-outlook of proto-religion/pre-history. Rituals, morals and beliefs are common to all three beginning assumptions about the core nature of Reality. Religion simply entails relational intelligence/knowledge versus the rational intelligence/knowledge in an ontological outlook.

Self, in a relational perception of Reality, is entirely different from the notion of individual as found in the atomized culture of the West. The Hebraic person arises from a self-experience that is prior to any atomized self-image. Self-imaging includes such reified notions as: being, matter/spirit, gender, race, age and countless other images used to conceptualize a self. The self at the core of the Hebraic person begins and expands solely upon the direct interaction between Call/response. At this level, both the divine and human selves derive mutual identity. Unlike a Platonic self, a Hebraic self cannot be stolen because response (the human self-identity) is the other self of divine Call. Stealing the human self entails stealing also the divine Self since the divine/human self form a dichotomous relation, identified as the Hebraic person.

The Hebraic self is the origin and not the product of being – just the opposite of the Platonic person. In other words, in a Hebraic perspective, you are a self before you are a being – self produces your sense of being. A newborn has a self-experience long before the infant begins to reify self-experience as a being with body, caretaker and surroundings. You have a body because you are first a self; you are not a self because you have a body. In Platonic thinking, a newborn has a sense of being long before an elementary self-experience as consciousness of consciousness. However, as discussed in chapter two regarding devolutionary psychology, consciousness-of-consciousness logically has to come before any concept of atomized being. The Hebraic concept of person as the interface between divine/human selves has roots far deeper than Western culture and is the basis for understanding the East and religion.

Comparison

The essential difference between the two concepts of person is that one is image-based and the other experience-based, one is philosophical and the other religious, one grew out of the Hellenistic and the other out of the Hebraic world. The originator of the first is Plato; the second comes from Abraham, the father of religion. The first is a mental artifact arising from the reification stage of psychological devolution; the second arises from the seventh (self/object) stage in the devolution of human consciousness. Reifying Reality logically leads to a Platonic person, just as a self/object relation as the core of Reality inevitably leads to Hebraic person.

It is possible that the Hellenistic concept of person had some influence on Hebraic culture. Palestine is the super highway between the great culture centers of Greece and Egypt. However, there is important difference between the Greek philosophical and the Hebrew incarnate perception of person. Philosophy explores Reality using reason as the primary intellectual tool; religion explores Reality using experience as the primary tool. Sensory and emotion-based knowledge are of equal importance to knowledge derived from reason. The Hebrew people draw from Abraham's premise of a distinct life to arrive at their understanding of Deity as divine Call (to Life). Call to a distinct life eventually concretizes as a distinct/chosen tribe. The final insight into Abraham's experience of a distinct life is a distinct human self that is juxtaposed to the divine Self. Vital→ tribal→ espousal experience (versus imaging) is the path for reaching the notion of the Hebraic person. Freud draws from his Jewish tradition when he surmises that self-knowledge involves delving into subconscious experience – an arena where images have not yet formed. Person as a response/Call relation logically leads to divine incarnation; person as an individual being logically leads to reifying Deity as a Supreme Being in a world apart.

Furthermore, the two notions of person pose very different questions about Reality. For example, in the West, the key issue is: does a Deity exist? For the East, the issue is: does self exist as distinct from all/else? And, what is the nature of the relation (religion) between self and all/else not the self? Self as distinct from all/else is the fundamental issue posed by Abraham, leading to religion and the end of human sacrifice. Abraham's relational view of Reality leads logically to searching out the providence versus the existence of Deity. Speculation on the existence of Deity has nothing to do with religion and everything to do with philosophy; religion is like marriage that is focused not on the existence of spouses but on how they relate.

What is unique about the Israelites is that through the centuries they reflect on their collective experience seeking by trial and error to mirror more accurately the never changing face of divine Call – just the reverse of Hellenistic thought. A philosopher tries to figure out the nature of a Deity and then who we are, for example, a Creator implies we are creatures. In contrast, the history of Israel is one of exploring the meaning of tribe (humanity) as an unfolding response to Call. As mentioned, Abraham begins by perceiving divine Call as consciously intending his distinct life; Moses further surmises that coalescing, as a distinct tribe, is a logical extension of Abraham's notion of a distinct life; finally, tribal bonding coalesces into a self vis-à-vis the divine Self. The vital→ tribal→ espousal experience is the gradual incarnating of both a human and divine self. The imagery of Life→ Chief→ Spouse reflects the gradual concretizing of divine Call.

Perhaps the most important comparison between the Platonic/Hebraic notions of person is the site of origin – the one centers on head and the other on heart. The Platonic person arises primarily from refinement of philosophical speculation; the Hebraic person arises from life experience leading to greater sensitivity to Life. Thus, the Hellenistic world produced philosophical writings and rational intelligence, whereas the Hebrew tradition produced wisdom literature and relational intelligence. Greater sensitivity to Life is emotional knowledge/maturity. Developing via a vital → tribal→ espousal relation is a process of maturity arising from the heart. The concept of a Hebraic person is akin to espousal maturity wherein two become as one.

In a Platonic person, being precedes choice; in a Hebraic person, choice precedes being – a Chosen People and a chosen self emerge into being through choice. A Hebraic relation is not an intellectual exercise but a history of ever-wiser and deeper choices that bring a people/self into reality. Choice is the underlying theme of the story of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Mary and Christ. Choice concretizes relation and reveals intent. Choice, leading to deeper wisdom, represents an incarnate approach to Reality, in contrast with the dual natural/supernatural world adopted by Plato. Making a choice in the face of dire consequences is the cutting edge in the development of religion (The book to read: *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.) The history of wiser choices made by Israel in becoming the Chosen People is a template for the choices made by Christ in desert in becoming the Chosen Person (Matt: 4).

Inherent exclusiveness versus inclusiveness presents yet another important contrast. The Platonic person is an individual defined by the exclusion of other individuals; the Hebraic person is a relation defined as the inclusion of humanity/universe. The human self is all-inclusive as the complement of the divine Self. Even though the relation of self/all-else is a clear, logical dichotomy, Western culture misses the logic because of its need to first reify Reality. Breaking out from the box of reification to a wider relational perspective in psychological devolution is like entering a whole new world – like a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly.

Whether Reality is viewed through the lens of being or relation is not an issue of right or wrong. Platonic and Hebraic notions of person are radically different, but not in opposition. The problem lies in the inability to see Reality from two fundamentally different perspectives. Assuming Reality to be a collection of isolated beings or a dichotomous relation is the choice of the observer. This is analogous to what physicists have found in nature: a beam of light behaves as tiny particles/things (called: photons) or tiny waves/relations, depending on the choice of an experimenter. Reification of the world gives us science and technology; a relation-based world gives self-experience and the universe as the divine courtship. The greatest danger is failing to realize choice is key for unlocking Reality. Based on choice, the world is an object in motion or the unfolding of self vis-à-vis all/else not the self. Choice also allows one to see Reality through the lenses of two radically different assumptions.

Historical Perspective

Tertullian (b.160 A.D.), an early Christian theologian, demanded to know what Athens had to do with Jerusalem. He is among the first to see a fundamental clash of cultures between East and West. St. Augustine (b.354 A.D.), the father of Western Christianity including both Catholic and Protestant traditions, tries to solve the dilemma. Due largely to the influence of Plotinus (270 A.D.), a neo-Platonic philosopher, Augustine substitutes the Platonic for the Hebraic person to make Christian doctrine more precise and Christianity a better match for Western thought.

Plotinus views Reality as a gradation of ‘being’ with divinity possessing the fullness of being while humans, animals and earth have progressively a lesser being. Like Plotinus, Augustine envisions divine union through increasing ‘being’ via intellectual/contemplative enlightenment. For Augustine, our body and the physical world are shadows of being and interfere with our soul/spirit yearning for union with the true divine Being. When we are freed from our mortal bodies, we gain full enlightenment and enter into a beatific (intellectual) ‘vision’ of the Supreme Being - the Source of all light. The Supreme Being, as it were, absorbs the lesser being of the soul, like a candle light pales in the light of a brilliant sun. Augustine’s famous book of Confessions, depicting a struggle between the flesh and spirit, set the tone of Western ‘spirituality’ to the present day.

In contrast to seeking more ethereal being, Hebraic thought begins with the action/reaction relation – a basic law of physics governing the inanimate world - and elevates the relation to one of call/response by progressively incorporating the notion of distinct life→ tribe→ self. Response begins with Abraham’s sense of a distinct life, progresses in Akhenaten’s coalescing of Reality into a unified consciousness, concretizes in tribal bonding and, finally, emerges as a self vis-à-vis the divine Self. Unlike the Platonic fixation on the mind/being, the response at the core of the Hebraic person increases in depth by listening/choosing. Where Platonic ‘spirituality’ is anti-incarnate, Hebraic quest of Reality is in and through the body.

The neo-Platonism of Augustine, wrapped in biblical imagery, effectively changes religion into a philosophy of religion. Reducing religion to ideology logically leads to the need to precisely define the faith and to the plethora of Christian sects found in the West today – every new idea calls for stating a new church. A philosophy of religion results in an obsession of finding the true religion rather than the true (mature) relation – a relation that historically transitioned through vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal stages. Augustine recasts the relation-based Hebraic person into the atomized Platonic person. The switch is a stroke of genius in that, by replacing the Hebraic with the Platonic notion of person, Hebrew influence like a Trojan horse begins penetrating the West. Otherwise, Christianity may well have remained a cult within Judaism like Sufism within Islam. Unfortunately, the switch preserves all the imagery but looses the substance of the Gospel, thus transforming it into a preserve for the intellectual elite and dictum of moral conduct. The relentless persecution of the Jews through the centuries reflects the severing of Christianity from its Hebraic roots.

Importance

Assuming the core of Reality to be ontological (being) versus relational has an enormous consequence because it divides the West from the East (see sidebar in chapter two: Self as Key to Understanding East and West). Recall that the Homeric ontological concept of person is that of a rugged individualist, competitive elite and paragon of virtue. This Western/Hellenistic concept of person centers on power and refers primarily to males who made up the warrior class. Even as late as the writing of the American Constitution, the phrase, “all men are created equal”, referred primarily to landholding-gentlemen in a soldier class.

The diverse view of person is at the root of the conflict between East and West. The West’s ontological focus produces science and technology; the East’s relational focus produces tribal/human bonding. In a conflict, the Western advanced technology of killing only intensifies tribal bonding and the bonding, in turn, fuels resistance. The situation is mutually incomprehensible because the reified bias of the West sees progress in body count; the relational culture of the East sees resistance as the deepening of faith. The West finds certitude deductively through analysis of the results of a conflict; the East finds certitude inductively through the experience of martyrdom, i.e., giving witness to relation. A relational culture is far more complex than cultures centered on the intellectual tools of reification/reasoning.

*******END SIDEBAR*******

Beginnings

The threat of tribal destruction because of an Egyptian pharaoh spurs a people to envision divine Call more concretely as a redeeming tribal Chief. More than a thousand years later, the threat of personal destruction because of tribal bonds spurs a young Jewish woman to envision the divine Chief as Suitor. In her, tribal bonding matures into espousal union between the human and divines selves. In her, Abraham’s distinct life becomes a distinct self vis-à-vis the divine Self. Abraham’s distinct life had devolved through two thousand years to include the added features of unified consciousness, intent and choice – critical developments for coalescing into tribal consciousness. Now, tribal consciousness in turn coalesces into a consciousness of self; in so doing, tribal bonding morphs into espousal bonding, as in a marriage. Marriage, of course, existed from ancient times. However, this is the first time divine/human bonding is framed as a marriage between two equal selves.

The emerging new espousal imaging reflects the most profound insight in the divine/human relation ever achieved: the chosen tribe becomes the chosen self, the divine Chief transforms into Suitor, and the Promise Land transits to human body as the arena of divine presence. This monumental expansion of consciousness does not occur high on a mountain amid clouds and rolling thunder, as in the time of Moses, but hidden away in the anxious heart of a young, pregnant woman, named Mary, betrothed to a Jewish man, named Joseph. The looming crisis for the young woman is that Joseph is not the father of her unborn child.

Mary faces a tribal culture extremely hostile to an unexplained pregnancy. Tribal faith is based on preserving tribal bonds as the means of insuring divine presence among the descendants of Abraham. An unexplained pregnancy threatens disruption of tribal continuity that comes only through male descendants. In ancient times, people believe that a mother is like soil that nurtures the male seed of life. Women are simply defective males and unable to transmit a tribal identity. The male alone provides tribal continuity and full tribal identity belongs only to a male child. A pregnancy other than by a Jewish man is disastrous to tribal continuity.

If a Jewish male impregnates a non-Jewish woman, the male offspring would still be considered a descendant of Abraham. Tribal law does not consider such behavior by males as worthy of harsh punishment. It would be very reprehensible, however, for a Jewish man to cover for a woman by claiming responsibility for a pregnancy not of his doing. The child in such a situation could not be considered a descendant of Abraham. If a woman is found to be pregnant by a man other than her betrothed, the husband-to-be is required to expose the woman and, in accordance with the Law of Moses, be the first to cast a stone ending her life as well as the life of the child alien to the tribe. Participants in the stoning are driven by the belief that such severe punishment would be a warning to other young women so tempted and serve also to rekindle zeal for the purity of a tribal faith throughout the community. Failure to stone constitutes betrayal of the faith because the bond that unites the intended people of Call has been broken. The lack of zeal for tribal bonding has been the cause of divine retribution throughout the centuries.

Stoning is not a pleasant way to die. However, given the cultural milieu of the time, the pain endured from lethally thrown rocks may not have been the greatest agony. The woman's own husband-to-be, family, friends and neighbors are expected to participate in the execution. Thus, the condemned is faced with punishment that goes to the very core where a sense of self arises. The shame of public humiliation itself kills at a depth that no stone can reach. The worst pain of all is in realizing that one would be excommunicated from the Chosen People and forever alienated from the divine Chief. In short, the survival drama clearly shifts from the arena of tribe to self.

It is hard for us today to appreciate the traumatic social pressure placed upon Mary. Our society increasingly accepts unmarried pregnant women, but this tolerance is fairly recent. Even today, in some societies, husbands and fathers kill young wives and daughters for the 'honor' of the family. For Mary, the situation is far harsher than would be found in tribal societies today. Mary does not have the freedom to move out of her family circle or access to the range of other choices we take for granted. She is a teenager, does not know life much beyond the village in which she lives, grows up in a society where tribal law dictates every detail of life, and lives under the threat of severe punishment for violations of tribal law, especially in the case of an unexplained pregnancy.

Joseph, Mary's betrothed, is also put on the spot. He could not be expected to understand the origin of Mary's pregnancy. If he does not expose Mary, he would be guilty of cover-up, thus compromising his own tribal faith. In such a cover-up, he, along with Mary, would be living in a faith community that, in his heart, he knows both he and his wife are excluded. By accepting Mary, he would be as guilty as she. Mary, keenly aware of Jewish law and tradition, knows well the agonizing choice confronting Joseph. In the end, Joseph steps forward impelled by a dream and, by taking Mary as his wife, signals the unborn child as his own, thus shielding her from a dreadful fate.

*******SIDEBAR*******

ANGELS AND DREAMS

The literary forms of angels, dreams and divine manifestations are frequently used throughout the Old Testament and are used again here in introducing the new espousal-imaging stream. How else could the writer present this event two thousand years ago? We must not let the imagery used by the writers gloss over what must have been a horrendously agonizing experience for Mary and Joseph. Even if the writer wanted to give an eyewitness account of events, how would Mary be able to explain to her family and friends that her pregnancy is from divine Call? Angels and dreams are necessary to convey what is truly happening. There is a danger of dwelling on the glamour of an angel talking to Mary/Joseph along with imagery associated with Christmas and, as a result, missing the whole point of the story aimed at shifting the divine/human arena from a tribal to self-level. Ancient Eastern writers are driven by meaning and choose images, such as angels or dreams, to highlight the meaning of an event – demand for eyewitness news is a bias of modern times.

*******END SIDEBAR*******

Mary, long imbued with tribal response to Call, faces a profound choice in her heart of hearts regarding a continued tribal relation with Call. Rejected from the tribe and faced with execution, she is forced into a self-experience more profound than tribal membership. In the crisis, her tribal self-experience deepens into an espousal self-identity vis-à-vis the divine Self. As the tribal bonding of old signaled an increase of the divine Chief's incarnation in human history, so the espousal bonding of Mary signals the incarnation of the divine-Self in human flesh. The chosen tribe/Chief relation morphs into chosen self/Suitor relation. The epicenter of divine presence shifts from tribal to marital bonding.

Throughout history, catastrophic events spark radical changes in divine Call-imaging. Thus, vital Call-imaging begins when Abraham is poised to kill his son; tribal imaging begins when an enslaved people is on the brink of extermination; and, an espousal imaging begins when a woman is faced with the annihilation of self-experience at a depth beyond what image can express. The experience of a true human self/all-else dichotomy emerges for the first time – Mary stood radically alone before divine Call with no intervening image. Her only recourse is in self-experience as the epicenter of life/tribe/land. In an amazing moment of light to which only she is privileged, Life merges with her life, Chosen People coalesces into a chosen self, Promise Land becomes her body and a beloved People becomes a beloved spouse.

Response to the divine Call at a depth touching the very identity of the human self fulfills Abraham's yearning for endless life and Israel's quest for eternal divine bonding. Espousal faith fulfills tribal faith and reveals the Self of divine Call to all humanity far beyond the capacity of a member-to-member relation within a tribe. Mary is the first to discover the complementary truth that, if Reality coalesces into one divine Self, as Call, there can only be one human self, as response – an awareness still a challenge to this day. The insight is truly remarkable since, in her day, a woman did not rise even to the level of tribal member - much less a distinct self level.

Her espousal response sets a new depth for the human self in that a calling to be the only beloved touches the full depth of human self-experience. Since the espousal proposal is from divine initiative, an espousal response has the effect of revealing the Suitor. Thus, just as a Chosen People reveals the divine Chief, the human-self reveals the divine Self. The history of Israel is one of a Chosen People responding as the beloved of Call; the history of the human self henceforth is one of self-responding as the beloved of Call. Mary's response as the only beloved is archetypal for all of humanity for all times. Such response reveals both the divine and human self. As Moses introduces the Hebraic tribe, Mary introduces the Hebraic person. Mary transforms divine imaging from Chief to Suitor. The communion of the divine/human selves now drives the course of history as the cutting edge of human consciousness.

Mary achieves the fullness of tribal unity by choosing to be the responsive other-self of the divine Self/Call. Faced with a crisis that entails a religious, psychological, social and physical annihilation, she recognizes that the tribal bond linking Israelites to Call is the same bond that unites her directly to divine Call, but at a much deeper level. Thus, the understanding of relation (religion) at the core of Reality moves progressively through a bonding to Life (vital stage), to a bonding within tribe (tribal stage) and, finally, at its fullest simplification, to a bonding between the divine Self and human self (espousal stage). This progression is in the growth of the human-self and not the divine Self. The divine espousal Call began before time, but human response is slow and reaches maturity in Mary for the first time.

Mary grows up with the notion that the Promise Land forms an incarnate link between her as a tribal member and divine Call. When Mary enters the deeper level of self-experience as the direct bonding with divine Call, Promise Land transits to the body itself since the body is the primary expression of the human self, just as land is for tribe. The body now is the arena of divine/human Self-to-self engagement. The body, at a self-level, is not tribal but universal - just as the notion of self-experience. Body-ness links every human, nature and the universe itself. Mary's response at a self-level is isomorphic, that is, humanity and universe converge into her self-experience as response to the divine, loving Call.

Like Abraham, it is unlikely Mary perceived all the implications of the divine espousal relation as the basis of her self-experience. Never in history has there been found such imaging where equality between the divine and human self is implied. Although Akhenaton thought of self as the incarnation of the Deity, Mary adds the missing dimension, namely, the distinct human self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self. The relation introduces a depth of freedom far beyond the tribal/political freedom ushered in by Moses/David. The awesome holiness of divine Call, before whom even Moses trembled and whose awesome name the Israelites never deigned to pronounce, enters human flesh. By her listening/obedience she makes divine Call transparent to the world. The last frontier of Call/response imaging is breached – in the universe there is now only the human-self responding to the call of the divine other Self.

The Gospels reveal that Mary's response to an espousal Call brings about the divine Incarnation. A crucial issue at point is that Mary becomes a person jointly with Call – the Hebraic person is the juncture of the human with the divine selves, just as the Chosen People is a juncture of a tribe with the divine Chief. The virginal conception reported in the Gospel clearly highlights the divine initiative whereby two become as one and from this divine/human union the Hebraic person is made flesh. Mary is the fullness of response encompassing all humanity in her communion with Call. She becomes the revelation of Call as divine Call becomes the revelation of her – as would be expected in any marriage where spouses reflect each other.

Mary manifests the presence of Call as an all-inclusive human self. The inclusiveness of self replaces tribal bonding as the vortex of divine presence. Mary freely responds by entering into divine intercourse as a chosen spouse, just as Israel had freely responded entering into the divine tribal relation as the Chosen People. She clearly reveals the depth of the divine/human relation initiated by Abraham in that, at her word, the Word of divine Call becomes flesh – the divine/human dialogue is fully human and divine. The espousal religion introduced by Mary opens up a new universe of divine/human Self-to-self communion. Maintaining and developing this relation/religion goes beyond the free choice of a Hebraic People to the free choice of the Hebraic person.

The most important change ushered in by espousal faith is that the dynamic of the divine/human relation goes beyond tribal Law to become one of Love – the most intimate of love between spouses. Henceforth, the presence of Call is to be found wherever human love is found. The divine espousal initiative toward Mary forever changes divine Call initiative to one of Love – human love is in effect the in fleshing of divine Call/Love. Where formerly human life reflected divine Life, human experience of love is a direct experience of divine Call. Changing the divine Call-imaging from Life→ Law → Love took two thousand years of Hebrew history, culminating in Mary. Each image shift marks the vital, tribal and espousal stages in the development of the divine/human relation.

When divine Call is defined as identical to Love (1John: 4) the world changes. Love goes beyond friendship and implies an espousal self-surrender between the divine Self and human self. Tribal bonding emerges through obedience (listening) to tribal Law; espousal bonding emerges through obedience (listening) to Love. Tribal Law is enshrined in a temple and engages the aspirations of a people; Love is enshrined in the sanctuary of the heart and engages the senses, emotions and intellect of a self that is so touched. The presence of Love creates the Hebraic person as tribal Law creates the Hebraic tribe.

By redefining divine Call as espousal, in lieu of tribal, Mary initiates a paradigm shift in human consciousness. All subsequent divine relation has validity only in the measure it reflects back on the archetypal event in which Mary transforms her aloneness, occasioned by tribal excommunication and threat of death by stoning, into an espousal response to Call. This divine intercourse not only creates the core of human self-experience but also brings forth new life soon to be born in Bethlehem.

Salient Features of Espousal Religion

The response of Mary to Call is the Mt. Sinai of espousal religion. Just as exploring the divine covenant event with Moses on Mt. Sinai created a tribal faith, exploring the divine covenant event that occurred in Mary creates the espousal faith elaborated on in the Gospels. Transforming tribal to espousal religion introduces a radically new world vision. The salient features of this world are: communion, beloved-ness, meekness and peace. An explanation of each feature follows.

Communion

We think of self as a separate individual due to our cultural bias for atomizing. The Hebraic/relational sense of self-experience is communion. A Hebraic person is a communion of divine/human selves rather than an entity or being. This means that the divine Self of Call and the human self of response commune in the same body – two selves in one body. As we have seen, religion is by definition a relational rather than an atomized perception of Reality. The core relation, long thought to be tribal, as in member/Chief, deepens to an espousal level between human-self/divine-Self.

Tribal religion views bonding between multiple tribal members as the incarnation of Call and a Promise Land as the arena for nurturing divine/human bonding; espousal religion views bonding at a self/self level and, therefore, the body as the ‘Promise Land’ for nurturing human self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self. ‘Body’ is not defined ontologically as a skin-bound object, but as the medium of both divine/human self-presence and self-articulation. A human body, when it is perceived as Call, is the presence of the divine Self; when perceived as response, it is the presence of a human self. The body itself is the ‘Mt. Sinai’ defining the new covenant between the divine and human self – the two become one flesh, as in a marriage. The divine/human bonding in the body, in lieu of a special territory, is inherently universal. Thus, in espousal religion, you are in the Promise Land by virtue of having a body.

When you look at the world around you as Call, you see the face of the divine Self; when you look at the world around you as response, you see your own self-identity. This is the direct consequence of perceiving Reality as a communion. Thus, response as a human self reveals the Call of the divine Self – like one spouse reflects the other. The divine Self initiates the communion through divine Call embedded in the body/ surrounding world. Divine Call, concretized in the surrounding world, is as invitation to you to awaken to the self-identity of an ever-deepening response. Human self-experience, as response, is simply complement to the divine Self, as Call. The more response becomes a conscious self-identity coextensive with humanity/universe, the more the face of the divine Self becomes visible. Mary began the Incarnation of the divine Self; divine Incarnation continues wherever espousal response is to be found.

Forming an image of personhood, as a communion, is impossible. The body is simply the epicenter of divine/human communion. When Abraham surmises a distinct life vis-à-vis Life globally, a Call/response communion/body as the essence of person is the logical consequence. The history of Israel refines the distinct life of Abraham, first as an incarnate tribal/response and, finally, as incarnate self/response. Chapter two (see the section regarding modern science and self-experience) reflects extensively on the relational versus the ontological perception of the body. While a relational view of body is alien to the West, it is at the essence of espousal religion. Just as the Old Testament chronicles the tribal progression of divine/human incarnation to form one tribe, so, too, the New chronicles an espousal progression of divine/human incarnation to form one body. History stills unfolds on the saga of divine/human incarnate communion in the forming of one body.

Beloved-ness

Because Call/response is a dichotomous relation, you are the only beloved of Call by virtue of being a self. Just as there can be only one Chosen People as the only beloved, there can be only one Chosen Person as the only beloved of divine Call – the Hebraic (human) tribe simply further coalesces forming the Hebraic person. The subsuming of all/else into self as response to Call is the only path for recognizing self as the only beloved. The divine Self is knowable only by reflection, never directly. The billions of individuals throughout history occasion the human self-experience to reflect countless facets of the divine Self, because one side of a dichotomous relation mirrors the other. The infinite facets of the human self is the glory of divine Self, just as the infinite facets of the divine Self is the glory of the human self. Beloved-ness pertains to self-experience, not to self-image. The oneness of the human self, with an identity of response, reflects the oneness of the divine Self, with an identity of Call.

The logic is clear once human self-experience is defined as response versus Call. Where do you set the boundaries of response? No boundary can be set because Call and response are mutually exclusive, universal identities. Thus, response anywhere by anyone is inseparable from your own identity as response. The billions of people throughout history not only are inseparable from your identity of response but also they embody the presence of the divinely initiated Call. Divine Self can never be response just as a human self can never be initiator. A self, defined as response, is coextensive with Call. Thus, your response is a revelation of Call in time and place; the revelation of Call, in turn, occasions deeper consciousness of self as response. The human body is the initial environment where self, as response, gains consciousness. The consciousness of self as response develops through body-ness until self is coextensive with humanity and the universe itself.

The word beloved is code for choice, which is incomplete until it is mutual. Mary is the archetype of that mutual choice – she is chosen and she chooses in return. The response inherent in humanity/universe is not complete until the human self says yes - until then, there may be dating but no marriage. Espousal religion is human choice-centric because the divine Spouse has already pronounced the “I do” of the marriage. A deepening response, versus indifference/reaction, is a progressive entering into the divine marital bond forming the Hebraic person.

As mentioned previously, Call, defined as initiating Love, conveys with it the wherewithal of response, while at the same time preserving the freedom of response. By way of analogy, a suitor proposes marriage to a beloved with a love that by its very nature attracts a positive response without forcing it. Humanity/universe embodies a loving Call that inherently enables without forcing response. There are no fireworks until the response becomes one’s own. Response to loving Call can range from the superficial to a response of great depth. Mary sets the standard by responding in such depth that she reveals divine Call in the flesh.

Meekness

Tribal bonding centers on power, but espousal bonding centers on meekness. Thus, meekness is the core-image of espousal religion as power is the core-image in tribal religion. Meekness means a listening heart divested of control; it is what holds a marriage together. In espousal religion, divine absolute power changes to absolute weakness. Power intimidates, meekness attracts; power induces fear, meekness induces response. The divine Call-imaging of tribal religion as a powerful but distant tribal Chief turns into an anxious Suitor seeking an intimate Self-to-self espousal relation. Mutual surrender of power by both the divine and human selves is at the essence of an espousal relation. Any use of force or manipulation lessens the freedom of both parties involved and, therefore, the very validity of the marriage.

The surrendering of power in espousal religion is not a change in Call, but in the human perception of divine Call. Akhenaten, by coalescing Reality into a unified whole, implicitly precludes the very notion of power. Moreover, the philosophical notion of divine power is irrelevant as it is just as easy to create a grain of sand, as it is to create a thousand universes – any scale applied to infinity has no relevance since there is no beginning or ending point. The notion of power is a human invention. We invented the notion of power as a means for controlling our natural and social environment. We naturally transfer the notion of power to a Deity and, consequently, sense discomfort in defining Deity as absolute weakness – the discomfort says more about ourselves than about divine Call.

For tribal bonding, power-related images promote unity within a tribe; for espousal bonding, meekness-related images promote divine/human conjugal unity. While divine imaging as a higher/greater power reflects a human need for order and security, divine imaging as total meekness reflects a need for spousal intimacy and spontaneity. In tribal imaging, Call is a Protector and Defender; in espousal imaging, divine Call can only Love - a Love that creates unlimited potential in the beloved. Divine meekness nurtures awareness of the human self as the only beloved. Changing our divine imaging from one of power to one of meekness is a maturing process.

Espousal gentleness/weakness changes the arena of the divine/human relation from land (as in Promise Land) to flesh. Landholding is a symbol of power; flesh is the embodiment of weakness. Far from escaping the flesh – the flesh becomes the brothel chamber replacing the Holy Land central to tribal imaging. Divine Call is to be found through a deeper involvement in the flesh, not less. Mary's virginal conception leaves no doubt that Call is incarnate and that the flesh is the key arena for revealing Call. The pregnancy of a virgin is a very concrete, down to earth way of saying that the relation between Mary and Call is not simply a mental or 'spiritual' exercise. There is a direct connection in and through the flesh between Call and the human self - just as hitherto it was between divine Call and tribe. Flesh, in a deeper sense, links self with all humanity, thereby linking the human self with the divine Self that is inseparable from the flesh. Call has become flesh and dwells among us (Prolog of St. John's Gospel). Flesh is both the divine Call of the divine Self and, at the same time, the response of the human self. The weakness of flesh, hitherto a source of scandal, becomes the link between divine Suitor and beloved.

The imagery of Call becoming flesh highlights the divine surrender of power. In tribal imaging, Call is the divine Chief exercising absolute power over tribal members. In contrast, in espousal imaging, Call has no power any more than that of a suitor enticing a beloved. What satisfaction could Call get from merely displaying power that intimidates and repels? How much more conducive to Life/Love is a displaying of meekness/weakness that invites but never forces free response.

Imaging Call as powerless is not entirely new. Throughout the Old Testament there are hints that power is not an apt image for defining the divine/human relation. Old Testament glimpses of this deeper imaging of Call abound. David, although the least among the eight sons of Isai, is anointed king; Moses, although unable to grasp divine mystery, speaks for Call. The weakness of Call is central to the New Testament. The Jews expect a powerful messiah would arise from the seed of David; the messiah is born of a virgin, teenage mother. Thus, a woman, the 'weaker' sex, and not the seed of a man give origin to the messiah. The theme of weakness continues in the lowliness of a stable birth, flight into Egypt and residency in unpretentious Nazareth.

The divine/human communion forming the Hebraic person is quintessentially a world of meekness/gentleness. In espousal religion, Call is no longer distant, high on a mountain that none but Moses dares to approach - divine Call is now as close as a self experienced as response to Call. Self, as the only beloved of Call, fulfills Hebraic history. In Mary, the beloved tribe becomes the beloved spouse of Call. Mary, in her dire helplessness due to the unexplained pregnancy, prophetically exposes the face of the divine Self to the world. The child born to her incarnates divinity as the epitome of both weakness and meekness. Mary's responsive meekness to the divine advance, thereby drawing the divine Self into flesh, is archetypical for a new divine/human relation. All flesh must enter the same vortex of meekness to not only find self as the only beloved but also to hear the voice of the divine Suitor.

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PRAYER, UNITY AND FREEDOM

Transforming our understanding of divine Call from infinite power to total weakness fundamentally alters the nature of prayer. In tribal religion, the divine Chief is the center of power, reflected in images such as the Almighty, Chief, Father, Lord, Creator, Master and the like. In this imagery, prayer takes the form of beseeching the Deity for strength, protection, necessities of life and so forth. In espousal religion, powerlessness is at the very core of being the divine Suitor, and 'power' shifts to the beloved. Hence, prayer is redirected from the Deity to the human side of the relation. In an espousal relation, the divine Self is gifted to the beloved, thus the human self is heir to the divine fortunes. As a result, the human self is the gatekeeper of the creative/healing, loving initiative of the divine Spouse.

In other words, we pray to each other to make the world better because the divine espousal relation means it is wholly within our power to do so. In making the world better, the human self discovers self as the epicenter for the manifestation of the divine Self as the true source of healing. The divine Spouse, making the works of the beloved fruitful and healing, forever remains helpless without spousal collaboration. Divine Call can do no more beyond choosing the human self as the only beloved – divine 'power' then flows through the human self as response to Love.

While divine power brings unity within the tribe, divine weakness/meekness brings unity within the self. A self that is altogether manifests the advance of the divine Self. A self that is altogether necessarily attracts; a self that is scattered repels. Mary demonstrates a self-coming together at the advance of the divine Self, thus setting a new depth of unity. Threatened with tribal expulsion, Mary plunges into a response to divine Call that is beyond tribal and reaches a depth never reached before by the human self. At such depth, unity derives not from tribal bonds, but from divine espousal encounter at the level of self. Through the initiative as Suitor, divine Call is the sole source of unity at the level of self. Thus, a self that is all together is a sign of Call's presence, just as unity in the tribe of Israel reflects divine presence. A self-radiant with unity initiated by Love draws all flesh into a unity born of Love.

Implied in the divine Suitor imaging is: freedom, love, equality, and commitment between the divine and human self. Divine Suitor imaging categorically removes the holier than thou syndrome of philosophical and tribal religion. Freedom, especially, takes on a much deeper meaning. The Israelites preserve their life/freedom by increasing tribal bonds; Mary preserves her life/freedom by her espousal bond to the divine Suitor. For Abraham and Moses, freedom is in the surrounding atmosphere; for Mary, freedom wells up where self begins as response to the divine Self. Hostile force can disrupt tribal freedom; freedom, arising at the core of self, can never be taken away by force.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Peace

The hallmark of espousal religion is a profound peace of rectitude/reconciliation, thus removing the very notion of sin and guilt. Divine Suitor initiative is the basis of espousal rectitude/reconciliation. Rectitude between the divine Self and human self is direct in that the divine Suitor initiative requires a direct yes/no response; tribal rectitude, in contrast, is indirect through right behavior needed to form a Chosen People. Sin/guilt and need for reconciliation are tribal images originating from disruption of tribal bonds. The Ten Commandments define the parameters of tribal life, the violation of which leads to sin/guilt. A preoccupation with sin/guilt is the trademark of tribal religion, just as peace arising from marital response is the trademark of espousal religion. The concept of sin/guilt evaporates in espousal religion because the arena changes from tribal bond between members to the birth of self as response. In espousal religion, non-response is not a tribal sin because it affects only the emerging as a self; a non-response can be in the form of reaction or simply indifference to the advance of the divine Suitor.

Sin is absent from espousal religion because a nuptial proposal requires a free response - in contrast to obligations between tribal members. Radical freedom to respond is present in a Chosen People as a whole, but is unrecognizable at a member level. In espousal religion, freedom of choice, through which self-experience develops, is front and center. If Mary had not responded to the divine espousal initiative, there would have been no sin or guilt for her. However, without her response, divine Call would not have morphed from divine tribal Chief to Suitor. Furthermore, her tribal awareness would not have emerged as self in consort with the divine Self. Her failure to respond would have left her and the world in darkness still.

Our response may fall short of the divine espousal Call, but unresponsiveness is never a sin. In fact, an espousal response to the divine Self-gift is never adequate - short of death. Mary takes away the issue of sin by reframing the tribal into an espousal divine/human relation. Tribal religion centers on behavior to achieve an identity as a beloved people; in contrast, espousal religion centers on identity as the beloved spouse from which flows loving behavior. When self emerges as the only beloved, loving behavior is the inevitable consequence because the identity of the divine Self is thereby being revealed.

Espousal religion takes away not only sin but also guilt. There can be no guilt for unresponsiveness because the divine Suitor's proposal rests on absolute freedom to respond or decline. Divine Call cannot take offense at a gratuitous Love spurned. To be a gift, there can be no strings attached on the part of the giver. The divine Suitor proposal stands unconditionally from the beginning and is forever. However, spurning the divine initiative for such an espousal union, in which there is nothing to lose and everything to gain, is the height of folly. A refusal is in effect a declining to emerge as a self (recall that self is a religious/relational and not a philosophical notion). In a tribal religion, sin/failure of one member hurts everyone because it weakens tribal bonds. In espousal religion, divine election conveys a dignity to self beyond comprehension. Unresponsiveness to the relentless divine courtship only leaves the beloved empty handed since the divine Suitor cannot force response.

The tribal sins of the Chosen People lead to loss of tribal life and to slavery; espousal reluctance leads to the loss of self and a sinking into indifference/reaction. A human self is knowable only as response, while the divine Self is knowable only as Call. Self is by definition a growing consciousness of worth as the only beloved of Call. Refusal of the dignity offered as Call's beloved is conveyed in the New Testament through such parables as the prodigal son, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price and the lost lamb. Where formerly the concept of sin is tied to behavior, now, the greatest of misfortunes is the denial of one's worth and dignity as the beloved of Call; nevertheless, refusal is not to be construed as sin. The refusal of the prostitute to accept her dignity, in *Man of La Mancha*, is a modern parable of espousal religion.

The nature of rectitude also changes. In tribal bonding rectitude is passive – as long as tribal laws are not broken a member assumes a state of rectitude. In espousal bonding rectitude is active; rectitude can be affected only through active response. Rectitude accrues from the divine/human marriage bond. There is no bond/marriage until the human-self responds as the only beloved. Furthermore, response expands and deepens. In espousal religion no one has total rectitude because response has no limit just as divine Call has no limit. The divine Suitor initiative in humanity/universe inherently includes the wherewithal to respond, but deliberate and continuous human choice to respond in the context of humanity/universe is necessary for closure. Expanding response brings in its wake profound peace. Just as adherence to tribal laws guarantees Call's presence in a tribal context, response as the beloved mediates Call's presence in the new order. Response alone (versus indifference/reaction) provides insight into the divine espousal initiative toward the beloved. Pursuing the insight brings an aura of peace that engulfs the beloved, thus forming tangible evidence of divine presence and reconciliation.

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RELIGIOUS VERSUS WESTERN NOTIONS OF SIN

Tribal sin is very different from the concept of 'sin' in the Western world. Sin has the root meaning of being without (tribal bonds) and has its origin solely in tribal religion. In the atomized culture of the West, 'sin' is simply a violation of law. Violation of law and rupture of tribal bonds are very different notions. Law violation is a concept that comes directly from the Greco/Roman culture and is founded on the assumption that there is the divinely established law of nature governing all human behavior. Regardless of wealth or social status, all are subject to the universal law, whether derived direct from nature or from the Author of nature. Rule of law is simply an idealized social order abstracted from nature/humanity based on reason.

Tribal sin goes far beyond a violation of nature's law. In the story of Adam and Eve, sin is imaged as disruption of the relation of divine friendship (imaged as a walking with Call in the Garden of Paradise). The Old Testament presents a woman, Eve, as the initiator of sin by encouraging a human bonding to the exclusion of divine bonding. The New Testament presents Mary, the new Eve, as restoring divine/human bonding but at the much deeper level of conjugal relation. As a result, Call once more walks among us. The Paradise lost by the sin of a woman comes back enriched a thousand fold through the response of a woman.

Genesis presents sin in the early vital stage as a loss of a richer Life (Paradise). Moses adds more specificity to the vital notion of sin by equating it with the disruption of tribal bonding. Tribal bonding will lead to fuller Life – imaged as a Promise Land (Garden of Paradise) walking with the divine Chief. The Ten Commandments specify how tribal bonding can be broken and are only analogously related to the Greco-Roman notion of a universal law based on nature/reason.

Mary ends the ancient biblical notion of sin. Her espousal response actually exposes a flaw of tribal bonding that allows reaction and response to coexist. In the divine espousal relation the two possible choices are either a yes or a no - like an on/off switch with no neutral position. The absence of response is a negation of self vis-à-vis the divine Self. The yes/no response dichotomy cannot be used to assign sin/guilt because the radical freedom at the core of a true marriage would thereby be compromised. Espousal religion brings a profound peace that necessarily excludes the sin/guilt found in tribal religion. The self that is created by response increasingly radiates the presence of the divine Self. In espousal religion, response is reconciliation with Call.

Original sin is not a sin related to human origins, but rather points to the origin of all misfortune, namely, the turning a deaf ear to a loving Call to walk as friends. Mary addresses the very essence of sin. She brings us full circle back to the original state of Adam who responsively walked with Call. Her espousal response totally purges reaction from the human-self so that once more divine Call dwells in our midst. Tradition expresses the Marian responsiveness as freedom from original sin, i.e., the original unresponsiveness to divine friendship.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Word Made Flesh

The conjugal word cementing the divine/human Self-to-self bond becomes flesh in Mary's womb. The sacred union between the divine and the human self in Mary is the Hebraic person and from her the Hebraic Person is born into the world. The incarnate bonding of the divine and human self in Christ is furthermore a direct continuity of the incarnate divine/human tribal bonding among the Chosen People of Israel - a history of two thousand years at last bears its fruit. Divine tribal bonding had reached critical mass – it could go no further. Mary crystallizes tribal into an espousal relation bringing a vast new depth in the divine/human bond. The fullness of time had come to reveal in all its depth the true face of both the divine and the human self.

The conception of Christ changes the bonding between tribal members into a bonding at the level of the flesh where the human self meets the divine Self. Christ is the incarnation of the divine Call and the human response of Mary – two selves in one flesh. He is Emmanuel – divine Call with us – par excellence. Just as Israel is the archetype for the divine incarnation in the tribe of the human race, so Mary is the archetype for divine incarnation in the human-self. The cornerstone of human society shifts from family/tribe to self-responding to Call.

St. John begins his Gospel with a reflection on the Word becoming flesh. The in-fleshing of the Word is in and through human conjugal-response by which divine Call is now present with unsurpassable clarity in the world. When John reports that the Word (intent) of Call becomes flesh, he signifies that through Call's proposal to Mary and her conjugal response, the two became one in the flesh – the classic definition of Hebraic person. The invisible Hebraic person of Mary becomes the visible Hebraic Person of Christ and of all who follow his lead. She is the mother of all the living.

John, writing in the context of his culture, uses Word to signify espousal covenant versus the tribal covenant of the Ten Commandments. Word signifies that the divine/human conjugal bond forming the Hebraic person can never fail or be withdrawn – in contrast to the tribal ups and downs in keeping the Ten Commandments. Word in Semitic tradition signifies identity, while in the West a word is merely an abstract image of an object. For Semites, word is more the very substance of the reality than it is image. Because writing paper was not available and few knew how to write, human relation and identity is established by word alone. Failure to keep one's word is a slide into non-existence.

Mary, in and through her word, incorporates all of humanity (all flesh) in her espousal response of 'I do'. Her conjugal word is identical to her flesh that represents all flesh; her espousal response is not the abstract imagery of marriage vows. Mary's word meets divine Word in marriage whereby divine Word becomes in-fleshed, thus bearing the fruit of Christ. When word, as response, arises from the core of self, response joins the divine Word of Call and two selves become one flesh. Mary is archetype of the new order.

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ESPOUSAL RELIGION AS A NEWWORLD ORDER

Espousal religion introduces a radically new world order. We think of world order hierarchically – from the top down. Mary introduces a new world order centered on self-response to divine Call in a Call/response relation. Espousal religion means that divine Call invites the human self to respond as the only beloved. That response is the center of the universe. The world itself embodies the divine Call to the beloved, inviting a divine Self-to-self relation.

Recall from previous discussion that such a new world order could not be more alien to Western culture. We equate self with individual and make no sharp distinction between self-image and self-experience. For us to shift from an ontological to a relational perception of Reality is like taking fish out of water. It is hard for us to think of individual as a communion, that is, the incarnating of the divine Self, as Call, and the human self, as response, thus forming the Hebraic person. It is much easier for our mind to reduce self to an image, such as an isolate individual being, rather than wrestle with the relational consciousness of self-experience as response to Call. Response is intangible, fluid and in need of frequent refinement. A fixation on self-image in place of self-experience provides tangible comfort and security, but the idolatry of reducing self-experience to self-image leads to a sterile existence.

Developing self-identity as the responding side of the Call/response bipolarity takes concerted effort. Reification occurred millennia ago and, therefore, is deeply embedded in our psyche. Perceiving Reality as a myriad of discreet things persists because it produces a wealth of detail. But, if you were to open a book and focus on the texture of the paper, the style of the print, the composition of the ink and the atomic structure of chemicals used, you would get very fine detail indeed. But, a fixation on analyzing the material composition of a book down to subatomic levels ignores the much more important issue of what the book is about, namely, the election as the only beloved. Or, you can reify a car down to the individual atomic particles that make up the steel, but you can never understand a car through the isolated, individual atoms - a car is a relation more than it is a thing.

An atomized individual is an onlooker and Reality is boring when viewed as an accumulation of isolated beings/objects; in contrast, self is central and Reality is exciting when viewed as a dynamic relation. It takes conscious effort to stretch an individual oriented psyche into one of communion. The expansion of awareness is necessary because the discovery of self is possible only in the context of a universal response to Call and not by breaking Reality down into a myriad of objects. In a relational view, each neighbor I encounter is a unique divine Call; when I respond to each unique Call, the neighbor is subsumed into my own identity, as response, thereby achieving a corporeal (versus tribal) unity. Only one human self is possible because no other human identity except response is to be had. Response is response is response – variety of either response or divine Call does not increase the number of the two underlying self-identities involved.

The new world order expands self-experience to encompass the hidden richness of Call – like a blossom manifests the richness of seed, root, stem and leaf. Self-experience gradually incorporates nature/humanity whereby the divine Suitor designs are made manifest. If this sounds like a hopeless utopia, what is missing is a true understanding of self-experience as response. Even though foreign to our way of thinking, the logic flowing from a relational view of Reality as Call/response leading to the Hebraic person is impeccable. In relational logic, becoming the beloved of Call requires a free and deliberate choice both on the part of the divine Suitor and the human self as the beloved - just as becoming the Chosen People required a deliberate choice on the part of the Hebrews and the divine Chief.

In the military chain-of-command order endemic to Western culture, choice at the individual level is reactionary. In the new order, choice at the level of self is key to progress. Espousal religion by definition changes reaction to response. For example, the deliberate choosing by Gandhi and, more recently, Martin Luther King transformed a reactionary social order to one more closely reflecting response. The door that opens to response, giving entrance to self, opens by choice and cannot be battered down. Espousal religion implies the ability to distinguish between response and reaction. A successful marriage depends on transforming reaction into mutual response. Response is a way of life rather than a social or military structure. Espousal religion is a self-discovery that manifests the presence of Call as the divine Self.

The dynamic between Call/response is self-centric, rather than human or Theo-centric. A distinct human self emerges out of Call and not visa versa. In Plato's Theo-centric view of Reality, the Deity increases in direct proportion to the decrease in the human self. This is an anti-incarnate view, leading to philosophy rather than religion. A Platonic view of world order reflects proto-religion in which a distinct self diminishes by being absorbed into a higher Being. The opposite occurs in the Hebraic person. The more a distinct self emerges, the more the Self of divine Call is incarnate. Response reveals Call, as Call reveals response - to look at one is to see a mirror reflection of the other, analogous to one spouse reflecting the other in a marriage. When Abraham made the leap of faith to a consciousness of a distinct life, the incarnation of divine Call becomes a logical outcome in as much as the human self of response is known only in and through the divine Self of Call and visa versa.

Learning to respond is the history of Israel, of each of us, and the human race as a whole. In the West, we tend to think philosophically about the Incarnation as the Deity coming down from heaven to earth. In contrast, the Israelites image divine incarnation as emerging from their responsive tribal bonding. The tribal bonding of Israel morphs into an espousal bonding. The intercourse between the divine Self and the human self in the flesh transforms the Hebraic tribe into the Hebraic person.

Flesh is the epicenter of the new order in that the flesh is the new Promise Land wherein divine/human selves bond. In the flesh, Mary gives birth to divine Call. In so doing, she is the archetype of the new order of Call/response occurring in and through the flesh. The child conceived in Mary's response becomes the first fruit of that relation and, as such, the manifestation of fullness of humanity and divinity. As the first Eve is taken from Adam, Christ, the new Adam, is taken from Mary, the new Eve – thus redemption is achieved as history is reversed. In her flesh is to be found all flesh. Flesh captures the weakness as well as the gentleness of the Call/response relation. By identifying with the flesh, self is at one with the human race and with the incarnate divine Call. The new order changes tribal Law to connubial Love pursued in the arena of the flesh.

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Flesh Made Word

If Word becomes flesh, it follows that flesh is thereby called to become Word. Mary, by becoming wholly responsive to Call, gives flesh to the Word. Christ is the incarnation of Mary's espousal experience with divine Call and, therefore, is the conjoining of the divine and Marian nuptial word. The birth of Christ begins the transformation of all flesh into the Word. Christ in word and action shows the Way for transforming flesh into Word. The Word is the divine/human espousal word first spoken by Mary and now made visible in Christ. The time for revealing the suitor intent of divine Call, hidden since the beginning of the world, has at last arrived. Christ is incarnate Love that heals in the flesh as the unmistakable sign of divine presence. Love/healing is the ongoing divine incarnation in subsequent history.

Jesus learns at his mother's knee that he embodies the fullness of humanity and divinity joined in eternal nuptial embrace. He is the human/divine marriage made visible and the architect of a new order. In him, the Chosen People coalesces into the Chosen Person, thereby transforming tribal into an espousal response and putting a face on divine Call. He is not the messenger but the message, giving light to all who seek self-identity. In him, both the human and divine face becomes visible. The flesh is the epicenter of intimate dialogue between the divine Lover and the beloved. Even today we find beyond comprehension the proclamation of the divine and human selves as two in one flesh – the distant Deity of tribal faith is as near as the self.

Proclaiming an espousal faith two thousand years ago for the first time in a society immersed in an ancient tribal tradition is asking for trouble big time. Given the violent doctrinal ethos of his day, Jesus could only speak and act in metaphor. Jesus begins with seeking baptism in the Jordan - a symbolic crossing over into the new Promise Land of his own body. Water is an ancient symbol of divine presence – especially to desert dwelling peoples. Water also signifies beginning/birth, as in the breaking of a mother's water. Baptism means a plunging into, thus the baptism of Jesus is a birth/plunging into the new espousal faith – a Chosen People reborn as a Chosen Person. His cousin, John the Baptist, announces the advent of the Chosen Person. The heavens open up and divine Call's marital Word descends on Christ in the form of a dove. The Call of Israel is now the divine Call of Christ. Just as the history of Israel incarnates the divine Call, so, now, Christ in word/action incarnates the Word of Call in the world.

Introducing an espousal religion is a formidable task in a world inhabited by giants of power, greed and pride. Jesus turns away from the impending ordeal, as did the Hebrews of old when faced with stalwart inhabitants of the Promise Land. Following baptism, Jesus retreats to the desert for forty days, reminiscent of the forty years Israelites wandered in the desert seeking a tribal identity. During those forty years, the Israelites discover themselves to be the beloved People of divine Call; during the forty days in the desert, Christ finds his identity as the only beloved of divine Call. His battle, however, focuses on finding self-dignity as the only beloved, rather than on conquering a people and a land. His desert experience represents a plunging into the response identity of the human-self vis-à-vis the divine Self.

Upon returning from the desert, Jesus immediately gathers around himself a small group of disciples, soon to become friends. The selection of twelve followers reflects the twelve tribes of Israel, implying thereby continuity and fulfillment of the Old Testament. His task is to transform a group that is bound together as members in a tribal faith into a communion of friends reflecting espousal faith. Interaction in a small gathering is the archetypal social reality for discovery of self as the divine consort. Human friendship embodies the sacred presence of espousal Call, just as tribal bond formerly manifested the sacred presence of the divine Chief.

The free choice of bonding between friends introduces a new order beyond blood/ tribal ties. The divine espousal relation requires a mature self-experience that can develop only in and through a small gathering that is conducive to growth in friendship. Self-experience is not an ideology to be learned, but a deepening experience of friendship to be reflected upon; a small gathering makes this possible. Moses gathers a tribe of hundreds because the concept of self is still hidden in tribal religion. In a small gathering of friends, self and self-experience are front and center. Such a gathering creates an atmosphere for experiencing the divine Self in lieu of Chief. Response to the divine Self, present as Call/Love in such a gathering, is the Way for flesh to become Word.

A small gathering of friends turns divine Call into healing Love, versus Call to a large tribal gathering that is manifested as controlling Law. Healing is tangible evidence that flesh is becoming Word/Love. Christ's miracles are not Houdini type wonders, but evidence of the healing effects of friendship. The most outstanding miracle of all, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is a healing of a disrupted relation among friends, thus implying that healing includes even death. Forming a communion of friends adds new depth to the domestic synagogues developed during the Babylonian Captivity. The gathering of friends in itself forms the new temple more pleasing than the tribe gathered around a sanctuary of stone. Bonding as friends is divine incarnation extended through history.

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FRIENDSHIP AS CATALYST OF DIVINE PRESENCE

Love is an incarnate experience of the divine Self-gift – this is the essence of the Christian faith (1John 4:11-16). We are so accustomed to friendship as a nice part of social life that it is easy to forget that when Christ identifies friendship as the incarnation of divine Call/Love, he introduces a profoundly new insight. The love between friends is the key to divine presence. The Old Testament envisions family/tribe as the cornerstone for divine presence and social order; Christ envisions self-experience (versus self-image) emerging from the Love that draws friends together as the bedrock of a new social order. Self-experience is directly related to friendship and only indirectly to family/tribe. Self-experience, arising from the experience of Love, is the epicenter of faith, and is as revolutionary today as it was two thousand years ago when tribal faith was the norm. Christ does not invent self-experience, since tribe seminally includes the notion of self-experience, but he prophetically recognizes it as the epicenter of faith and gateway to divine encounter. Self-experience is the arena in which the divine and the human selves draw together in espousal embrace. The self bonds with the divine Self only in the context of friendship that far surpasses mere tribal bonding.

Two thousand years ago the time is ripe for a communion of friends to emerge as central in the long saga of faith. The institution of the synagogue that had spread throughout the world placed increasing emphasis on member over tribe as a whole. In the time when Roman power dominates the world, including the Jewish homeland, the notion of citizen begins to overshadow tribal membership - citizenship in the empire becomes highly prized. Citizenship is a new social awareness beyond the narrow concept of tribal membership. Citizenship among equals, in turn, lays the foundation for envisioning a social order based on friendship between equals. The stage is set for the human psyche to shift from tribal-member to citizen, and from citizen to friend. Christ recognizes and affirms the new social awareness that is already developing. He envisions human self-to-self friendship as an incubator for the nuptial relation between the divine and human self.

To be a friend you must first be a self. During the early centuries of Christianity, many tried to discover self as response to divine Call so much so that the desert became more populated than the cities. Like the Israelites seeking an identity as a Chosen People in the desert, so also the desert is the place to seek self-identity as the Chosen Person. It is interesting to note, in passing, that a desert experience or its equivalent marks the beginning of each of the four epochs of religion. As mentioned in the note above, a desert entails going from an object rich to an object poor environment, i.e., from an ontological to a relational mindset. A desert experience clears the mind and touches the deepest experience of self. Finding self, and thereby the divine Self incarnate in human friendship, is the Holy Grail of religion.

Friendship, like thirst in a desert, can develop to great intensity. Thirst is a favorite image in Scriptures. In the Old Testament, divine Call is like finding water in a parched desert. The New Testament continues the theme of thirst by equating it with friendship and seeing friendship as an intense thirst deeper than hunger. Unsatisfied hunger will subside, but thirst will not; survival is measured in weeks for unsatisfied hunger, but only days with thirst. "I thirst" is among the last words of Christ. Thirst is the incarnate experience of response – the thirst on Calvary is the moment Christ achieves a full response identity. Thirst is also acronym for self-experience. Thus the thirst on Calvary is the moment of full self-experience in the presence of the divine Self. Human self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self means nurturing an insatiable thirst in the presence of divine Call – the Source of living waters (John 4:10, 7:37).

Deliberately developing a thirst is prerequisite for drawing together a communion of friends. Unlike tribal membership where birth is central, friendship requires repeated choice made in changing circumstances through a lifetime. Choice that intensifies thirst for relationship creates the self. Choosing, by which self emerges, is the dominant theme throughout Scriptures and is the key opening each epoch in the devolution of religion. Thus, Abraham's choice of a distinct life introduces the vital epoch, Israel's choice opens the tribal epoch, and the choice of Mary/Christ opens the espousal epoch. In each epoch, choice reaches a deeper level. Thus, choice follows the vital→ tribal→ espousal path leading to the divine/human nuptial. Scripture details the three temptations of Christ in the desert as a series of deliberate choices needed in finding the self as the Beloved (Matt: 4). Ever deeper choices increasingly expose divine and human intent. Choice that finds self as the only beloved must create a thirst that matches the intense thirst of the divine Suitor seeking the beloved, only then can there be a true marriage that lights up the world.

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The Word Dwelling in Our Midst

The Word dwelling in our midst means that the human experience of love and divine presence are one and the same. Hitherto, tribal law defined divine presence. The new paradigm placing the human experience of love in lieu of tribal observance of law as the dynamic core of Reality turns tribal structure on its head. The chief priests and rulers of the people recognize the implicit loss of power in a primacy of love and become alarmed, concluding that it is better that one member perish than the whole tribe. A communion of friends, over tribal hierarchy as the cornerstone of social order, is beyond their comprehension. Their blindness is reminiscent of the Hebrews at Mt. Sinai when Moses pushes them beyond Nature worship to tribe bonding. Just as the fearful Israelites clung to a golden calf, so, too, the leaders of the people cling to tribal over espousal bonding to insure divine presence. Divine imagery of Love over Law draws self-experience to a far deeper level than is possible in mere tribal bonding and is the next logical step in relational knowledge/intelligence.

The chief priest and leaders of the people excommunicate Jesus and deliver him to the Roman authorities to be crucified. The leaders of the people, charged with overseeing conformity to tribal law, assume power to excommunicate and even take away life in the interest of protecting tribal solidarity. Contrary to the illusion of his persecutors, Jesus freely lays down his life as no one can take it from him (John 10:18). Only the human-self can elect divorce from the espousal bond with divine Self; no one has power to excommunicate or take away life arising from Love. Jesus envisions his tribal excommunication and death as the summit response to Call/Love. Through his total response the divine/human selves become as one.

Jesus is the ‘sign of contradiction’- meaning that the divine/human, Self-to-self espousal union is the standard against which all other unions must now be measured. The self-awareness of Christ, whereby he realizes that he has a distinct life/self that is his to freely give, relates directly to Abraham’s vision of having a distinct life vis-à-vis Life globally. Self-awareness is a precondition for forming a union with divine Call. The decision of Jesus to lay down his life puts him in equal partnership in a self-to-self relation with the Author of Life – the Author of Life initiates, but Christ defines the parameters of Life. Equality between the divine and human selves is absolutely essential in retaining distinction between the two – otherwise, one would absorb the other. In his response, Jesus defines the fullness of Life that becomes radiant in and through his resurrection. Thus, the summit of all human unions is the divine/human mutual self-surrender of divine Life for human life.

The resurrection of Christ is the presentation of the newly weds to the world. A distinct life freely given to the loving initiative of Call does not end, but brilliantly radiates both the divine and the human self. Tribal bonding of old reveals the presence of the divine Chief; now, the radiant joy enveloping the beloved reveals the presence of the divine Suitor. The resurrection of Christ exposes as reaction the behavior of the high priest and all who fled in the time of danger. Resurrection is the turning of reaction into response. Christ’s resurrection confirms that transforming self into response is intercourse with the divine Self transformed into Call. The resurrected Christ exposes in a visible way Mary’s invisible response to the divine Suitor. Our choosing an identity of self, as response, is resurrection in progress, thus opening the floodgates of Life/Love and healing for all of humanity.

Christ mediates the divine Word in our midst by prophetically pointing to response versus reaction as the Way to life. By responding to his persecutors rather than reacting, Christ becomes the light of the world pointing the Way to Life. Henceforth, anyone responding in lieu of reacting to injury or failure mediates Life and not death. Christ replaces the negative preoccupation with sin (as a tribal disruption) with the positive quest of self-discovery as the only beloved of divine Call. Just as joy arises in a marriage through transforming reaction to response, so, too, joy arises in response in lieu of reaction in seeking a deeper self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self.

Mary, standing by the cross, directs her sorrow away from reaction to the injustice suffered and into a response at one with Christ. She is revered as a co-redeemer because the visible response of Christ on the cross is the invisible response of Mary. While Christ at Bethlehem is the incarnation of Mary’s response, Christ’s response on the cross is the incarnation of Love in our midst. From Calvary we recognize response to Love is both cause and substance of divine incarnation in human flesh. Love becomes incarnate in John, the lone apostle standing with Mary at the foot of the cross; he is the first fruit of their labor. Henceforth, marital over tribal relation is the arena of divine presence. Marriage depends on transforming reaction into response. Marriage is the arena of self-development in the context of Love, as tribe is the arena of member-development in the context of Law. In marriage, spouses nurture each other in a self-to-self relation to form one body. In espousal religion, the divine/human spouses nurture complementary selves to form the Hebraic person in whom the fullness of divinity and humanity shine.

The paradigm shift in religion from tribe to marriage is a cultural bombshell. The followers of Christ, paralyzed with fear and confusion, remain in seclusion for forty days and nights. The period recalls the desert experience of forty years for the Israelites and forty days for Christ in search of identity. Military, political and tribal power crushed Christ and, in so doing, is exposed as infested with the cancer of reaction. The contradiction between tribal reactions versus the gentle response of Christ stands in sharp contrast; the disciples must now move beyond tribal faith to forge a new identity as simply response devoid of reaction.

While secluded in the upper room, the disciples come to recognize self as the only beloved of Call. The election is imaged as a tongue of fire that settles not on the group as a whole but upon each disciple. The tongue of fire is reminiscent of the pillar of fire in the desert that guided the Hebrew tribe as a whole out of slavery into recognition of being the Chosen People; the pillar of fire over each disciple guides the disciple out of the slavery of fear into recognition of self as the beloved of Call. No abuse of power can extinguish the flame of divine election as the only beloved. The disciples leave their place of hiding and fearlessly become the light of the world.

Zealots of tribal faith, especially a man named Saul, react violently toward the disciples. The story is told that Saul had a blinding yet illuminating experience that threw him from his horse while pursuing perceived enemies of tribal faith. For days he wanders in total confusion until scales fall from his eyes, and he begins to see through his rather than 'tribal' eyes – he transforms from a Saul to a Paul. At that moment, he becomes an apostle able to see as Christ sees. His tribal faith matures to espousal response. He puts away a life of reacting toward those lacking his understanding and travels the world over giving witness of divine election to all who would listen. Those listening gather in homes to reflect on this good new (Gospel).

Paul's traumatic experience leading to scales falling from his eyes highlights self-experience versus tribal membership as the epicenter of espousal religion; the more a human self-experience develops, the more the Self of divine Call is revealed. Thus, a discovery of self is the Way for discovering the divine Self. Because Christ clearly reveals the divine espousal initiative of divine Call, pleading ignorance no longer washes. He exposes indifference/reaction of those around him as in effect making a deliberate choice of resisting the divine Suitor advances. Entering into the divine Call/response relation is like entering into a marriage. In the relation, the human-self increasingly radiates the presence of the divine-Self, as healing and peace. A self-experience, as the beloved of divine Call, incarnates Love that disturbs the status quo and, like a magnet, draws all into communion. The divine mission changes from winning tribal members to the Law to finding one's true self as the only beloved.

Seeking self-experience (versus self-image) as the only beloved of divine Call is the sole mission of espousal religion. Awareness of self as the only beloved of divine Call comes about not by assertion or self-delusion, but in direct proportion that self is coextensive with divine Call. The polarity is between the human self and divine Self not between individuals, or between tribal members and the divine Chief. Humanity/universe, embodying the call of the divine Self as a direct invitation to the beloved, is the arena for developing self as response. A consciousness of self as the beloved can emerge only by delving into an identity of response to Call – a response that is already embodied, like Call, in humanity/universe and awaiting acceptance.

The divine Self and the human self meet in the domain called 'pre-reflected experience' – a world of self-experience that exists prior to reflection or self-imaging. We all share the same pre-reflected experience of self. The human-self is the other self of divine Call. Finding where the human-self leaves off the divine Self begins is the cutting edge of divine incarnation in human history. The human self can emerge only as response and never as reaction; the divine Self can emerge only as Love. Response incarnates divine Call; reaction precludes a sense of a distinct self. Response makes it possible to distinguish the human from the divine Self in a Call/response relation.

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, expressed as the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), underscores that divine Call is not to be left in the realm of ideas, but is to be found in and through human experience. The Greek word "logos" used by John means: "what is the point!" The point is that divine Call has in-fleshed and dwells among us - the flesh is the realm where the divine and human self will emerge.

A flesh-bound, divine/human relation includes the emotions. The Bible is a history of relational intelligence that translates into emotional intelligence. In biblical times, the heart more than the head is the seat of intelligence. It is a mistake to seek divine Call outside human experience as it renders divine Call alien to humans or, worse, simply a figment of the mind. True intelligence is as much from the heart as from the head. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman presents a case for the heart as a better measure for intelligence than the head. In any case, John's identity as "the one who Jesus loved" suggests he had a keener relational insight into the Gospel.

Everyone chooses imagery to fit his/her comfort zone. However, the moment we posit a distinct self versus all/else not the self, Reality becomes a dichotomous relation that begs further definition. Experiencing Reality goes back to the dawn of human consciousness, but a distinct self-experience as such reaches back only a few thousand years. Religion is a history of reflecting on where self leaves off and all/else that is not self begins. It is of fundamental importance to recognize that the human self is defined precisely as the consequence of the divine Self and visa versa. The direct connection between the divine/human selves is the legacy of Mary/Christ. Christ scandalized the learned of his day by declaring that the self of even the child, the sinner, the poor, the outcast and the Gentile related directly to the divine Self. Growth of self as response leads to an encounter with the divine Self and to a deepening awareness of self as the only beloved of divine Call.

*******SIDEBAR*******

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT IMAGERY

The Bible is the only substantial collection of writings in history that attempts to view Reality through a bipolar lens versus the monopole orientation of pro-religion and the ontological orientation of Western culture. The Bible is a work of art and filled with imagery aimed at putting a face on the human self in order to mirror the divine Self. Creating a human self requires reframing Reality as a polarity between the divine and human selves. Biblical imagery develops from life experiences rather than through rational or philosophical speculation - like an artist seeking to experience a deeper reality before touching brush to canvass.

In Biblical times, virtually the only method of preserving a sense of tribal continuity and collected wisdom is through imagery and story telling – a sort of living art. Eventually, these images and stories found their way into Scripture. Tribal images used in the Old Testament foreshadow the more refined images of espousal religion. Chief/tribe imaging in to the Old Testament foreshadows the Suitor/beloved imaging in the New. The Bible addresses the transiting from reaction to response: first at a tribal then at a self-level – the changed arena defines the Old and New Testaments respectively. In the Old Testament, the divine Call/response relation is seminally present in Abraham, tribally defined by Moses, and becomes espousal in Mary/Christ.

The key metaphor of divine presence changes from tribe to marriage. Christ often uses marriage in lieu of tribe to frame the divine Call/response relation. Marriage is the ideal social institution for reflecting bonding between selves. In the Old Testament, divorce is permitted because the focus is on perpetuation of the tribe; in the New, divorce is not permitted because the bonding centers on the divine/human self – marriage is the incarnate expression of this deeper union. Transforming marriage from a metaphor of the divine/human bond into a rigid law forbidding divorce is another issue. A dead marriage has poor divine espousal imaging potential. Nevertheless, multiple marriages, and even more so, polygamy and polyandry, reduce the imaging potential of this institution. A permanent, monogamous marriage versus tribal belonging is normally the best means to touch one's deepest psyche making the divine spousal relation comprehensible. With the new understanding of marriage, free choice in selecting a spouse replaces the custom of arranged marriages often associated with tribal cultures.

What Mount Sinai and forty years of wandering in the desert is to creating the Chosen People, marriage is to the creating of the chosen spouse of divine Call. As the divine influence in the Old Testament draws together the Hebrews into a chosen tribe, the divine influence in the New draws together the human self to such depth of response that it draws together all of humanity. The oneness in marriage, where two become as one flesh, is now the archetype of divine incarnation. Marriage is the key metaphor making the New Testament comprehensible and distinguishable from the Old.

A marriage metaphor shifts the emphasis from monolog to dialogue. The Old Testament's key image of the divine Chief directing and disciplining a people, while implicitly inferring divine/human dialogue, nevertheless, puts more emphasis on monolog. The divine marriage proposal to Mary shifts the focus from the monolog of a tribal Chief to dialogue between a Suitor and the beloved. Henceforth, the model for divine-human intercourse transits from tribal structure to marriage. In this new order, any human intercourse not based on dialogue is doomed to failure.

Espousal religion means that the divine-human relation is not predetermined like yesterday's football game, but is radically open as an eternal dialogue. This entails a freedom far beyond what Moses envisioned and a bonding at the level of self far beyond family/tribe. Abraham/Moses introduces divine Call to history; Mary incarnates divine Call as an unfolding history of loving dialogue between the divine and human selves. Dialogue versus monolog stands as the very essence of the new faith that initially attracted many. From the earliest times, the first Christian church was called a communion (the Latin word for dialogue). The first formal creed identifies the essence of the church as a "communion of saints" that spans all time. Christ is still very much in dialogue today as in apostolic times. Dialogue endures beyond death because Love initiates dialogue.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Recapitulation

Devolutionary psychology traces human awareness through the ten stages of consciousness of consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. Philosophy/science emerges when human awareness reaches the stages of cause/effect, reification and reasoning. Religion emerges only when human awareness reaches a notion of self, thus introducing the seventh self/object stage. Beginning with this stage, probing the nature of Reality shifts from a monopole to bipolar approach as an underlying assumption and requires the development of relational versus ontological intelligence/knowledge.

Self-experience (versus self-image) is by definition relational (religious) and entails framing Reality not ontologically but as a relational Call/response dichotomy. Self-experience, rather than Deity, is the epicenter of faith. Probing self-experience began when Abraham first surmised his life to be a distinct life in the context of Life globally. Faith is not to be equated with a set of beliefs or doctrines. Just as science is intellectual exercise leading to ontological knowledge, faith is relational 'exercise' leading to relational intelligence/knowledge that is needed for bonding. The Hebrew tribe acquires faith/relational knowledge through 2000 years struggling to bond as a Chosen People; Christ further develops relational intelligence/knowledge at a self-level in pursuit of becoming the Chosen Person.

Faith, like ontological knowledge, is true knowledge that can expand to great depth. Faith is not blind adherence to convictions – like a child adamantly protesting there is a Santa Claus. Faith intelligence/knowledge is what leads to wisdom and relational maturity. While rooted in the emotions, faith includes an intellectual component that seeks to 'digest' relational experience drawn from sensory/emotional stimulus and translate it into image and action.

Relational knowledge is wisdom, just as ontological knowledge is information. A school is the road to the ontological knowledge of science; laughing/crying is the road to the relational knowledge of faith. After the joys/sorrows over twenty-five years of marriage, spouses would be expected to have gained a great amount of relational knowledge – faith knowledge that cannot easily be transferred to offspring or taught in a classroom. An IQ score reflects genetically based rational intelligence; an RQ score reflects experientially based relational intelligence; and an AQ score reflects aesthetic 'knowledge'. Aestheticism is the ability to coalesce Reality into a unified whole prior to any differentiation. It is the mindset of an artist and the basis of proto-religion. An AQ score reflects heightened awareness more than enhanced knowledge.

Distinguishing between the two worlds of knowledge is of critical importance. Ontological knowledge fosters rational development; faith knowledge fosters relational maturity. Ontological knowledge yields a livelihood; relational knowledge yields a life. One can be an encyclopedia of ontological knowledge, but clueless in relational knowledge. Likewise, one can have great depth of relational and only surface ontological knowledge. Each of the two is a universe of knowledge that can assist but does not guarantee the other. Relational intelligence is the driving force of Hebrew culture making it unique in the world of cultures. It is important to rediscover the Hebrew reverence for Deity and humanity by referring to them respectively as Call and response and thus avoiding the paralysis that comes with ridged imaging. Equating relational knowledge with ontological knowledge is the root cause for Christianity splitting into hundreds of sects each with its own doctrinal spin.

Abraham set the world down the road of relational intelligence by seeking to define self. Awareness of a distinct self develops through vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal phases. The normal development of an individual epitomizes the developing relational intelligence of the human race as a whole. An infant progresses from a consciousness of having a distinct life, to a toddler able to coalesce the immediate physical environment into some minimal order, to a child able to coalesce the social environment as family/peers and, finally, to full adult self-awareness in a one-to-one espousal relation. Religion focuses on the relational intelligence of the human race growing from infancy to a mature relation between the divine and human selves.

In reviewing how espousal religion develops over time, a distinction needs to be made between espousal religion and Christianity. Espousal religion is the genotype while Christianity is the phenotype, i.e., the historical expression of the divine/human marriage. Christianity is bound by and shaped by its history. Its content is: the life and teachings of Christ, the establishment of a church, the refinement of doctrine and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. The espousal experience of Mary is genetically present, but this reality has to be clothed in imagery readily available. The danger is in idolizing the expression of Christianity at the expense of espousal divine/human intercourse – akin to ignoring self-experience and worshipping self-image.

Many of the cultural icons associated with Christianity existed centuries before the time of Christ. These cultural forms include such things as incarnation, after-life, sin, redemption, messiah, virgin birth, baptism, priesthood, angel, monotheism, moral law, devil, heaven, hell, judgment, grace, religious heroes, sacraments along with many other beliefs and practices. Even the one cultural form most associated with Christianity, namely, church (versus synagogue or temple) existed at least four centuries before Christ as a unique form of self-government in Greek city-states.

So, what is the one great insight that Mary/Christ makes to relational knowledge/intelligence? Mary/Christ incarnates the espousal intent of divine Call – the divine proposal that existed even before time began and now forms the vortex of history. Mary/Christ does not originate the Call/response dichotomous relation, but reveals the human self as the otherness of the divine Self. The Call/response relation is not an abstract doctrine, but an experience in and through the ‘flesh’ whereby the human self interfaces the divine Self. The flesh not only links the human self to the divine Self but connects self with the flesh of all humanity/universe.

Mary/Christ parlays divine Call-imaging from tribal to a self-experience level, and thus portrays the divine/human intercourse as the defining core of self-experience. Before the time of Christ, a direct relation with the Deity is reserved for great rulers such as pharaohs or emperors. Such imaging is based on power kings wielded. Christ is in sharp contrast: his power/influence emanates from a pursuit of self-identity and not his position in society. All the bells and whistles that have accumulated to Christianity over time are useful only to the extent these images help in finding the divine Suitor as close as one is to one’s own flesh. You must eat the ‘flesh’ so to speak – become a self in the flesh – to enhance awareness of an espousal divine Call. Life in the flesh→ unified-consciousness→ tribal Law→ espousal Love is the experiential path to the relational core of Reality. Espousal contact with the divine Self is the essence of the Gospel. The divine espousal relation is the crown jewel of Christianity; everything else is setting to bring out the brilliance of this gem.

A self in equal partnership with the divine other Self, defined as the Hebraic person, is an absolutely new and startling insight into the core of Reality. Confusion arises when a Platonic notion of person (i.e., a being composed of material and spirit) replaces the Hebraic perception of person (i.e., a Call/response communion). This occurred when Christianity spread throughout the Hellenistic world of the West. In the transition, the biblical trappings of stories, miracles and actors remain but the focus on the Call/response relation inherent in biblical faith easily gets lost. Reality, as a relation, means that the universe is a dynamic exchange between divine Self of Call and the human self of response. The universe is neither the divine nor the human self but the point of opposites interfacing in a bipolar relation.

In thinking about the Call/response relation, recall the distinction made in chapter two. The divine/human self-expression is very different from self-experience. The universe is an expression of the divine Self, but does not constitute the Self-experience of divine Call. Likewise, the universe is an expression of the human self, but does not constitute the self-experience of human response. For example, your home is an expression of your self-image, but does not constitute your self-experience. Your self-experience and the Self-experience of divine Call are polar opposites. Bipolar opposites interface via self-expression, never through self-experience. Nature/universe is the self-expression of both divine Call and human response and, consequently, forms a common body for mutual self-experience.

The simplicity of espousal religion is astounding, but becomes incomprehensible when forced into the atomized culture of the West. How six million Jews could go meekly and trustingly into gas chambers is beyond our comprehension. But response is so deeply embedded in Hebrew culture that it rendered the Jews ill disposed to grasp the cynical abuse of trust in the Western world. There is an eerie comparison between the crucifixion of Christ and the Holocaust. Pilot washing his hands signifying noninvolvement reflects Western nations closing borders to fleeing Jewish families; the meekness of Christ in the face of wonton cruelty is reflected again in the responsive meekness of the Jews; and the betrayal of countrymen is found in both events. Unfortunately, many Jewish survivors today turn to a militant reaction thus burying their most precious legacy of response in spite of the chaos brought on by reaction. The essence of Christianity is simply the responsiveness of a Chosen People transposed to the deeper level of a chosen self. The Hebraic person is the crowning achievement in a relational perception of Reality – the human self and the divine Self meet in the flesh.

The human and divine selves are the two sides of the same coin – one with an identity of Call and the other as response. Proto-religion is Theo-centric, philosophy is being-centric and religion is response-centric. Religion is the delving into the meaning of a human self as distinct from the divine Self. The vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal epochs trace this growing awareness over thousands of years. Each epoch logically follows the former, but involves a profound paradigmatic shift in concept and image stream. Abraham's awareness of a distinct life naturally leads to Akhenaten's coalescence of Reality into a unified whole. Coalescence of Reality into a unified whole naturally forms a template for tribal unity. Tribal unity is just one step removed from coalescing into the self as an espousal response to the divine Self. The Hebraic person is the final divine/human espousal communion. Hebraic person is a subsuming of the entire human tribe into self in pursuit of an identity of response to Call. In this pursuit, imagery of the divine dramatically changes from Call/Life→ Chief/Law→ Suitor/Love; this evolution of divine imaging reflects a gradual maturing of the human race.

CHAPTER FIVE

NEIGHBOR

Summary: Espousal religion revolves around *neighbor*, just as tribal religion centers on *member*. *Deference* toward neighbor is the basis of morality in espousal religion, just as *bonding among members* is in tribal religion.

Outline of Chapter

Defining Neighbor

New Testament Linchpin

Neighbor-bonding Facets

History of the Neighbor Religion

Neighbor Religion as a Discipline

SIDEBAR
TWO COSMIC VIEWS

Prisoners in Nazi concentration camps smoke their own cigarettes when they have decided to throw themselves against an electric fence to end their life. Those clinging to life reserve their cigarettes to bribe Nazi guards for more lenient treatment. Victor Frankel reports this observation in his priceless book entitled: *Search for Meaning*. Frankel studied victims of the Holocaust, searching for an answer to the question: What keeps a prisoner alive when so many elect suicide? His subjects are Jews reduced to a state of extreme deprivation and doomed to extermination in a gas chamber. Added to the physical misery is the realization that their extermination is not from natural causes but to 'cleanse' the human race. Holocaust victims were reduced to a state stripped of all the physical and psychological props of human existence. Frankel wonders what makes an individual cling to life when everything else possible is taken away.

Hitler tried to exterminate the entire tribe of Israel. Two thousand years before Hitler, the Chief Priest sought the death of Christ to save the tribe. Now, the situation is reversed in that the death of the tribe 'saves' the self, so to speak. The unintended consequence of Hitler's atrocity is to force tribal consciousness to refocus squarely on the survival of self. Frankel poses the question: when stripped of everything, including even family/tribal identity, what makes the *self* endure? Frankel addresses the depth of the human psyche where the experience of self emerges at a primal level. At this level the single issue is simply one of raw self-continuity.

Frankel finds that those prisoners who cling to some meaning, however defined, survive while others despairing of meaning died. *Meaning* may be in the form of a spouse, child, unfinished task, friend or some other definable value. His conclusion is that self survives as a response to some meaningful calling however tenuously defined. The calling may be concretized in a thousand different ways - it may be no more than to taste again a favorite dish. *Responding* to some tangible call has the effects of inducing life at the level of self when stripped from all physical and psychological props.

In the camps the self-image of prisoners is methodically obliterated leaving only a fragile self-experience. At this level the victim can frame Reality only as a Call/response relation. Responding to the 'call' of a child, spouse, or unfinished task, among many other possibilities, has the effect of preserving the self from extinction. The Call/response dichotomy found in the world of self-experience has been discussed extensively in the previous chapter. Frankel provides us with a concrete demonstration of how Call/response, forming the relational core of Reality, proves to be the surviving factor for victims of the Holocaust.

When Frankel's findings are put in a larger picture, the conclusion is that those who responded to some 'call' enter into a Call/response relation. The particular 'call' that solicited response from the Holocaust victim mediates the incarnate presence of divine Call. Recall from previous discussion (see sidebar in chapter four: Call/Response) that Call coalesces into the divine Self just as response coalesces into the human self. Any 'call' that solicits response is a manifestation of the divine Self, just as any response defines the human self. Between these two selves with exact opposite identities there is nothing in common except mutual presence.

Defining a relation of simply mutual presence is to define the very notion of *neighbor*. *Neighbor* says nothing about the self, other than simply presence. Shifting the spotlight from *tribe* to *self* changes the imagery of divine presence from tribal Chief to Neighbor, and from tribal bonding into deference toward neighbor. What kept a prisoner from self-annihilation may have been no more than one more glimpse of home, but that home functions as a specific manifestation of divine Call and conveys the presence of the divine Neighbor seeking response. Since the divine/human self is a dichotomous relation of Call/response, presence as mutual neighbors enables interaction of the divine Self with the human self. The despairing Jews must have thought that even their divine Chief abandoned them. In reality, the Holocaust changes a distant, divine Chief to an incredibly close divine Neighbor.

Victor Frankel, in the middle of Hitler's killing machine, looks at the prisoners not as fellow tribal members but simply neighbors making a life/death choice. In reality, he is looking deeply into his own self-experience to define what would keep him from throwing himself against an electric fence. With tribe on the verge of extermination, Frankel sees the need for defining the self, i.e., that which alone remains when tribe ceases. He may not have grasp the bigger picture, namely, by responding to something of lasting value he would in effect become neighbor to the divine Neighbor, Who is present as Call in what he values. When we enter into the arena of self-experience, the universe turns into a neighborhood between the divine Neighbor and the human neighbor.

None of us are likely to face the ordeal of extermination camps and a plunge into the uncharted world of self-experience where everything else has been stripped away. Grasping the notion of *neighbor* as the incarnation of the divine/human *self*, as described above, is challenging. Our mind is prisoner of an atomized world precluding a relational view of Reality. Nevertheless, recall the definition of *self* that is derived from simple logic as discussed in the second chapter. Self, whether divine or human, is what remains in a relation to *all else* that is not self - expressed as a self/all-else dichotomy. Self is not an *individual*, as commonly thought in the West, but a *relation* that can be defined only in the context of being opposite all-else that is not self – all-else is the *version* and self is the *inversion* of all-else.

Chapter four details the historical circumstances in which the self/all-else dichotomy gradually becomes defined as the human self versus the otherness of the divine Self. By way of review: the logical is straightforward in that the human conscious self as a *relation* implies an opposing conscious Self. A dichotomous relation necessarily reflects its opposite, for example, up/down, east/west. The two opposite selves that emerge from the self/all-else relation are identified as *divine Call* and *human response* - forming a polar *relation* (religion) that begs further definition.

It has also been discussed that, since there are only two self-identities possible in a Call/response dichotomous relation, there logically can be two and only two selves. (See sidebar in chapter four: Platonic and Hebraic Person.) When Abraham introduces the insight of having a distinct life and Akhenaten surmises that Reality coalesces into one unified consciousness, they set the foundation for defining the notion of *self*. The Israelites, building on these insights, develop the notion of the *tribal-self*. Mary/Christ further coalesces the experience of the tribal-self into the human self versus the divine Self. This new insight frames Reality as the juncture of two and only two possible self-identities. The two selves, having opposite identities as Call/response, have nothing in common except *presence*. Mutual self-presence is concretized specifically as mutual neighbors. Mutual presence as neighbors is prerequisite for an espousal relation.

While in tribal religion there can be many members, in espousal religion there are now only two – a human-self and a divine-Self. The 'bond' that defines two exact opposites is that of neighbor – meaning that they are simply present to one another. Neighbor-to-neighbor (self-to-self) is a much deeper concretization of the divine/human relation than the imagery of divine Chief/tribe. Tribal member, implying multiple individuals and functional relation, is not applicable in a self-to-self relation. Thus, while tribal religion revolves around *member*, espousal religion revolves around neighbor/self. Even though the relation is found ultimately to be espousal, the underlying *neighbor* relation never ceases.

The concept of neighbor (versus *member*) is inherent in the very notion of *self* – without a sense of *self* there would be no such phenomenon as neighbor. A self/all-else dichotomy implies distinct neighbors (i.e., *self* versus *all-else*). A sense of neighbor arises concomitantly when ascribing the notion of *self* to *both* sides of the self/all-else relation. If self is defined as all/else that is not self, then, when all/else is ascribed with a conscious self, the two selves become mirror reflections as neighbors. The two selves are neighbors because they have radically different identities and can only have a relation of *presence* to one another. Call becomes the *other-Self* of response and response likewise the mirror of Call.

Just as *self* is relational, so, too, is *neighbor*. *Self* and *neighbor* are universal concepts and as such lead to the logical conclusion that just as there can be only two selves, there can only be two neighbors. This relational concept is counterintuitive to the Western mind with its ontological bias leading to the assumption that *neighbor* and *individual* are synonymous. In a relational view, *neighbor* means simply *presence*. The presence is not spatial but relational. Thus, the body itself is the epicenter for the consciousness of *self*, as well as the consciousness as *neighbor* to arise. When viewed through the lens of *Call*, your body is the presence of a divine Self/Neighbor; when viewed through the lens of *response*, your body is the presence of the human self/neighbor.

Frankel finds that life depends upon responding versus reacting. When reaction to their plight gained the upper hand, prisoners plunged to their death. The world of ‘neighbors’ that surrounds the self is by definition the reflection of the one and only divine Neighbor. The world of ‘neighbors’, which may include sadistic Nazi guards, can trigger reaction as well as response. Responding to some meaning in this world, however vaguely defined, will preserve the self against all odds; failure leads to reaction and the destruction of self. Developing the ability to respond in a world composed of ‘neighbors’ of every description will eventually induce in the self a universal neighbor-identity whereby the human self will come to know the divine Self/Neighbor. The concept of *neighbor*, versus tribal *member*, is the key to exploring the relation between the divine/human selves. There is a lot more to *neighbor* than immediately meets the eye. Imaging Call as Neighbor, in lieu of divine Chieftain or Creator, leads to searching for the meaning and potential of neighbor-relation in as much as it is precondition and prelude to divine espousal union.

Defining Neighbor

The obvious definition of neighbor is simply one who is neigh or near. *Neighbor* refers solely to *proximity* and proximity translates into simple *presence*. Neighbor, like *self*, is a universal term devoid of all ideological, moral, educational, racial, gender and ethnic labeling. Everyone is both neighbor and self. However, we are uncomfortable with a relation based only on proximity and consciously or subconsciously tend to categorize. A neighbor morphs into a member of a particular gender or race and reflects a certain economic or academic social status. Interaction with a neighbor enables further categorization regarding ideology, politics, religion and so forth. While neighbor is an easy concept in itself, it is very difficult to grasp the notion of neighbor in the abstract much less achieve interaction based solely on neighbor.

When even the slightest categorization is applied beyond proximity, the perception of neighbor ceases, and tribal imaging begins. You are no longer interacting with neighbor but rather with a representative member of some categorical class or tribe. *Neighbor* is the incarnate version of *self*— self-experience, like neighbor, is a universal relation that cannot be categorized without losing its universal character. Neighbor, as a universal term, can be applied equally to the human as well as the divine Self. Neighbor qua neighbor implies equality, freedom, impartiality and availability for contact. What distinguishes the two is that a divine Neighbor can only initiate and a human neighbor can only respond. However, a human neighbor may be indifferent or react instead of respond. Reaction requires first categorizing a neighbor as threatening or as forming a part of a despised group. In such a reaction, one ceases being both a self as well as a neighbor. *Self* and *neighbor* are aspects of the same reality and cannot be defined beyond simple presence. Reaction implies categorizing, thus both neighbor and self are annihilated as universal relations.

Neighbor means that two can draw together as one and yet remain wholly distinct from one another. The best illustration is the coming together of spouses. Even though two become as one, they remain distinct as neighbors. Or rather, the ability of two to become one depends on achieving interaction while preserving a distinct neighbor-to-neighbor, i.e., self-to-self relation. Such a relation is always fresh because it is free of categorization and the exercise of power. Neighbor means proximity only, devoid, therefore, of any power of one over the other. Power (divine, parental, political, economic, academic) is associated with *tribal* imagery. It is precisely the absence of power that makes it possible for neighbor-to-neighbor interaction. Once any form of dominance enters, the parties cease to be neighbors and the relation must otherwise be defined. Because *self* is a relation, the drawing together of neighbors is the only way *self* develops and blossoms. *Self* incarnates both as *body* and socially as *neighbor*.

We live in a *tribal* society. Evolution of tribal groupings enabled early humans to hunt more successfully and bring down large prey. All subsequent social groupings are an extension of the same primitive drive to survive by forming cooperative endeavors. *Neighbor* as cornerstone of social order is hard to envision. A neighbor-based versus tribal-based perception of society is a radically new insight that took millennia to devolve. Divine Neighbor/neighbor or Self/other-self is the last and most challenging stage in devolutionary psychology. What looks obvious in hindsight is not obvious looking forward. The origin of neighbor as a universal flows directly from introducing bipolarity in framing of Reality. The concept of *neighbor* depends on recognizing the presence of a complementary self formed by the *all/else* that is not the self – thus the dichotomous relation, *self/all-else*, forms not just one but two selves/neighbors. At this advanced stage, Reality is the interaction between self/other self or neighbor/other neighbor – each side of the self/all-else relation is understandable only in the context of the other, like spouses in a marriage relation.

A correct understanding of *neighbor* is like entering into a new world. Recall that, when Reality is relationally defined, only two selves are possible: a divine Self identified as initiating Call and a human self as response. And, as mentioned, it follows also that since there can be only two selves there can be only two neighbors – the one divine and the other human. The implication is that both selves subsume the entire human race/universe in as much as *all/else* is the basis for defining *self* in the first place. Thus, both the divine and human *self*-experience develop precisely in the context of humanity/universe as the common ground for Self-to-self encounter. Both the divine and human self-experience concretize as *neighbor*, and the human race/universe is the substance of contact; the human race is the arena wherein the divine and human selves meet. The human race embodies the divine Self, as Call, and defines the potential of the human self, as response. The interaction of the divine/human selves creates the human race/universe as a Call/response relation. The communion of the divine/human self goes beyond tribal to form the union inherent in *person* - defined as the *Hebraic* versus Platonic person.

When tribal *member* mutates into *neighbor* vis-à-vis divine Neighbor, the relation is elevated to espousal union of two selves. Struggling toward unity is the quintessence of biblical history. The tribal drawing together under the influence of a divine Chief forming a Chosen People is fulfilled at the deeper level in the drawing together of a chosen self/neighbor under the influence of a divine Self/Neighbor. In espousal religion, the drawing together of divine/human neighbors brings about the revelation of the mutual selves, just as the drawing together of a Chosen People revealed both a people and the divine Chief. In the drawing together, each neighbor becomes more a unique self – one as Call and the other as response. The drawing together affects an increasing *presence* of a divine-Self to the human self and visa versa. This neighbor-level dynamic is a paradigm shift from the member-level dynamic of tribal religion because its base is self-experience rather than tribe-experience. The Hebrews pulled together as tribal members to affect the presence of a divine Chief and, consequently, become a Chosen People. In espousal religion, the divine and human selves come closer and closer as neighbors and, consequently, become the chosen Hebraic Person – a communion of the divine/human selves. The Hebraic Person is a neighbor in lieu of tribe. The Hebraic Person means that, as the nearness increases, both the divine and human selves become radiant of each other revealing the presence of both as one neighbor to the ‘neighbors’ of the world. Christ is the archetype of such a union.

We tend to base our notion of neighbor on *image* rather than on neighbor-experience. This is not surprising because we also confuse self-image with self-experience (see discussion in chapter two). Thus, a divine/human neighbor dichotomy at the core of Reality is alien to our atomized way of thinking. Proneness to idolize self-image prevents us from entering the world of self-experience wherein we can find the divine Neighbor reflected in myriad ways through countless ‘neighbors’ in the world. It is not that the divine Neighbor is distant, but that the human self-experience is still boxed in by limited self-images. This parallels the history of Israel. It is not that the divine Chief was far away, but finding a tribal experience that adequately reflected the divine initiative was painfully slow.

The more the world becomes a manifestation of the inviting presence of the divine Self, the more the human self emerges as neighbor. Nature unconsciously and humans in the conscious realm concretize both Call and response. By nurturing response to divine Call embedded in the surrounding human/natural world, both the divine and human presence as neighbor becomes more explicit and evident. Human self-experience increasingly emerges with an identity of *response* in the presence of *Call*. When perfected, the human and divine selves will have reached the fullness of nearness as spouses.

New Testament Linchpin

Neighbor is the linchpin of the New Testament. *Neighbor* concretizes divine presence in New Testament times as *tribe* did in the Old. Love your neighbor as yourself is no longer restricted to a tribal-neighbor (member) but now extends to a universal/catholic notion of neighbor, admitting no categorizing or restrictions. Depth of Chief/tribe bonding shifts to the depth of mutual presence between neighbors. Neighbor versus tribe now forms the arena of the Call/response relation that enables the divine/human counterparts to emerge as selves forming an espousal relation. Divine/human mutual self-experience becomes increasingly incarnate in and through the presence of one neighbor to another. The quality of presence as neighbor reflects the depth of self-presence to the divine Neighbor.

Christ defines the new divine/human arena in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30). To pinpoint the basic issue that would insure eternal life, a lawyer cross-examines Jesus on the notion of neighbor. Jesus responds with a parable. A man fell among robbers and is left near death. A priest and a Levite (a scholar of that day) pass by, but a Samaritan (a social outcast of the day) stops, binds up the man's wounds and pays for nursing care. Jesus ends the story by putting the lawyer in turn on the spot with a question: Which of the three is a neighbor? Even a child could have answered correctly. Thus, failure to be a neighbor may be excusable, but ignorance of what neighbor means is not. Following the response of the lawyer, Jesus strongly admonishes him to be a neighbor and he would live.

Another story along the same line is that of Lazarus (Luke 16:20). A rich man would not allow Lazarus, who lies at his doorstep, sick and near death, to eat even the crumbs that fall from the table. In explaining the point of the story, Jesus does not condemn wealth but only the blindness toward neighbor that wealth causes. The rich man is incapable of seeing Lazarus. The critical point common to both stories is that neighbor is a universal concept that is not conditioned by tribal membership or social status. The Samaritan is a social nobody and, therefore, more sensitive to neighbor awareness; the rich man is a member of the upper class and, therefore, blind to the neighbor begging for crumbs. Or, in the comment of a street person: the one advantage of living on the street is that you can see everyone as they are, but they cannot see you.

Jesus does not restrict his notion of neighbor to the down and out. He shocks his co-religionists with his treatment of everyone as neighbor including prostitutes, foreigners, soldiers, tax collectors, divorced women, children, shunned lepers, traitors, the sick, the lame, the learned, the powerful, believers, unbelievers and simply everyone who crosses his path. He sometimes admonishes behavior, but always in the context of neighbor-to-neighbor. He has little use for in-groups. Restricting association to those of like mind or circumstance falls short of neighbor religion and merits no reward (Matt 5:46).

He directs his anger at the Pharisees who set adherence to Mosaic Law as a precondition to acceptance – a pre-condition that the Pharisees themselves could not meet. Jesus so emphasizes neighbor over tribal affiliation that the leaders of the Chosen People fear that their tribal faith is being threatened. They begin to plot among themselves to do away with Jesus, reasoning that it is better for one man to die than that their tribal faith should perish.

Even at the moment of death Jesus manages to proclaim the prophetic image of neighbor as the foundation of the new order, much to the chagrin of his persecutors. He is crucified outside Jerusalem - the Jewish tribal center - between two neighbors who are thieves and perhaps murderers as well. In a dramatic neighbor-to-neighbor exchange, one of the neighbors responds to Christ and thereby opens self to the Call of paradise; the other reacts to his fate and curses his neighbor. Thus, response to neighbor, versus reaction, is graphically portrayed as the Way to Life.

Expanding self by deepening response is the *only avenue* for changing the world. Christianity is a neighbor religion precisely because it is centers on the espousal relation of self as the otherness of a divine Self. In espousal religion, since the relation of Call/response is dichotomous, the human self, as response, and the divine Self, as Call, is coextensive with humanity/universe. This means the response inherent in all humans coalesces into the human self-experience. In a tribal perspective, changing a member is the basis for changing the tribal world; in a neighbor level, changing self changes the world. As neighbor, Christ does not change those around him, 'who knew not what they were doing', but uses every adversity to delve deeper into his own self-experience to achieve an identity of response devoid of all reaction. His response in lieu of reaction is redemptive. Response alone changes the world because through response self emerges.

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of the new neighbor/espousal versus member/tribal religion is found in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1). Like Moses, who goes up on a mountain to receive the Ten Commandments that shapes a tribal religion, Jesus ascends a mound to proclaim the Beatitudes that will shape a neighbor-religion. In this new and deeper relation, Jesus speaks of joy, meekness, gratitude, accord, mercy, openness, peacemaking, condolence, and longsuffering. These all pertain to fostering an open relation between neighbors, in contrast to the Ten Commandments designed for fostering tribal unity. The Beatitudes are the 'neighbor-laws' that govern spouses in a successful marriage.

Christ's vision of expanding the notion of tribal *member* to universal *neighbor* is among the greatest insights of all times. *Membership* has a built-in straightjacket that restricts interaction according to specified ritual, laws and ideology in order to strengthen tribal bonds. Each member, based on the level of adherence to tribal ritual/laws/ideology, can measure the strength of his/her membership. In a neighbor-based religion the dynamic is just the reverse. *Others* determine your depth of being a neighbor, as no one can be a judge of self. Thus, the man who fell among robbers determines who among the priest, Levite or Samaritan is a neighbor and at what depth. A neighbor identity emerges as a response to specific need and only the beneficiary of the response can determine the level of neighbor-relation achieved. Even a child can recognize who is a neighbor and who is not, and at what depth. We are neighbor only in the eyes of others – never in our own. Furthermore, becoming a neighbor depends also on the ability to recognize when another is responding as neighbor. The victim of the robbers needs to recognize the initiative of the Samaritan who exemplified the behavior of a neighbor, and then respond also as a neighbor to others.

The ability to appreciate neighbor-initiative leads ultimately to recognition of the divine Neighbor. Following Christ means being neighbor in time and place as the Way to discern the presence of the divine Neighbor. Recall from the first chapter that you can create an image according to your choosing and then the image, in turn, creates you. When you image *self* concretely as *neighbor*, the image 'neighbor' in turn creates the image-maker. Thus, choosing *neighbor*, as the deepest imaging of *self*, empowers the neighbor-image to create the *self* as simply: *presence as neighbor*. When *neighbor* becomes the defining self-image in social intercourse, the divine Neighbor becomes increasingly visible. Awareness of the presence of both the divine and human neighbors is a precondition for discovering the underlying divine espousal relation.

Many assume moral laws, beliefs and rituals to be at the essence of religion, but religion refers to a concrete *relation*; *self/neighbor* is the ultimate in concretizing a relation (religion). Mary is first a neighbor to the divine Neighbor, and her response as neighbor to the loving initiative of the divine Suitor/Neighbor brings about the divine Incarnation. Prelude to neighbor imaging is tribal imaging, i.e., a Chosen People responding to a divine Chief. The new paradigm is neighbor vis-à-vis Neighbor. Turning *self* into *neighbor* is the Way to the heart of the divine Neighbor, just as formerly becoming a people was the Way to the divine Chief. Neighbor, as the epicenter of divine/human presence, is good news many have not yet heard to this day. How often have you read or heard a blunt statement that Christianity is the introducing of the divine Self/Neighbor/Suitor – nothing more or less?

Neighbor-bonding Facets

Tribal bonding centers on *behavior* such as the Ten Commandments, in contrast, espousal-bonding centers on *presence*. Being a neighbor with no strings attached is a step into the Gospel world that envisions a presence that is not conditioned by ethnicity, ideology or behavior. Finding the abiding presence of the divine Neighbor (versus a distant tribal Chief) is the good news of the Gospel. Being neighbor is not simply a mental exercise or overactive fantasy, but entails a responsive presence that changes the status quo and opens the door to a concrete 'bond'. The neighbor-bond goes beyond tribal bonding to the relation of one self with another self. The relation is akin to marriage in which two can have differing ideologies but nurture a common presence. Espousal religion survives as a neighbor-presence even if the ideologies between 'neighbors' radically differ. Such a presence incarnates the presence of the divine Neighbor who abides as Call to the beloved regardless of circumstance.

We tend to think of neighbor as an individual rather than as a *relation* based on *presence*. The biblical concept of neighbor is very different from that found in the West. *Neighbor*, like *self*, is a relation and not an entity. Neighbor, so to speak, is the 'bond' of dating before the marriage. The neighbor 'bond' makes marriage possible. Neighbor is not a static concept but refers to the potential of increasing the level of nearness without the conformity pressure found in the bonding of tribal members. Bonding, while still remaining as neighbors, is a new concept for many. Tribal bonding is easily understood. The Ten Commandments makes such bonding specific and concrete. It is more difficult to define what constitutes the bonding presence as neighbor. Presence, as neighbor, is like a gem with many facets. There are three salient facets that characterize neighbor presence. These facets are: incarnate, person-centered and dialogic. Each of these facets is discussed below.

Incarnate

Recall from the discussion in the previous chapter that *incarnate* is one of the hallmarks of religion, distinguishing it from philosophy and ideology. Tribal Law, Chosen People, Promised Land and temple are examples of incarnating the divine relation in Old Testament times. What incarnates divine presence in New Testament times is *neighbor*. Just as *Chosen People* is the concrete expression of a tribal religion, so, too, *neighbor* is the concrete expression of an espousal religion. Neighbor makes divine Call incarnate in time and place. Because neighbor is tangible and ‘neighbors’ are everywhere, access to Call is immediate and direct.

Neighbor by definition goes beyond tribal bonding and tribal faith. Tribal doctrine and tradition may foreshadow, but the faith germane to espousal religion is neighbor-based. Becoming neighbor concretely in time and place is the only gateway to meeting the divine Neighbor. Neighbor is the essence of the new faith because religion must be incarnate in some way to be religion – if not as *tribe* then as *neighbor*. Just as the travails of forming a beloved Chosen People led to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, so, too, the travails of being neighbor leads to the wisdom of how to respond as the only beloved.

The genius of neighbor over tribal faith is that neighbor is far more concrete than tribal bond in as much as ‘neighbor’ is tangible where tribal bond is not. Everyone instinctively knows what neighbor means and when some one is being a neighbor. Being neighbor, since it simply signifies unconditional presence, is far more demanding than adherence to doctrine, moral codes or ritual. Divine Call lays the foundation for a neighbor-religion by taking the initiative of being present as Neighbor/Spouse to Mary. Response to the divine Neighbor requires direct relation with ‘neighbor’ as an embodiment of the divine Neighbor, and acceptance of the joy/pain that comes with neighbor involvement. Being neighbor is a challenge of *incarnate* presence at a sensory, emotional, intellectual, imaging and behavioral level that matches a given situation. Such a presence is prelude to recognizing the same depth of presence of the divine Neighbor in one’s own behalf.

The underlying premise of the Bible is that divine presence is increasingly discernable within the range of human experience. Divine *Neighbor* fulfills all previous images and is the most incarnate imagery ever achieved. Divine incarnation, as Neighbor, implies equality with the human neighbor and an unconditional accessibility that overshadows institution, gender, race, wealth, education, ideology and social standing. Equality arising from the notion of neighbor/self stems from the mirror, verse/inverse relation between the divine/human selves – as is true with all dichotomous relations. Divine Call, as Neighbor, is the ultimate in divine/human proximity short of actual identity.

Divine incarnation comes as a quickening of Life. In Old Testament times, unity, security and material prosperity – very tangible ways to manifest a quickening of Life - are manifestations of divine incarnation as tribal Chief. In New Testament times, healing, peace, understanding and joy – also very tangible outcomes - are manifestations of divine incarnation as divine Neighbor. Life flowing from divine Neighbor-to-neighbor is the heart of the Gospel. Christ expresses this succinctly when he said that he comes to bring Life (John 6:35). Healing, peace and joy radiate at the core of self as the authentic marks of the Gospel.

Transitioning from divine tribal *Chief* to *Neighbor* imaging - the essence of a neighbor religion - is predicated on the important insight that *self* and *neighbor* are identical. *Neighbor* is the incarnate form of self and is the link between the divine and human selves. Both the divine and human selves are present in your body as neighbors without loss of the complementary self-identities as divine *Call* and human *response*. Recall earlier discussion that the Gospel shifts the notion of Promise Land from a designated territory, as in the Old Testament, to the human body itself in the New. The divine/human proximity is as close as you are to your own body. Self, as neighbor, means simply a relation of proximity within the same body without preconditions. It is far easier to picture a Deity in distant, tribal images such as the Almighty, Lord, Master, Creator, Father, Judge and the like. Tribal images, by definition, insinuate preconditions for inclusion in a tribe. Neighbor is a step beyond tribal images and signifies merely a relation of immanent presence. When Christ’s disciples go forth from the upper room to proclaim the Gospel, tribal barriers melt. Although people are present from tribes all over the world speaking a multitude of languages, each understands the words of the disciples as speaking in a common tongue. On that first Pentecost day, even language ceases to be a barrier and the world becomes ‘neighbors’. The world becomes ‘neighbors’ because the tongue of fire that settled on the disciples symbolizes the presence of the divine Neighbor in one body speaking in unison with the human self.

Recognizing neighbor as the concrete interface between the divine and human self is a relational view of Reality radically different from the Western mindset. By way of illustrating how self can be projected: a rose in your garden is a concrete reflection of the divine Neighbor's inviting presence, much like the welcome mat at your door signifies your inviting presence as 'neighbor' to a visitor. We use the world of things such as a ring, candle, cake, candy or some other gift to signify a special self-presence to another. Imaging Call as Neighbor means that everything in the world, including your own body, projects divine presence as Neighbor. Thus, the world is a multitude of gifts from the divine to the human neighbor with no strings attached on the part of either the Giver or the receiver. You can frame Reality as composed of isolate things for detached scientific examination, as commonly done in the West, or you can pursue scientific discoveries as an unwrapping of gifts expressing the presence of the divine Neighbor – the former is an ontological and the latter a relational view. In the latter perspective, the 'thing' becomes a 'relation' between self and the divine Neighbor. In the Gospel concept of neighbor, the entire human race is the incarnation of Call inviting response at the concrete level of one's immediate 'neighbor'. Humanity/universe, embodying a divine Neighbor as Call, is a Call of Love that thereby enables response. The universe is not a divine Neighbor showing off, but a lovesick Suitor begging for response from the beloved. Even though an enabling response as the only beloved is embedded in the universe, it is not yet *your* response until you freely make it so.

Person-centered

A neighbor-religion is *person* versus *tribe* centered. (*Person* refers to Hebraic not Platonic person – see sidebar in previous chapter.) The Hebraic person, defined as the communion of the human and divine selves, is central to the New Testament, just as the Hebraic tribe is the central theme of the Old. As discussed above, in espousal religion there can be only two neighbors since there is only two possible self-identities, namely, divine *Call* versus human *response*. The divine Call/response relation at the core of the Chosen People is exactly the same Call/response relation at the core of the Hebraic person – the tribal Call/response is simply taken to the deeper level of divine/human neighbors. *Neighbor* unlike ethnic *tribe* is a universal, consequently, the human neighbor vis-à-vis the divine Neighbor implies a response identity coextensive with divine Call made manifest in and through the human race and the universe itself. Espousal religion is simply proto-religion with two parties (neighbors) instead of only the divine Party. A Call/response relation involves two distinct self-identities, neither of which absorbs or overshadows the other and, therefore, can be classified only as neighbors, or simply as the Hebraic person versus the Hebraic tribe.

The title to one of George Bernard Shaw's plays is: "Christianity - Why not give it a try?" Shaw reflects an error common in the West. Espousal religion is not pursuant of a *practice* but an *identity as a person* in the same sense that Chosen People is not a practice but an *identity as a people*. Practice/behavior follows identity not visa versa. Unfortunately, popular notions equate religion with beliefs, ritual and morality rather than seeking identity as a divinely chosen people, as in the Old, or as the divinely chosen person, as in the New Testament. Beliefs/practice is the byproduct of the growing awareness of divine election, first as tribe then as spouse.

The stumbling block for the West is in the inability to go beyond atomizing neighbor or equating religion with beliefs and practices in order to adopt a radically new relational (religious) perspective where there can be two and only two neighbors. Absorbing the Hebraic sense of Reality, going back to the original insight of Abraham, is absolutely indispensable for a relational worldview. A Jewish rabbi, following the destruction of the World Trade Center buildings, captured the essence of neighbor religion when he said, "Three thousand people did not die, rather, one person died three thousand times". What Israel achieved on a tribal basis, Mary/Christ did on a person basis, thus becoming the archetype of a new order. In entering the presence of the divine Neighbor, the world of 'neighbors' is the myriad dimensional presence of the one divine Neighbor. The Hebraic person incarnates as the communion of divine/human neighbors.

Dialogic

Since the word *neighbor* means only *proximity*, dialogue is the only form of interaction. Through dialogue, neighbors come closer but never lose distinction as neighbors. Dialogue implies infinite possibilities between neighbors. Dialogue gives substance to a neighbor bond and produces mutual influence. Dialogue is in contrast to monolog where one party, while remaining the same, tries to change another. Monolog implicitly denies the very notion of neighbor. In the divine Neighbor-to-neighbor dialogue both parties involved are constantly adjusting to and influencing one another. The divine Neighbor adjusts the Love initiative to meet the needs of the human neighbor and the human neighbor adjusts response to the divine initiative. The divine/human mutual adjusting is analogous to dating leading to marriage where dialogue is key to success.

In practice, dialogue means listening. (See chapter four on obedience/listening as one of the characteristics of religion.) For the divine Neighbor, listening means adjusting Call to meet the needs of the human-response, while, for the human neighbor, listening means adjusting response to meet the divine Call. Listening implicitly contains the notion of otherness; neighbor by definition implies otherness and, therefore, the need to listen. A blotting out of neighbor would remove any need for listening. Acknowledgement of neighbor implicitly includes the possibility of more specifically defining the mutual relation of presence. The listening involved in dialogue means allowing a neighbor to be neighbor with some measure of risk for altering self-perception due to the effects of listening. Ultimately, the relation that will emerge is that of self as the beloved of Call in response to the initiative of a divine Neighbor. The spread of the Gospel means increasingly tuning into self-experience - only listening can do this. A self-experience reflecting a listening between neighbors fuels the light on a lamp stand that makes the Gospel shine for all to see (Matt 5:15). *Listening* to neighbor fosters dialogue through which the divine Neighbor becomes increasingly visible – a listener is analogous to yeast in a lump of dough making the whole loaf rise.

History of the Neighbor Religion

The concept of *neighbor* took thousands of years to develop. Christ is the first to recognize the *centrality* of neighbor both as the basis of a new social order and the foundation of divine/ human relation. Neighbor incarnates divine Call and makes concrete the challenge to transition from reaction to response. Religion is not an exercise of the mind or ‘spirit’ but the achievement of a neighbor-to-neighbor dialogue as prelude to divine intercourse. Christ recognized and demonstrated *response* versus *reaction* as key to dialogue (communion).

However, it is important to see Christ’s contribution in the context of a wider background. The concept of neighbor is a very advanced level of imagery well beyond the notion of *member* found in ancient tribal societies or groups. The ancient Greeks broke through the tribal member syndrome with a concept of *citizen* as a viable basis of social structure. *Citizen* among the ancient Greeks means basically having *voting rights* – a right reserved for fighting men who more effectively defend the city when they are stakeholders in decision making. *Citizen* is a concept halfway between tribal *member* and the more abstract notion of *neighbor*.

It is fascinating to note that the emerging concept of citizen/neighbor is concomitant with the notion of the human race as whole. Alexander the Great (c.356 B.C.), in the course of his world conquest, is among the first to realize that all humans are basically alike even though they belong to a variety of tribal groups/societies. Everywhere people struggle with the same problems. When he conquers an adversary, instead of establishing himself as the exclusive lord and master over subjects as is the custom for victors, he allows the defeated to retain their own government, culture and deities. He often dons native clothes and participates in activities of conquered people, much to the chagrin of his officers who viewed foreigners as subhuman. Aside from paying tribute, Alexander’s only requirement is that those he conquers not be his enemies.

Alexander does not behave altruistically in allowing semi-independence of subjects. He is cruel as any conqueror found in history. However, he is the first to realize that he could not directly control the entire world and needed the *cooperation* of subjected peoples to maintain a world empire. Based on that premise, he is able to conquer and govern a sprawling empire. Implicit in his mode of operation is the notion of one human race that is made up of peoples that have different cultures and customs, but all are equally human. Alexander, by recognizing the sameness and diversity in the human race, prepares the way for the concept of citizen and eventually of neighbor.

Although Alexander’s perception of non-Greek peoples - as cooperators instead of subhuman subjects - is strategically needed to further his world conquest, the push for human rights today is rooted in Alexander’s implicit notion of the unity of the human race underlying the vast difference between individuals and groups. His vision of autonomous/cooperative individuality contributed to the democratic form of government that developed in Greece and spread throughout the West. Citizen/neighbor versus slave/member slowly seeps into human history as the foundation for conceiving a human social order. Christ comes along when the world is already on the verge of asking the next logical question: Who is my neighbor?

Christ grows up in a time when Rome dominated the world. The Romans borrowed from the Greeks the concept of citizen and a universal human race as the underlying ideologies for building empire. The world is divided between the Roman citizen and the non-citizen, i.e., citizen versus uncivilized barbarians/slaves. Obtaining citizenship is a coveted prize – to be a citizen of Rome is to be a citizen of the world. However, Romans expand on the Greek notion of citizen by guaranteeing civic freedom for all individuals, but with special privileges reserved for those holding Roman citizenship. Everyone is free to pursue any profession or livelihood. In this atmosphere, tribal identity begins to lose some of its luster. Rome's extension of civic freedom to all opens the door for the far more abstract notion of *neighbor*.

Living in a social context of civic rights for all, Christ homes in on neighbor-to-neighbor as the bedrock of a truly universal social order. The notion of *neighbor*, versus tribal *member* or *citizen* as a way of concretizing the human race in time and place, is a unique contribution made by Christ and represents a paradigmatic shift in social consciousness. While *citizen* is quasi-universal and requires a more complex social consciousness than the exclusivity inherent in tribal member, *neighbor* is a true universal. Moreover, citizen implies social *rights* while neighbor implies social *responsiveness*. The atomized concept of Platonic person, endemic in the West, leads to emphasis on rights as citizen. In contrast, the relational concept of Hebraic person envisioned by Christ leads to a focus on response/responsibility.

Neighbor consciousness frames the Gospel. Jesus debates with and chastises the learned elite, the rich and the powerful, but addresses himself mainly to the crowds following him, having no formal structures beyond simply being neighbors who listened intently. His mode of operation implies that a neighbor religion is between neighbors and is within the grasp of people on the street. He does not turn his back on the tribal exclusivity surrounding the temple, but prefers the synagogue model of gathering in homes to reflect on the kingdom of God. The gathering of neighbors in itself is the message in that divine presence occurs when even two comes together (Matt 18:20). The central message of the Gospel is that bonding with neighbor (versus tribal member) is at the same time a bonding with the divine Neighbor.

Neighbor becomes both creed and practice for the infant church. The new neighbor-religion has special appeal in cities. Ancient Roman cities are not like our modern cities but are simply concentration of people living at subsistence level, something like Calcutta today. People live anonymous lives in a wider world of wealth and privilege enjoyed by free and independent citizen – a world out of reach to the masses trapped in crowded slums, living hand-to-mouth.

In these conditions, the first Christians, using the existing Jewish synagogue practice of gathering in small groups, gather neighbors to search for a sense of identity in an otherwise faceless society. These gatherings afford opportunity for gaining a sense of self-worth - not unlike the experience of Abraham finding a distinct life in the global Life that surrounded him. Recognition of *neighbor* necessarily leads to a sense of *self* in as much as both are universals. The interaction between neighbors is the workshop, so to speak, for remembering Christ who, as a human neighbor, makes present the divine Neighbor. The communion of the divine/human neighbors reintroduces again and again the Hebraic Person to the world.

For a hundred years after Christ, conversion means the act of actually coming together as neighbors with no reference to a body of truths, laws or rituals. Thus, neighbor-to-neighbor interaction constitutes the discipline, worship and creed of the early church. Since neighbor is the basic criterion, everyone comes together at the same level, including women – Christianity is the first women liberation endeavor. At the time, Roman society is just beginning to recognize the right of women to own property. Christianity builds on a growing social awareness by giving full equality to women, laying the foundations for the potential of expanding women's rights beyond ownership of property to free choice of a marriage partner, equal inheritance rights and access to education. The neighbor dynamic of the infant church has a special appeal to women.

While the gathering in homes reflects the domestic gathering of Hebraic synagogues that originated during the Babylonian Captivity, there is an important difference between the church and the synagogue. The church centers simply on the *presence* of gathering neighbors; the synagogue centers on *instruction/understanding* tribal Law and *deepening* tribal bonds through deference to one another. The notion of *deference*, however, forms an extremely important link between church and synagogue. Even more important than observing the dictate of tribal law is the need to offer deference to tribal members. The unwritten law of deference, also known as the law of honor/shame, dates back to ancient times and forms the basis of a governing relationship within a tribe. It still is the fundamental law among some Mediterranean people.

Deference that researches beyond tribal *member* to *neighbor* is the very identity of the infant church and is the epicenter of morality in espousal religion. Deference encapsulates all previous ethical and moral principles. The infant church simply universalizes ancient *tribal* deference to include *neighbor* deference. Deference means total responsiveness that accords honor to another as worthy to be heard. The shift from member to neighbor may seem trivial, but it has enormous consequences. Extending deference beyond fellow tribal member to neighbor is what makes the church catholic; and neighbor (versus tribal) deference is now the criterion of divine presence. Deference offered to neighbor mirrors the deference proffered by the divine Neighbor. Cultivating deference to one's 'neighbor' leads to awareness of the deference of the divine Neighbor toward self.

A focus on deference implies that the greatest shame is in refusing or snubbing an invitation from one's neighbor. In ancient times, responsiveness to hospitality is the highest virtue and deemed to be the very source of tribal life. Destruction befalls Sodom and Gomorrah not because of sexual orgies, but because of failure to offer hospitality to a visitor. One can only admire the level of sensitivity reflected in this level of awareness regarding human interaction. The infant church picked up on deference/honor that greased the bonding of tribal members. Just as deference fostered tribal life, so, now, neighbor-to-neighbor deference becomes the sanctifying grace (graciousness) of the infant church. Thus, inviting and sharing as neighbor is living in grace (*grace* stems from what the ancients referred to as *deference*) and is the essential dynamic of the early church. Neighbors gather to celebrate gracious deference (communion) towards one another and to send acknowledging letters to other gatherings. Receiving and sharing letters from the apostles lead to the forming of the New Testament.

As the numbers in the new neighbor-religion increase, informal structures to facilitate contact also begin to evolve. The underlying principle of governance is that no one can ever become an expert neighbor – *neighbor* like *self* refers only to *presence* and is not like a function that admits levels of expertise. Divine Call, as the Neighbor par excellence, is a Presence detectable as life enrichment arising from mutual deference among neighbors. The early church takes its cue from the practice of the ancient Greeks who selected leaders by lottery based on the belief that any citizen could lead the state. Any neighbor can and, by calling, does nurture neighborhood communion. The earliest structure arising in the infant church is in the expectation that the hosting neighbor would lead the domestic gathering by blessing the shared meal proclaiming thanksgiving for the presence of the divine Neighbor made visible through the gathering. The role of priest eventually emerges from this custom.

As sharing among neighbors grows deeper, divine presence becomes more tangible as an enveloping peace and joy. Some experience the presence of the divine Neighbor more deeply than others and begin to function in a prophetic (explaining) role. Thus, the second key ministry of the early church is that of prophet (*facilitator* is the modern equivalent of *prophet*). A prophet's role is directed to neighbor bonding, i.e., to facilitate the quality of presence of one neighbor to another. Recall that *neighbor* bonding replaces Old Testament *tribal* bonding as gateway to divine presence. However, neighbor prophets unlike tribal prophets never set themselves up as a go-between for neighbor and divine Call. The essence of the new faith is that the presence of divine Call is as immediate as Neighbor in contrast to a distant divine Chief - a third party would disrupt the emerging courtship.

Listening to neighbor connects to the divine Neighbor. The responsive listening implicitly conveys a sense of worth to a neighbor that releases healing both to the listener and the neighbor. Listening keeps religion from drifting off into fantasyland in that it is directed toward healing a real physical/psychological need. Healing is the third role to evolve in the nascent church, taking the form of kingly-servant. The healing service of the kingly-servant opens the door of communion with the divine Neighbor by rendering needed service in such a way as to preserve the self-worth of neighbor as the beloved of Call. The responsive lifestyles of listening and providing for real needs of neighbors lead observers to remark about the love Christians have for another even before they know one another. Such behavior is synergetic in that the healing effect extends beyond the domestic gatherings (church) to the wider community. The communion of neighbors elevates the consciousness of the whole community and is the archetypal model for divine Neighbor incarnation in human history.

Healing is not just on a broader social level but is within and between neighbors. The Christian belief of two joined in marriage for life come directly from the potential we have to heal each other in as much as the basis of our bonding is the divine Neighbor. Previously in tribal marriages, divorce and remarriage are permitted because bearing of children to insure a continuation of the tribe is of paramount importance. With the advent of a neighbor-religion, the encounter of self with a divine other Self surpasses tribal membership. A divine/human bonding at the level of self has unlimited healing potential, making marriage the primary institution for in-depth healing.

Because the interaction is between neighbors, versus members, Love rather than tribal Law is the identifying ‘substance’ of divine presence. Because the first Christians equated divine presence with Love, they felt no need for a more structured organization beyond the three just mentioned (priest, prophet and kingly-servant) until 180 AD. As more and more are attracted to the new Way, many give generously of their possessions to feed the poor and care for widows and orphans as no state sponsored social services existed. The first formal effort to organize is aimed at the administration of a large accumulation of goods to insure the needs of all are met.

After nearly two hundred years, the early Christians begin to select/elect an administrator of goods, who receives the designation of *bishop* or *overseer* of goods. The bishop also represents a house church of neighbors and, in addition, has control of distribution of donated goods collected by a number of house churches. Dominion over other gatherings beyond a bishop’s own household church develops very slowly. The house churches in Rome are the last to accept the idea of vesting in a bishop general authority over neighborhood communions. The Roman churches adamantly cling to the vision of church as a gathering of neighbors as the Way into the presence of the divine Neighbor. Distribution of donated goods more often than not is a distracting task and is to be handled by the bishop with as little fanfare as possible. Giving with no strings attached is simply the fundamental criterion of being a neighbor – the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing (Matt 6:3).

Faith is *relational knowledge*. In Old Testament times, elders and prophets, excelling in the relational knowledge needed to foster tribal bonding, provide leadership. In the New, the gathering of neighbors, versus tribal members, forms the essence of divine presence and requires relational knowledge far beyond tribal faith. In the nascent church everyone by virtue of being a neighbor is a leader. Some begin to excel in the relational knowledge needed to gather neighbors. Eventually, these become known as elders or presbyters (priests). The holy orders of the presbyter arise from the communion of neighbors, rather than through inheritance as in the tribal priesthood of the Old Testament. The function of a priest, however, never overshadows the gathering of the church/neighbors. Divine presence is in the *gathering* of neighbors as such - as oppose tribal gathering found in Old Testament times. However, the introduction of professional functionaries such as elders/presbyters is the beginnings of a gradual shifting away from emphasis on church as a neighborhood communion to a structured organization.

There is no bishop of Rome until about 100-150 AD. A practice develops in which each neighborhood communion sends a piece of bread to signify unity with the gathering of neighbors in Rome presided over by the bishop of Rome. Dropping a piece of bread in the cup of wine during the celebration of the Mass is the ritualistic remnant of this practice. Concentration of power in Rome develops slowly. St. Cyprian (c.250 A.D.) demands that people elect their bishop; democracy is not only a given in the patristic church but also touches upon its very ability to function. Pope Victor (200 AD) is the first to argue for the primacy of Rome against Eusebius. By 700 AD church and state merge. The ritualizing common to state functions gradually shifts over to church gatherings. Churches begin hiring singers for ceremonies as is customary in the courts of kings and emperors.

In 1100 AD farmers in large numbers move into faceless cities and begin seeking ways to bond with each other, as they were wont to do in small farming communities. A need for bonding leads to the formation of guilds that give birth to economic ventures, small government units (like modern neighborhood watches), defense organizations, and religious centered groups. In 11-1200 AD, the church loses its neighbor-to-neighbor identity and is divided into clergy versus laity. Celibacy of the clergy becomes mandatory as a way to insure this division and facilitate transfer of church property. General administrators rather than local churches select the clergy to be leaders of the people.

In reaction to these changes, the laity begins confraternities reminiscent of the original gathering of neighbors. There were 75 in Florence, 150 in Venice and many in other cities. These took liberty/fraternity/charity as their model. Since these groups seek mainly a sense of community at a human level, accumulation of wealth is a low priority; consequently, financial contribution is completely voluntary.

Confraternities have two purposes: prayer and assistance to the poor in a time when no social services are available. Confraternities have a special concern for condemned criminals. St. Catherine of Siena ministers by catching in a basket the falling heads of executed criminals. The offering of at least this one small service, in testimony to the nascent dignity of even the vilest criminal, gives testimony to the durability of a neighbor-religion. Even the seemingly lowest human is still a neighbor with worth. In spite of the emphasis on organization, there remains a hunger for a sense of community. However, there are no prophets in medieval times to revive the awareness of a neighbor-to-neighbor relation as the essence of church.

The confraternities gradually shift away from the *gathering* of neighbors to the *practice* of good deeds as evidence of conversion to the Gospel. Confraternities eventually become legal entities, begin tithing, administer baptism and provide a place to fulfill Easter duty. They pressure local bishops to send priests to provide daily Mass for confraternity members.

In 1500 AD, (time of the French revolution) the Council of Trent formalizes a parish structure on a territorial basis, requires a resident priest for providing Mass/sacraments and moves to eradicate the independence of confraternities. Confraternities are now to report to the bishop who is free to direct confraternity money to his purposes. Confraternities soon fold or are morph into altar societies, Holy Name societies, and catechetical instruction groups. (Confer: *Foundations of the IEC in the Early and Medieval Church*, Dominic Monti, IEC Conference, Washington, D.C., 2001.)

The Council of Trent is a reaction to the Protestant revolt against the centralized administration exercised by Rome. However, by defining the world organization of church down to the level of neighborhood (the word *parish* means *neighborhood*), the Council set the stage for moving back to a neighbor-to-neighbor basis of church. Five hundred years later, the Second Vatican Council goes a step further and defines the church as a communion of people (neighbors). *Neighbor* is what makes the church *catholic*, not membership in a tribal organization. The Council of Trent and the Vatican Council become powerful influences in returning Christianity to its roots as a neighbor-religion.

We have come full circle. It is fair to say that most people today still frame religion on a tribal rather than on a divine Neighbor-to-neighbor espousal basis. There is generally only vague awareness of the Hebraic concept of person as a divine/human communion. Most think of themselves as a *member* of a Moslem, Jewish, Protestant or Catholic group/organization. This Old Testament imagery keeps divine presence in a distant and holy place in the sky. This mindset leads to thinking we live in a sort of exile waiting for a better life in another world wherein our particular view on Reality will be vindicated. In espousal religion, the divine Neighbor is not off in the sky, but present, as Collaborator, in concert with the human self to create a world here and now beyond fondest dreams. A penchant for ideological vindication is philosophical not religious. The point of beginning is an opening the door to the neighbor.

Neighbor Religion as a Discipline

Originally, Christianity is called simply the *Discipline*. The Discipline refers not to following a new set of more torturous laws or practices than those found in tribal religion, but the extraordinary self-control required in being neighbor. It is easy to be with the agreeable; the challenge is to find a presence with the disagreeable. In the new espousal religion, suffering does not come down from above, but from each other as a result of cruelty, reaction or indifference as neighbor. Response in the face of indifference/reaction of another goes beyond the immediate 'neighbor' to the divine Neighbor in as much as the human 'neighbor' is the focal point for the incarnate presence of the divine Neighbor. An unresponsive or reactionary 'neighbor' distorts the image of the divine Neighbor. Self-disciple is needed to stay on course in the face of the negative feedback of indifference/hostility. Regardless of another's seemingly 'strange' beliefs, behavior, or indifference, the divine Neighbor remains steadfastly present and as such is the model to be emulated.

Christ demonstrates the Discipline of being neighbor regardless of circumstances. Christ does not tell others what to do, but simply provides a glimpse of the divine Neighbor walking among us. In neighbor/espousal religion no one can judge another (John 8:15) since the espousal relation is between self and the divine Self. The Gospel is not about us, but profiles a divine Neighbor as the ultimate in divine imaging. However, the actual presence of human 'neighbors' keeps divine/human espousal dialogue real. The indifference of one's neighbor can be made beneficial when it occasions insight into our own indifference to others and ultimately to the loving initiative of the divine Neighbor as portrayed in the Gospel. The Gospel shines a light on only one side of a bipolar relation – the side of Call as Neighbor inviting response. By providing a portrait of Call, the Gospel implies a model of response. When response mirrors the divine Call of the Gospel, the divine Neighbor once more walks among us. The Gospel is not a burdensome mandate but an invitation and opportunity.

To respond when all around is reaction requires ongoing self-discipline. The Discipline of *response* incarnates Call in history. Mary responds amid a world crashing down all around her and her response is what incarnates the divine Call, thus revealing the face of Call. Christ demonstrates the hidden response of Mary throughout his life and especially on Calvary. His subsequent resurrection shows divine Call as the other side of response. Thus, the Call/response Discipline that inaugurates divine presence in history is clearly demonstrated.

It appears that while in the garden of Gethsemane Christ recognizes the full import of his calling to be response in order to reveal the divine Neighbor. The rejection by the leaders of his own people, the abandonment of his disciples and the betrayal of a close friend left him painfully alone in an hour of crisis. How easy it would have been to react. This Gethsemane experience is the archetypal moment in which response over reaction triggers divine redeeming initiative in the world. Prophetically, Christ changes the imaging of the Deity from a divine Chief as an avenger lashing out at perpetrators of injustice to one of a patient, longsuffering Neighbor. As Neighbor, the divine Self can only be *with* the human neighbor – reminiscent of the divine promise in the burning bush of being *with* Moses. Christ's acceptance of the traitorous kiss of a dear friend takes responsiveness to a new depth.

Everyone is invited to be co-redeemer in like fashion. The discipline required for responding, versus reacting, is a redeeming act in that it implies the worth of the antagonist and respects a radical freedom based on equality. The worth/freedom applies first to the responder and is redeeming in that it implicitly invites the antagonist to also respond. Thus the self-worth/freedom is immediately evident in Christ's calmness, courage and loving demeanor as he faces the ordeal of rejection, torture and crucifixion. Christ's calm dignity causes his disciples to scatter and his enemies to grow in fury, thereby rejecting the redeeming invitation. Christ simply stood as a neighbor amid cruelty and indifference. As such, he is the incarnation of the divine Neighbor.

Acquiring the Discipline of being neighbor does not suggest a spineless existence. When Christ admonishes followers to turn the other cheek (Luke 6:29), reference is being made to a demand for a strike with the palm of the hand rather than with the back of the hand. Striking with the back of the hand is a sign of disdain, as a superior might strike an inferior. Offering the other cheek means that the palm of the hand in a back swing would strike the cheek thus implying recognition of worth/equality. Self, as neighbor, implicitly requires respect and equality; there is no backing down from the dignity of being a self – respect/equality is a line in the sand. Backing away from that demand means ceasing to be a self. The human neighbor derives respect/equality from the divine initiative of being Neighbor. The worth of the human self reflects the worth of the divine Self. Christ stands in silent dignity in the midst of turmoil from insult and torture. His testimony to the worth of the human self is a redeeming invitation to others to likewise take a stand without reacting.

Response is the act of creating self; *reaction* is self-destruction. Reaction can be so deeply embedded in self or culture that it is beyond the reach of consciousness but, like a hidden cancer, damage is still being done. Reaction can be so deeply seated that it can even take the appearance of response. Many isms that have arisen throughout history are reaction clothed as response. Thus Christ sought to define Abraham's vision of a distinct life concretely as self/neighbor, but the religious leaders plotted the death of Christ in the name of Abraham. What started as Abraham's response to Life is twisted to reaction ending a life.

The Discipline of being neighbor means sorting out deeply embedded reactions and excising them. Many are unaware of the damage done by inbred reaction, as Christ reflects in his dying words of forgiving those who know not what they do. Christ is redeemer par excellence by descending into the hell of reaction and arising in a paradise of response. The choices of the two crucified with him symbolize the two choices now open to all. Both go into the hell of reaction with Christ but only one chooses to arise from reaction into resurrection of response.

Turning reaction into response is self-discipline, versus imposing discipline on surrounding 'neighbors' to effect change. Discipline directed toward changing others is the hallmark of tribal religion. Response/reaction can coexist in tribal religion, but response alone reigns in espousal religion. In espousal religion there is no longer Jew/Gentile, male/female, rich/poor, slave/free, but only neighbor – in the Hebraic communal versus the Platonic isolate sense of person. The Hebraic person is putting on the human self a face that complements that of the divine Self. *Self* is not ideology, but is the incarnate communion of divine/human neighbors.

Since self is communal, excommunication or avoidance of neighbor is in itself a contradiction to being a self. Excommunication is reactionary and is a holdover of tribal religion. Although others may be reactionary, self-to-self response is always to the divine Neighbor and only indirectly to an antagonist. The diversity of 'neighbors' embodies the richness as well as the challenges of the divine Call to be neighbor. The Discipline of responding is the ongoing divine incarnation in human history. Many Jews expected a political Messiah to restore the power of Israel - never expecting that the new arena of Neighbor-to-neighbor surpass political power. The enduring presence of the divine Neighbor is the excitement of Pentecost. A willing neighbor makes all things possible. A world focused on *neighbor* fulfills all law/prophesy.

Social Science and Neighbor

Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology are three modern disciplines that progressively cast a tighter net around the notion of self. Anthropology looks at humans in the broadest sense as a distinct species; Sociology focuses on underlying economic and political forces to understand human social organization; and Psychology casts the tightest net by exploring the human self as the most fundamental facet of human society. Modern social science reflects the same pattern of ancient sages seeking an understanding of human society by casting progressively tighter nets around the human self, going through vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal imaging. Both social scientists and founders of religion meet at the level of *self*. However, religion adds a dimension that social science has yet to discover, namely, the realization that *neighbor* incarnates *self*. Becoming a self means concretely becoming a neighbor. All other self-imaging is purely functional.

Even within psychology the vital→ tribal→ espousal devolutionary pattern is evident. Freud focuses on the *subconscious* (vital), Skinner is preoccupied with *conditioning* (tribal) and Rogers emphasizes *meaning* (espousal). (See chapter two: Psychology – the search for self.) Psychology, boxed in by the West's corpuscular view of Reality, sees society through an isolate rather than relational lens. An isolate lens sees *individual*; a relational lens sees *neighbor*. Psychology could make enormous contribution to understanding and healing both self and society by shifting its focus from the self, as an isolate individual, to self as identical to the notion of neighbor. Finding self as neighbor is the same as the finding of self.

Like *self*, the concept of *neighbor* arose in the context of religion and, therefore, is a religious term at its core. By putting neighbor as the essence of self, psychology and religion would find common ground. If psychology were to shift to a relational self, more concretely defined as *neighbor*, the listening tools developed in clinical psychology would be valuable for helping one discover self as neighbor and thereby induce self and social healing far more effectively. Perception of the world as the presence of a healing, divine Neighbor depends entirely upon replacing an isolate notion of self with a relational self/neighbor. Such an experience of self leaves only a sense of presence stripped of all other qualifications or preconditions. A sense of self prior to family, social status, possessions, accomplishments and the like enables self to touch upon the very source of Life. Once connected with Life, self is simply a responding presence that enables the divine Neighbor to heal the human self and the world through the self. *Neighbor* is the highest calling to which anyone can aspire and gateway to probing the depth of the divine Self/Reality.

Imaging divine presence as *Neighbor* takes considerable psychological energy because it flies in the face of traditional divine images. The divine Neighbor insight, inaugurated by Mary/Christ, does not go against prevailing vital/tribal images but simply beyond them. Ascribing the image of *Neighbor* to the Deity implies divine acceptance of you as neighbor just as you are with no strings attached. The catch-22 is that grasping this divine predisposition requires the actual accepting of one's neighbor just as he/she is. Or to put it in a positive way: you are an unfathomable treasure, but the catch-22 is that you will never know this until you find your neighbor as an unfathomable treasure. You can never see your own face directly but only via reflection. Likewise, finding neighbor as a priceless treasure is the only way you can see yourself as a priceless treasure. Finding self as a priceless treasure is the same as finding the Self of the divine Neighbor. Finding the Self of the divine Neighbor is a precondition for finding the mutual espousal relation of the self vis-à-vis the divine Self. In an espousal relation, self mirrors the unfathomable treasure of the divine Self.

Thus, finding *neighbor* is the same as finding *self* as boundless treasure. Furthermore, finding the neighbor as a treasure is reciprocal and synergetic – reciprocal because it leads to mutual discovery of the value of the two neighbors involved, and synergetic because a treasured self stimulates the social environment. Divine Neighbor-to-neighbor relation is not a metaphor any more than a marriage is a metaphor. *Neighbor* imaging is the closest humans have come to concretizing the human self as well as the divine Self. Neighbor is the visible expression of the Hebraic person. Christ is the archetypal Hebraic person; in him is to be found the fullness of divinity and humanity. Becoming neighbor leads to the divine Suitor and the Hebraic person, just as becoming a tribe led to the divine Chief and the Chosen People. Furthermore, the notion of *neighbor* is key for maintaining distinction between the divine and human selves. *Neighbor*, as a universal, is the ultimate concretizing of divine/human *otherness*. Psychology can play an important role in connecting the human self with Reality by building on *neighbor* as the essence of *self* and the basis of forming relationship.

Psychologically, we find it much easier to derive identity through exclusion or reaction rather than inclusion. *Neighbor* is the focal point around which a psyche of inclusion can be developed. Neighbor is inclusive locally and, through modern communication/travel, easily expands to universal inclusion. Mental health develops the more self-identity incarnates as inclusive neighbor-identity. Achieving an identity of neighbor requires developing a response versus a reaction psyche - a principle dear to the heart of clinical psychologists. The surrounding Reality is an invitation/opportunity in a response perspective, and a threat/danger in a reactionary mindset. An inclusive psyche is predisposed to perceiving surrounding Reality as a manifestation of divine Call to espousal union.

In practice, 'neighbors' you see every day concretize in time and place the relation between self and the divine Neighbor. Each 'neighbor' provides a unique insight into self and the divine Self at a far more conscious level than can be found through simple exposure to nature. 'Neighbors' form the arena for stimulating dialogue between the divine and human selves. Such dialogue intensifies in the bond of marriage in that a spouse is the sacrament (sacred Presence) incarnating the presence of the divine Self. Marriage, as a sacrament of exposing the human self to the divine other Self, is critical for revealing the divine Self to the marriage partner and via the marriage to the community generally. Joy in a good marriage is visible to all. While reaction is terminal, response is radically open and life giving. Finding self as neighbor is to find the long-suffering divine Neighbor. Becoming a neighbor/spouse is possible precisely because Call has taken the initiative in so doing.

That there can be only two neighbors - one divine and the other human - is a huge psychological hurdle to get over, but it is the very core of espousal religion – in marriage, three is a crowd. *Self* is not ontological but relational. Transition through a vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal relation as a defining core of Reality represents a maturing faith process everyone faces. A religious framing of Reality is a challenge to the atomized Western mind. Transition from an ontological to a relation-based paradigm does not occur on a mass scale but takes place slowly at the most basic level of self-experience. Reframing Reality as a Call/response dichotomous relation is the initial step in religion. Further exploring leads to defining the Call/response relation concretely as a mutual presence of divine/human neighbors and, finally, discovery that the mutual relation is espousal in nature. Espousal religion goes beyond ideologies/rituals/cultures in that it reflects the absolute inclusiveness towards partner that must be found in a successful marriage.

Thus, the word *neighbor* implies not only proximity but also incarnates invitation, equality, faith, directness, response, freedom, self-identity, otherness, agony, ecstasy, dialogue and presence. Christianity with all its adornment accumulated through the centuries is a neighbor-religion – nothing more and nothing less. Modern psychology can be as helpful in defining Christianity today as Aristotelian philosophy was seven hundred years ago. We choose the distance between self and neighbor. We keep neighbor at arms length for many reasons all of which relate to the challenges that neighbor represents. Psychology can be helpful in dealing with consequences choice brings. Accepting divine Call as Neighbor means entering a world of ‘neighbors’ with a divine/human shared consciousness. Responding to neighbor allows the divine Neighbor once more to walk the earth.

Micro World of Neighbor

Espousal religion requires the ability to transition from a macro-world of tribe/state to a micro world of self-to-self relation – one neighbor relating to another. It is only at this micro level that imaging the Deity as divine Neighbor/Self/Spouse is possible. In the macro level, divine imaging is confined to functional images such as Creator, Intelligent Designer, Father, Lord, the Almighty, supernatural Being and other power-based images. Ascribing to the Deity a conscious *Self* vis-à-vis a human self is entering the arena of neighbor/espousal religion.

It is hard to gear down from a macro to a micro world of self. However, as the world increasingly becomes a global village and the Internet makes ‘neighbors’ of people half a world apart, the micro world of neighbor/self is where the true action is. Neighbor-level focus may well be the key for the survival of the human race. The problems of the world can be found in the neighborhood. If problems cannot be solved at the neighbor level there is little hope of forestalling social disintegration or impending environmental catastrophe.

It is safe to say that there are no cultures or institutions today based on neighbor as *neighbor*. Virtually everyone is raised with a formidable array of preconditions in dealing with others. Imaging divine Call as Neighbor, implying mutual respect/equality, was beyond comprehension two thousand years ago and still is today. In the past, the macro vision of the world dominated; in the emerging micro world, functional-based imagery drawn from ideology or politics will gradually give way to the presence of one neighbor to another.

The micro world of neighbor and the macro world of tribe/state appear radically different. What is obvious in a micro world appears foolish in a macro view. For example, in a micro world, neighbor means *neighbor* that defines both divine and human presence. Any pre-condition automatically negates a neighbor relation. A neighbor-focus insures against getting lost in a labyrinth of ideologies or moral constructs - all of which imply pre-conditions for mutual presence. *Neighbor* is the concrete expression of *otherness*, versus *sameness*. When sameness drives a relation, it ceases to be neighbor-based. The inclusiveness implied in the notion of otherness is the basis of a divine/human relation and can occur only in the micro world of neighbor. In a macro world, such inclusiveness would be a world of fantasy.

The view on redemption illustrates the radical difference between a micro and macro world. From a macro/tribal perspective, the Deity heaps all the sins of humanity on Christ to satisfy a need for divine vengeance, thus allowing the rest of us to escape retribution. However, the crucifixion itself is tantamount to committing a colossal sin that only adds to the sum total of sins - like using gasoline to extinguish fire. From a micro/neighbor perspective, it is the *response* of Christ that is redeeming. He had every reason to react against disciples, religious and political leaders and life generally, but he responds even in the horrible death on a cross, thereby becoming the archetypal redeemer of the human race. Whenever anyone responds in lieu of reacting at a neighbor level, redemption is occurring in time and place, i.e., freedom from the slavery inherent in reaction. Reaction destroys self; response creates the human self.

Entering a micro world of self-to-self relation requires a self-starting discipline. It is easy to focus on unresponsiveness found in the world of ‘neighbors’ and overlooking responsiveness that is growing everywhere beneath the surface. Among the twelve close companions of Jesus, eleven responded and only one reacted – portrayed by Scripture as a self-hanging. The eleven grow in their response, laying the foundation upon which the micro world of neighbor is built. At the core of their response is free choice. The essence of faith is making a free choice to respond regardless of consequences of reactionary violence. Changing reaction to response is the path everyone can see, but choice at the deepest level of self-experience alone is gateway to that path. The reaction/response crisis can be addressed only in the micro-world of self.

Just before Jesus died he called out something that bystanders did not understand. I heard one scholar commenting that the words ascribed to Jesus were Mayan words translated as: "Alas! Alas! I see the light!" If bystanders didn't understand the last words of Christ, I doubt we can two thousand years after the event. However, the translation seems appropriate in that, faced with death after long agony, the divine Neighbor becomes visible to Christ as a Lover in a darkened world. Reaction of his persecutors is darkness; response to a Lover that comes from the depth of his self-experience is the light. The light of Love now is the shining point of history; the resurrection is Christ revealing *response* as the true light of the world.

Christ is to be found in the micro world of neighbor where the relation of loving Call/response finds its fullest expression. The neighbor microcosm, inaugurated by Christ, is like yeast in the dough of a macro world. Rejecting the Beatitudes governing a micro world by default means facing the control of the law governing the macro world. These two worlds are very different and yet connected in ways beyond present human understanding. The micro world of self/neighbor and the macro world of society follow very different and, seemingly, contradictory sets of laws. The confusion stems from limited knowledge of Reality rather than within Reality as such. Complex social structures survive largely because they include sanctions for behavior destructive to other members of the tribe/nation. The macro world relies on fear of retribution as the bedrock foundation for maintaining social order. The micro world depends totally on free and deliberate invitation and response. The end result is a divine/human nuptial. Macro law insures the maximum social freedom, but micro law leads to a divine espousal freedom beyond human imagination.

*****SIDEBAR*****

TWO COSMIC VIEWS

That the laws governing the micro versus macro world are radically different should not come as a surprise. The same holds true in the macro/microphysical world. A major problem in physics today is that the macro and the micro (subatomic) world appear to be governed by two different sets of physical laws. In the micro world, the law of gravity does not seem to apply and matter appears to be influenced by the choice of the researcher. For example, a beam of light will behave as a wave or a stream of particles *depending on the interest* of an experimenter. At a microphysical level, probability rather than certainty is the measure. In quantum physics, particles and antiparticles transit in and out of existence. Physicists speak of whole universes popping in and out of existence. Physicists explain that the dual set of laws in the macro versus micro worlds is due to the inability to grasp the whole of Reality.

The contrast between the two sets of laws governing the micro/macro world of physics is analogous to the Beatitudes governing the micro world of neighbor/self and the Ten Commandments governing the macro world of tribal life or society as a whole. Error and confusion arise from the uncritical application of the micro laws to the macro world, or visa versa. Espousal religion deals *only* with the micro world of neighbor and not directly with society as a whole. Laws (both natural and tribal) governing society on a macro scale have been evolving for thousands of years before Christ and continue to develop today. Christ in a laser like fashion focuses on the core of Reality as a relation of neighbors - a micro depth unseen by eyes conditioned only to a macro perspective.

The difference between micro/macro laws can be seen by way of contrast. The nature of evil at a micro level appears very different from evil at a macro level. At a micro level, 'evil' is unresponsiveness; at a macro level, it is deliberate abuse. In a macro world, sin is a violation of ordinance; in a micro, it is a lost opportunity. Or, from another perspective, sin in a tribe/nation/state framework is a violation of a law established for the purpose of maintaining unity/order in society; in a divine Neighbor-to-neighbor framework, sin is unresponsiveness that erodes dialogue between neighbors. Evil at the macro level entails the harming of others; evil at a micro/espousal level harms only self - akin to suicide. It is self-destructive because the very identity of self is *response* - as defined in the Hebraic Call/response relation.

At the micro level, the self is created as a deliberate, conscious response to Reality/Call/Love. Because the loving initiative of divine Call embodies the wherewithal of response, unresponsiveness requires a conscious choice of either indifference or reaction on the part of the beloved. This unresponsiveness is not 'sin' but lost opportunity that otherwise comes with response to a divine espousal initiative. Judas, in rejecting the responsive invitation offered by his neighbor, sought refuge in the oblivion of suicide. He lost for himself the opportunity afforded at Pentecost. At the micro level, divine Call is the begging Suitor unable to force any response - much less an espousal response.

The contrast between the two worlds can also be seen in the underlying dynamic. The central dynamic at a micro world is dialogue, while a macro outlook depends on the use of power for the good of the whole of society; influence drives the micro world, as power drives the macro world. Power takes many forms: political, economic, academic, physical and emotional. The hallmark of power is subservience; the hallmark of influence is free response.

Dismissing the Gospel as a doormat approach to life fails to make a distinction between the micro/psychological and macro/sociological set of laws governing two connected but very different realms. When Christ admonishes to go an extra mile or surrender tunic as well as cloak (Luke 6:29), this would be foolishness at the macro level defined by power and competition. At a micro level, going the extra mile creates influence that invites reciprocal responsiveness. When religious, political and physical power comes crashing down on Christ, he stands before Pilate striped of every vestige of power and near death. Pilate asks, "Are you a king?" It is at this point that Christ makes a sharp distinction between the macro and micro realms when he said this realm (kingdom) is not one of power – power that often becomes a narcotic in the macro realm. Christ's kingship is in the micro world of influence that endures long after Rome is swept into the dustbin of history.

Laws governing more abstract (macro) concepts of society such as tribe/state/nation, and laws (Beatitudes) that govern a neighbor-to-neighbor (micro) concept of society appear to be at odds. Beatitudes, when extracted from a micro setting of neighbor-to-neighbor, appear as poetic words of a dreamer with little practical value. For example, when have you ever found a meek politician possessing anything, let alone the whole land as promised by the Beatitudes? The more abstract the concept of human society (tribe→ state→ nation→ world), the more we need emphasis on the rule of law/justice to preserve the good of the whole over that of a member. In the micro world the whole coalesces in the self. Thus, you function in the macro world as a citizen by respecting human rights defined by law; you 'function' in a micro world by responding as neighbor, thereby encompassing the whole of humanity in the consciousness of self.

The laws governing the micro world of self are still far beyond our comprehension in the present stage of social evolution. Recall that faith is relational knowledge and does not mean blindly taking another's word for something, like believing in the tooth fairy – this is a child's concept of faith. For an adult, faith means the ability to see a micro world defined by the Beatitudes and acting as if that world has already been realized even though such naivety makes one a laughing stock. It is only through the efforts of a few brave prophets who can see divine Call, as Neighbor, that a new stage in psychological devolution will come about. The only question of importance to one guided by the law of the Beatitudes is: Am I present as neighbor? The answer to that question determines the ability to image Call as Neighbor. For St. Paul, the micro worldview comes as scales falling from his eyes.

Two cosmic views are at stake. Those who live by the laws of the street should not lightly dismiss the Beatitudes because they seem to be for wimps. The Beatitudes, while impractical in a power-based society, are law at a neighbor level. Everyone serious about marriage will pay heed to these laws or fail in their marriage. In the Beatitudes, divine Call is a Suitor and not a Conqueror leading an army, or a divine Avenger killing the firstborn, or inflicting plagues on Egyptian families. A power-based society is tribal by definition; tribal or military images simply do not fit a neighbor-based society. But, less anyone think the micro world of neighbor is for the faint hearted, take notice of what happened when physicists tampered with the micro world of the atom thereby unleashing energy beyond imagination. When Call becomes Neighbor, one cannot begin to envision the results. Christ, by lifting a corner of the veil to the micro world, changes history forever. The tiniest particles determine the structure of the vast universe, so the micro world of neighbor is quietly transforming the macro world of society.

***** END SIDEBAR*****

Recapitulation

Self-experience incarnating as *neighbor* is the foundation of the ultimate social order and the final frontier of psychological devolution. Think of the divine/human self-experience as compressed into an infinitely dense particle or 'point' prior to the 'Big Bang'. The distinction between the divine/human self is already there as a *Call/response* polarity. The unfolding of the universe/history following the Big Bang is in effect the unfolding of the relation between the divine and human selves – like living out a marriage. Thus, the evolution of the universe is the manifestation of the divine Self inviting response and, at the same time, the unfolding of the human self as a growing, conscious response. The divine/human selves, hidden from the beginning, develop in root (vital), stem (tribal) and blossom (espousal) stages as from a growing seed.

Such a view of Reality has rich possibilities. We are wont to break the world down into things, time, space and motion only because we need to do so in dealing with such unfathomable Reality. It is like pressing your nose against a painting, resulting in the ability to see only a small portion of the painting. Because the whole is so overwhelming, we use images to piecemeal Reality, but images are only tools to get at Reality and not a substitute for Reality.

Every new discovery of science is a revelation about the human as well as the divine Self. Humanity along with nature reflects the fullness of Call. Truth is never outside of self-experience because the human self, as response, is mirror reflection of the divine Self. Developing as a neighbor is the epicenter for divine/human encounter.

Neighbor compresses unfathomable Reality to a tangible level. The first followers of Christ used *catholic* (a Greek word meaning *universal*) to emphasize the universal implication of neighbor. Neighbor is inherently universal and, therefore, interchangeable with catholic – as apposed to the more limited notion of tribal member or citizen. The word *catholic* also aptly expresses openness to the richness of divine Call. Catholicity does not *cause* unity but only reflects the unity inherent in divine Call. Because unity derives from the initiative of the divine Self, unity comes from the divine Self/Call alone and not from our response. Response serves to manifest unity already inherent in divine Call.

Unlike in biblical times, the world today is rapidly shrinking into a neighborhood. It seems better to return to the word *neighbor* to make more concrete the meaning of the word *catholic* and to bring out the catholicity of the Gospel. Christianity is far less philosophical and more incarnate by referring to it as a *neighbor* rather than as a *catholic* religion. The self becomes neighbor/catholic only by subsuming the human race into the self and in so doing draws near to the Self of a divine Neighbor. Such a view may be dismissed as hopelessly utopian. However, once the threshold is crossed from the sixth stage of psychological devolution, namely, from the sixth stage of *reasoning* to the seventh stage of *self/object*, the divine Neighbor-to-neighbor, Self-to-self relation is inevitable. Such an encounter is the final frontier.

CHAPTER SIX

GATHERING

Summary: Divine Call incarnates in the world as *gathering together*. Gathering together not only reveals the divine Self, as Call, but also occasions the revelation of the human self, as response.

Outline of Chapter

Concept of Gathering

Entropy Principle as Revelation

Gathering Stages

Cosmic
Biological
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Communion Persona

Communion Persona as Neighbor/Sacrament

Communion Persona as a Neighborhood/Sacrament

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Neighbor/Gathering as the Fruit of Neighborhood Communion

Neighbor/Gathering in a Historical Perspective

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Sacred versus Secular Gathering

SIDEBARS

BODY AS MODEL OF UNITY

MACRO VERSUS MICRO WORLDVIEW

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

CREATING A NEIGHBOR/GATHERING

In an ancient Greek play by Euripides, called *The Bacchae* (c. 400 B.C.), a mother approaches her young son-king and, in spite of the loud pleading of her son, tears the boy's arm off and begins eating it. Others, who are gathered around, join in the eating frenzy as they rip the boy's body apart limb by limb and begin gnawing on the bleeding flesh. They are caught up in a religious fervor inspired by the god Dionysus. In the play, the boy morphs from a victim of a crime to a divine offering and the words, "they know not what they do" are placed in his mouth.

Ancients believe that eating raw flesh/blood transmits Life directly to them. Eating/drinking in consort with the divine yields both insanity and wisdom. In the insane eating, the actors, who hitherto wear masks indicating various roles played in the drama, become unmasked and, gazing on each other, find they are as one. At this moment of wisdom there is no longer male/female, Greek/barbarian, slave/free – all are as one. The eating of the flesh, resulting in the unmasking of the actors, is also an epiphany unmasking the hidden identity of Dionysus.

Dionysus had the reputation of always hiding his true identity. He is associated with all fluids of life such as wine, milk, honey, blood and semen. He appears to delight in being involved in human affairs, but at the same time remaining mysterious. In *The Bacchae*, a mask falls from the face of Dionysus for the first time and he reveals his true identity. Central to his identity is *Deity-meeting*. His mother, while Dionysus is still in her womb, wants to see Zeus naked in order to see him as he really is, even though it would mean instant death. Upon seeing Zeus naked, she is consumed but her fetus flies from her womb and enters the thigh of Zeus from which Dionysus is later born. The *Bacchae* drama purports to create the circumstance where *Deity-meeting* occurs; namely, the eating of the flesh of the boy king leads to the unmasking of the actors and of Dionysus himself; in the unmasking all are consumed in unity.

Concept of Gathering

The theme of *The Bacchae* is one of gathering. Throughout Scriptures, gathering is the hallmark of divine presence. In the Old Testament, the gathering is of a Chosen People; in the New, it is the drawing together of the chosen self via a communion of neighbors. Christ, when faced with betrayal, torture and death, exemplifies in his persona the ultimate gathering together. He gathers the world into himself as *response* to divine Call. In so doing, victim becomes victor. In himself, he is the full communion between the human self of response and the divine Self of Call.

Gathering together is not restricted to biblical history, but underlies all of human history. Long before Christ, the Bacchae struggles with understanding the source and nature of unity. In the play, Dionysus points to a high mountain on which this same ritualistic drama of flesh eating is taking place and says to those gathered that *there* is Deity. The play ends when the actors recognize that, while engaged in eating the young boy, it is they themselves that are on the mountain. Dionysus is pointing to the gathering itself as the divine epiphany/manifestation. Having removed the masks defining the role they had been playing, they are no longer actors but now form but a single unity among them - oneness that includes the audience and the audience at one with them. Thus, the spectators themselves are on this high mountain where the divine and the human fuse in the drama of eating sacrificial flesh. The play ends with the divine presence radiating from the mountain in the form of a gathering together into one the small group of actors, the spectators, the polis (citizens of Athens) and, by implications, the entire human race.

A mother eating her son and sharing him as the main dish in a gathering is gruesome to modern sensibilities. The imagery used in the Greek drama must not distract from the critical issue the play addresses, namely, the source and nature of unity. The playwright, writing at the end of the Golden Age of Greek drama, envisions Dionysus as the source of unity that extends from the mountaintop to a gathering up of humanity. *Gathering* is the secret identity of Dionysus long hidden from view. Eating the flesh of the divine son of Zeus in effect joins humanity to Zeus himself.

Portraying a gathering together through such cannibalistic imagery would certainly get the attention of the ancient Greeks. The prime lesson of the play is that unity may be reflected in the polis or city-state, but the true source of unity is from Zeus through his son – Dionysus. The very *body* of Dionysus is the nature of unity. In the Greek drama, the eating of the flesh of the boy-king transforms him from victim to sacrifice, thereby identifying the boy with Dionysus. The shared eating of the flesh of Dionysus as a sacrificial offering causes the release of a divine gathering effect that draws the entire world into one as in one body.

Euripides, as does Christ four centuries later, struggles with the issue of unity. Euripides, however, probes unity as a divine, monopole, philosophical abstraction drawing together a group into sameness, while Christ frames unity as bipolar between two equal selves, with the divine-Self as *Initiator* and the human-self emerging as *responder*. Unity arises by preserving the uniqueness of the human self and not by subsuming self into the divine. For the Greeks, unity is one-dimensional but for Christ two-dimensional. For Christ, unity incarnates the divine self, but in doing so draws forth the human self – first as a sense of community (tribe) and then as (Hebraic) persona. Christ's sacrificial death implies *equality* of self-gift between the human self, as response, and the divine Self, as Call. His subsequent resurrection is the mutual divine/human self-surrender that reveals the hidden nature of the divine Self as: Call to Life at the level of *self* (versus *group*). His resurrection is the gathering effect of divine Call addressing the human self in the chaos of death. The world quakes (Matt 27:51) as the risen body of Christ begins the emerging of the human self that responds in equal depth to divine Call.

With the advent of Christ, the focus on divine incarnation shifts from a tribal to a bodily level. The human body itself is now the locus of divine presence as well as the model of divine unity – a unity far surpassing tribal. The divine and human selves meet in the same body, while the self-identity of both remains distinct as *Call* versus *response*. The arena for divine incarnation transits from tribe to neighbor and, thence, to a divine Spouse-to-spouse relation. At each level of gathering the depth of presence increases, thus giving greater definition to both the divine and human self. At the espousal level, two selves become as one body that occasion mutual self-revelation.

As discussed in chapter four (see sidebar: Platonic versus Hebraic Person), just as the divine Self is the coalition of all-else that is not the divine Self, so, too, the human self is the coalition of all-else that is not the human self. The divine/human selves have a verse/inverse relation – neither can be *directly* defined, but are knowable only as exact opposites. The divine identity as Source/Initiator of unity distinguishes divinity from the human self that draws identity as the responder/reflector of unity. The *espousal* relation forming *one body* is both paradigm and summit of unity. In this union, the divine Self leads the dance.

Unity, therefore, is the distinguishing sign of divine presence. Unity is not the philosophical abstraction reflected in a Greek drama, but is in one body that incarnates the divine/human selves as *neighbors*; *neighbor* implies otherness and concretizes both the divine Self, as Call, and the human self, as response. A body, perceived by us as an isolated object, is, in relational Reality, the incarnate presence of two neighbors – one human and the other divine. The mutual presence as neighbors is the ultimate challenge of gathering together leading to the full revelation of both the divine and human selves. At this level, understanding *neighbor* (versus chosen *tribe*) is gateway to the knowledge of both the divine and human self.

The joining of the divine/human selves as one body occurs at a pre-reflected level. Subsequent reflection introduces imagery that limits and distorts the divine/human relation and can never do just to the underlying Reality. The pre-reflected experience is akin to divine/human espousal intercourse. It is at the pre-reflected level that Mary conceives and brings forth Christ. Later, Christ tries through many parables and analogies to express in image the underlying divine relation.

The more response mirrors pre-reflected experience without the distortion of imaging, the more the communion with the divine Neighbor becomes apparent. Unity has its origin in the divine identity of Call and can be reflected in an infinitely diversified response. However, the 'reactor core' of unity is the divine Self that seeks human response both at an unconscious (pre-reflected) and ultimately at a conscious level. Cohesiveness in a community as a whole draws its life from this core – like a room fills with light from a lamp. The 'visible' presence of the divine Neighbor in a community/group is proportional to the depth and clarity of unity at the level of self. Gathering together is hallmark of divine presence not just in the self and human community but also in and through nature/universe.

Entropy Principle as Revelation

Physicists tell us that there are three laws that govern the physical universe. These laws are: conservation, limit, and entropy. The *conservation* law means that matter cannot go out of existence but can only change form. Thus, when wood is burned it changes to gas/energy; a tree captures energy and turns it back into wood. The law of *limit* means that it is impossible to reach absolute zero – we cannot get beyond the physical universe. This law is closely related to the law of conservation. The third law of physics is that of *entropy*, which states that all matter tends relentlessly toward disintegration and disorder. Your coffee goes from hot to cold because of the law of entropy. You counter this effect when you deliberately reheat the coffee and thereby induce a measure of order by bringing molecules closer together.

Our world is constantly increasing in *entropy* – a word taken from a Greek word meaning *transformation*. Contrary to our superficial observation, the universe is not a giant, finely tuned clock giving us minutes, days, months, seasons and years. Disorder began with the original Big Bang that sent matter flying off in every direction. Someday our night skies will be totally black; the earth will have lost the moon, the stars will have receded so far that light from them will no longer reach us, and the sun will disintegrate when its fuel is spent. The entire physical world, impelled by the law of entropy, will continue toward a state of maximum disorder. The process is always in one direction, from order to disorder and never in reverse – an egg breaks into disorder/pieces. You will never see a broken egg reassemble except in film run in reverse.

Physicists have demonstrated through experimentation the validity of the law of entropy. Since all matter necessarily disintegrates, it follows that any introduction of order, thereby reducing entropy, requires conscious and deliberate intervention. Humans can only *respond* to order – like a choice of reheating coffee. But, the induced order is always revelatory of divine initiative – we do not *cause* the coffee to heat. The underlying relation is that of Call/response with divine Call as causal source of order. For example, a growing tree reflects divine initiative in reducing entropy; a carpenter induces entropy (chaos) to the tree by turning it into a pile of wood and reduces entropy when the pile of wood is assembled to form a house. The order inherent in a tree reveals the initiative of divine Call; building a house reveals the *responding* skills of a carpenter and, in so doing, reveals *a new dimension of ordering stemming from Call* - this time not through *nature* but through the *carpenter*. The more skilled the carpenter, the more the divine Author of order is exposed.

It follows that entropy and revelation are directly related. The law of physics holds that the universe is driven to ever-greater disorder. Any reversal of the entropy law involves revelation either of the divine or human agent – for the divine Agent the revelation pertains to Call, for the human agent the revelation pertains to depth of response. Furthermore, the deliberate intent of both the divine and human agent is unfolding in and through the order each induces to reverse entropy. (See chapter four on *intent* as a characteristic of religion.) Thus, if the law of entropy means scattering in ever-greater disorder, the law of divine/human revelation means gathering in ever-greater order in a Call/response duet. Just as entropy begins with the Big Bang, so, too, does the inducing of order. Order begins on a cosmic scale reflecting divine initiative and devolves to biological and eventually to a conscious stage. The vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal epochs, as discussed in chapter four, reflect the divine intent of inducing order until ultimately reaching the level of self. At the level of self-experience, the divine/human agents become full collaborators in pushing back the chaos of entropy.

Seen in reverse, self-experience is defined as a gathering-together that has been in progress for billions of years and finally reaching the level of consciousness. Recall that a *conscious self*, by definition, is a gathering together of all/else that is not self. Self-experience is the ultimate expression of order drawn out of cosmic chaos. The Author of the cosmos begins gathering together the elements that eventually form the building blocks of life. Then divine Call draws together complex plant/animal organisms. Finally, divine calling together centers on the first human, who then collaborates with divine Call in creating increasingly complex social organizations, such as family, bands, tribes and nations. We are now at the stage when not just the divine but also the human self is being revealed. When and wherever order is induced countermanding the chaos of entropy, divine/human revelation is taking place.

Genesis is not about creating the world out of nothing but the inducing of order in chaos. Creating out of *nothing* is a later philosophical spin applied to Genesis. The author of Genesis had no concept of zero/nothing – a concept that likely originated in ancient India. Throughout Scripture divinity is portrayed as inducing a higher order - Adam is made from clay and Eve from a rib. The point of Genesis is to contrast the Initiator of order with darkness/chaos. Adam defies this contrast by eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge in order to be the initiator of order on his own in a world apart. In so doing he forgoes the role of responding partnership with divine Call in building Paradise. We do the same thing when we trash the environment in creating a world of our own.

Stand back and enjoy the show - gathering-together is the only show in town. Gathering together versus chaos is how we detect divine initiative – all unity is traceable back to divine origin as humans cannot initiate but only reflect unity. Gathering together has been ongoing for billions of years. Only in the past few billion years does unity/order rise to the biological and conscious level. Long before humans arrived, the evolving universe is forming and gathering together the elements making life possible. The evolving order from the very beginning is a response to Call.

Nature seems chaotic and wasteful; yet the coming together of the forces of nature has produced a splendid cornucopia of life forms. The same wasteful and chaotic forces seem to operate also on the cultural level, but, because it touches us more directly, we become more conscious of social discord and division rather than the cornucopia of cultural expression that emerge from human gathering together. Technology is shrinking the world and is so doing expands the self. Nations are increasingly interdependent and the self is emerging as a citizen of the world.

The growing consciousness of self is now the epicenter for reducing entropy and inducing harmony. The order that is evolving is revelatory because it is the direct initiative of the divine Self calling forth the human self – the human self defined as a unified conscious *response* - is the end product of the universe. (This is referred to as the *anthropic principle* in science literature.) All gathering together is miraculous because it requires direct involvement of divine Call to induce order into chaos/entropy. The human self induces order only as response to the order originating from divine Call. We induce order in a garden, but our garden merely reflects the divine order already reflected by nature. By responding to order we are entering the presence of divine Call. Since we are not tuned into such a relational perception of Reality, it is helpful to focus specifically on the divine gathering together manifested on four discernable levels, namely, the cosmic, biological, sociological and psychological dimensions.

Gathering Levels

Cosmic

The author of Genesis views Reality prior to the divine initiative as total chaos. Could they have known a basic law of physics long before modern physicists discovered it? Into this disorder divine Call induces order over a period of six days and rests on the seventh. The biblical author is pointing to the order in the cosmos as evidence of divine initiative/intention and notes that divine Call needs to rest after putting forth the effort. The author depicts divine Call as looking over all that had been wrought and seeing that it is good – the induced order reflects the character of the divine Agent – like a house shows the skill of the carpenter.

Due to scientific advances in astronomy, the imagery of forming the earth has changed, but the principle of revelation remains the same. Any gathering together inducing order reveals deliberate intent and, therefore, something about the intender. If the author of Genesis were writing today, the imagery would be quite different. Genesis would read something like: 'Entropy exploded as a Big Bang fifteen billion years ago. In the ensuing chaos, divine Call begins gathering together to form countless galaxies and, within each galaxy billions of stars that interact to form a variety of other celestial entities. In the super hot blast furnaces of exploding stars, divine Call induces simple molecules of matter to fuse and form complex molecules that become the mineral stuff of planets.' (The book to read: *The Bible According to Einstein*.) Whether we read an ancient or modern script regarding the origin of the universe, the single fact that remains is that cosmic gathering together is a deliberate and ongoing divine initiative pushing against the physical law of entropy. To say the same in reverse: entropy is a necessary environment for divine revelation – darkness is necessary before there can be light.

Biological

Divine initiative reaches a new plateau in the gathering together of the building blocks of life. Some four billion years ago, a remarkable transformation occurs in the gathering together of light, electron and mineral that opens the door to life on our planet. All life on earth comes from this original gathering together of light from the sun, lightening from the sky and minerals of the earth. The resulting breathtaking beauty and complexity of biological life is everywhere to behold and reveals new dimensions of the divine Self. Although we can never know Life directly, the plethora of life forms reflects the divine Initiator.

Biological life is an extension of cosmic order. (The book to read: *Vital Dust*, by Christian DeDuke.) The integration of cosmic forces to produce life has always been associated with the divine presence. In proto-religion, Life is the divine force behind Reality; in religion, Life is the enveloping presence of the divine Self. It is the divine presence that induces order whether among the stars or in gathering together light/electron/mineral to sustain life in increasing complexity. From the first bacterium, to the strange creatures that swam in ancient seas, to the awesome birds that filled the skies, to the great dinosaurs that roam the land, to the warm blooded mammals that rule the world today, the action of gathering together is still an unfolding response to divine initiative.

Sociological

The divine initiative of gathering together that brought forth the first bacterium produced also the first flash of intelligence. Consciousness/intelligence elevates the gathering together of light/electron/mineral to a new order of magnitude. Gathering together now enters the level of human consciousness. Beginning with the spark of intelligence, the dynamic of coming together rises dramatically from a biological to a sociological level. Consciousness of human association devolves beyond family to extended family→ band→ tribe→ kingdom→ state→ nation→ global association. When gathering together moves from a biological to a sociological level, the self-revelation of the divine Initiator and the human responder increases dramatically.

In the sociological arena, the focus of gathering together has been primarily on the tribe. Tracing the development of a tribal consciousness is the substance of the Old Testament. The picture created is clearly one of collaboration of two agents rather than a single divine Agent – the agents are depicted as a conscious divine Call and human response dichotomy. A highpoint of gathering together centers around king David, who occasions such unity that he becomes a transparent image of divine Call, thus shifting the innermost identity of Deity from Lawgiver to *Source* of unity. The deeper insight identifying gathering-together as the essence of Deity leads to the expectation of a coming messiah who would radiate such unity as to draw together all of humanity. Thus, a universal gathering together will be the unmistakable sign of authenticity of the true messiah and the nature of divinity will at last be transparent.

It is of this tradition that Christ speaks when he proclaims that he would draw all together when he is raised up (John 12:32). The chaos of Calvary is the darkness in the human heart that reflects cosmic entropy. Christ's response to divine Call is the light that breaks forth dispelling the darkness enveloping humanity. The legacy of Christ is that the entropy of reaction can be transformed into response; thereby allowing the divine initiative of cosmic gathering together to reach the world where *self* is formed. Each transformation of reaction to response bears witness to the messianic mission of Christ aimed at reducing the entropy separating the human self from the divine Self.

We tend to fragment gathering-together into isolated events, but gathering is seamless. Cosmic, biological and sociological gathering together is an integrated whole revealing divine Call. Intelligent life is not superimposed on this gathering, but represents a deeper level of divine initiative in gathering together – an initiative operative since time began. Adam, arising from the clay of the earth, is the fruit of a long comic and biological order revealing divine initiative. Christ simply takes the cosmic gathering together to the ultimate level, namely, that of *self*.

Psychological

Sociology explores gathering together *between* humans; psychology delves into a coming together at the core of *self*-experience. The emergence of the divine Self vis-à-vis the human self in a Call/response relation is the underlying ‘plot’ of the entire gathering-together drama. The Call/response relation, in defining the nature of the gathering together, increases in specificity from: a divine Neighbor-to-neighbor→ Self-to-self→ Spouse-to-spouse relation. At the neighbor-level, reduction of entropy means a reduction of the chaos at the core of *self* that keeps neighbor at arm’s length.

The New Testament picks up the tribal story of the Old at the self/neighbor level. Genesis starts with divine initiative inducing order into cosmic chaos/entropy and notes how Adam/Eve reintroduces entropy. The rest of the Old Testament chronicles divine initiative to restore order by incarnating as tribal bonding, thus reversing the social entropy induced by Adam/Eve. The New Testament shifts from tribal to espousal incarnation whereby the divine Self now induces order directly in the human self. The reduction of chaos shifts from reaction between tribal members to the *reaction* found in the core of self. Divine incarnation is the transformation of reaction into *response* that can happen only at a self-level. A self in total *response* incarnates the divine Self as Call, thereby reaching the summit of order when the human self mirrors the divine Self. Although science and technology are rapidly increasing the possibility of global consciousness, our human *self*-experience (versus self-image) often remains quite primitive. The human self emerges proportionate to the consciousness of the world as the manifestation of the divine Self. Purging the chaos of reaction allows the cosmic human-self to enter full partnership with the divine Self.

Mary is the first to recognize that self rather than tribe is the true epicenter of gathering together. She is the first to transit from tribal-member to neighbor-identity, thus enabling her to be in an espousal relation with the Self of the divine Neighbor. Her entering into communion with the divine Self is the ultimate fruition of the cosmic→ biological→ sociological→ psychological devolution. Mary is the archetypal expression of the Hebraic person – the vortex of cosmic Call/response communion. Mary gives birth to divine Call in history as the divine *Self* that far surpasses divine *functional* imaging such as Creator, the Almighty, Lord, Master, Father and similar tribal/philosophical imagery.

What occurs in the persona of Mary is made visible in Christ. Christ is the incarnation of the divine initiative of gathering together at a self-level. He weeps over Jerusalem, reflecting grief over unsuccessful effort to include all his people into his divine espousal response. The Last Supper is the pivotal event that gives insight into Christ as the communion of the divine and human self. On the day before he died, he gathers together a small group of ‘neighbors’, washes their feet to signify collapse of all social barriers, and defines the relation between them as equals: friend-to-friend, self-to-self. In fact, they are more than friends – they are his very flesh and blood. By giving his flesh for food and blood for drink, Christ defines his self-identity as a corporeal gathering together of all in one body as a communal response to Call.

Recall that Akhenaten visualized Reality as coalescing into a unified divine consciousness to form one divine Self. His view smacks of pantheism. Christ turns the spotlight to the other side of the equation beyond the purview of Akhenaten. Christ envisions the coalescing of Reality into one unified *human* consciousness to form a human self as the complement of the divine Self. *Self* is a *relation*, therefore, a positing of the divine *Self* necessarily implies the exact opposite in the form of a human *self* – like east is opposite west. Coalescence of a Chosen People is Christ’s cultural core and is context to his vision of coalescing all into a unified, chosen self.

The Last Supper clearly changes the arena of divine/human connection from *tribe* to *body*. Christ invites his disciples to become one body as remembrance of him - i.e., as the way to ‘re’-‘member’ him when he is torn to pieces. It is only in the context of *body* versus *tribe* that both the divine and human self can emerge. Bonding in the New Testament takes place only at the body level. When the disciples form one body through sharing Christ’s body as food/drink, they celebrate their entering into their own body that is also the body of the divine Self. The human body is the arena where the divine/human selves meet.

The coming together as one body is based on the logic that there can be but one human self. (See sidebar in chapter four: Platonic and Hebraic Person, and chapter two on the concept of *body* in: Self and Modern Science.) Christ, vis-à-vis the divine Self, becomes a communion-body concretized in the gathering of his ‘neighbors’. All are called to do likewise. The human race itself is the arena for the human self to encounter the divine Self, and *neighbor* is the concrete expression of the human race. The Passover Supper, having once defined the Hebraic tribe, now defines the Hebraic person. An increasing coalition of all into self to form one body is the true Passover and the very substance of communion with divine Call. Christ/humanity/universe form one body in response to the divine espousal Call. Obviously, this understanding is far beyond what Christ’s disciples are able to grasp at the time. Soon they scatter, first from boredom leading to sleep, and then from fear when betrayal/violence ends their pet dreams.

Gathering together of the self makes little sense in the atomized notion of self that is prevalent in the West. Consuming flesh/blood signifies entering a corporeal union, just as accepting the Ten Commandments signifies entering a tribal union. The body is the epicenter for the incorporation of humanity in developing both the divine and human self-experience. This Call/response relational concept of two selves is the classical definition of the Hebraic versus Platonic person. It is precisely in achieving this Hebraic identity, as a self that incorporates humanity, that Christ is connected to divine Call. Divine Self, as Call, already incorporates humanity; human self-experience is deficient until it encompasses humanity as response to loving Call. Consciousness of humanity/nature as the incarnate manifestation of divine Call actually produces response. Divine Call embodied in the world is one of Love that elicits response *in its very recognition*. We can only be conscious of Call, just as divine Call can only be conscious of response – the relation is dichotomous. To respond we must see Reality for what it truly is, namely, a marriage proposal by the divine Suitor.

*****SIDEBAR*****

BODY AS MODEL OF UNITY

It is hard not to relate the eating of the body of the son-king in The Bacchae to Christ four centuries later. While the body is the crux for modeling unity in both this Greek drama as well as in the drama of the Last Supper, it is impossible to determine the impact Greek culture had on Christ and the writers of the Gospel. The Bacchae seems to be a blending of religion, originated by Abraham, with Hellenistic philosophy. The followers of Christ were well aware of Greek culture. Certainly, many attended Greek dramas in as much as these plays were the major source of entertainment as well as means for spreading ideas. Hellenistic influence on the evangelists is evident in that they wrote in the Greek language for a Greek-speaking audience.

Actually, the far more ancient Hebrew culture may have been the influence that led to the writing of The Bacchae in the first place. When the evangelists write about eating/drinking the body/blood of Christ as sign of *bodily* unity, everyone would have readily understood the message – everyone except the devout Jew whose notion of unity is tribal rather than corporeal. Those fixated on tribal bonding among members can easily be blind to the deeper unity in a self-to-self bonding as one body.

While both The Bacchae and the Last Supper center on body to model unity, Christ provides important new understandings far beyond that found in Greek culture. Similarities can be found in: the gathering of a small group, the eating of flesh/blood as an act of communion, the dropping of masks/roles hiding the self, the recognition of self in and through the many, and the unmasking of the Deity in the same process of unmasking the self. Furthermore, the uniting of the dramatists via the eating of flesh creates a bonding with the audience, the people of Athens and all of humanity. These similarities provide a remarkable background for the drama orchestrated by Christ at the Last Supper, wherein he is both victim in the eating of his flesh/blood and victor in affecting a corporeal unity among many.

While the similarities are noteworthy, the dissimilarities are of the greatest importance. The one overriding difference is that The Bacchae idealizes unity as a *group* phenomenon that is conducive to uniformity; Christ perceives unity as centered in a communal *self* in a Call/response relation between the divine and human self. The Last Supper is not about the disciples forming a group, but a celebration of Christ’s own identity as a communal human-self gathering the disciples as his body in espousal response to the divine Self. The expansion of *self-experience* rather than the forming of a group is the true font of unity.

Euripides focuses on the bond itself *between* individuals as locus of divinity that leads to removal of the masks we wear or the roles we play. He recognizes the Deity as Source of unity, but he could not get beyond the Platonic concept of person, and, therefore, envisions divinity as bridging the gap *between* isolated individuals – analogous to the tribal bonding in the Old Testament. Greek mythology assumes Reality to be ontological and, consequently, the world has many individuals. In contrast, the legacy of the Hebrew people is a perception of Reality as a dichotomous *relation*, defined progressively through vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal epochs. Consequently, unity arises first as growing *tribal* consciousness and then as an expansion of tribal consciousness in *self*-experience, as demonstrated by Mary/Christ,

Another important difference between the group of actors in The Bacchae and the gathering at the Last Supper is what may be called the frenzy factor. In The Bacchae, the participants are caught up in something of a divine frenzy – frenzy not unlike that conjured up in some modern day dance and religious groups. The ancient Greeks were wont to engage in synergistic group dynamics of various sorts that often resulted in intense frenzy. The excitement leads to a narcissistic withdrawal from a consciousness of surroundings. This is in sharp contrast to the gathering at the Last Supper where the sharing is quiet, intense and at a very deep level of self-experience in the face of death. The Hebraic perception of person, introduced by Mary/Christ, leads to *intense awareness of surroundings* as the very means of responding to the divine, loving Call. The surrounding social/physical reality rather than narcissistic withdrawal induced by group frenzy is the proper arena for increasing a sense of self-experience. The intimate exchange between Christ and his friends reflects the divine/human exchange occurring at the core of Christ's own persona.

The words Euripides places in the mouth of the boy-king as he morphs from victim to sacrificial victor are that they (victimizers) know not what they do. But, in spite of their crime, they are redeemed and brought into the presence of each other and behold the face of Dionysus. In such a drama, staged four hundred years before Christ, it is easy to see the shadow of Calvary and the Christian concept of redemption. But, striking as the similarity may be, what is missing in The Bacchae is an extremely important detail that gives motive to the last words. The words, “they know not what they do” are placed in the mouth of the crucified Christ but, unlike the Greek drama, these words are prefaced with “forgive them” as they know not what they do.

Forgiveness is an utterly new concept being introduced by Christ. Forgiving is the turning of reaction into response and is the only way to find self as the beloved of divine Call and affect communion. Thus, forgiving is key to the redemptive gathering of all humanity. It reflects a deeply psychological struggle directly related to an emerging self-experience. Hitherto, the law governing social relations was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. In other words, *reaction* to an offence must not exceed the original injury. Equivalence between reaction and harm suffered was a giant step forward in social evolution over the then prevailing practice that sometimes led to not only gauging out the offenders eye but also killing the aggressor and his family and burning down his house. A gratuitous forgiving is a radically new concept in that it is a direct consequence of struggling for self-identity. By forgiving, the human self emerges as a reflection of the divine Self, making possible not only an espousal union between the two selves but also communion with humanity/universe. The eye-for-eye law seeks to preserve simply tribal not espousal unity.

Only in the context of the Call/response relation forming the Hebraic person does the notion of forgiveness make sense. Failure to forgive destroys the self by changing self-identity from *response* to *reaction* toward the offender. Reaction is like a cancer that destroys a sense of self. Response, in contrast, preserves self-identity with humanity/universe and in so doing gains a freedom directly from divine Call. The essence of Christ's redemption is in freeing himself from reaction to those around him – ‘who do not know what they do’. Forgiveness is his lifeline to freedom, and at the same time opens the door for the divine initiative to reduce social entropy by affecting a gathering together into self; response to Call always gathers, while reaction always scatters. Those resisting forgiveness born of Love go deeper into reaction. Forgiving mediates divine Self-presence. Christ is the archetypical mediator in that he points to forgiveness as key for finding both the divine and human self. Henceforth, forgiving is *self*-survival for all whenever faced with reactionary victimizers who know not what they do.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Communion Persona

The divine cosmic→ biological→ sociological→ psychological initiative of gathering together culminates in the communion persona. The communion persona is the unique contribution biblical history makes to the world. As Chosen People is the product of the Old Testament, communion persona is the product of the New. Communion persona means that the divine tribal presence morphs into a divine espousal presence and the human self emerges by responding as the only beloved. The vortex of gathering together now centers on self-experience.

While unity/communion is the thread that runs throughout the Bible, what changes is the increasing depth of unity. Of all the paradigm shifts in defining unity the greatest is from *tribe* to *self*. Coming together changes from *between* tribal members to a drawing together as a persona - from the forming of the Chosen People to the forming of the Chosen Persona. Thus, the final frontier of the divine/human relation (religion) centers on the communion persona – a coming together of the divine/human selves.

The coming together as a communion persona shifts the spotlight from tribal *law* to *emotions* – *self* arises from the ordering of emotions, as *tribe* from the observance of law. Communion persona is in sharp contrast to the isolate, Platonic persona - idolized in the West - that views emotion as weakness. Euripides, in *The Bacchae*, struggles to understand emotions but finds them to be uncontrolled frenzy. The actors achieve oneness by reducing a sense of a distinct self in the *blending* of actors and audience together in a frenzied emotional experience. It is much more challenging, however, to preserve a distinct but inclusive self based on an experience of finely tuned emotions. Faith, i.e., relational intelligence is also emotional intelligence. Self-identity is an expanding *response* to Call *concretized* in and through human emotions. When self-experience expands to envelop the full range of emotions in response to Love, the human self enters intercourse with the divine Self. Observing tribal Law is divine presence in tribal religion; refined emotional life is divine presence in espousal religion.

Note: Recall from the discussion in the first chapter that the irreversible order of human response is: sensory experience→ emotion→ intellectual processing →image production. Self-experience arises at the emotion level and, therefore, precedes intellectual processing and forming of a self-image. Emotions represent the initial blending of sensory stimuli upon which and through which intellect/imaging works to craft a unified and distinct psyche. Since sensory stimuli spark emotions, the more intense the exposure to *Reality/Life*, the more intense the emotion. For example, the reproductive drive is closely associated with Life, accordingly more intense emotions are stimulated. The more sensory stimuli are transformed into *image*, the less intense the emotion - as in a military culture wherein conformity to a rigid military image is key and emotions only hamper performance.

Biblical history is an account of an expanding depth of human experience with corresponding shifting of divine Call-imaging to reflect human experience. While gathering together is the theme, the Bible peels back human experience like layers of an onion to expose finally the world of emotion. Divine imaging, reflecting this probing as the *identity* of Call, devolves from Life→ Law→ Love - concomitant with ever-deeper expansion of the human-self *experience* centered on life → law→ love. The Bible begins with Abraham's preoccupation with Life, moves on to human gathering together through the tribal Law of Moses, and ends with the combining of Life/Law in the espousal Love experience of Mary/Christ. Thus, the divine Call of Life→ Law→ Love becomes a progressively deeper human vital→ tribal→ espousal response; espousal response entails a delving into the world of emotions.

What separates the Bible from all other literature is the vision of a gradual divine *incarnation* in the world of human experience. In ancient times the experience of *life* concretizes the presence of Deity; *tribal* life later on simply further concretizes divine presence; tribal life eventual morphs into the human experience of love as the most concrete expression of divine presence. The final conclusion of the Bible is simply: divine Call is Love. Thus human love found anywhere manifests divine presence in some measure. The intensification of the divine *presence* in human history as Life→ Law→ Love - all basic to human experience - is the core message of the Bible.

Divine *presence* means a progressive divine Self-giving via Life→ Law→ Love that entices a human self to emerge as a self-giving via vital→ tribal→ espousal response. Just as the Chosen People gathered together through tribal Law, the human self comes together under the influence of Love. When human response reaches the espousal stage, the divine/human selves form a communion (Hebraic) persona as in a marriage.

Defining Love as *divine presence* means that Love is *not* an *emotion* any more than Life or Law is an emotion. Life→ Law → Love is the historic progression of divine incarnate presence. Love is not an emotion, but is the *cause* of human emotions. Where, formerly, the enshrining of the Law formed the Holy of Holies, Love, wherever found, forms the new Holy of Holies – human love found anywhere is the sacred ground defining divine presence. Just as divine presence as *Life* reduces entropy by inducing biological life, and just as divine presence as *tribal Law* reduces entropy in the social arena, so, too, divine presence as *Love* reduces the entropy of swirling emotions in self-experience.

A communion persona emerges through delving into emotions triggered by the presence of Love in order to touch divine Reality beyond emotions. Recall that there are three avenues of knowledge, namely, five/senses, emotion and intellect. We are inclined to forget emotion as a valid insight into Reality. The Western mind, boxed into a reified view of Reality, is prone to consider love as just one of the human emotions and to view emotions generally as hindrance to clear thinking. Biblical history ends with the startling conclusion that the experience of human love is an incarnate experience of divinity. While Love triggers the emotions, the experience of Love ends emotional entropy/chaos precisely because Love also induces *order* to the emotions. Love impacts upon the chaos of human emotions precisely to create order out of which human self can emerge, just as a divine Chief impacted on the Hebrews to create order so that a Chosen People could emerge. An ordering of emotions in a hierarchical response to Love is key to healing self and, by extension, social chaos.

Initiating-Love is the divine Self-identity just as response is the human self-identity. This means a human cannot love but can only *respond* to or reflect Love, as in a mirror. Even though we speak loosely as loving somebody/something, in effect we are responding to a concrete *reflection* of Love in somebody/something – the human self cannot step outside a *responding* identity in a Call/response dichotomous view of Reality. Recognizing a Call/response dichotomy is the crucial difference between the Western Platonic and Eastern Hebraic perception of Reality.

Love, no matter how distorted by cultures and ideologies, is the subtle influence of divine presence relentlessly calling forth the human self. In the tribal imagery of the Old Testament, devout Jews fixed to their forehead a small scroll containing the Law. For them, tribal Law is the actual presence of the divine Chief. The New Testament goes beyond the surface manifestations of Life and Law and finds concealed in every atom of the universe the presence of Love calling forth a human self – the divine presence residing not on the forehead but in the very perception of self.

Love, while itself not an emotion, triggers not only the whole range of human emotions but also human consciousness as a self. Self, by definition, is unified consciousness. Exposure to Love not only manifests the presence of the divine Self but also induces a response from which human unified consciousness as a self emerges vis-à-vis the divine Self. Thus the divine consciousness inherent in Call nurtures the consciousness of the human counterpart. In the presence of Love/Call, a human self can emerge only as response and can expand in consciousness only as response. The human self can emerge as response because the universe itself embody an unconscious response to Call/Love and implicitly reveal the Self of the divine Initiator. Plant, animal and human life reflect a response to Love with the difference being in the depth of *unified conscious* response. Thus Love drives the human expansion of consciousness.

Human consciousness expands through the full range of emotions, with *emotion* defined as: *response in varying degrees to Love*. What we perceive as different emotions is actually varying degrees of *response* to Love. As noted above, emotions reflect a closer contact with Reality than imagery created through mental digestion of sensory/emotional experience. We tend to image emotions as separate entities and overlook emotion as a seamless response to Reality inherent in self-experience.

A communion persona emerges by bringing the full range of emotions into a hierarchal order that accurately reflect Love. Love reduces entropy by inducing an order to emotions – an ordering that ranges from the lowest to the most intense response. A hierarchical ordering of emotion under the influence of Love from the lowest to highest is: fear→ guilt→ despair→ shame→ sadness→ envy→ hate→ bitterness→ anger→ empathy→ admiration→ hope→ faith→ excitement→ gratitude→ peace→ joy→ ecstasy. Without the influence of Love, self-experience is simply a chaotic blend of emotions. The proper ordering of emotions is called *relational* intelligence (RQ) versus *rational* intelligence (IQ). Awareness of how Love orchestrates a hierarchy in the realm of emotions is called *relational knowledge*. (See Recapitulation in chapter four.) Relational intelligence/knowledge is simply called *faith*, as apposed to rational intelligence/knowledge.

A communion persona is an ordering of emotions around Love like iron filings around a magnet. Or, as another analogy, think of the emotions as notes on a music scale. Notes need to range from low to high in order to create music, so, too, each of the emotions express response to Love in a lesser or greater degree and make for a richness of response. If emotional life is restricted to anger as the only note on a scale, response to the presence of Love is extremely restricted and no melody is possible. But, anger has a role to play. Anger arising from injustice enhances the presence of Love. Emotions are the music and Love the verse.

Love requires disciplined response. Love is analogous to the conductor of an orchestra. A conductor creates music by bringing all the musical instruments into one harmony. Likewise, Love brings all the emotions into harmony to reflect the richness of Love. Emotions give us a self-identity and make our life worth living, but they become reactionary and destructive when disconnected from Love. Emotions without the influence of Love become as irritating sounds without meaning. ‘Spiritual’ life in espousal religion means proper emotional development to reflect Love/Call.

Fear is the farthest removed from Love in the hierarchy of emotions and, therefore, is valuable as a barometer of ‘spiritual’ life – in the biblical rather than Platonic sense. Fear produces paralysis; Love produces exhilaration – the heart physically shrinks with fear and expands with Love. Fear, rooted in the deepest instincts to survive, is not evil but a gift when it alerts a living organism to danger. (The book to read: *The Gift of Fear*, by Gaven DeBecker.) However, when fear is elevated above other emotions in the hierarchy, it induces a cancerous disorder (entropy) in a communion persona. The more fear overpowers other emotions, the more it becomes antithetical to Love. Terrorism takes advantage of the volatility of fear. Love drives out fear. When fear reigns, Love will not be found and visa versa - there is an inverse proportionality between them. Thus, the emotion of fear is a perfect gage measuring the depth of an espousal relation – whether between human spouses or the divine and human selves.

Fear, because it is an emotion farthest removed from Love, plays another critical role beyond instinctive warning of danger. All the emotions can shift downward except fear - for example, anger can sink to bitterness and bitterness to hate and hate to envy and so on. Fear is a bottom feeder akin to the paralysis of death. Reactionary fear turns into an obsessive phobia that can dominate the whole persona. A phobia is imagery gone amuck totally disconnected from any underlying reality.

Love and fear are so completely opposites that they touch on the very identities of the divine and human self respectively; both Love and fear have a life of their own. Love is the experience most reflective of the divine Self, as Call, and fear is the experience most reflective of the human self, as response. The inherent exclusivity of Love/fear is key to *experiencing* Reality as a dichotomous relation. In this relation we surrender the self of primal fear in exchange for the surrender of the divine Self as Love – what a bargain! Fear and Love cannot coexist.

It took thousands of years to discern that Love is the presence of divinity. The insight into Love parallels the recognition that fear is the unique contribution that only a human self can make and, therefore, is the foundation for a human identity. *Fear* is the experiential side of *response*. It is precisely because we instinctively respond to Life/Love that fear emerges in our consciousness – the experience of life brings with it a fear of losing it. Love does not drive out fear so much as illuminates fear as the key experience from which is derived the true identity of the human self: as *response*. Fear, therefore, is an emotion that is distinctly our own and provides insight into our identity as responder. Debilitating fear makes dialogue possible because it is the only thing we can bring to the table that divine Call cannot.

Fear can choke off the full range of emotions and even life itself. Transitioning from fear to an identity of response requires deliberate and persistent human choice. Habitually seeking out and responding to the presence of Love induces a hierarchy of emotions ranging, as mentioned, from fear→ guilt→ despair→ shame→ sadness→ envy→ hate→ bitterness→ anger→ empathy→ admiration→ hope→ faith→ excitement→ gratitude→ peace→ joy→ ecstasy. To know self is to become cognizant of the transforming influence of Love ordering all of the emotions. Love gives meaning to emotions and emotions display the richness of Love. Love is the divine initiative inducing order to emotional chaos in order for the self to emerge as the beloved spouse. The warmth of Love melts fear into response, leading into a world of emotions reflective of the divine Lover. Emotions turn into *reaction* when they get out of order. While each emotion has a role to play, emotions together light up Love like bulbs on a Christmas tree. It is in the ordering and balancing of emotions that makes Love visible.

A communion persona does not *manage* emotions, but simply responds to Love - it is Love that orders emotions and ordered emotions is the hallmark of divine presence. The love between spouses or for a child/friend is not an emotional attachment to be managed, but an experience of the presence of divine Call to be appreciated. Love is the initiative of Call inducing Life. Even the emotion of hate can be a useful response, though at a very crude and minimal level. Fear is far more antithetical to Love than hate. Unlike fear, hate can be a powerful reaction that can be transformed into an intense response. The conversion of St. Paul is a classic example. Thus it is better to hate than to fear – fear leads to paralysis while hate is speeding in the wrong direction – a momentum that can be redirected. Hate is tempered by bitterness and bitterness by anger and anger by empathy and so forth. Emotions are not to be suppressed but orchestrated by Love.

Communion Persona as Neighbor/Sacrament

Sacrament means a *sacred presence*. *Neighbor* is the incarnate form of both the divine and human self. Thus, *neighbor* is also the incarnate expression of a communion persona. In neighbor, the depth of divine/human presence goes beyond tribal to the level of self. A communion persona, incarnating as neighbor, means the *sacred presence* of both the divine and human selves. This sacrament is the summit of divine/human presence and the source of life for the human self and thence for the entire human race. Just as the Chosen People is a tribal sacrament affecting the presence of the divine Chief, so a communion persona is a neighbor-sacrament affecting the presence of the divine Self.

Recall that espousal religion is based solely on Neighbor-to-neighbor relation. All other relations are tribal - taking multiples forms based on ideology, politics, family, ethnicity, economics and the like. Neighbor-to-neighbor is the sole basis of espousal religion because *neighbor* puts the spotlight on *self* rather than on a functional (tribal) relation. A communion persona, as a neighbor-sacrament, means the immediate presence of both the divine/human selves with a relation of proximity not of identity – the two selves do not fuse. The divine *Self* vis-à-vis the human *self* - in a concretized form of neighbor - is the tenth stage of devolutionary psychology that frames the New Testament. In the Old Testament, i.e., the ninth stage of *self/other-selves*, divinity is distant; in the New, divinity is as close as self/neighbor.

Communion Persona as Neighborhood/Sacrament

Neighbor cannot be separated from *neighborhood* because the incarnation of communion persona, as neighbor, means presence in time and place. Just as neighbor is the sacrament (sacred presence) of the communion persona, so, also, is neighborhood the sacrament of neighbor by extension. Becoming a neighbor cannot be isolated from neighborhood. Neighbor/neighborhood insures the incarnate nature of religion, thus keeping it from degenerating into ideology. A Chosen People without a Holy Land would soon become fantasy; a communion persona without a neighborhood would share the same fate. The divine/human self is not an abstraction but incarnates as neighbor/neighborhood in the tangible world. As a result, the neighborhood itself by extension becomes a sacrament of the communion persona – a place of sacred presence of both the divine/human self.

It is hard to visualize *neighborhood* as a sacrament of divine/human presence. Recall that matter/flesh is not a hindrance but the manifestation of divine Call (see sidebar in chapter four: Platonic Versus Hebraic Person). The material world/neighborhood is the ‘gestational womb’ for developing the response identity of the communion persona inherent in a Call/response dichotomy. Religion morphs into ideology/philosophy when separated from a specific, concrete neighborhood. Unless incarnate in an actual neighborhood, communion persona is simply a mental exercise. Just as living under the same roof keeps a marriage from drifting off into fantasyland, so, too, a neighborhood keeps response as communion persona from being a baseless self-delusion. A neighborhood incarnates the divine Call and sets the conditions for an authentic response as communion persona. Every neighborhood, accordingly, is a sacred place for divine/human encounter. Since neighborhood is the arena for developing communion persona, just as the Holy Land is the arena for developing a chosen tribal identity, all *non-neighborhood* based gatherings/endeavors are, in varying degree, ideological or purely functional in nature.

Communion Persona as Neighborhood-Communion/Sacrament

Communion persona incarnates not only as neighborhood but also as the coalescence of immediate ‘neighbors’ to form one’s body. Christ’s body is not the reified body of Western culture, but the body he deliberately formed by coalescing into himself twelve specific ‘neighbors’ with names and differences, even though some are responsive and some not. Communion persona, as neighborhood communion, means recognizing that one’s true body incorporates immediate ‘neighbors’, with names and differences, though some are responsive and some not. Communion persona has to be incarnate specifically as both *neighborhood* (physical dimension) and *neighborhood communion* (social dimension) or be dismissed as ideology or fantasy.

Perceiving immediate ‘neighbors’ as one’s own body fulfills the essential *incarnate* nature of religion, thus avoiding the pitfall of reducing religion to philosophy or moral precepts. The Old Testament centers on the forming of one *tribe*, the New around forming one *body*. A communion persona, when perceived as a coalition of specific ‘neighbors’ to form one’s body, is a neighborhood communion, and as such is the primary sacrament of divine presence among ‘neighbors’ and in the world. Christ exposes his twelve ‘neighbors’ to divinity precisely because he identifies them as his own body. His legacy is that in so doing one not only comes face-to-face with the divine Neighbor but also exposes divinity to ‘neighbors’ as they coalesce to form one’s own body.

Idealizing or generalizing *neighbor* to include all of humanity is a good mental exercise, but it is not religion. Religion to be religion must be in-fleshed. Christ had to extend the perception of his body into a communal body of twelve ‘neighbors’ in order to recognize his true identity because *body* is critical in forming *self*-identity. When specific neighbors become one’s communal body, a true awareness of self as *response* to divine *Call* becomes possible. Neighborhood communion, i.e., the coalescence of specific and immediate ‘neighbors’ to form one’s body, means the response to Call embodied in and through the ‘neighbors’ is one’s own response. Just as the divine Call of Israel is in the context of tribe, Christ’s divine Call is in the *context* of twelve ‘neighbors’. In that context he makes the response embedded in the twelve his own. *Corporeal* inclusion is the essence of redemption/freedom, just like Moses by forming a *tribe* brought redemption/freedom to the Israelites. Corporeal oneness (versus tribal oneness) means the *response*, or lack thereof, embedded in ‘neighbors’ is one’s own. The human self, emerging as *communal body*, is the *Way* of responding to the divine espousal Call.

The ontological bias of the West makes the notion of neighborhood communion derived from the relational culture of the East difficult to comprehend. Long ago, Plato convinced us that we are prisoners of our skin and happiness comes only when we escape from our body. In contrast, Christ becomes more fully embodied by incorporating 'neighbors' as his real body. In so doing he finds his identity as the only beloved of divine Call. The incarnation of divinity has now gone beyond the tribal to the bodily arena. To find the divine Self we must become more body - more in-fleshed - and not less. Perceiving the immediate 'neighbors' as one's body, thereby inaugurating a neighborhood communion is a necessary first step to the eventual inclusion of all 'neighbors'. 'Neighbors' are not obstacles but reflect the presence of divine Call.

Neighbor/Gathering as the Fruit of Neighborhood Communion

Neighborhood communion means that the immediate 'neighbors' form one's true body. Recall that, in a relational versus reified view of Reality, there can be only two neighbors: the divine Neighbor, incarnate as Call, as distinct from the self of the human neighbor, incarnate as response. Subsuming immediate 'neighbors' into one's own body exposes 'neighbors' to the sanctifying graciousness of the divine Neighbor. The divine Self thereby incarnates as Neighbor exerting influence in a neighborhood. Evidence of divine presence is the actual drawing together of 'neighbors'. Likewise, a neighbor/gathering is evidence of the presence of the human self operatively present as neighborhood communion.

A gathering triggers the mutual revelation of both the divine and human selves. Coalescing of 'neighbors' to form one's true body allows the divine Self to exert a corporeal versus tribal unity among 'neighbors'. Recall that divine Call is the *sole* source of unity – we can *only respond* to the divine initiative. Unity follows precisely because divine and human selves occupy the same body – incarnated now to include 'neighbors'. You will know the divine/human presence by its fruits of neighbor/gathering – a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. Neighborhood communion allows the divine Self jointly with the human self to reverse the entropy of deep freeze or scattering prevalent in neighborhoods.

Dialogue is the lifeblood of a communal body. Perception of one's body as a coalescence of very diverse 'neighbors' is a formidable challenge. Dialogue is the lifeblood for transforming immediate 'neighbors' into the 'substance' of one's own body. 'Neighbors', at best, are indifferent and, at worst, hostile. Neighbor/gathering is the workshop for developing self as a conscious *response* and in so doing reveals the divine Self as *Call*. *Response* requires the unlearning of *reaction*, including the passive aggression of indifference. The struggle centers more on developing *emotions* to include 'neighbors' as one's body than in finding new *ideas*. Emotions rather than ideas are key in fostering corporeal union with 'neighbor', and 'neighbor' is context for finding the divine espousal relation.

A neighbor/gathering is simply the visible manifestation of the unseen communion persona growing in awareness of the divine Neighbor/Spouse. 'Neighbors' and neighborhood form the incarnate context of a sacred dialogue between the divine and human self. Dialogue increases awareness of self, as neighbor, and leads to a greater awareness of partnership with the divine Neighbor. Every neighborhood has some minimal level of dialogue – at least at a visual level. A communion persona is a neighborhood communion among 'neighbors' that functions as a sacrament embedded in a neighborhood inviting 'neighbors' to deeper communion – like yeast in dough.

Hebraic person, communion persona, neighbor, neighborhood and neighborhood communion are all the same, only looked at from different perspectives. A Hebraic communion persona is progressively incarnate first as neighbor, then in time and place as neighborhood, and, at a social level, as neighborhood communion – each representing different dimensions of sacred presence, as explained above. Communion persona, as neighborhood communion, becomes visible in the actual drawing together of 'neighbors' in a specific neighborhood. The neighborhood communion is the root, while the gathering of 'neighbors' is the stem/leaf/blossom that breaks the surface. The actual gathering is the 'institutional' expression of the communion persona.

When communion persona through its social dimension as a neighborhood communion leads to the actual gathering of 'neighbors', an important line has been crossed. Neighborhood communion – the hidden dialogue between the divine/human self – becomes visible as a social institution in a world of institutions and as such is the cornerstone of social order. Neighbor/gathering, as a social institution, forms a vortex of unity in a neighborhood by visibly reflecting the presence of the divine Neighbor. The neighbor/gathering makes it possible for the divine Neighbor to introduce order by reversing social entropy/chaos. The visibility of the divine Neighbor increases as a growing unity. Neighbor/gathering amplifies the divine Self-to-self, Neighbor-to-neighbor relation by raising the communion to a visible/institutional level.

A neighbor/gathering, as a social institution, is an extension of the communion persona – *never visa versa*. A neighbor/gathering simply reveals the prior presence of a communion persona/neighborhood communion. A neighborhood communion is analogous to marriage. Just as loving dialogue in marriage enriches the social environment, so divine/human dialogue in a communion persona/neighborhood communion enriches a neighbor/gathering. A neighbor/gathering goes beyond marriage in that its sole purpose is to unveil Love as the identity of the divine Self.

The importance of neighbor/gathering as a social institution to give visibility to *self* cannot be exaggerated. All other social institutions are functional gatherings, aimed at promoting a specific ideology, project or cause. Keep in mind that a social institution aimed solely at self-revelation devolved over thousands of years, having transit through specific stages of gathering together: the *vital* stage of gathering-together, exemplified in Abraham preserving his life through listening rather than through manipulative sacrifice, the *tribal* stage in which the enslaved Hebrews form sacred tribal bonds, and the *espousal* stage in which the divine and human selves come together as one body – the ultimate coming together. In each stage the divine presence becomes increasingly visible as a *social reality*. In the Old Testament, the social reality is the cessation of human sacrifice, and the forming of *tribal bonds* to incarnate a divine Chief; in the New, the social reality is a *neighbor/gathering* to incarnate both the divine and human self.

*****SIDEBAR*****

MACRO VERSUS MICRO WORLDVIEW

A neighbor/gathering (the *institutional* form of communion persona/neighborhood communion) is a micro insight into society. A neighbor/gathering is to the macro world what a cell is to the body, or as genotype is to phenotype. Just as the life and health of the whole body depends on that of the cell, the life and health of the body politic ultimately stems from neighbor/gathering. To use another analogy: as the smallest particle determines the structure of the entire universe, so neighbor gathering determines the ‘structure’ of the entire human race. In a macro view, we image society as a pyramid with power and prestige concentrated at the top; in a micro view, the pyramid is inverted so that the whole body politic is simply an extension of the cellular neighbor/gathering component.

A micro world transforms a pyramidal/military world centered on *power* to one centered on *influence* as a distinguishing dynamic. *Power* drives social institutions familiar to us such as government, business and academia, while *influence* simply nurtures relationship in the micro world. A communion persona breaks surface as a neighbor/gathering by surrendering *power* to gain *influence* – analogous to a parent yielding power to gain influence with a growing child. Gain of influence is inversely related to the surrender of power. Power fosters reaction, fear and subservience; influence nurtures responsiveness, love and listening. Craving power brings greater distance; craving influence brings greater presence.

Christ, the first communion persona/neighborhood communion, forms a social institution in the micro world by drawing together twelve ‘neighbors’ relying totally on influence. By shunning all vestige of power and relying on influence, he provides the first glimpse into a micro world. *Influence* is equivalent to the biblical word *kingdom*, i.e., *divine Call*. The word *kingdom* is placed in the mouth of Jesus 99 times in the Synoptic Gospels. It is obvious that Christ is making a sharp contrast between the macro world of power and the micro world of influence. He strives to give insight into the micro world of influence through his many parables and analogies.

Kingdom/influence, replacing the traditional tribal-*power* images, goes to the core of his legacy. Healing *influence* that includes foreigners, sinners, the poor and the sick – in short, the neighbor - replaces power that leads to fear, control and exclusiveness. The micro world of influence is beautifully illustrated in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11). This allegory depicts divine Call as inconsolably distraught over a wayward son and frantically *running* to embrace the returning son when spied in the distance. The story is not about human failings, but is an insight into divine governance as influence versus raw power. The story reflects the longsuffering nature of divine Call’s initiative toward the unresponsive. Who rules by the power of the sword (political, intellectual, spiritual, economic or military) will also be subject to the law of the sword. Influence is the beginning of a new world vision. Seen through micro eyes: power is an illusion of the powerless and a delusion of the powerful – absolute power leads to absolute delusion. The only *human* ‘power’ is influence.

Influence incarnates as *gentleness* - increasing gentleness is influence manifesting divine presence as Love. Christianity, as a *religion* (versus *ideology*), exists only in the micro world of influence where the human and divine selves meet. Military imagery applied to Christianity is an oxymoron. Gentleness is the hallmark of influence. It is only through gentleness that the divine Self coaxes response.

Entering the micro world of influence requires a radical shift in our perception of Deity. Deity imaging in the macro level of tribe or philosophy centers on power. In tribal imagery, Deity is: Creator, Father, Lawgiver and Judge; and in philosophical imagery: the Supreme Being, Who is omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, omnipresent and supernatural. The micro world, in contrast, uses influence related images such as: divine Call, Communion Persona, Neighbor, Suitor and Love. Power gives substance to a macro world, just as influence does to the micro. In the micro world, divinity is the epitome of weakness. Deity imaging in a macro world inspires awe and submission; in a micro world, divinity imaging as the quintessence of weakness inspires gentleness and listening whereby the human self emerges.

Chosen, as in Chosen People or Chosen Person, implies the divine surrender of power. *Chosen* is not like choosing a favorite dish or chair, but implies the actual gift of the divine Self to the beloved that then becomes the defining core of what constitutes the chosen human tribe/self. Thus the surrounding world is the incarnate evidence of the divine gift of Self and concomitant surrender of power. The very response as the beloved entails the reciprocal gift of the human self that also implies surrender of power – as in a marriage. Mary is the archetype of the mutual surrender at the core of the micro world hidden from the eyes of the macro world.

We are free to select a tribal, philosophical or espousal imaging of divinity. The selection, whether done consciously or unconsciously, takes on an independent life and transforms the image-maker. (See chapter one on the *power of imaging*.) For the past two millennia, humans have applied every conceivable power-related image to the Deity - often reflecting more the agenda of the image-maker than accurate reflection of Reality. We are still at the dawn of seeking divinity in a micro world where our notion of *power* has no meaning and self, as responsibility, fills the vacuum. The Hebrews have struggled over four thousand years with the identity of Chosen People; two thousand years have lapsed since Mary/Christ introduced the micro world of Chosen Person/self; we are still at the threshold of this new world. We get a glimpse of the contest of influence versus raw power in the civil rights movement of the 60s.

A neighbor/gathering is the concrete extension of the communion persona in time and place in the macro world. A neighbor/gathering is gentleness entering a macro world grabbing for power. The communion persona, at the core of neighbor/gathering, foregoes power not with a secret hope for divine vengeance upon power abusers, but as the only way to know the presence of divine Call, as gentleness. When Christ is about to expire on the cross, bystanders rush to his assistance. Others interfere, protesting that if he is the beloved of Call, let divine Call demonstrate power by coming to his assistance. Immediately, Christ draws his last breath and dies. His death is the death of divine power imaging. Death itself symbolizes the surrender of power. Calvary is the death of the divine/human selves to a world drunk with power. Calvary exposes the weakness of power and the 'power' of weakness.

Enigmatically, the very surrender of power becomes the source of influence – like a powerful vacuum that draws all to itself. Influence and not power is the all-pervasive energy flowing from the micro to the macro world. Influence comes directly from the relentless initiative of the divine Suitor; power arises from fear leading to a compulsion to dominate. Power relentlessly lords it over subjects; influence is dialogue between equals. Where application of power is often sporadic and superficial, application of influence is continuous and pervasive. The neighbor/gathering is the incarnation of divine Call that, like yeast in dough, will eventually raise the human race above the rule of tooth and claw.

Power is intoxicating and blinding to those addicted to it. As the rising sun dissipates fog, so is the coming kingdom/influence of divine Call dissipating the illusion derived from power. Influence increases as power over our neighbor decreases. Shifting from reliance on power to influence requires growth in relational intelligence/knowledge. Christ admonishes that those who save their life (as power) will lose it and those who lose their life (as power) will save it (Luke 9:24). Christ surrenders power on Calvary and gains life/influence that spans the centuries.

By surrendering power, Christ takes gathering together to a radically new depth – that of an encounter between the human and divine self concretely reflected in and through a neighbor/gathering. The neighbor/gathering - the most profound social institution ever achieved in cultural history - is an unexplored world of gentleness that is more a Way of life than an institution. A neighbor/gathering is the ongoing presence of the divine Neighbor in history.

The neighbor/gathering heals both biologically and socially. Expressed in a comprehensive view: gathering together seamlessly extends through the vital dust of the stars, through the biological juncture of light/electron/mineral, through the emergence of human consciousness, through a communion persona and, finally, as a neighbor/gathering. The divine/human self that forms the communion persona is now the template for ordering the entire universe. The gathering-together at the level of self is the final stage of the divine Call that began billions of years ago. As it is written: "Before the mountains with their huge bulk had been established, or rivers confined to their banks, or the heavens made, I called you. All I ask of you is to walk humbly with your Call" (Micheas 6:6).

Self means *presence*, there is no such thing as a *functional* self – a human self is simply conscious *response* to the call of the divine Self. The macro world produces self-images; the micro produces self-experience. Entering into the micro world of neighbor/gathering means grappling with the notion of self as *communal presence* rather than as an object or function. Self-experience goes beyond gender, parent, teacher, computer programmer and the like. Self-experience is the source of an infinite number of self-*images*, but first and foremost, self is a communion inseparable from the divine *other* Self.

The human self, as a relation, is as infinite as the divine Self. The juncture of the divine/human selves is a communion persona made visible through neighbor/gathering that manifests divine presence as Love - like a tree bearing good fruit. When self-image dominates over self-experience, the tree will bear only bad fruit. A communion persona reflects the Self of divine Call, thus acting as a magnet drawing all. Christ highlights the difference between influence/power declaring that who does not gather (via influence), scatters (via power) – he mentions no middle ground (Matt 12:30).

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Neighbor/Gathering in a Historical Perspective

Hebraic person→ communion persona→ neighbor→ neighborhood→ neighborhood communion→ neighbor/gathering (church) defines the micro world from its invisible beginnings as Hebraic Person to its visible expression as institution in neighbor/gathering. The neighbor/gathering is as much a social institution as the chosen Hebraic tribe. *Marriage* rather than *tribe* is a better template for neighbor/gathering because marriage focuses on self rather than tribal membership. Marriage obviously is a social institution, but it is also a tangible sign of the unseen espousal union between the divine/human self. Neighbor/gathering amplifies the visibility of the espousal relation between the human/divine self found in marriage. The point is that a neighbor/gathering is the final in a long history of social institutions aimed at incarnating divine presence. Without some visible expression of divine presence the incarnate character essential for religion to be religion would be missing, in such a case 'religion' simply morphs into ideology or illusion.

While neighbor/gathering is the simplest and yet the most profound social institution aimed at concretizing divine presence, other social institutions leading up to it are: shrine→ temple→ synagogue→ church→ neighbor/gathering. *Gathering together*, thereby reducing entropy, is the underlying dynamic that links all these institutions leading to the divine/human Self-to-self encounter at the neighbor/gathering level. Each succeeding institution narrows the distance of Deity. For example, the Deity of a shrine implies the greatest distance to the point of making the human *self* as such irrelevant; in contrast, the divine Self in neighbor/gathering forms with the human self an espousal relation of equals. The arrival of each new institution is essentially a closing of the gap between the divine/human counterparts. A discussion of each institution is helpful to appreciate this evolving courtship.

Shrine

Creating a shrine is the earliest attempt to give visibility to Deity. A shrine is a sacred spot/symbol that signifies/represents the Deity. Shrines arose in ancient times when Deity is thought to be synonymous with Life. Homage at a shrine is directed to the Deity to insure continuation of life in the form of a good harvest or successful hunt. The notion of *self*, as a distinct life, has not yet emerged. Shrines provide a focus for directing homage to a sacred yet distant divine Reality.

The psychic product of this institution is the monk. A monk is the embodiment of the shrine and by extension the visible expression of the Deity. Uniform dress, behavior and lifestyle serve to lessen self-expression in order to be more transparent of divinity. A monk seeks to be at one with Life. Monks of Tibet, scurrying ahead of bulldozers at a construction site to rescue earthworms uncovered by the digging in order to rebury them in a safe place, illustrate the sense of oneness with Life and consequent need to preserve life in its myriad forms.

The proto-religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism use shrine as a key institutional expression. A shrine-based imaging - mono-polar by definition - focuses squarely on Deity, in contrast with religion that is bipolar and, accordingly, focuses on defining the *proximity* between the divine and human worlds. Proto-religions use shrine to attain particular objectives: Hinduism seeks inner peace/harmony, Buddhism seeks enlightenment, and Shintoism seeks harmony with nature. All three equate undifferentiated Life with Deity.

Temple

The institution of shrine is the precursor to temple. Constructing temples began when a need arose to accommodate the numbers seeking to honor the Deity. A temple houses a shrine with the added feature of a facility to provide accommodation for devotees coming to pay homage and offer sacrifice. Shrines were originally built solely to honor a Deity. When expanded to accommodate worshippers, shrines evolve into the institution of *temple* that not only honor a Deity but also signify a *sacred place* for the *gathering* of devotees of a particular Deity.

The Hebrew religion develops around a temple as a key social institution. Tribal gathering around a shrine within a temple is a perfect fit for signifying divine presence both in the shrine and in the tribal bonds. The shrine of the Ten Commandments in the Holy of Holies affixes the presence of the divine tribal Chief; the temple proper becomes by shrine-association a sacred place to affix the divine presence at a tribal level - gathering a Chosen People arises from this association.

The Israelites gradually shift emphasis of divine presence from shrine to the gathering itself of a Chosen People – a new depth in divine/human proximity. The very Law ensuring divine presence also binds them as a Chosen People, thus divinity enters a *social* dimension. The human (tribal) relation becomes the *source* of the divine connection – a gigantic leap in consciousness. The primacy of shrine, however, still endures as only the chief priest is allowed to annually enter the Holy of Holies to seek atonement for violating or ignoring the divine/tribal relation.

Because the people are excluded from the shrine, i.e., the Holy of Holies, activities and prayers in the temple outside the shrine increase in importance. A shift to a shrine/people focus clearly exposes the bipolarity of religion, thus eclipsing the mono-polarity inherent in shrine. The Holy of Holies images the divine presence and the temple images the gathering together of a Chosen People. Deity/people begin to fuse as one image and subsequent history struggles with the implications of shrine/temple synthesis. Human bonding gains equal importance to Deity and shrine.

Synagogue

The destruction (587 B.C.) of the shrine/temple by the Babylonians is a cataclysmic shock to the Hebrews; the icon from which they derive their very identity is erased. The disaster gives birth to a radically new institution for incarnating divine presence. During the years of Babylonian Captivity, having little hope of rebuilding the shrine/temple, the Hebrews begin gathering together in homes to console one another, to reflect on their legacy and to seek guidance from prophets, i.e., those deeply imbued with divine tribal presence in the days before the temple destruction.

The domestic gatherings of Hebrew slaves in Babylon become known as *synagogues*, i.e., *places of learning*. The synagogue emerges as a key social institution in which older or more educated members teach the tribal Law and traditions that define the calling as a Chosen People. Home/synagogue gathering of a remnant people replaces shrine/temple gathering. Gathering together as an expression of divine presence now becomes separate from shrine altogether and is an enormous advance in perceiving divine proximity; the idol of shrine having been removed, the *tribal bond* itself takes center stage. The only tenuous connection to the destroyed icon that remains is a yearning to rebuild the shrine/temple.

A shift from shrine/temple to domestic synagogue marks the beginning of Judaism as a *world* religion. Even though the temple in Jerusalem is later rebuilt, the Jewish religion retains the ability to survive without the shrine/temple symbol. The synagogue, while still oriented to shrine/temple, survives as an independent institution. The synagogue, however, sets new direction in seeking divine/human proximity. It is just a matter of time before of divine presence drifts further from temple to focus exclusively on the Hebraic *tribe*, and from tribe to tribal *member*, and then from tribal member to Hebraic *person*. Christ is the catalyst for envisioning the ultimate in divine proximity as the communion persona whereby the divine/human selves are present in one body.

Church

Following the Babylonia Captivity, eleven of the twelve tribes of Israel fade away through assimilation and intermarriage. The tribe of Judah alone returns to Palestine and plays a key role for the emergence of a new institution. Although rebuilding the shrine/temple, they retain the social institution of synagogue. Soon thereafter a new institution arises that combines *synagogue* with the ancient institution of *church* – a social invention of the ancient Greek consisting of gathering citizens to discuss the affairs of the city. The hybrid institution adds a *universalism/catholicity*, inherent in the Greek notion of *citizen*, to the *tribal* orientation of synagogue.

It is a relatively small step to go from the notion of *citizen* to the still more universal notion of *neighbor*. Combining synagogue with church also changes the imagery of divine Chief present to a Chosen People to divine Citizen/Neighbor present to the human citizen/neighbor. *Church* (versus *tribe*), as a newly reconstituted institution, consists in acknowledging the presence of the divine Neighbor and becoming neighbor in response. Just as the divine Chief called forth the beloved Chosen People, so, now, the divine Neighbor calls forth the beloved neighbor. The divine advance toward the chosen human self goes beyond civic to an espousal relation. The divine espousal relation affects the gathering of humanity in and through the human neighbor, whereby the Chosen People finds fulfillment.

Christ is first to recognize that the divine presence in tribal bonding becomes universal when tribe is extended to a self/neighbor level. Having grown up in the synagogue tradition, he models his public life after it by gathering disciples and taking the role of teacher. What is notable in his teaching is the absence of shrine/temple. The Gospels mention the temple in reference to Christ only four times. In the first instance he is presented in the temple and is given the name Jesus. In the second instance as a boy of twelve, the evangelist makes the points: he is lost in the temple, has greater wisdom than temple sages, and causes wonderment to his mother. In a culture that exists on symbol, the message is clear: a shrine-focus leads to getting lost, greater wisdom comes from synagogue gatherings, and something deeper than either shrine/temple or synagogue is afoot. The message gets sharper in the third reference to temple. Jesus in his only show of anger overturns tables of moneychangers and condemns the turning of a shrine/temple into a business venture. The last time temple is mentioned is when Jesus dies and the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom. There is no mistaking the symbolism: the divine Captive escapes the shrine/temple and is to be found wherever there is gathering together.

While Christ begins his public ministry using the synagogue model, he ends it at the Last Supper by adding to it the radically new insight of universality. He makes a point that gathering is no longer to be as teacher/student but a gathering of equals as neighbors/friends. He envisions the sacred Bond gathering a Chosen People as one tribe is the same that gathers ‘neighbors’ to form his body. He transforms divine imagery from the tribal Chief exerting power to the divine Neighbor exerting influence; divine *tribal* presence deepens as divine *Neighbor* presence. The ultimate in divine/human proximity is the presence of divine/human neighbors in one body. The evolving nearness of Deity through the shrine→ temple→ synagogue sequence reaches its fullness as church (neighbor/gathering) manifesting divine/human communion in corporeal versus tribal oneness.

Tribal *member* in the time of Christ meant male and Jewish. Jesus begins with this premise and expands member into the universal neighbor that is, unlike member, the incarnate form of *self* rather than *tribe*. By deliberately choosing only twelve, he gives recognition to the twelve tribes of Israel and thus implies continuity; more importantly, however, twelve is about maximum for an institution based on neighbor. Beyond twelve, the presence of self, as *neighbor*, diminishes, forcing the relation to become increasingly tribal in nature. By selecting a small number, Christ is shifting the spotlight from tribal bonding to focus squarely on self-experience. Self-experience is not gender bound but is a universal. Transforming synagogue into neighbor/gathering (church) changes the institution from one of learning tribal heritage to one of self-discovery – from responding as a tribe to responding as a self.

Unlike tribe, church is not an end in itself but the means for divine/human self-revelation. Church, as a gathering of neighbors, is to be created and recreated repeatedly and supported by a wider ministerial organization. Church allows for the self-expression needed to nourish self-experience. A precondition for discovering the divine Neighbor is finding self, as neighbor. Just as the twelve tribes of Israel spread throughout the Promised Land and yet remained as one, so, too, the communion of twelve is to be replicated many times throughout the world and yet remain as one.

It is not until after the Resurrection that the idea of church as an institution separate from synagogue clearly emerges (Matt 16:18). Christ's insight of neighbor/gathering affecting divine presence needed a new nomenclature to identify the new institution. *Church*, used by the ancient Greeks in referring to a gathering of citizens for consultation, voting and self-governance - as opposed to subjects rule by king, emperor, pharaoh or chieftain - is ideally suited to distinguish neighbor versus tribal gathering. While the original purpose of church among the Greeks is to produce the citizen warrior ready to fight for the polis, the new institution of church is to make present the divine Neighbor via the gathering of 'neighbors'.

Church, as a nomenclature for Christ's expanded vision, is not an exact fit because church, as used by the Greeks, centered on *citizen* and *rights* rather than the more universal *neighbor* and *response*. However, the Greek notion of church has the critical notions of equality of citizens and a universality that synagogue does not. Furthermore, the Greek notion of church is a *listening* to fellow citizens in contrast to synagogue that centers on *teaching* tribal members. Christ chooses the listening needed for a neighbor/marriage relation over chief/tribe as the crux of the divine/human enigma. *Listening* is the same as *responding*. Listening is key in knowing where the divine Self leaves off and the human response begins. In a successful marriage, it is hard to know where self leaves off and spouse begins. In a successful church, it is hard to know where human self, as response, leaves off and divine Self, as Call, begins - the line between Call/response is a moving target. Search for self-identity is the final frontier, and gathering together of 'neighbors' is the arena of the hunt.

When Christianity becomes a state religion under Constantine (312 A.D.), the Roman state gradual becomes the model for understanding church. Cultural blending over the centuries has clouded the original meaning of *neighbor church* as explained above. Now, *church* can refer to temple-like building, large assembly, missionary enterprise, hierarchy, world organization, moral code, tradition, doctrine, or spiritual institution versus secular state.

Church, as an institution among the first Christians, applies only to the gathering together of 'neighbors' - *neighbor* in its universal sense of simply presence/proximity without any further qualification. Church is not about social control but the social realization of the human self vis-à-vis the divine Self. *Belonging* consists in a *presence* in the gathering - as discussed in the previous chapter - because self-discovery depends on actual presence. In its original meaning, *being a member of a church* is an oxymoron - it would be like referring to being a member of a marriage. Marriage, like church, depends on actual presence. Membership applies to a tribe or group, but *church*, even as originally understood by the Greeks, is a gathering of free, independent citizens as a value in and of itself.

As soon as reference is made to even one element of differentiation beyond presence as neighbor, the original Christian use of the word *church* can be use only in a metaphorical sense. As an illustration, the president of General Motors uses a metaphor when referring to the large company as a *family*. When we call a large organization or building a *church*, it is a metaphorical use of the term. *Church* defines a *relation* between 'neighbors', just like marriage defines a relation between *spouses*. Church is an arena of self-discovery, and as such is an extension of the micro social institution of marriage. A neighbor needs church to see self - like needing a mirror to see your own face. *Anonymity* and *church* are contradictory words - it would be like being married anonymously.

Originally, *church* was a *verb* and not a noun. The reification bias of the West turned it into a noun. *Church*, as a verb, originally expressed the unique relation of one Greek citizen to another. Later, Christ recasts the relation as one neighbor to another. Church and marriage, because both refer to a specific *relation*, are verbs disguised as nouns. Marriage is gender related, while church is neighbor related. Neighbor relation is much deeper than marriage in that human birth follows marriage, while divine incarnation ensues from neighbor/relation. Idolatry is the inevitable result of reifying church, thus shifting it from verb to noun. *Church*, recast as a noun, morphs into a building, a rigid tribal structure or ideology/morality.

A clear distinction exists between 'church' gatherings on a macro versus micro scale. On a macro scale, a gathering together may be in the hundreds or thousands where a tribal image and the discipline of sociology would aptly apply. On a micro scale, gathering together centers on self-experience and the discipline of psychology would apply. However, where psychology deals with personality traits, behaviors and functions of the brain, gathering at a micro scale of church is the progressive expansion of an inclusive self-experience as *response* to Call. At a macro level, numbers are important for measuring the social strength of a gathering together; at the micro level, the reverse is true: the greater the number involved the less 'gathering together' at a self-level is possible - for a couple in love, three is a crowd. Furthermore, a gathering needs to be on a *neighborhood* basis because proximity is necessary for the sharing of mutual influence leading to a blending of lives. The depth of influence is proportional to the inclusiveness of self-experience. A sense of 'community' in a small gathering is the effect of an inclusive self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self.

Neighbor/Gathering Today

State sponsorship of church, beginning with the conversion of Constantine, caused the two essential elements of *locality* and *neighbor* to slip into the shadows. Without specific locality and specific ‘neighbors’, the *incarnate* nature of religion evaporates and religion drifts into ideology, morality and belief systems. A focus on *neighbor* avoids the danger of equating church with ideology, structures or tribal bonding. In modern times, ease of mobility and communication is further eroding connection to locality and neighbor.

Today, many are rediscovering the micro world of locality and neighbor. Millions of neighbor/gatherings, under a variety of names, are emerging in many parts of the world. A search for self-identity, fostered by modern psychology, has spread worldwide. The roots of psychology go back to the ancient Greek institution of church that implicitly recognized self-involvement as a key element. Notions of human rights and world citizen can also be traced back to the Greeks. The reintroduction of Christ’s vision of *neighbor church* that sees *response/responsibility* as the foundation of human rights is increasingly possible today.

Self-awareness is by definition a sense of responsibility. Recall that religion originates from Abraham’s sense of a distinct life/self that implies response. While macro organizations depend on self-*image*, e.g., parent, teacher, athlete, nurse and so forth, church depends on delving into self-*experience*. Finding the divine Self is inseparable from finding self - the human self is the *otherness* of the divine Self. We often limit self to self-image, while ignoring the boundlessness of self-experience. Our self-image changes with time, but self-experience only deepens. Self-experience is church when responding to a near infinite variety of divine Call reflected not only in ‘neighbors’ but also in every facet of nature. Ironically, the modern phenomenon of mega church prospers through the *suppression* of self. This is the result of substituting the Platonic for the Hebraic person, thus shifting the focus to numbers.

Neighbor/gathering today does not achieve the status of social institution comparable to well financed modern church organizations. However, the shrine→ temple→ synagogue→ church→ neighbor/gathering is a logical sequence of institutions for gradually incarnating divine proximity. Large or small gatherings today that foster self-development are prophetic of neighbor/gathering. Neighbor/gathering is the goal because it is the summit of self-experience in as much as *neighbor* is simply the incarnate form of *self*. We are not there yet, but history is not over. As the idolatry of self-image looses its grip on us, expansion of self-experience, as response to the Call of the divine Self, will follow – the human self emerges concomitantly with the divine Self. Concretizing the divine/human relation in a micro social institution of neighbor/gathering guards against slipping back into the mono-polarity of proto-religion or into the ontological shell of philosophy. Neighbor/gathering, the summit of relational intelligence, is gateway to consorting with divinity.

*****SIDEBAR*****

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Each culture as well as each individual is at a different stage in devolutionary psychology. (See chapter two on the ten stages.) The first six intellectual tools focus on the devolutionary psychology of the human *mind*; the last four focus on the devolution of human *relation*. Any given stage in the devolution of the intellectual tools can become the core around which cultures form. At certain points in history, a strong leader, such as Moses, Jesus or Mohammed, can cause large numbers of people to transit to a new stage. Such strong leaders gave birth to the world’s major religious traditions. The leader does not descend out of the blue, but is generally among the first to recognize a new intellectual tool that radically expands the perception of Reality. A growing new vision can reach critical mass in a given society, making a concrete expression of the vision by an insightful leader inevitable.

We are prisoners of our culture as well as of our own self-image. Not only can cultures be very different but also within a culture everyone has a different self-image. Culture/self-image changes over time. The social institutions of shrine→ temple→ synagogue→ church→ neighbor/gathering represent a cultural devolution centered on divine proximity. Individuals gravitate to one or other of these social institutions depending on their cultural exposure and the ability to form increasingly complex self-images. For example, a *shrine-centered culture* creates a subservient self-image, *temple-culture* nurtures a tribal-self, *synagogue-culture* nurtures a disciple self-image, and *neighbor/gathering culture* fosters a universal self-experience. Expansion of self-experience requires transiting through the ten psychological stages and the five social institutions of shrine/temple/synagogue/church/neighbor-gathering. Throughout the transition, self-experience continuously refines self-image until self-*experience* and *neighbor* become identical.

Force/fear never changes culture or self-image. No one, regardless of religious persuasion or lack thereof, can be forced to a new stage in development. Change occurs only by the *attractiveness* of the new. Being accepted as neighbor induces neighbor awareness that has the potential for bringing about the greatest expansion of consciousness. The genius of Christ is in accepting neighbor without qualification or demand. The very act of doing so frees the neighbor to discover self and ultimately the divine other Self.

A neighbor/gathering is not an ideological or task-oriented group meeting, but a self-to-self meeting of ‘neighbors’ as mutual sacraments to the presence of the divine Neighbor. ‘Neighbors’ embody a wide range of responses, out of which the *response* constituting the human self gradually matures to reflect the Call of the divine Self. As response deepens toward a neighbor, the reaction/indifference harbored by that neighbor induces discomfort and begins to surface. The surfacing of reaction calls for response rather than reciprocal reaction/indifference. Achieving response forces the battle to be where it should be: always with self never *between* neighbors. Recall that reactions can be transformed into response only at the *self* and never at a neighbor or group level. Not even the divine Neighbor can change reaction into response. Transforming reactions into response is putting a face on divinity. Diversity among neighbors is to be seen as diversity of *response* since no one can judge another as reactionary – only within self can reaction versus response be distinguished.

Although a case can be made for generalized or institutionalized images of divinity at a macro level, at a micro level it must be assumed that there are as many images of divinity as there are individuals. True progress can be made only by sharing at a neighbor level. Large religious institutions are useful in exploring divine presence in the macro world. These institutions ought to create an environment that fosters searching rather than controlling; each individual needs space to master the intellectual tools needed to deal with Reality. Deity imaging, like the relation of marriage, grows in refinement as an individual matures. Few, if any, have the same image of marriage after twenty-five years as the day of the wedding. St. Paul speaks of growing out of childhood to adult imagery (1 Corinthians 13:11). A child’s imaging of Deity is little more than a glorified Santa Claus; a mature imaging must be one worthy of both the human as well as the divine Self. Entering into divine Neighbor/neighbor, Self/self partnership requires maturity not just sophisticated ideology; ideology can be a way for hiding self and keeping others at arm’s length. Communion between neighbors requires faith, i.e., relational knowledge/intelligence.

Any human gathering reflects to some degree a vital, coalitional, tribal or espousal dynamic. The different levels of gathering are complementary and not contradictory. Hug a tree or be mesmerized by a sunset is a ‘gathering together’ of self with Life expressed at the most fundamental level of nature. Embracing ethnic group → family → spouse requires an increasingly refined sense of self-experience. Moses builds a culture around family and Christ around spouse. The awareness of the divine Self includes appreciating nature, tribe (family) and spouse (self) – all are connected and make a contribution, but all are distinct stages in self-discovery. Condemning another for adhering to a particular stage in Deity imaging is a holdover from pre-Copernicus times. Before Copernicus, there could be only one religion (relation) simply because image and Reality were identical - there cannot be two Realities at one and the same time. Therefore, anyone that did not share the accepted image of Reality must be delusional. Ancestral habits of condemning tend to die-hard. Imaging Deity is like working on a piece of art. Recall that the image is never the Reality it proposes to reflect. Rather than condemn an image embedded in any individual or religious tradition, emphasis is better placed on clarifying the underlying assumption behind our imaging, and especially on *why* we find the assumption useful in defining a sense of Reality. Phenomenological, ontological and relational assumptions regarding the nature of Reality are the three starting points – all are valid beginning points and each creates a contrasting world. Many can envision Reality through the lens of only one of these assumptions. Few have a three dimensional grasp of Reality. (See sidebar in chapter four: Platonic Versus Hebraic Person.)

An accepting atmosphere makes progress possible. Recall from the first chapter that knowing requires first making an assumption. We would not progress in our understanding of the world if scientists do not first observe a particular phenomenon, create a theory/assumption about it, experiment to test the theory, and, finally, modify the theory based on outcomes. The same is true in developing relational knowledge and intelligence. People in ancient times learned by trial and error to advance through vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal stages of divine/human relation. Every individual goes through the same psychological devolution. Images are only surface indicators of an underlying assumption. Fixation on image rather than on assumption is the source of violence leading to rivers of blood that continue to flow to the present day. An idolatrous fixation on images leads invariably to reaction toward another individual clinging to a different divine image or religion. Reaction breeds reaction enduring a lifetime, or even for centuries at an institutional level. When attention shifts from image to assumption, sharing/dialogue between equals/neighbors follows, along with a deeper insight into the trilogy at the core of Reality.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Ministry

Ministry is the *functional* dimension of *neighbor*. ‘Ministry’ not derived from neighbor consciousness pertains to the macro world of government, not to the micro world inaugurated by Christ. *Neighbor consciousness* incarnates communion persona and *functioning*, as neighbor, is the ministry that increases the *visibility* of the divine Self Who is incarnate in the human neighbor as one body. Christ is communion persona (divine/human mutual presence) incarnate as neighbor. When he *functions* as neighbor, he unveils the divine Self Who is incarnate in the human neighbor as one body. Behavior stemming from a consciousness of being neighbor is called *ministry*.

Ministry is a revelation of what it is to be neighbor and thus is the means for revealing both a human as well as the divine Neighbor. All ministries in espousal religion are neighbor based, just as all ministries in Old Testament times are tribe based. Moses assigns ministry to only one of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the New Testament, ministry arises from an extension of the very concept of *neighbor*. The crux of the Gospel is: the human neighbor along with the divine *Neighbor* (versus *Chief*) is in fleshed as one body (versus one *tribe*); ministry gives visibility to the divine/human selves forming one body.

The neighbor behavior of the Good Samaritan introduces the new concept of ministry. The Last Supper provides the occasion for revealing the full depth of this ministry. Jesus washes the feet of his ‘neighbors’ and then calls them friends. He defines ministry not by words but symbolically in action. He renders a service as neighbor thereby creating a friend and admonishes his neighbor to do likewise. Espousal ministry focuses on neighbor/friend in order to affect the presence of the divine Neighbor, just as tribal ministry focused on a Chosen People to affect the presence of the divine Chief.

The genius of *neighbor* over *tribe* ministry is in its resistance to power grab – a recurring problem in the Old Testament times. A tribal framing of society concentrates power centrally; neighbor framing of society disperses and transforms the very notion of power. ‘Power’ is in the *need* found in the weakest. Neighbor ministry is response to a real need that invites the recipient to respond not in kind, but as a friend, thus power is transposed into influence. The need of the weakest is ‘power’ because the need concretizes divine Call inviting response in time and place. When in response to divine Call the need of a ‘neighbor’ is met, the friend that emerges reveals the divine Neighbor – no greater ‘power’ than this can be found.

Ministry is not like social service, but is the *functional* expression of *neighbor*. In a wider perspective, ministry is the functional extension of: Hebraic person→ communion persona→ neighbor→ neighborhood→ neighborhood communion→ neighbor/gathering. When neighbor functions in a given neighborhood, the fruit is a neighbor/gathering that opens the door to friendship. Neighbor/gathering is the hallmark of espousal ministry – *all other ministry is tribal*. A neighbor/gathering centers on the relation of self/self, neighbor/neighbor. Neighbor/gathering is the essence of the New Testament, as tribal gathering is of the Old. The role of the neighbor/gathering is the incarnation of the divine Neighbor, just as the Chosen People is the incarnation of the divine tribal Chief. The church is *catholic* (versus *tribal*) precisely because of the universality inherent in the notion of *neighbor*.

Forming an *organization* based on *neighbor* is an oxymoron. *Neighbor* means simply *proximity* – nothing more and nothing less. However, ministry, which is the *functional* extension of neighbor, is conducive to organization. Furthermore, neighborhood can be both local and global. Needs cannot always be met within a localized neighborhood. A neighbor can function through organized ministry but neighbor remains always above functional organization because *neighbor* is the communal focus of the divine and human self – like spouses in a marriage. Spouses can ‘function’ in a wider community but such ministry must be as an extension of the marital union and not an escape from it.

It cannot be stressed enough that ministry arises from communion persona, i.e., neighborhood communion, and not visa versa. Ministry can never be greater than the communion persona/neighborhood communion that it seeks to express, even if the organized ministry becomes global. Ministry is distinguishable from social service in that it centers strictly on expressing and nurturing a consciousness of neighbor. Neighbor is the incarnation of the divine/human self. The more consciousness as *neighbor* develops, the more the divine/human self emerges. Ministry that facilitates the mutual revelation of the divine/human self is the light dispelling the darkness of reaction/indifference.

Ministry targets one of three *environmental* factors that together nurture neighbor consciousness, namely, respect (deference), listening and healing. Ministerial *organizing* has the sole purpose of creating an atmosphere of respect/listening/healing to foster the emergence of self/neighbor. The three environmental factors of respect, listening and healing are the ministries of priest, prophet and kingly-servant, respectively. The threefold ministry does not create the church but only the *environment* in which neighbor-consciousness – the essence of church - can emerge and prosper.

All organizational efforts, including gathering in large groups are, at best, an exercise of *ministry* and not church. Church is a direct *self-to-self* level relation, while ministry is *functional*. Once church expands beyond the relation of self-to-self, it morphs into ministry seeking to create an *environment* conducive for a self-to-self relation to prosper. *Neighbor* is the primary sacrament of the divine Suitor-presence. Ministry facilitates awareness of the divine Suitor by: offering respect/deference (priestly ministry), by listening thereby implying worth (prophetic ministry) and by healing real needs while preserving the inherent dignity of a neighbor (kingly-servant ministry). Ministry makes visible a respecting/listening/healing divine Neighbor.

Ministry is a hierarchy of respecting/listening/healing *service*, not one of ruling over subjects. Ministry is not church but a ‘function’ of church and is never outside or above the church. Church, like marriage, creates a sense of self and, like marriage, can be thought of as an organization only in the sense that marriage is an organization between spouses. The organization of ministry, as a functional extension of church, can have great impact on a larger environment inimical for nurturing neighbor-consciousness. Violence, poverty and abuse rampant in the world distort the face of the divine Neighbor rendering neighbor consciousness impossible. The chaos/entropy of violence in the world is Calvary enduring through time. Christ on Calvary reveals the true depth of ministry as one of confronting chaos at the epicenter of *self* – not as a call for organization or social services. The agonizingly slow transforming of self from reaction into response is the true mission of ministry – response brings order out of chaos. Only through response can there be the sharing that will heal social ills. It is only in a paradise of response that Adam is able to walk with the divine Neighbor.

Ministry in Old Testament times sought to strengthen divine presence in tribal bonding through ritual sacrifice, teaching and enforcement of tribal laws. Ministry radically changes in the New to a celebration of the presence of the divine/human neighbor (priest), to a listening heart (prophet) and to an extended hand (kingly servant). The joy arising from such ministry radiates into the world. Thus, ministry is aimed at restoring the face of the divine Neighbor to transform nature/neighborhood once more into paradise. When we dehumanize nature or others, we dehumanize the self – thus the mirror is broken and the divine image fractured. Nature and humanity manifests the divine Suitor designs, but sometimes ministry of matchmaker is needed to make visible the divine Suitor initiative.

*****SIDEBAR*****

CREATING A NEIGHBOR/GATHERING

You are a priceless treasure because the gratuitous, divine Self-gift is at the core of your self-experience. Just as the divine Chief-gift is the core of tribal experience for the Chosen People, so, too, the divine Self-gift is at the core of your self-*experience* (versus self-*image*). Just as tribal gathering incarnates the divine Chief, so, too, neighbor/gathering incarnates the divine Self. Just as the summit of tribal unity wrought by King David occasioned a *promise* of the Messiah, so, too, the summit of espousal unity wrought by neighbor/gathering occasions the *presence* of the Messiah. Neighbor/gathering is the Way for you to discover your identity as the beloved in that only in such a gathering can *self* be reflected and the divine Self-gift be manifested.

Thus, the treasure of the divine Self-gift is as close as your self-experience. However, discovery of the treasure of self is impossible except via reflection in neighbor. It is akin to needing a mirror to see your own face because of the physical impossibility of seeing your face directly. Neighbor is the field where the treasure of self is to be found and neighbor/gathering is the tool for digging. The arena for searching has changed. A thousand year search for the divine Chief at the core of a Chosen People changes to an ongoing search for the divine Suitor as the very core of your self-experience. But, again, finding the hidden treasure that is self occurs only by finding the divine Self-gift in neighbor – the divine in neighbor reflects as a mirror the divine Self-gift in self. Furthermore, finding treasure in neighbor is reciprocal and synergetic – reciprocal because it leads to mutual discovery between self and neighbor, and synergetic because exposing a self on fire with the divine Self-gift illuminates the social environment.

Neighbor-to-neighbor bonding requires developing clear relational knowledge/ intelligence (i.e., faith). Correct relational knowledge distinguishes between ministry and church. *Church*, by definition, applies only to neighbor/gathering; ministry means *functioning* as neighbor; ministry is an extension of neighbor, *never visa versa*. A military model for organizing is a core feature of the West. Western culture virtually forces upon us a military view of church as a controlling hierarchical organization, which is conducive for blending church and ministry as identical. Viewing *neighbor* (versus a military command structure) as an organizing principle is a challenge, but not an impossible one. The transition requires switching from an ontological to a relational mindset. (See sidebar in chapter four: Platonic Versus Hebraic Person.) Christ may have borrowed the idea of church from the ancient Greeks, but he gives it a radically new depth by reframing citizen-church as a neighbor-church. *Church* is first and foremost about self-experience rather than organization; the bias for military imaging in the West precludes the centrality of self-experience.

Although neighbor/gatherings are beginning to emerge in many places throughout the world, many do not grasp their origin or implications. Neighbor/gathering is the surface wave of a deeper current driven by delving into self-experience, concretely expressed as *neighbor*. Neighbor/gathering is the visible expression of and workshop for entering into the divine/human communion at the level of self. Whether everyone in a neighbor/gathering is able to see the *church* dimension is not the point. The key issue is that the gathering is fostering self-experience that eventually will become the basis for an awareness of the divine Self.

A *neighbor/gathering* is the best insurance against drifting into abstract ideology or demagoguery. When two neighbors agree, the chance of self-delusion is greatly diminished, and when three agree, delusion decreases even more so. Thus, neighbor/gathering is an ideal arena wherein the drama of divine/human intercourse unfolds. The human self is the polar opposite of the divine Self. This means that we can know the divine Self only as a reflection of the human self. The human self is not ideology but is the very core of our experience. Self-experience, when perceived as Call, is the presence of the divine Self and, when perceived as response, is the presence of the human self – the two form one body. Delving into self-experience is what makes religion distinct from proto-religion; the deeper the self-experience the more the bipolarity at the core of religion is accentuated.

When the presence of the communion persona results in a neighbor/gathering, the unseen divine/human communion at the level of self emerges as a visible social institution. The geographical extend of the neighborhood area included in forming a visible social institution depends on the area needed to draw 10 –12 responding adults. A neighbor/gathering beyond twelve morphs into ministry, and ministry, if detached from neighborhood communion, slips into preaching ideology or social/political activism. Numbers beyond twelve is a step back into the tribal epoch of religion that emphasizes such telltale imagery as membership, conformity, rules, obligations and unity *between* members rather than expansion of self-experience. Aside from its value for relational development, a small group has the ontological value of affording mental aerobics for the health of the mind, akin to physical aerobics for bodily health.

While a neighbor/gathering is not an organization, it begs for ministry in the form of respect, listening and healing. These ministerial roles *within* a neighborhood gathering may be identified as correspondent, counselor and co-correspondent, respectively. These three ministries, respectively, reflect Christ, the archetypal communion persona, as priest, prophet and kingly-servant. All three dimensions must be present in neighbor/gathering when perceived as church because they concretize the presence of the divine Neighbor. The priest incarnates the divine Neighbor as Love, the prophet incarnates the divine Neighbor as listening Love, and the kingly-servant as healing Love. Multiple neighbor-gatherings need the additional ministry of mediators to interface with a wider ministerial organization. Financial management of goods donated for “wiping the tears from every eye” (Rev 7:17) remains largely within the control of neighbor/gatherings to avoid the distraction of concentrated economic power. The ideal is direct contact of one neighborhood church with another. The role of mediators insures that large gatherings, organizations or economic resources do not eclipse the church as a neighbor/gathering.

Neighbor/gathering, as *church*, means that the gathering can have no other purpose but coming together. Going from larger to smaller gatherings is the Way for reducing chaos/entropy – the devil is in the details. All social conflict/tranquility is rooted ultimately in conflict/peace at the level of self. The communal Hebraic person is the quintessential source of Life in a church among ‘neighbors’ and the source of life for the whole community – not visa versa. A neighbor/gathering is in effect a growing self-experience under the influence of an ever-present divine Neighbor/Suitor. When the neighbor/gathering occurs on a regular basis as a lifestyle around a shared meal, the gathering becomes a Way of life that radiates a communal influence in the world.

Neighbor/gathering introduces a radically new social order based on interaction between ‘neighbors’ qua neighbor. Hitherto, social bonding is through bloodlines: family, extended family, band and tribe, or through political structures: kingdom, state and nation, or functional structures: profession, work, ideology, interest and so forth, but never as neighbor qua neighbor. Gathering of ‘neighbors’ without agenda is a radically new phenomenon in social devolution. It represents the pinnacle of definable relation. Such a gathering has the greatest potential for revealing the self because the meeting depends solely on the free choice of self-to-self relation.

Neighbor bonding through simply mutual presence is the antithesis of the entropy principle of disintegration and, therefore, is most conducive for the revelation of the human self as well as the divine Self. The discovery of self is inseparable from grasping the Selfhood of divine Call. Opening the heart to neighbor as the beloved of divine Call is the new arena of divine revelation and divine healing initiative. It is like placing a light on a stand for all to see, or like yeast in a lump of dough, or like finding a lost treasure, or buying a pearl of great price. Mary is the first neighbor to open her heart to the divine Neighbor, whereby the espousal intent of divine Call is clearly revealed for the first time. Mary is the archetype of *church*; in her we see what it means to be a self before the divine Self; in her offspring we see the results.

A gathering of a few ‘neighbors’ may seem insignificant, but keep in mind a wider perspective. *Neighbor* is the concrete expression of the Call/response relation in time and place. Each ‘neighbor’ is an event/relation that reflects at some minimal level the gathering together between the human self, as response, and the divine Self, as Call. The more advancement in self-knowledge the gathering together achieves, the more the affects from it spreads throughout the neighborhood and the world. Christ, rather than write, gives such self-depth to the gathering of neighbors that to this day he draws all to himself. Whoever gives or gains depth of self-experience in a gathering affects the self-presence of Christ in history not as a written but as a living word. A modern example is Martin Luther King investing self as a dream of freedom and equality. All self-investment/knowledge leading to gathering together flows from the divine initiative. Christ’s depth of investment for self-knowledge has set the standard.

A further point of relational knowledge is important: the divine/human self, as communion persona, is church affecting a drawing together of 'neighbors'. While 'neighbors' may enjoy the experience of 'community', the *source* of 'community' is the communion persona. The difference between *communion persona* and *community experience* is reflected in the ancient distinction between church and catechumenate. Response radiating from the communion persona attracts a catechumen even before the catechumen assumes the identity of response implicit in communion persona. Church, at a micro level, is a communion persona extended into neighborhood communion. Neighbor/gathering is the visible expression of neighborhood communion incarnate in communion persona. It takes only one communion persona to create a sense of community in a neighborhood. Church, as neighbor/gathering, is the *consequence* not *cause* of the communion persona.

When the catechumen is the source rather than simply recipient of 'community', the catechumen achieves the consciousness of communion persona. Think of it as a marriage. Enjoying 'community' is the dating stage for the catechumen. Not until the catechumen enters as equal partner with the divine Self in creating communion does the relation change to marriage (church). Accepting a human identity of *response* seals the divine espousal Call - thus turning a divine dating into a marriage relation. Self-to-self, face-to-face coming together between the divine and human self is the culmination of consciousness that began when divine Call first addressed primordial chaos and began gathering together. In Genesis, the calling begins with the universe and is not complete until it reaches the human heart. The human self-experience is now the cutting edge for inducing order out of chaos. Marriage is the ultimate workshop for inducing the order that comes from Love and is the model for neighbor/gathering.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Sacred versus Secular Gathering

Gathering together as the defining presence in history of divine Call sooner or later bumps into the issue of sacred/secular, church/state. The ontological bias of the West makes church/state separation a practical necessity. Throughout history, misguided people engage in both physical and psychological violence under cover of religion, which is bad enough, but, when joined to state power, the damage can be catastrophic. However, relational intelligence sees the church/state separation as different roles. The role of the state is to protect civic *rights*; religion fosters *response/responsibility*; there can be no right without a corresponding responsibility. While the state uses force to preserve rights, religion can never justify force but depends solely on influence to nurture *response/responsibility* from which a sense of self emerges. As response grows, the need for the state to defend rights recedes.

An historical perspective may be useful in assessing the church/state conflict. The distinction arose when Constantine, the supreme head of Christendom, moves the government from Rome to Constantinople in 326 A.D. As a consequence, Rome loses significance as a power center. Gradually the pope in Rome begins asserting power over 'souls' not just in Rome but also throughout the entire Roman Empire.

For the first time a clear distinction is made between the secular and the sacred. (The book to read: *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, by Edward Gibbon.) This marks the beginning of a battle between church and state that goes on in the West to this day. The Near East continues Constantine's view that government and society are religious by nature. Russia, dominated by Eastern rather than Western influence, establishes the Orthodox Church as an arm of government. During the years of official atheism, Communism takes on all the trappings of a state religion. Today, Russia has reinstated the Christian Orthodox Church as the *state* religion. Russians tend to visualize society as either totally secular or religious.

While gathering together is the underlying dynamic of world history, the divorce of church and state, dating back to Constantine, has added a confusing enigma to gathering together in the West. The church/state divorce in the West is based on the philosophical dichotomy between spirit/matter, temporal/eternal, and natural/supernatural. Spirit/matter imagery leads to endless debate regarding the separate identities of church/state and which institution takes precedence.

With the fall of Constantinople to the Muslims, the pope, following Constantine's lead, assumes leadership of both church and state. For a few centuries the issue of divided authority is laid to rest. In the fifteenth century, Martin Luther raises the question again declaring that the state takes precedence over the church. John Calvin counters that the church takes precedence over the state - society is to be the beginning of the divine kingdom on earth. The Anabaptists propose an absolute separation of church and state. Tired of the centuries of bloodshed over the issue, our founding fathers, as a practical expedient, sought to dodge the problem by an absolute separation of church and state for the emerging new nation. But the battle rages on.

All four viewpoints (Constantine/combined power, Luther/state first, Calvin/church first, Anabaptist/separation of both) are based on an ontological rather than a relational perception of Reality. Therein lies the key to the riddle. In an ontological view, unity is a *product* produced by an agency - whether that agency is church or state. Since unity is a *thing* or product, the producing agencies can design it to their liking – hence the spark of unending conflict.

In a relational perspective, unity, whether at the cosmic, biological, sociological or psychological level, is key for defining divine presence. Recall that any reduction of entropy requires conscious and intentional initiative. Divine initiative has been going on billions of years before humans arrived on the scene. The divine Agent alone is the Source of unity; humans can enter into divine partnership but even then can only reflect unity - like reflecting light from the sun.

The state evolved over time as human interaction and endeavors became increasingly complex. Complexity rose to a new order of magnitude with the introduction of religion. When Abraham reached the consciousness of a distinct life, he transformed human consciousness from subservient subject to one of partnership. The search for unity shifts from a focus on central authority to the *self* – concretely defined as *neighbor*. The state continues to have a role in guaranteeing rights in complex human interactions and in pursuing complex endeavors. A sense of partnership, introduced by Abraham, is still a work in progress. The ultimate partnership is between divine/human neighbors with the divine Partner leading the dance of unity. The distinctive role of church is in fostering a self that is communally responsive.

The sign of full maturity is in the recognition that the cornerstone of social order and world communion goes beyond family to *neighbor*. Neighbor, unlike *family*, is both *ontological* and *relational*. As an ontological concept, *neighbor* concretizes in time and place a human presence to be protected by the state. As a relational concept, *neighbor* embodies the self as a unified consciousness in time and place forming the basis of religion. From a state perspective, a neighbor is a citizen; from a church perspective, neighbor is a self. (Recall that *self* arose as a religious notion, while *citizen* predated the concept of self.) Neighbor is both citizen and human self.

As previously discussed, *self-experience* is a communion persona defined as the presence in one body of the divine/human selves in a dichotomous Call/response relation. The divine-Self has the identity of initiating Call and, consequently, is the *only* Source of unity. The *corporeal* unity of the divine/human selves far surpasses the *tribal* (family) unity introduced by Moses. In a micro world, unity is corporeal and thence blossoms forth in a macro world. Unity produced by either church organization or state has worth only to the extent it reflects the unity emanating from the divine Self in consort with the human self.

We are entering a point in history when it is increasingly important to nurture a unity arising from a communion persona that is beyond just tribal bonds *between* isolate individuals or states. The church/state conflict must not cloud the realization that the chaos/entropy induced by reaction can be transformed into response only at the self-level. Our compulsion of authoring our own brand of unity brings to mind the prophet Samuel. When Jesse presents each of his seven strong, bright sons to be anointed king to gather together all of Israel, Samuel counters that divine Call sees the heart (the persona) while we see only power and appearances. For centuries we have tried to craft a gathering together at a macro level of society using brain and brawn, but to no avail. Unity radiates into society only via the communion persona as evidence the human self is a responding consort to the call of the divine Self.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENDTIME

Summary: Time is *metric* when measuring the number of moments, and *epic* when measuring the depth of moment. Metric time is theoretically endless; epic time ‘ends’ when all of Reality coalesces into the present moment.

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REVELATION AS INSIGHT

HEAVEN AND HELL

CHURCH AS FINAL JUDGMENT

EUCCHARIST AND DEATH

There was a great earthquake, and the sun turned black as coarse sackcloth. The moon turned blood red, and the stars of the sky fell to earth like figs falling from the tree in a strong wind. The sky tore and withdrew like two scrolls rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. There came hail and fire mixed with blood, which was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, as were a third of the trees, and all the green grass (Rev. 6:12, 8:7). ‘Remember, I am coming soon! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Rev. 22:12).

For many people, every reported volcanic eruption, flood, plague, war or other disaster of human or natural origin is evidence that the end of the world is imminent and Christ is about to appear coming in the clouds. The more global the disaster, the greater the excitement and anticipation of those who have “cleanse their robes and are about to enter the city through its gates; outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, debauchees, murderers, idolaters and the deceitful” (Rev. 22:14). Final judgment is here at last when evil people will receive just punishment and the righteous eternal bliss. If you still feel calm after reading these forebodings, you should read the whole book of the Apocalypse – it’s not good bedtime reading. How much time do we have before these apocalyptic events befall us?

Meaning of Time

Time is a human invention. Humans have invented only two notions of time, namely, metric and epic time. Epic time goes back to human origins, but metric time arose in later centuries. Ancient Egyptians develop the notion of epic time. They base the concept of time around the event when earth, sun and Sirius (the fixed star around which all the others move) are in perfect alignment, which occurs every 365 days. This marks the beginning of a solar year. During a solar year the moon circles the earth thirteen times. Thus, the year consists of 364 solar days divided into thirteen lunar months of 28 days. The 365th day is the epic *timeless event* – the moment of perfect alignment.

The timeless event encompasses all Reality in one epic event. In the Egyptian view of time, we never actually leave the timeless event. That event has such depth that it is simply beyond human comprehension. Hence, each of the 364 days following the timeless event dies, but leaves a *forecasting shadow* of what the timeless event will be. At the same time, each day is a radically new *unfolding* of what the timeless event actually encompasses. The *forecasting shadow* and the *unfolding of the radically new* dwell side-by-side in the enduring timeless event drawing us in deeper and deeper. (The book to read: *The Nature of Time*, by Peter Toonen.)

Stated in another way: the 364 days *prior* to the timeless event are a *forecasting shadow*, while the 364 days *following* are the *unfolding* of the timeless event itself. The dying of each day leaving a shadow of the timeless event is called the *alpha* factor; the unfolding of the radically new is called the *omega* factor. The alpha and omega factors are two sides of the same coin. While the Far East, as in India, envisions time as an endless circle of repetition, the ancient Egyptians view time as *spiraling* in every tighter cycle and moving toward a *point*. The *point* is the timeless event when the meaning of history will come to full light because the alpha (shadow/death) and omega (fullness/life) converge. St. John reflects this view of time in the passage cited above in referring to Christ as the convergence of alpha/omega.

The spiraling of time converging toward a singular timeless event enables the pharaoh, Ahkenaten (1350 B.C.), to conclude that there could be only one Deity. (Recall that the notion of *self* arises directly from this universal convergence to singularity.) Reality is a relentless spiraling toward a single Omega Point to which Ahkenaten ascribes a divine consciousness. While Ahkenaten dwells on the Omega side of the equation, Moses and Christ develop the alpha side – the shadow/death factor. If Reality coalesces into one Omega Point vested with a conscious, divine Self, it stands to reason that the alpha that foreshadows the Omega must also coalesce into one conscious, human self. Vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal religion, discussed in chapter four, traces this growing realization.

The notion of *self*, as a unified consciousness, stems from the Egyptian view of time. The divine Self, as Initiator, is the Omega; the human self, as responder, is the alpha. The two selves are spiraling toward a point at which alpha/death meets Omega/Life. In this meeting, the human self derives identity in death (defined as *response*); the divine Self derives identity as Life (defined as *Call*). The two selves are complementary as a Call/response relation. It is important to recognize that religion (versus proto-religion) originates from this view of time. The alpha/Omega defines the bipolarity of the relation (religion) at the core of Reality. Religion is a delving into the 365th day of Egyptian time – the timeless event where death/Life meet.

By using alignment of earth/sun/Sirius as the pivotal event, time for the Egyptians means being immersed in the mysterious rhythm of nature. Recall that the *incarnate* characteristic of religion derives from the rhythm of nature. Biblical *time*, drawing on the Egyptian notion, means fulfillment of all of nature culminating in the self – a self that arrives into the stillness of the present as a timeless event. In contrast, the West artificially divides time into twelve months for the purpose of keeping track of time in a linear sense. These two perspectives produce radically different concepts of time, namely, *epic* and *metric* (*epic* comes from the Greek word *epiphany*, meaning *event*). The worldview produced by epic and that of metric time are very different. Religion is gibberish outside of *epic* time. Epic time is so new to the West and is so central to religion that an extended discussion of it is in order.

Metric time needs no explanation, as it is simply motion measured by a clock. If motion were to cease, metric time would also cease. Humans invented metric time as a mental tool through which a generalized experience of motion is reified into seconds, minutes and hours as a measuring device. The Greeks used the word *kronos* (from which we get our word *chronology*) in referring to this ontologically based notion of time. The Greeks invented linear time as a device for spacing the Olympic games every four years. Hitherto, time centered on important events, for example, time ends with the death of a king and begins again with the advent of a new king. The abstract notion of time, introduced by the Greeks, makes possible our concept of history as a *passage* of time in a linear sense.

Metric time underlies the culture of the West - expressed sometimes with a saying that time is money in that your wage is based on the number of hours worked. This notion of time is so deeply embedded in Western culture that it would take monumental effort for us to see Reality in any other context. We assume time to be in the very nature of Reality rather than as an invention of our mind. The next revolution in physics is to prove that metric time exists only in the mind and not in Reality. (The book to read: *The End of Time*, by Julian Barbour.)

Egyptian not Western culture forms the background of Hebrew history and the Bible. The Bible is written in epic rather than metric time. From a biblical perspective, there is no end of the *world* but only the end of *time* – this is a huge difference in perspective. There are only two ways to frame the end, namely, the end of the *world* and the end of *time*. In the linear perspective of the West, the end of time is the end of the world; in the biblical perspective, the end of time is the fulfillment (beginning) of the world as an epic event. We are moving toward the beginning and not the end of the world. Epic time will cease because all of Reality will coalesce into the present.

Epic time is radically different to us because it is based on a relational view of Reality versus the ontological assumption underlying metric time. The relation of heavenly bodies, from which the timeless event emerges, reflects the relational core of Reality. The key for measuring epic time is the depth of interaction between alpha/Omega. Unlike metric time that is the same for everyone, epic time varies by individual and culture. Epic time is an elastic present that can be stretched out or concentrated because a moment has the potential of containing all of Reality as in a single point. Where metric time measures duration of motion in moments, epic time measures depth of experience in a moment. Self-experience comes from epic time because it is a quality-event not a quantity; your body experience comes from metric time that begins with birth and endures to your present age in years – *self* and *body* operate in two different timeframes.

Thus, your body may age but your experience of self is timeless and is measured by depth of experience. The ancient Greeks recognized the two concepts of time using *kronos* to refer to time as measured by a clock or calendar, and *kairos* for time involved in a meaningful event. The Greeks realized that change could occur slowly in nature or instantaneously as in an awakening wherein metric measurement is irrelevant - *kairos* or *epiphany* means an *awakening*. The story of Rip Van Winkle is framed in the double meaning of time.

While metric time measures duration, epic time measures depth of experience. As self-experience intensifies, epic time becomes more concentrated. As consciousness of self recedes, epic time stretches out. By way of analogy, think of maple syrup. The sweetness is so defused in the sap as it comes from the tree that it is undetectable. The more the sap is boiled, the more concentrated the sweetness. Like maple syrup, self emerges through the concentration (boiling down) of experience. We experience the dilution or concentration of self in epic time consciously or unconsciously. For example, epic time measures the amount of experience that can be packed into an instant - like a weekend. The workweek often seems interminably long because epic time is being stretched out. The controlling factor is the level of self-experience. In the workweek you fill a role or function, so time moves slowly; on the weekend you become yourself, so time moves with great speed. Acute pain can make epic time stretch out because of low self-investment; pleasure accelerates epic time because it meets a need vested in a self.

Metric time has a past, present and future that is measured by days, weeks, months and years. Epic time has only a *present* with the 'past' providing depth to the present – the past is simply a dimension of the present. For example, you grow in a sequence of infant, child, adolescent and adult with each stage representing a greater level of presence, i.e., varying depths in self-experience. These developmental stages measure the passage of epic time. More precisely, it is *growth* rather than *passage* of time because each stage includes the former while adding on a new depth of self-experience. Epic time, unlike metric time, may freeze at any stage; for example, an individual may live for many years but never get beyond an adolescent stage. Moreover, the greater the consciousness of the past, the more intense is the present. For example, you may recall an exceptional great weekend. Your recollection of all previous weekends is the basis for perceiving a particular weekend as spectacular. Epic time is cumulative whereas metric time is transient.

The important issue is that these two concepts of time are radically different, but are extremely important to your psyche experience. In dealing with each other or in making a living, metric time is essential. However, in the realm of meaning, self-awareness, family and friends, epic time is key. Have you ever met someone and experience the feeling you had known the individual all your life? That is an experience of epic time. Children function in epic rather than metric time for the most part. Schooling induces metric time as part of a controlling and socialization process. Metric time often induces monotony and boredom while epic time is packed with excitement. Boredom signals the need for a deeper self-experience, i.e., acceleration into epic time.

Since epic time has only a present, it is measured by the intensity of presence in the moment. Metric time may be useful for knowing when to celebrate your birthday, however, your age in years does not necessarily define your level of presence. Presence is an epic *quality* rather than a *quantity*. The quality/depth of epic time increases with the intensity of presence. You may speak of spending quality time with your child. What you mean is that you seek to increase your presence in the life of your child and the child in yours. Presence is not just a moment on the clock, but a *quality* that increases or decreases subject to your will. In contrast, metric time is ontological rather than qualitative and operates independent of your choice.

Epic time is an event that qualitatively can change based on the accumulated experience of the past, new input from the immediate present and your choice. For example, the moment of giving birth includes an accumulated sense of what motherhood is, the present emergence of a newborn, and choice of acceptance or rejection. All three go together to create the time/event of motherhood concentrated in a single moment. What has gone on in the past plays a major role in defining the quality of presence in the birthing event. Strong, positive experiences relative to bearing a child will make the moment a pivotal event that explodes with joy – a lifetime can be concentrated in that moment.

It is important to underscore that metric time underlies the culture of the West while epic time underlies the biblical culture of the East. *Meaning* framed in epic time dominates Eastern cultures; *action* framed in metric time dominates the West. The *quality* of presence and not the *fact* of presence is the true measure of time in the East. The West meets stiff resistance when superimposing a metric framing of Reality upon the East that has operated in epic time since civilization began.

The *framing* of Reality based on divergent assumptions about the nature of time renders East/West mutually incomprehensible. By way of illustration, metric time favors the worship of youth because *life* is time running out; epic time favors age as the repository of wisdom and fullness of life. In the ancient East when writing was uncommon, people revered an elder as the epic embodiment of the people's tradition and identity in the here and now. Aging meant growing in wisdom and grace rather than simply adding chronological years.

Where the West looks to science, the East looks to wisdom. Wisdom means the ability to use the past to gain insight into the present. As a consequence, the present continuously becomes a richer event. The *present* is a quality and not a date on a calendar – a notion that is quite foreign to us. In epic time, there is no future; rather, the past acts as a vortex drawing us into the present. The Greeks expressed this ancient concept of time as a going from *kenosis* to *pleroma* – a going from zero (kenosis) to fullness (pleroma) of 'presence'. A newborn begins as a zero (kenosis) and grows to fullness (pleroma) of age – an increase in the quality of presence to Reality involving a progression from ignorance to fullness of wisdom.

An epic perception of time goes back to human origins. Early humans living in a hand-to-mouth existence had to focus on an enlightened present that bore their accumulated wisdom distilled from past experience for day-to-day survival. A struggle for subsistence gave little time to develop a notion of the future – a prerequisite for a metric framing of time. Epic time is the underpinning of proto-religion. In proto-religion, as exemplified in Hinduism and Buddhism, time stands still because Reality is a circular repetition. A few millennia ago the West came up with a linear notion of time. Biblical time combines circular and linear notions of time into a spiral moving in ever-smaller cycles toward an Omega Point.

Psychological anthropology is rediscovering the ancient concept of time by focusing not just on human physical evolution but also on mental artifacts that indicate human expanded awareness of the surrounding world. For a complete picture, human evolution should not just be physical development framed in metric time. A series of awareness breakthroughs that enabled humans to become increasingly present to surrounding Reality is also an evolutionary process. Each step in awareness is like a punctuated equilibrium. That is, each stage in psychological devolution produces a ‘psychological syndrome’ that can last indefinitely in metric time.

Recall the sequence of steps in psychological anthropology discussed previously in chapter two: consciousness→ pattern→ imaging→ reification→ cause/effect→ reasoning→ self/object→ self/all-else→ self/other-selves→ self/other-self. The fourth stage of awareness (reification) gave birth to a *metric* perception of time. Epic time arises from a paradigmatic shift from one stage to another. The shift is not metric but *qualitative* – like an awakening. Everyone is somewhere along the ten-step continuum from consciousness of consciousness to self/other-self. A particular stage can go on endlessly in metric time, but the next introduces a world epically/qualitatively greater in complexity and opportunity. For example, when reification transits to an awareness of cause/effect, the world of technology opens up making it possible eventually to land on the moon. Such technological progress is beyond a culture restricted to simply atomizing Reality.

Expanded consciousness, the key measure of epic time, does not necessarily correlate with metric time. For example, the stage of pattern recognition lasted a million years in metric time and still endures for some isolated, primitive tribes. The stages following pattern recognition emerged intermittently, but could not have been predicted using a metric timeframe. The tenth stage of epic time has begun and we cannot imagine what an eleventh stage might be. Transition to a new stage usually occurs slowly and almost imperceptibly. Passage from one stage to the next is an event in epic time and involve an enhance presence to the richness inherent in Reality. One stage is not superior to another, but each simply brings a new measure of freedom and possibility not possible in a prior stage.

Metric time is a useful tool for connecting humans – we all synchronize our watches and follow the same calendar. However, unlike metric time, epic time does *not* connect humans. Epic time is measured by an increasingly accurate response to Reality and its ‘passage’ is detected not by the hands on a clock but by a greater quality of self-experience. For example, self-experience as a communion persona is measured in epic rather than metric time – communion persona is an insightful event/epiphany and not a diploma. Although young in *chronological* age, Mary reaches the fullness of *epic* time in finding self in the presence of the divine Self. Epic time reflects the level of self-realization in a Call/response relation. Thus, your age is measured both in metric years and in epic time. Epic age is ‘measurable’ by the quality of your presence (response) ranging from zero (kenosis) to fullness (pleroma). Your metric and epic age scales may or may not correlate. To give a modern example, a drug addict may have many calendar years but in epic time be quite primitive due to an inability to respond, as a self, to surrounding Reality.

It is important to recognize that time is a product of imaging and only humans are affected by it. You are locked into the *present* whether you view time metrically or as epic event. The future quickly becomes the past, but you forever remain in the present. Regardless which concept of time more accurately defines Reality for you, it is impossible for you to be other than in the *present*. In a metric view of time, you cannot determine precisely your exact moment of presence. You can break time down to a minute, a second, and a millisecond and on into infinity. No matter how infinitesimally small metric time is subdivided to get to the point that defines the moment of your presence, theoretically, that moment of time could still be divided into smaller units. Metric time is useful to arrange activities but useless for discovering self. *Self* is outside of metric time and is to be found in the stillness of the Omega - an epic ‘event’ beyond motion. The essence of the epic event is the alpha and Omega merging together in perfect sync in the stillness of the present.

Genesis of Stillness

Perhaps the best analogy of the two concepts of time is the hurricane. The eye of a hurricane is perfect stillness. Ironically, it is the powerful centrifugal winds surrounding the eye that produces the stillness. In approaching the eye, the motion of the wind becomes increasingly intense until it finally gives way to stillness. A hurricane illustrates the sharp contrast between motion and stillness. Stillness is not simply the absence of motion, but a dynamic actuality that has gone beyond motion. The stillness in the eye of the hurricane is analogous to what is called an epic event. In an epic event, motion is so intense that it morphs into stillness – so much is going on that Reality simply becomes an event.

In an epic event, a second is a million years and a million years a second - motion is simply irrelevant. End-time means not the end of the world but the end of *measurable* time – time is transformed into a dynamic stillness. Since metric time is simply a measure of motion, it follows that, if motion intensifies to the point of creating stillness as in a hurricane, then time itself becomes still. Recall Einstein's discovery that motion/energy is another form of matter - like ice is another form of water. At the speed of light, motion/time morphs into the stillness of infinity. Metric time is a mental device we create to break down the dynamic *event* of Reality into small units.

The vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal sequence, discussed in chapter four, represents a moving into an ever more intense present – a transit from infant-life to intense espousal life. Espousal life brings a stillness arising from a profound sense of self-experience as beloved. The genesis of stillness is the journey, beginning with Abraham's sense of a distinct life, to Mary's self-experience as the only beloved of the divine Suitor. The advent of religion itself, beginning with Abraham, represents the end of time in as much as the emergence of a distinct life/self induces bipolarity into Reality – a relation that cannot be measured metrically. Subsequent biblical history only adds substance to the distinct 'self' event.

It cannot be stressed enough that the Bible is framed in epic time, ranging from primal chaos in Genesis to a stillness that comes with self-realization in resurrection. Metric time was simply unknown in the biblical era. The sedentary lifestyle of 2000 years ago made one day indistinguishable from the next. Life centered on events, not on clock or calendar. The overall direction of the Bible is one of reflection on events that go beyond the surface monotony of daily life to detect an underlying constant or *stillness* that results in forming a distilled wisdom about Life. Christ touches on the stillness theme when he calms the waters, stills the winds, allays fears and proclaims a peace that is not the absence of war but the stillness found in the fullness of Life.

The Bible exposes the *present* like peeling layers of an onion. Jesus explains to the disciples on the way to Emmaus that his death/resurrection is a fulfillment of Moses and the prophets, causing their hearts to burn within them as they awaken to the meaning of Scripture. The Bible is a history of *fulfillment* not a *prediction* of the future. The resurrection of Christ is the drawing together of all Hebraic history into the present with such intensity that the heart of the disciples burn in their attempt to grasp the moment. Tribal life speeds up in Self-resurrection in a way that slow moving human comprehension cannot grasp – tribal 'winds' give way to the stillness of self in the eye of the hurricane. Failure to appreciate the epic time framing of the Bible renders Scripture incomprehensible and subject to bazaar interpretation.

Divine revelation takes place *only* in epic time and is characterized by an intensification of stillness. Revelation is never about the future, but always about the present. Imposing the Western bias of metric time on Scripture leads to peculiar distortions. Armageddon (the decisive battle of good versus evil at the end of time) becomes a date on the calendar. Anticipation of its arrival peaks at pivotal times such as the turn of a millennium. As the year two thousand dawned, about every prominent figure in the Old Testament, from Moses to King David, had registered in a Jerusalem hotel to herald the Second Coming and to be the first to lead followers into the new land prepared for the chosen. Prior to the recent millennium, city administrators had to hire special police to ensure that believers did not feel called upon to create destruction and mayhem to help along the anticipated chaos heralding the end of time. *Stillness* rather than *chaos* is the logical ending of time.

*****SIDEBAR*****

ENDTIME OBSESSION

Because the West erroneously views Scriptures through the lens of metric rather than epic time, many have been obsessed with end-time hysteria. The recent display of feverish expectation as the year 2000 dawned was a mere passing curiosity compared to the wholesale panic that swept through Europe when the calendar turned to the year 1000 A.D. Many gave away all their property, as they would no longer have any need for it; churches were jammed; and sinful ways repudiated with much wailing and frantic cries of repentance. Believers hastened to wash their robes awaiting the immanent advent of Christ coming on the clouds with great power to judge the living and dead. History of this period makes for interesting reading.

We may be amused at the antics of a few zealots in centuries past as well as apocalyptic cults of today. But, less one feel too enlightened and untouched by prophets of doom, an end of the world obsession underlies significant events happening in the Middle East that affect us all. Many believe the founding of the Jewish state in 1948 the fulfillment of the prophecy: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number" (Jeremiah 23:3). The reclaiming of Jerusalem in 1967 in the Six-Day War fulfills the prophecy: "And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek divine Call's favor" (Zechariah 8:22). According to Scripture (Micah 4:1), Jerusalem is the staging area for the return of Christ.

The conflict between the Jews and Palestinians as well as with other Arab states is of critical interest to many Christians who see in it the staging of what is to come. The attempt to reestablish a Jewish state and the intense campaign to prevent it serve as a model for terror activities around the world. Many believe that the mosque built in Jerusalem must be blown up because it is interfering with the restoration of Jerusalem – the focal point for the Second Coming of Christ. For many, Armageddon has begun as a battle of Christ against the antichrist. Believers see themselves as fulfilling biblical prophecy and hastening the Savior's return when they take militant action against the forces of evil lead by the antichrist – the harbinger of chaos. Many in America support this biblical interpretation of what is happening in the Middle East, including some holding the highest offices in the land. The end of the world is not a preoccupation limited to a few on the fringes of society, but a subtle influence that is dictating important national/international policies. It is saddening that the West imposes metric time on the Bible causing disruption and even death for so many.

Using metric time to frame Scripture is like portraying Christ driving a Ford. Images torn from Scripture for legitimacy and then spun to illicit fear is a lucrative industry. The Internet has abundant websites and books on the Apocalypse, end of the world, antichrist, Armageddon and related items that have stirred the general public and made prophets of doom rich. Edward Edinger in his books: Archetype of the Apocalypse: Divine Vengeance, Terrorism and the End of the World, sees the widespread of terrorism, AIDS and the spread of apocalyptic cults as signs of the last days. The titles alone of these books of doom are enough to strike dread in the bravest heart. A series of books by LaHage and Jenkins have become the rage among large numbers of people obsessed with the end days. These books have such titles as: *Apollyon: the Destroyer Unleashed*, *Tribulation Force*, *Rise of the Antichrist*, and *Left Behind*. The latter book refers to the frightening prospect of being left behind and missing out on the 'rapture' that true believers will experience as they are caught up to meet Christ on the day of judgment. You can be sure that the authors present earth as a very unpleasant place for those left behind.

Historically, as Christianity became westernized, the spin on the return of Christ became increasingly framed in metric rather than epic time. When Christ did not show up on a predicted date, it became necessary to constantly come up with a new date. Now, prophets of doom settle on simply that Christ is coming very soon.

All of end-time anxiety could have been avoided with the knowledge that the biblical notion of the last day is the 365th day of the Egyptian calendar – the timeless day. The last day refers to the quality of presence not the quantity of days. It has nothing to do with the Western calendar. The ethnocentric West, with a recent history of looking down on the East as a 'developing world', is still far behind the wisdom found in the East. The 'enlightened' West assumes that the last day will happen in the future at a pre-set point of metric-based time.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

The Anatomy of Stillness

Stillness is not idleness; rather, it is an epic experience that exceeds motion because it encompasses all Reality in a dynamic present. Stillness increases proportionate to exposure of self-experience to all of Reality. The epic stillness is not just mental exercise, but encompasses the entire feeling psyche. We know well what metric time feels like every time the doctor is late or the morning alarm sounds. Motion is central to the 'feel' of metric time; epic time has the 'feel' of stillness as a rich fulfillment.

Dissecting of the experience of stillness reveals that it has three critical dimensions, namely, love, aloneness and thanksgiving. There is a stillness associated with love, aloneness and thanksgiving because all three *go to the very core of self-experience*. To reach the epic stillness of love/aloneness/thanksgiving that form the eye of a hurricane, it is necessary to pass through the chaotic winds of metric time. We do not just wait for the end of time to arrive, but actively seek the stillness that constitutes the end of time. Such stillness is the end of time because it is the fulfillment of self-experience. Unfortunately, because of cultural conditioning, we are prone to view end-time as time running out rather than as something to be achieved. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss each of the elements that are critical for achieving self-identity that leads to end-time stillness.

Love

Love is not an emotion but the experience of divine presence. (See *communion persona* in previous chapter.) Love, concretely, is the divine surrendering of power via a divine Self-gift to the beloved – as in a marriage vow. Love stills the heart because Love causes us to enter a world of divine depth beyond motion. The experience of Love touches the depth where self-experience begins and, therefore, challenges image making in expressing it. The Bible traces the devolution of human experience, sequentially centering on life/law/love, and sees it as a gradual maturing of response to divine presence. The Bible concludes with the discovery that Love is divine presence at the very core of human experience. Thus, Paul writes: “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). As Abraham is the prophet of Life, and Moses of tribal Law, Christ is the prophet of Love.

Love is not a trip into fantasyland. Christ defines Love concretely on Calvary as a surrender of power. The prophetic message of Christ is that divine presence is an experience of Love accessible to all willing to surrender power in return – marriage requires a mutual surrender of power. The human self responds to the divine Self-gift via the surrender of power. A self-experience, freed from the obsession of power, enters in divine embrace with a calm, stillness and peace as the only beloved.

While Christ prophetically demonstrates the disarming effects of Love, John is the prophetic voice of Love. John, described at the Last Supper as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23), reveals a remarkable heart-to-heart communication with Christ. John is the only one of the twelve apostles to stand at the foot of the cross beneath his dying friend. In his last words, Christ charges his loving disciple to continue for him Mary’s divine espousal calling when he said to John, “Behold your mother”, and to Mary, “Behold your son”.

John’s vision in all his writings is rooted in the emotional intelligence of the heart. Such intelligence enables him to understand better than those around him and far beyond philosophers of today. John seeks in his Gospel, and especially in his epistles, to make Love visible, as it were. The other three Gospel writers attempt to chronicle the words and deeds of Jesus. In contrast, John is obsessed with Jesus as the Hebraic person - the Word/Love made flesh. Jesus is the epiphany whereby the face of divine Call, long emerging throughout Hebraic history, suddenly becomes visible with brilliant clarity.

In his epistles, John is even more explicit when he declares without equivocation that divine Call is Love and abiding in Love is abiding in Call (1Cor. 2:10). The divine initiative of Love is not limited to a vague, primordial act of creation, but is an experience that brings order out of chaos in the human self. Love is the sacred presence of divine Call at the eye of the hurricane. Love, as the surrender of power, is the clear and final definition of divine presence in human history. Wherever love is found in any place or circumstance, divine presence is entering human history.

Understanding divine presence means bringing together Abraham (Life), Moses (Law) and Jesus (Love) into a single epiphany. All three are like peeling back layers of human experience to pinpointing divine presence. John could only give witness because Love enters human experience and can never be fully defined. The experience of Love, however faint or distorted, is the manifestation of the divine Self. Negatively put: any unloving act is a direct affront to divine Call, as was violation of tribal Law of old. Divine Call has moved out of the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies, and into human intercourse wherein Love constitutes the presence of the sacred. We now approach Love with the same reverence and awe that Israelites of old approached the Ark of the Covenant containing their tribal Laws. Love, relentlessly drawing forth the only beloved, is the fullness of divine presence hidden since the world began.

Recall that the divine Self-identity, in a Call/response relation, is initiating Call while a human-self identity can only be response. We loosely use the word 'love' to express our attraction toward individuals or things. However, a human-self can only respond to and can never be the initiator of Life, Law or Love. It is no more possible for a human to love than it is for divine Call to respond; two diametrically opposite identities are involved. In any dichotomous relation, one side is knowable only by its opposite. Thus, wherever Love is found, there is divine Call; wherever response is found, there is the human-self. Stillness increases and time ceases the closer human self-experience takes on an identity of response to the divine presence of Love.

John, as the evangelist of Love par excellence, draws his understanding directly from the heart of Christ, who, as John's mentor, responds to death, even to an excruciating death on a cross. The stillness of death thereby becomes simply response to Love. Christ enters into his death as a surrender of power in *response* to Love, and in so doing reveals the divine identity as Love. Calvary undoubtedly is the catalytic event opening the eyes of John to clearly recognize Love as the true identity of divine Call. Love is divine presence leading to the stillness that swallows up death in an embrace of the beloved. The curtains of the temple tear asunder as divine presence diffuses throughout the world to be present wherever Love is to be found. From then onward, John could speak of nothing else.

Aloneness

Achieving stillness means arriving at aloneness. It may have already occurred to you that, if there can be only one human self then you stand *alone* vis-à-vis the divine Self. Recall that the seventh stage of psychological devolution begins with the notion of *self* as a *distinct life* versus global Life – having a *distinct* life implies aloneness. A distinct life, i.e., *self*, as a relation, is a coalition into a unified consciousness of all/else that is not self. Only two selves are possible because only two opposite identities are available, namely, self, as *response* to all/else, and Self, as *Call* initiating all/else. One side of this dichotomous relation defines the other and each is *alone* in respect to the other by virtue of having opposite identities. As discussed in chapter four, the relation between Call/response devolved along vital→ coalition→ tribal→ espousal stages. Aloneness is implicit in the first three stages of this sequence, but is *front and center* in the final espousal stage.

Religion, to be espousal, necessarily excludes the possibility of a third party. The relation between the divine and human self is *espousal* precisely because it is based on mutual aloneness inherent in the notion of self reciprocally defined. The divine Self is alone as initiating Love, just as the human self is alone in responding as the beloved. While the central experience in tribal religion is *belonging*, as in belonging to the Chosen People, *aloneness* is central to the experience of espousal religion – the aloneness craved by two joined in espousal embrace. Aloneness is the *otherness* of two exact opposites and, therefore, key in experiencing opposing identities.

The experience of aloneness is the direct consequence of assuming a distinct self in the presence of the divine Self. Abraham took the first step toward aloneness by sensing a distinct life; the Hebrews took the second step by pursuing the aloneness associated with being distinct as the Chosen People; Mary took the final step in her chosen espousal over tribal aloneness before divine Call. Christ demonstrates the new espousal faith in the aloneness of Calvary and the subsequent plunging into the hell of aloneness. He arose from this hell via the divine embrace of the Resurrection. Before his death, Christ pleads with his sleepy disciples to be with him in his agonizing aloneness - they left him alone in his hellish ordeal.

Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane is directly connected with his struggle to accept aloneness – a pre-requisite of espousal faith. Upon deciding to accept the aloneness inherent in an *identity of response* to divine Call, immediately a great calm comes over him that endures to his last moments on Calvary. Christ had to enter a human experience of aloneness in order to relate to the aloneness of Call. The basis of espousal relation is the aloneness of both spouses – triangles don't work. When human *response* is in sync with divine Call, aloneness turns into the stillness that comes with fulfillment – alpha and Omega join in an embrace of fulfilling aloneness.

Espousal aloneness brings human history to a fulfillment that cannot be measured by metric time. Tribal bonding may be viewed over historical (metric) time because it is a response that grows, is localized, and is pursued as an exclusive bonding between numerous members; espousal bonding is trans-historical because it is a response that is universal and inclusive with no strings attached. The tribal history of the Chosen People is introduction to the human self-bonding with the divine Suitor. The aloneness factor becomes more explicit when opposites come together – opposites enhance identity and, therefore, aloneness.

Call coalesces into *one* divine Self and it stands to reason that *response* also coalesces into *one* human self – like two sides of the same coin. However, understanding the aloneness that results in bringing the two opposites together is a formidable challenge. John Horgan, in the epilogue to his book entitled, *The End of Science*, eloquently grapples with the issue of aloneness as an overpowering experience. He explains his experience as something of a trance wherein he suddenly realizes the miracle of existence so profoundly that he alone was the only conscious being in the universe. The experience brought with it intense joy and unlimited power. Then, suddenly, a vast darkness overwhelmed him upon full realization that he alone existed. His experience of joy turned suddenly into unspeakable horror. The shock of aloneness jolted him out of his trance. Upon reflection, he surmised that he had discovered the cause of existence, namely, God's fear of aloneness. He put the frightful experience out of his mind for many years until he happened upon a pseudoscientific theory: the Omega Point.

Horgan's Omega Point is the moment the Deity recognizes that the price of divinity is aloneness. In his view, creation is "the desperate, terrifying flight of the Omega Point from itself." Horgan's imaging of aloneness as a horrible, terrifying experience betrays his Western ethnocentric bias for *being* (versus *relation*) as the exclusive mental tool for probing Reality. The flaw in logic is obvious: How can *Being* use being to flee from *being*? His suggestion that Deity creates to escape aloneness is dead wrong. *Aloneness* by definition is *relational*; *creation* by definition is *ontological* – a going from non-existence to existence. The ontologically oriented act of creation does not touch the aloneness inherent in the very definition of a self; creation does not capture the dichotomous relation of the divine Self, as Call and the human self, as response. Initiating *Call* as the basis of the divine Self and *response* as the basis of a human self introduces the notion of aloneness – not creation. Aloneness is what distinguishes the divine Self from the human self as an *otherness* where one side precisely defines the other. The aloneness of the human self complements the exact opposite aloneness found in the divine Self.

Since the human self complements the divine Self, aloneness goes with the territory of consciousness as a distinct *self* – whether divine or human. Such aloneness translates into a vast hunger between the two selves involved. Divine Call experiences this aloneness/hunger, as *Call*, and the human self, as *response* to Call. Drawing the two selves together intensifies the experience of aloneness because the opposing identities of Call/response become sharper. The human self, as response, expands the aloneness of divine Call, just as initiating Call expands the aloneness of the human self.

Expanding aloneness is the essence of divine/human self-experience that has no limits. Aloneness is in effect the experience of a *distinct* self that goes beyond metric time because self is relational and not ontological. The 'bond' that unites *Call/response* is aloneness together - analogously found in marriage where two become as one without losing the unique identity of each. A marriage, in which there is distinction of self, oneness in being and equality in majesty, is prophetic of the divine/human espousal relation unfolding throughout history.

As the above author suggests, there is nothing so frightening than the emotional sensation of being alone. Prisoners confined to solitary confinement struggle to retain sanity. We place great emphasis on family, community, friends, and support groups of every description as welcome escapes from loneliness. Fear of aloneness stems from evolutionary social pressures for belonging as a means of survival through cooperative hunting, rearing of children, learning and mutual protection. If not actually embedded in our genes, bonding is as strong a tendency as any trait based directly on genetic makeup. The experience of aloneness, therefore, is horribly frightening because it is contrary to our evolutionary past.

In spite of our aversion to aloneness, it is the necessary consequence of achieving a *self* versus *tribal* experience. Family/tribal experience is inherently limited; the aloneness in self-experience, whether divine or human, is inherently coextensive with, but not limited to the human race/universe. When the human self, as *response*, is juxtaposed to divine Self, as *Call*, response found anywhere in humanity/nature is logically indistinguishable from your own self-experience, as response. This level of self-experience is the pinnacle of consciousness. The human self, when fully responding to Call, incarnates as humanity/nature, thus revealing the divine Self made manifest in and through humanity/nature.

Plunging into an emotional hell of aloneness, as described above by John Horgan, is the direct result of the *relational*, versus ontological, perspective of Reality inherent in biblical history. The biblical perspective of the divine Self, as initiating Love, evokes a corresponding human self, as response. Aloneness is at the core of both *initiating* and *responding*. *Aloneness* is the incarnate experience of *otherness* between the distinct divine and human selves. This relational aloneness of Call/response logically leads to divine incarnation in human history because of the mutual hunger implied. Response makes divine Call visible, just as Call gives substance to response - the Call/response relation entails mutual divine/human self-revelation. Incarnate Love gradually reduces fear as the human self responds as the only beloved; likewise, surrender of fear reveals the divine presence as Love. Death is the epic moment of aloneness; death is total surrender of power in response to the divine espousal initiative of Love.

Aloneness is more intense in espousal than in tribal religion. In tribal religion, aloneness is in being the one Chosen People - versus nature/other tribes; in espousal religion, aloneness comes with recognition of self as the only beloved. As mentioned, tribal belonging is central to experiencing tribal religion, and espousal aloneness is central to experiencing espousal religion. Belonging to a group is comforting and is a useful stage on the way to a one-on-one relation found in espousal religion. Danger is when group belonging hinders growth into a mature one-on-one espousal relation.

Aloneness arises only between the *divine* and *human* selves and not between *human* 'neighbors'. Aloneness is not loneliness or isolation from 'neighbors'. Humans are social by nature; fear of loneliness insures that socialization continues to evolve. *Loneliness* is purely an emotional experience, while *aloneness* has both an emotional and an intellectual base. At an intellectual level: aloneness is the same as *responsibility*, i.e., the ability to *hear* and effectively respond; at an emotional level: aloneness is the *inclusiveness* of self-experience expanding to become coextensive with divine Call embodied in humanity/nature.

Achieving a relational aloneness, versus loneliness, enhances listening capacity that draws 'neighbors' to the self. It is this drawing capacity of aloneness that creates the sense of 'community' sought by so many. Community, unlike tribal membership, thrives by listening for the uniqueness of each individual as the incarnate manifestation of divine Call. Each individual is window into the richness of divine espousal Love. Each individual is an invitation to experience self, as response, in a way that only that individual can orchestrate.

All experience, whether derived from nature or neighbor, is self-experience. It is impossible to get outside self-experience because it is the basis for defining self in the first place. 'Neighbors' reflect but do not originate the Call that incarnates the divine Self. The human self, as response, is alone in community because the 'neighbors' reflect the divine Self, as Call, and are the context for incarnating the human self, as response. Competition/comparison between members of a group is diametrically opposed to self-creation, as response. Because there can be only one Self with an identity of Call and only one with an identity of response, both are alone and mirror each other. It is the emerging of the divine and the human, as *self*, that creates 'community' – *community* is the effect and not the cause of *self*. There cannot be a human self without positing a divine Self, nor a divine Self without a human self, because self by definition is relational - like there can be no east without a west.

It seems that family and friends dispel all feelings of aloneness, so why is there a need for espousal religion? Family and friends fill a tribal need for belonging but cannot reach the depth where self-experience emerges. Furthermore, a human spouse, while touching on a much deeper level of self than friends, can lead only to the threshold of self-identity as response to Call. A sense of self is incomplete until juxtaposed to the divine Self. The universe and all that lives, when seen as *response*, constitute the presence of the human self; when seen as *Call*, they constitute the presence of the divine Self. Self-experience, initially bound by skin, expands until the body is coextensive with the universe, out of which the body is made. The universe is also the body of divine Call seeking response. While a body/universe is against the grain of the reified culture of the West, this relational view of the divine/human body is the consequence of Abraham's original vision of distinct life/self vis-à-vis divine Life/Self.

The experience of aloneness is what drives the felt need for dialogue. Aloneness, although initially terrifying, is the cutting edge of dialogue that unveils both the divine and human self. Dialogue is akin to all the anxieties that go into a wedding preparation that fade away as lovers are finally united in conjugal embrace. From the moment Akhenaten realized that there could be one and only one Deity, it is just a matter of time before facing the necessary corollary of aloneness. The aloneness occasions the dating dialogue between the divine/human selves that ends in conjugal union. Dialogue with 'neighbor' is context to dialogue with the divine Suitor.

But, discovering divine aloneness can be a terrifying journey. In our heart of hearts we ask why should we struggle with such a painful experience of aloneness? It is so much easier to restrict a sense of self to a tribal level inherent in kinship, competition, gender, age, occupation, possessions, social status, education, accomplishments and a host of other group generating realities. Some may react to the pain and begin to view aloneness as an evil to be avoided at all cost.

Facing aloneness is like deliberately going into a desert where everything is stripped away, exposing self to the raw experience of life that leads to a sense of intense aloneness. All the major proto-religions and religions of the world originated from an experience in a desert like environment. It is said that so many of the first Christians were so taken by an aloneness experience that more people lived in the desert than in the cities. This may be a slight exaggeration, but the point is that if aloneness is the necessary consequence of there being but one Deity, then aloneness must also be reflected in a self-experience that reflects the lone Deity. A desert-like deprivation stretches the domain of emotional/relational intelligence much like a university stretches the domain of the rational intellect. Expanding the sense of aloneness actually enhances both intellectual and emotional capacity. The death of a loved one is something of a desert experience in that it forces the experience of aloneness into the forefront of our consciousness, thereby affording opportunity, however painful, to expand self-experience. The transition to a deeper self-experience occurs gradually.

In the ontological orientation of the West, aloneness has a pejorative meaning, as in being a *loner* or lonely. A loner *reacts* to surroundings, whereas relational aloneness comes from *responding* to surroundings. The deeper the response, the more aloneness develops because the environment of the human self is the divine, espousal Call manifested in and through the surrounding world. A consciousness of a distinct self-experience, as aloneness, is a work in progress, dating back to the very beginning of religion. Aloneness is the direct result of the divine/human dichotomous relation. Our vision of Reality, as a relation, clears only through perceiving the aloneness of the divine Self and the consequent aloneness of the human self. Peace comes when aloneness/response reaches the core where self-experience begins. At the core of self-experience is a stillness that touches the divine stillness.

*****SIDEBAR*****

UNIQUENESS VERSUS ALONENESS

Everything about an individual reflects uniqueness, such as fingerprint, facial/eye characteristics, genetic code, point in space and time. Einstein concludes that, because everyone occupies a different spot in space and time, each individual occupies a different universe. Although we now live in a global village and in an information revolution, each individual, nevertheless, knows that one's thoughts are one's own. Each ultimately decides what those thoughts will be. Being unique means in effect being alone.

However, the uniqueness of countless individuals simply reveals the infinite facets of *Call*; at the same time, the uniqueness of countless individuals reflects the infinite facets of *response*. These responses are an extension of your human self-experience vis-à-vis the divine Self, as Call. Humanity/universe is the arena of the encounter between the divine/human selves. Uniqueness that we all possess points not to separate self-identities among us, but to various manifestations of the Call/response relation - the true division is between the mutually exclusive self-*identities* of Call versus response. Experiencing uniqueness is the beginning point for discovering self-identity as an all-inclusive *response* vis-à-vis the distinct divine Self-identity, as Call.

While delving into aloneness may be by individual choice, society as a whole is consciously or unconsciously moving rapidly toward focusing on the human self, stopping short of delving into what self-experience actually means and the aloneness implied. Marketing is increasingly taking into account the obvious uniqueness of each individual. Cultural emphasis on individualism and self-reliance in the West is forcing self-experience to center stage. Some try a forced entry into the world of self-experience through psychedelic drugs. Democracy, based on the notion of self-governing, is the wave of the future. Dictators are being forced to use ever more subtle means, such as feigned elections, to maintain control. Tribalism, in which individuality is deemed disruptive, is gradually becoming the *basis* rather than a *hindrance* for self-experience as tribes of the world merge into one human tribe. We are evolving toward the time when *member* of a tribe morphs into *citizen* of the world and citizen into *neighbor*. Christ is the archetypal neighbor revealing the divine Neighbor. While nature displays the glories of divine Call, a 'neighbor' is a manifestation of divine Call/Love that touches the very core of self.

The notion of *neighbor* includes aloneness, uniqueness and self. Each of the six billion 'neighbors' on the planet is a unique manifestation of divine Call, as Call. The human-self achieves aloneness by consciously identifying with the myriad responses of countless 'neighbors' as extension of one's own response. Self is redeemed precisely because the response of Christ on Calvary *is one's own*. 'Spirituality' consists in the growth of an inclusive self, not in some Platonic dematerialization of self into a disembodied spirit. *Neighbor* is the point where the human self meets the divine Self in an eternal ballet with divine Call taking the lead. Each 'neighbor' is an invitation and a challenge to growth in the 'spirituality' of response. Each 'neighbor', as a unique manifestation of Call/Love, is a gift for developing self-experience.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving, along with Love and aloneness, is the third leg of the trilogy supporting the stillness at the core of epic time. The experience of the trilogy Love/aloneness/thanksgiving feeds into a stillness born of profound fulfillment.

Thanksgiving is *self-as-response* in the deepest sense. Thanksgiving is the essence of the human self-identity, as initiating Love is the core of the divine Self-identity. Thanksgiving is the polar opposite of Love and both are connected by *otherness* in that one reflects the other. The experience of aloneness is the experience of *otherness* between the polar opposites: Love, as initiative, and thanksgiving, as response to initiative. We can easily identify with experiences of both Love and thanksgiving, from which divinity and humanity draws identity respectively; the experience of aloneness links Love/thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is affective and intellective – affective because it engages the human emotions, and intellective because it implies a ‘covenant’ (exchange) between the self of the receiver and the self of the giver. Growth in thanksgiving is growth in the awareness of *self* – not only of the human self, as thanksgiving, but also the divine Self, as initiating Love. At this point, this should be obvious; nevertheless, a brief review may be helpful.

The first law of physics is that whenever there is an *action* there is an equal *reaction*. Thus, an action/reaction relation governs all physical reality. By adding to this action/reaction dichotomy a minimal notion of a conscious *self* (as Abraham did) and action/reaction becomes a Call/response relation. By deepening the Call/response relation further, the relation elevates to a Love/thanksgiving dichotomy. The more the human self-identity emerges as response/thanksgiving, the more the divine Self-identity emerges as Call/Love. The growth is not in ‘spirituality’ but through incarnating *self* in the physical world that embodies the action/reaction relation.

The Bible delves into the action/reaction *relation* governing the physical world to ultimately find in action/reaction a conscious relation between two *selves* – the divine and human selves. The major players in biblical history are milestones for increasingly ascribing conscious *self* to the physical universe of action/reaction. Adam introduces reaction. Noah subsequently elevates the reaction embodied in the sin of Adam to the level of subservience, thus introducing a minimum investment of self. Abraham increases a self-investment by elevating subservience to obedience (mutual divine/human listening). Moses attaches a history to the incarnating of self by envisioning mutual listening to be concretely expressed through a history of tribal bonding. King David achieves such unity that *tribal unity* becomes prophetic of a messianic self that will coalesce all of humanity vis-à-vis the divine Chief. Mary reaches the pinnacle of self-discovery in that she is the first to envision the messianic self to be an espousal relation with the divine other Self. Christ adds to Mary’s vision the insight that thanksgiving is the innermost identity of the human self, and Love is the innermost identity of the divine Self. Thus the dichotomy of Love/thanksgiving is the epicenter of incarnating both the divine and human selves. The action/reaction that governs nature is in essence a manifestation of a Call/response relation and, more specifically, when a full self-consciousness is achieved, a Love/thanksgiving relation between the divine/human selves.

As mentioned, inviting Love is the divine Self-identity, just as thanksgiving is the human self-identity. This means a human cannot love any more than divine Call can be thankful without switching identities – they are polar opposites. A human can *experience* Love, but can respond only as thanksgiving. Thus, a response to a spouse or child can be only one of thanks to the initiative of Love *made manifest* in and through a spouse/child. We may imagine loving another, but, in reality, the experience is one of thanksgiving for Love reflected by another – it is like loving a flower, but the flower is visible only because it reflects the light of the sun. It is impossible for a human-self to love without becoming divine. An identity of response/thanksgiving is the counterbalance of the divine identity of Call/Love. You, your ‘neighbor’ and the universe incarnate divine Call/Love inviting response. While Love includes the wherewithal to respond, the loop is not closed until the human-self freely embraces the identity of response/thanksgiving. The expansion of self, as thanksgiving, is gateway for going beyond metric time to the stillness of divine encounter.

The Love/thanksgiving relation is synergistic: Love begets thanksgiving and thanksgiving begets Love. Thus, dialogue is the core of relational (versus atomized) Reality, in that Love and thanksgiving mutually foster and reveal each other. We make Love visible in the world not by loving the world, but by finding the world as occasion of thanksgiving – thanksgiving is the incarnate form of Love. Human self-experience expands in and through a growing depth in giving thanks. When thanksgiving is commensurate with the initiative of Love, the divine/human espousal intercourse is consummated.

It cannot be overemphasized that you do not *give* thanks but *become* thanks - thanksgiving is the assuming of a *response* self-identity vis-à-vis the loving *initiative* forming the divine Self-identity. Humanity/universe is the Love initiative that logically must precede *response*. Growth in thanksgiving is the gradual awakening to a response-identity coextensive with humanity and the universe itself. Response is not merely a mental exercise, but the entering into divine intercourse via thanksgiving for Love manifest concretely in humanity/universe. The gift of the divine Self is in and through a friend, sunset or snowflake; the human self-surrender is in the response of thanksgiving for friend, sunset or snowflake. The world is as an engagement ring given by the divine Lover to the beloved. The only adequate and possible response to such an offer is thanksgiving.

Conscious thanks for everything around, even for a single drop of water, little by little enhances the depth of thanksgiving. The capacity for experiencing Love is in direct proportion to the depth of experiencing self-identity as thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the means for going beyond the confines of our skin-bound body. *You momentarily become that for which you are thankful.* Giving thanks for a drop of water fleetingly transfers self-experience to the drop of water. Thanksgiving is the mode for incarnating the human self, as Love is for the divine Self. Every act of giving thanks opens the door a little more to the experience of Love. Each deeper experience of Love in turn sharpens self-identity as response/thanksgiving. (The book to read: *Simple Abundance*, by Sarah Breathmach).

As thanksgiving becomes increasingly the identity of self, aloneness ensues as a growing capacity of response to an overwhelming presence of Love/Call. The aloneness is not one of separation but rather an expansion of self as thanksgiving that potentially envelops humanity/universe, thereby touching the aloneness of the divine Self. As self-experience deepens, metric time dissolves into stillness, becoming like a whirling wind around a tranquil center. Seeking thanksgiving as the essence of self entails the gradual surrendering of all self-images in order to purchase the true self-identity of thanksgiving - the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field. To find the human self is tantamount to finding the divine Self as mirror opposite.

The one radically new insight Christ adds to the development of religion is that self-experience (versus self-image) is identical with the experience of thanksgiving. While thanks may have been the lubricant that led to civilization, Christ raises thanks beyond behavior to be the dynamic core of human self-identity. Christ celebrates with joy the presence of his friends at the Last Supper, sharing bread/wine as his body/blood in thanksgiving. The drama is in the taking of his friends, via thanksgiving, to become his own body/blood – a bonding in a *corporeal* self versus *tribal* self.

The drama is consummated by his friends' eating/drinking to form one body. That body has an identity of *eucharis* (*eucharis* is the Greek word for *thanksgiving*). Christ endures through time because his physical body has expanded to become a *eucharis* body. As a *eucharis* body he is forever response to loving Call. His *eucharis* body is the human self that encompasses humanity/universe in thankful response to Love. Love is everywhere in the world calling forth the human self of thanksgiving. The presence of Love in our lives engages all of our emotions that affects the body and challenges the mind. Love is the sole object of faith and the reward of hope, in as much as Love can only be experienced and never fully defined. The only adequate response to Love is in becoming a *eucharis* body that simultaneously gives body to Love that makes present the divine Self.

Christ reveals death as a plunging into the identity of thanksgiving as the beloved of divine Call. Love with no limits demands response with no limits. Because the espousal bond is between the divine and human *selves*, what remains in view is the corpse – the shell of response. Surrender of power and aloneness are easy to see in a corpse. What is not seen is the transformation of self into a *eucharis* body in the presence of Love. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human mind the experience of joy in the discovery of self as the only beloved of divine Call. Long before others see a corpse, the human self is transiting into a *eucharis* body increasingly reflecting the brilliance of Love shining brighter than the sun. Thanksgiving changes the darkness of death into the light that comes from Love. A *eucharis* body is how the self endures forever beyond death.

Our life is a calling to transform an alienated psyche into a *eucharis* persona. While *communion* persona is the presence of the divine/human selves in one body, *eucharis* persona refers solely to how the human self incarnates as body. Espousal religion, in practice, is striving to become a *eucharis* persona. *Eucharis* persona means the human self assumes its true body by achieving a self-identity of thanksgiving. Such *eucharis* persona is potentially coextensive with loving Call made manifest in and through humanity/universe. A *eucharis* persona is *relational*, as in a Call/response, Love/thanksgiving dichotomy. We think of body as an object; a body that is the incarnation of *eucharis* is alien to our way of thought.

A proper understanding of *eucharis* persona profoundly deepens popular notions about the Holy Eucharist. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is as *eucharis persona*. An individualistic, ontological notion of bodily presence, drawn from Platonic philosophy, does not do justice to Christ's communal presence. Christ emerges from the relationally based Hebrew culture and not the ontological Greek culture. The enduring presence of Christ in history is as *eucharis* body. The West's penchant for reifying the body of Christ in the Eucharist puts emphasis on the body as an *object* rather than the presence of the *self* that is by definition relational. The distinction may be subtle, but the consequences of not grasping the distinction are horrendous. The West tends to treat the Eucharist as an object, when, in reality, the Eucharist is the extension of the communal body of Christ through history as thanksgiving. Wherever there is human *love*, there is the presence of the divine Self; wherever there is a human *thanks*, there is the presence of the *eucharis* body of Christ. Thanksgiving, like Love, is universal. As the divine Self incarnates as Love, the human self incarnates as thanksgiving; union with Christ is through *eucharis* not love.

Our proneness for changing the Hebraic/relational perception of body into the Platonic/ontological body logically leads to using the Eucharist for control and, even worse, as a divisive weapon for separating the good from the bad. Eucharist pertains to *identity* and not behavior - behavior flows from an identity of being the only beloved and not as a means to such an identity. We receive the Eucharist not because we are good or to make us better, but because we are seeking a eucharis identity by transforming the experience of our body from physical object to an experience of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is how the human self takes possession of body, i.e., self, as body, achieves enduring presence beyond death through eucharis.

The culture of the West centers on behavior/law, while that of the East centers on identity/wisdom. The Hebrew history is one of probing what it means to be a Chosen People with *tribal belonging* as the distilled wisdom accruing from the search; likewise, the story of Christ is one of probing what it means to be the chosen self with *eucharis persona* as the distilled wisdom accruing from the search. Using the Eucharist as a means of control over behavior violates the entire tenor of Scripture. The West tends to equate religion with morality. Rather, religion is a search for self-identity; for over a thousand years the focus is on the chosen tribal-self, then, deepens to a chosen self vis-à-vis a divine Suitor. In this search all of us are equal as 'neighbors' and cannot be divided into good/bad, rich/poor, learned/unlearned, male/female or into any other category.

The same error of using the Eucharist as behavior control can be found in using Scripture itself as a means of control, or in deciding who is good and who is not. The Bible is a search for tribal/self *identity* rather than a code of conduct. It chronicles the emergence of the human self vis-à-vis the divine Self, leading up to the realization that eucharis is the final defining identity of the human self, just as Love is the final defining identity of divine Call. The Holy Eucharist is the human self of thanksgiving meeting the divine Self of Love. The Eucharist is the entire Bible in capsule form. We struggle to become eucharis persona in order to enter into the divine/human communion of Love/thanksgiving made manifest in Christ.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice precisely because it is a *thanks* gift, i.e., a *self*-gift that connects the human self directly to the divine Self-gift. Just as Love is a gift of the divine Self, a eucharis persona is a gift of the human self in return – as in the exchange of marriage vows. Recall from the discussion of proto-religion in chapter four that sacrifice means making a connection between the divine and human worlds. The Eucharist is the ultimate sacrifice because it connects the divine and human on the basis of *self*. The true Eucharistic sacrifice is emerging as a *distinct self* vis-à-vis the divine Self. The gift of *self*-realization is the only sacrifice that is pleasing in as much as the human self fully complements the divine Self. It is this dynamic sacrificial interchange between thanksgiving/Love and Love/thanksgiving that leads to the fulfilling stillness of an espousal divine/human encounter.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice superior to that of the Old Testament because the union achieved is *corporeal* and not just *tribal*. Divine initiative is the sole source of unity; consequently, a corporeal far more than tribal union reveals the divine Self. The lesson of the Last Supper is that we give our body (presence) and blood (life) as food and drink to effect corporeal union among 'neighbors' by bringing 'neighbors' into the self, versus 'feeding' off of others. Since the relation between the divine/human selves is corporeal rather than merely tribal, true sacrifice now requires the entering into a communal body whereby self identifies with neighbor. Our body is not torn to pieces, as is the case of the boy king in The Bacchae, but becomes a communal body by the incorporation of 'neighbors' in self via eucharis (thanksgiving) in response to the incarnate divine Neighbor manifested through 'neighbors' as Love. Entering a communal body requires plenty of sacrifice for Love, as Christ readily demonstrates.

In the centuries following Christ, the Eucharist, as an *object* of worship, has replaced the eucharis persona as central to faith. The change occurred gradually, giving birth to ornate pageantry, music and elaborate cathedrals. In the process, thanksgiving changed from *becoming* eucharis to a *giving* of thanks or, simply, a going to Mass – a transition that takes the heart out of espousal religion leaving only an ornate sarcophagus. Giving thanks as an obligation for gifts received rather than *becoming* eucharis persona is a reverting back to tribal religion in which the notion of self has not yet clearly surfaced. Many today feel a tribal obligation to attend Mass rather than seek to become eucharis persona as the essence of faith. For them, 'receiving' communion becomes a badge of membership in good standing rather than a celebration of divine espousal union.

Due to the error of *giving* rather than *becoming* thanks, excommunication, a trademark of tribal imagery, reappeared in history with a vengeance. In espousal religion, excommunication is impossible because how can a self be excommunicated from the eucharis body that gives self-presence? Judas chooses gold over eucharis, leading to a destruction of his body as an escape from a eucharis self – this is the only form of ‘excommunication’ possible in espousal religion. In espousal religion there can be only self-execution/excommunication – never by another’s hand.

Christ gives his eucharis body/blood as food/drink to signify that the divine/human relation is corporeal versus tribal. *Law* governs divine/human relation at a tribal level; *thanksgiving* governs divine/human relation at a corporeal level. Thanksgiving, rather than obedience to law, measures the response to Love that cements the relation between the divine/human *selves*. The new espousal covenant is now based on a simple marital yes/no, in contrast to the fickleness of graduated obedience found in tribal law; tribal religion can reach only the threshold of espousal religion.

The eucharis yes/no is not an issue of tribal obligation because it touches a depth where the human *self* emerges as spouse to the divine Self. Scripture, in speaking about being reborn, refers to the transition from a tribal to an espousal self – a full sense of selfhood. Eucharis is the birth of self and at this level excommunication makes no sense. No one can be excluded from eucharis identity save by individual choice. As fidelity to tribal law formed the Chosen People, so, now, growth in eucharis forms the Chosen Person. Eating/drinking Christ’s eucharis flesh/blood nourishes the emergence of the human self as eucharis persona. As eucharis persona, Christ is able to endure though history and shows the Way to Life.

The focus of the Last Supper is not on the gathering of disciples so much as on a poignant setting that allows expression of the divine/human marital covenant at the level of *self*. The small gathering, in lieu of a large tribal gathering, creates an environment for concretely (versus ideologically) emerging as eucharis persona incorporating specific ‘neighbors’. Only in such a setting can Christ take possession of and reveal his true identity as eucharis persona. By transiting into eucharis persona, the Love initiative of the divine Suitor becomes visible in the affection Christ manifests for his friends. The small gathering allows the participants a glimpse into the drama of human/divine encounter at the level of *self*. The human self of Christ affectively mirrors for those gathered the divine Self and the divine Self radiates from the human self - just as you would expect of spouses. Unity no longer comes tribally from the top down, but wells up as Love brought to visibility by Christ through such depth of thanksgiving for specific ‘neighbors’ that they form his eucharis body.

Thus, a eucharis communion of ‘neighbors’ replaces tribal bonding as key to divine presence. The neighbor ‘bonding’ is not social/tribal but corporeal. ‘Neighbors’ incarnate as one body as the direct consequence of the divine espousal presence. Thus, the divine and human selves are present as neighbors in one body, in which the divine Self has identity as initiating Love and the human self has identity as eucharis. In fact, the divine Self, as *Initiator*, is more present in the body than the human self, as *thanks*, i.e., your body is more the body of divine Call/Love than it is your body as thanksgiving. The body is already the incarnation of the divine Self, as Love; you incarnate only gradually as body through thanksgiving in the context of neighbor/nature. At the Last Supper, Christ introduces us to our true body as communal eucharis persona.

The eucharis persona is the enduring legacy of Christ and requires a relational over an ontological perception of body. (Chapter two introduces a relational notion of body.) Eating/drinking of bread/wine shared among friends in mutual thanksgiving is the ‘exercise’ for transitioning from a body bound by skin to eucharis body. The Eucharist is not an escape from a physical body, but an awakening to the eucharis body that extends far beyond the skin. When you feel gratitude, you are feeling your body at the deeper level of response to Love. Eucharis response to Love is experientially the incarnating of divine Call in the body, just as it is also the incarnating of the human self in the same body. The body is the tangible manifestation of an unseen divine/human, Self-to-self relation. A transition to eucharis body (*body* defined *relationally* as the medium of self-presence) eventually expands awareness beyond the skin to a body-universe embodying the divine Self-presence, as Call.

A eucharis persona is not an ‘out of body’ experience, but a progressively expanded body experience. John, the author of the Apocalypse, declares at the beginning of his book that what he witnessed was not an eyewitness news account, but rather something of a surreal body experience. St. Paul reports a similar experience when he writes that he does not know whether he is in his body or beyond his body – only divine Call knows. From John and Paul we get a hint that we are not dealing with an ideology but a mutation of how we experience body. Changing an awareness of body, as an object, to body, as a relation, progresses slowly extending through a lifetime – a challenge particularly difficult here in the reified culture of the West.

A deeper understanding of body is possible. A physical body begins with skin boundaries but becomes increasingly relational when consciousness of body expands to include the air that fill the lungs, sound striking the ears and a world around pressing on all our senses. As mentioned, increasing awareness of body as *response* to Reality is a process of *self-incarnating* (in fleshing). Entering ever more deeply into the flesh as gateway to divine contact is the basic assumption upon which Hebrew tradition and the Gospel is built. Incarnation, discussed in chapter four as one of the five characteristics of religion, means that grasping Reality is in and through expanding an understanding of what constitutes body. In espousal religion, *body* means mutual *presence* of the divine/human selves. The physical body/blood is always the beginning and ending point of divine Self-manifestation as Love from which a eucharis persona emerges.

A body responds via sensation, emotion, intellect and imagination. Eucharis persona wells up from the sensory, enters the emotions, then engages the intellect and finally is expressed by *image/act*, for example, as in the *act* of giving thanks or of receiving the Eucharist. The thanksgiving process cannot be reversed, that is, it cannot go from the imaging/action to the sensory level. A thanksgiving experience is the very source from which a sense of a distinct self arises. For example, the beggar in the Gospel parable feels gratitude at a sensory level welling up when offered a crumb. For the beggar, that crumb is his body, so to speak, for without it (and many more besides) his presence would cease. That crumb can be expanded to family, friends, possessions, nature and the universe itself. A body is not an isolated object. A tangible body, however, is the beginning point for experiencing eucharis persona and the body expands as thanksgiving expands. *Body*, in biblical terms, is simply *presence*. Thanksgiving expands your physical body (presence) to encompass nature/humanity/universe.

The goal of becoming eucharis persona in lieu of a chosen tribe provides the key for understanding biblical history. Fostering the eucharis persona is the sole purpose of Christ, just as the fostering of tribal bonds as the Chosen People is the sole purpose of Moses. Just as Moses finds freedom to be the necessary precondition for forming a tribal-identity as the Chosen People, Christ finds thanksgiving as the necessary precondition for forming a self-identity as the beloved of divine Call. As the Passover, in which the children of Israel were spared, becomes the occasion for celebrating a free people, the celebration of the Passover at the Last Supper becomes the occasion for celebrating the eucharis persona. As freedom gave the Hebrews their identity as a people before the divine Chief, thanksgiving now gives a human self-identity before the divine Suitor.

A shifting from *freedom* to *thanksgiving* as the dynamic core of religion changes the focus from bonding *between* members to self-discovery – tribal freedom pertains to external relations, while thanksgiving pertains to the very identity of self. Giving thanks is a free choice arising from the core of self that no one can take away. Despots can take away an individual's freedom, but not the choice of self-identity as eucharis persona. For the Hebrews, freedom creates a chosen tribe; for Christ, thanksgiving creates the Hebraic person with a freedom that comes directly from divine Call/Love.

The Last Supper is the paradigm of the new order. The Last Supper is the archetypal event of Love/thanksgiving expressing the new espousal covenant. The first Christians gather to share Christ's body/blood, not as cannibals, but as a way of slowly assimilating into their own persona the same identity of thanksgiving – much the same way as food is assimilated into the body. They gather because "putting on Christ," (Phil 1:20-24) means becoming eucharis persona in concrete circumstance among 'neighbors', rather than merely performing some ritual or 'spiritual' exercise.

In ancient times, *body* means *presence* and *blood* means *life*. Sharing of the body/blood of Christ in effect means sharing in Christ's presence (body) and Christ's life (blood) as the *archetypal* eucharis persona that transcends history. To connect with the presence/life of Christ, 'neighbors' share their presence (body) and their life (blood) in time and place. The gathering of 'neighbors' is a eucharis exercise of the New Covenant, whereby a self-identity as eucharis persona emerges. Thanksgiving is not a mental exercise. Thanksgiving for one's actual 'neighbor' concretizes eucharis persona. Becoming eucharis persona is the true Passover from death to Life.

The eucharis persona is inherently catholic (universal). Thanks, as a concept/behavior, is a universal phenomenon found in every human culture. All living things react to environment, but only humans can elevate reaction to a conscious response, and conscious response to an identity of thanksgiving. A pride of lions feeding on a kill does not display a please/thanks behavior – a behavior that evolves solely among humans and defines humans as such. A spark of gratitude found anywhere in the world is directly related to the Eucharist – the difference is only in the degree that thanks forms the basis of self-identity. A spark of thanks found anywhere can be raised to a flame and a flame can expand to an all-consuming fire of thanksgiving. Distinction is not between religions or believers/pagans but between 'neighbors' in a diverse human race. Thanks for neighbor anywhere leads to Life (1 John 2:10).

The story of the ten lepers beautifully reflects the universality of thanksgiving. Ten lepers sought a cure from Christ but only one, following a cure, returned to give thanks. Christ makes a point that a stranger rather than the nine believing members of a Chosen People returned to give thanks. Feeling injured is a common experience when due thanks is not forthcoming. An unrequited gift is a universal hurt deeply felt because thanks is at the core of self-experience – a sense of self however poorly defined by the injured individual. Christ is making a point that thanksgiving is the very source of self-identity in the New Testament, just as tribal belonging had been the source of identity in the Old – a point missed by the nine lepers. Christ makes the greatest contribution of all times to religion by revealing the eucharis persona as the summit of history. Ritualizing the Eucharist helps but does not substitute for the struggle of finding the true identity of the eucharis self. Thanksgiving is what makes us human and a consort of divinity. A sense of thanks existed long before Christ, but Christ is the first to recognize thanksgiving as the source of human self-identity vis-à-vis the divine Self-identity of initiating Love.

The eucharis persona of the Gospel is rooted in sound psychology. Receiving an unexpected benefit momentarily awakens a self-worth (a sense of a distinct self) implied by the giver of the gift. The gratuitousness of the gift actually creates in the receiver a sense of self-worth. Also, response of thanksgiving for a gift received implies recognition of the self-worth of the giver. Giving thanks lubricates human interaction and leads to ever-deeper awareness of self. Thanksgiving also seals a covenant between giver and benefactor in that mutual selves are affirmed. As the Ten Commandments is the defining convent of Old, thanksgiving is the defining convent of the New. A deliberate choice to give thanks repeated many times eventually transform self into thanksgiving. If it were possible to turn thanksgiving into a barometer, it would be possible to measure the exact depth of self-experience.

A gift as an unearned or undeserved benefit is the only way to communicate at a *self*-level, whether the self is human or divine - all other communication is utilitarian or reactionary. The image of *gift*, found only among humans, is the image ‘tool’ we created that not only expresses a sense of a distinct self but also nurtures this consciousness. Creating a distinct self is essentially an act of faith as it entails stepping into the unknown - a gift entices the emergence of self and is the empirical sign of the unseen reality that is self.

Try to imagine your life consumed by the *response* of thanksgiving to the myriad gifts that surround you communicating the presence of the divine Self. Each moment is a unanticipated/undeserved gift that invites a response of gratitude. Done habitually, response/thanksgiving purges reaction and becomes as natural as moving and breathing. When the last moment of life arrives, the predisposition of thanksgiving has built to such a crescendo that the last moment is just another moment of emerging as the only beloved of the bountiful Suitor. The Last Supper capped a lifetime of thanks, but Calvary is the moment that Christ assumes his eucharis body as self-gift in response to the gift of the divine Self – the ultimate Gift.

Christ’s admonition to spread the new espousal faith means transforming a physical body (presence) into a eucharis body (presence). Only the giving of thanks can reveal the presence (body) of the divine Self - incarnate as Love in the universe. Spreading the Gospel is not through ideology but via the revelatory and infectious nature of thanksgiving. Giving thanks for ‘neighbor’ engenders a sense of worth for both giver and receiver. Thanksgiving synergistically transforms all who are touched by it. Eucharis not only heals one’s own psyche but also promotes the healing of society. Thanksgiving is the sole environment for discovering a true self-identity as response to loving Call. The mission of Christ will have been accomplished when the world is enveloped in thanksgiving. In that new world, epic time becomes the joyful stillness of a thankful heart enveloped in Love.

Death

The anatomy of stillness is to be found in the trilogy of *Love* (defined concretely as power surrender), spousal *aloneness* and *thanksgiving*. We pass through the whirling winds of chaos and enter into the still eye of a hurricane in the measure these three facets of espousal religion gain hold of our psychic makeup. Regardless what level of stillness is achieved in life, at some point the stillness of death awaits everyone.

Death may be seen ontologically as the last moment in a lifelong series of moments or, relationally, as an epic moment of profound depth that encapsulates all of life. If death is framed in metric time as the last of a lifelong series of moments, death is abrupt and frightening. If death is framed in epic time, death will encapsulate all the moments of life in a profound response to the unknown that is a fulfilling rather than an ending. Death is an event that is both sobering and equalizing, whether it be one’s own or the human race as a whole at the end of time. Religion pivots around the life/death enigma. Escape from death in Egypt dominates the Old Testament; going into death is the core of the New.

Only humans die. The human species alone is aware of death as such and its inevitability. Humans become conscious of death as a direct corollary to the concept of *life* as a distinct reality. Death is simply the antithesis of Life. To understand one means to understand the other. We tend to focus on life as the source of self-discovery, but self-knowledge also requires insight into death. Everyone has a particular spin on death. There are, however, four general perspectives worthy of note, namely, the modern, natural, psychological and biblical view of death. A discussion of each follows.

Modern View

A camel is a horse put together by a committee. The modern view of death would make even a camel look good. Characteristic of the modern view is a fixation on life and the virtual denial of death. This is understandable because who wants life to end? Unfortunately, pushing death to the side inevitably induces reaction to it. Reaction to death is endemic to Western culture. We are preoccupied with finding technology to get rid of death or at least put it off as long as possible. Death is the epitome of the unknown. What is unknown produces an equal measure of paralyzing fear. Much of modern entertainment and youth worshiping hubris arise from the fear associated with death.

There are two assumptions about death that dominate the modern view. These are: death is when the soul separates from the body and death is a punishment. Neither of these images deals with the issue of death directly – the underlying focus is still on life. Although thought of as a *modern* view of death, the body/soul dichotomy has its roots in Platonic philosophy. In Plato's view, the world is but a shadow. We can know divinity only by turning away from material things and towards Life through intellectual enlightenment. Knowledge of divinity will elude all but an elite, intellectual few. Most dwell in the shadowy abyss of death – the epitome of darkness.

Plato, the guru of reification, begins with the assumption that Reality is divided into a natural and supernatural world of being. We must struggle to free ourselves from the tangible in order to reach the intangible. In Platonic thought, death is simply the moment of liberation when the soul leaves the body and returns to the spiritual realm of being. The existence of two worlds, spirit and material, is the cornerstone of Western culture. However, dividing Reality into spirit versus matter leads to a philosophy *about* death without dealing with death directly. The West may be characterized as a reactionary anti-death culture and, therefore, resistant to finding any meaning in death as such. We tend to shun its reality in various ways, such as making a corpse as lifelike as possible in a funeral home or euphemistically thinking of death as a sleep or release from the burdens of life. Such imagery subtly suggests an escape through suicide when life becomes too onerous.

Reaction to death also leads to viewing death as a *punishment* for wrongdoing. The danger of this view is that if the Deity can punish with death, so can we as instruments of divine wrath. This is the basis of capital punishment in the West. However, punishing another with death assumes that only those we condemn to death will die. In effect, the practice of capital punishment amounts to a quick, painless death for a criminal, while the rest of us often face a painful ordeal of dying, which the state requires be protracted for as long as possible.

Unscrupulous demagogues sometimes play on the punishment angle to induce fear of death and the pain associated with it. The popular Left Behind series, in which many are doomed to destruction and death, is one such example. Using death as punishment to fan the flame of fear even to the point of terror is an ideal tool to manipulate the behavior of people. The powerful have a vested interest in nurturing death as punishment in order to maintain control. The West's intense reaction to death makes us particularly vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist and manipulation by unscrupulous politicians. The modern view tells us little about death as such. Failure to understand death renders life equally incomprehensible.

Natural View

In contrast to the modern spin on death is a view of death as a natural event. For millennia, conscious human life and life throughout all of nature formed a seamless garment. Added efficiency in obtaining food through the use of better tools allowed humans to develop a sense of survival beyond the immediate moment or day. This set the atmosphere for becoming aware of life as *endurance* and death as termination of life. Thus, death is transformed from a *natural* to a *cultural* phenomenon. Abstracting life as *endurance* and death as a *termination* is distinctively a human imaging breakthrough. Animals, while still driven by instincts for survival, are not capable of abstracting life as endurance beyond what is needed for immediate survival. Animals do not grasp their life as a 'life'. Artifacts left behind, such as burying tools/weapons along with the dead, provide evidence that ancient humans were becoming aware of life not only as endurance but endurance even beyond death.

Death is as natural as eating, breathing and sleeping. Life is not possible without death. Death is indispensable for the preservation and ongoing evolution of life. Your body contains over a hundred trillion cells. Millions self-destruct every second. Cancer begins when a cell is unable to die. Death is inseparable from life. Plants die to nurture herbivores and these in turn die to nurture carnivores. Plants live again off the decay of deceased carnivores. Life emerges into more complex forms by consuming the life found in less complex forms. Life is not diminished but grows in intensity, allowing for more complex interacting with the environment. The higher the form of life, the more death is needed to support it. A plant uses only 10% of the sunlight that strikes it, herbivores utilizes only 10% of the energy in the plants it eats, carnivores use only 10% of stored energy in the flesh eaten. From a natural standpoint, it is obvious that there is a lot of death involved in going from a simple to a complex form of life.

Biological scientists view death as the by-product of complexity. Thus, there is no death among microbes since they are the simplest forms of life and can go on living by dividing endlessly. It is when microbes join together to form more complex life forms that death enters the picture. All life had the humble beginnings of a microbe, but through billions of years microbes coalesced to form organisms that have continued to change into a near infinite variety of complex life forms. This growing complexity requires death of lower to support higher forms of life. (The book to read: *Microcosmos*, by Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan.) Any transformation from one life form to another involves both a death of the old and birth of the new.

Scientists have come to realize that the entire universe from the moment of the Big Bang is geared to the production and support of life. The explosion of stars billions of years ago is as critical for the life we now enjoy as the oxygen that we breathe. We may view the forces of nature such as in hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, plagues, tornados, volcanic eruptions, asteroid impacts and the like as destructive acts of the Deity. But, when the universe is seen as a whole in the perspective of astronomical, geological, biological and evolutionary studies, what we view as destructive is nature at work relentlessly preserving and nurturing life. We observe these events out of context and, consequently, image them as divine vengeance. Without these natural processes, life would not be possible.

Understanding death requires recapturing the experience of death as a natural part of life. Today must die before tomorrow comes. Cultural spins on death may be useful for allaying fears of the unknown, but death must be appreciated for the role it plays in enhancing life. It is important to make a distinction between natural and cultural death. Cultural death is the spin we attach to the event of death. The images we invent reveal more about the image-maker than about death. Our reaction to death leads to so many death-related metaphors that the underlying reality becomes totally obscured. Death treats prince, pope and pauper alike. Obviously, death looms high in human consciousness, but it is essential to maintain the perspective that death is essential to life. Images we invent relative to death should never overshadow the wider role death plays in nature.

Our penchant to atomize Reality leads us to view death as an isolated event rather than as an aspect of life. We reify the body as a corpse, making it central to our concept of death. However, you have had many bodies in your lifetime. Your body is constantly dying as new life emerges. In responding to Life, your body transitioned through infant, child, adolescent and adult stages. Each stage left behind a dead body. Animals with exoskeleton, such as lobsters, have a skeleton on the outside and routinely shed their external bodies, retaining only the soft tissue with which to grow a new body. Primates, like ourselves, have internal skeletons so that the shedding of our bodies is continuous and, therefore, unnoticed. Those former bodies are as dead as any cadaver. The body is not a thing but a dimension of self-presence. (See chapter two: self experience as the cutting edge of evolution). Death is a necessary part of the growth process. Without death you cannot live; life/death is part of the same equation. You cease living when you cease dying.

*****SIDEBAR*****

DEATH AND DYING

It is important to make a distinction between death and dying. Dying is a process whereas death is an event. We associate pain with dying, but death should not necessarily be associated with pain as it is a separate issue. Evolution has provided us with a vast array of pain inducing alarm systems to preserve our life. From an evolutionary standpoint, pain is a blessing. When we put our hand on a hot stove, the ensuing pain is simply an alarm warning us that we are about to lose our hand. Whenever a person's body is not functioning properly, the body normally goes wild with alarms that often take the form of pain. Living creatures with poor alarm systems soon become history. Death is when the alarm system shuts down and should be understood as something quite apart from the pain/alarms we associate with dying.

Death is related more properly with the experience of listening rather than with the experiencing of pain or the negatively charged dying process. Death is closely related, if not identical, with listening. It is often said that listening is the last faculty to leave when someone is dying. Listening throughout life enables an individual to open up to the otherness of new worlds. (See chapter two on *otherness*.) Death is the moment of an otherness that differs only in degree from otherness experienced throughout life. Opening self to otherness throughout life is both a dying process and an emergence into greater life and joy.

Listening more than any other faculty we possess has the potential of transforming us; what we listen to, we become. In a wider sense, all our mental and corporeal faculties are the achievement of a dynamic listening/responding universe. Think of the body as a listening organism responding to the surrounding environment in evolutionary fashion. The body in effect is the listening epicenter of the universe searching for self-identity and meaning. Listening is not an exercise in passivity, but an acquired art that creates a self-identity. The challenge of a lifetime is to push back the selective hearing maintained by our culture or of our own making that restrains self-realization.

Death does not end listening but increases this capacity exponentially. A negative approach to the natural event of death closes our eyes to the ultimate frontier of human evolution. A long cultural bias of viewing death as a punishment, meted out for crimes by the state or for sins by a Supreme Being, leads nowhere. Death was around billions of years before crimes or sins. As long as death is viewed as a punishment, we will never develop a balanced understanding of the role death plays in the creating of a self through the wider experience of otherness.

Humans are a part of the natural death/life cycle. Rather than seek escape, we go *through* death to which, strangely enough, we owe our very existence. Life by definition demands increasing complexity, leading to shedding old, limiting forms to allow for new. If we dwell on death in a negative way, we turn our back to emerging Life. Without the darkness of death there would be no light of new life. We experience life in and through the ‘death’ of letting go in order to embrace an ever wider and deeper measure of life. While we drive with occasional glance on the rearview mirror, the main attention needs to be focused on the expanding life ahead.

Natural death appears very different when viewed through the lenses of metric versus epic time. For example, death is thought of as an *ending* in metric time but as a *dimension* of epic time. Death in epic time is entering more fully into the present – the more complete the letting go, the greater the embrace of the now. In epic time, an individual has many deaths. The previous moment must die before a new present can emerge. It is impossible to hang onto yesterday or jump ahead to tomorrow. From an epic time perspective, the body does not animate the self but the self animates the body. Self extends well beyond the limits of flesh/blood.

You have two bodies: the one image-driven and the other experience-driven. The image-driven body is how we think about our body; the experience-driven body arises from our response to Reality. Like all animals, a cat has no idea that it has four legs, two ears, a tail and black fur. A cat has only one body defined as an experience of Reality as cat-ness. We have two bodies because we are image-makers. Experience-driven body is our true body that will endure forever. Image-driven bodies die, returning from whence the image came. Christ is referring to his experience-driven body (presence) when he gathered with his ‘neighbors’ and said this is my body – he experiences his body as a communion of friends.

Death is the *experience of otherness* in the fullest sense. We are immersed in a culture that thinks of life as something to take hold of rather than respond to. Death is treated as a morbid issue to be avoided rather than a challenge of responding to the radical otherness of life. We are conscious of death only because we are conscious of life. Life/death is a definitional relationship that cannot be disassociated. Death serves life, thus the death of a loved one sharpens one’s appreciation of life. Western culture views advancing age as one of degeneration of life into death. In this view, youth is idolized. Deterioration of a bodily form does not mean a deterioration of self-identity; in most cases it is just the reverse. As one increasingly responds to Life, sooner or later, the experience of life will expand into new dimensions. Because death is the mirror opposite to Life, we can embrace one only by embracing the other.

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Psychological View

Psychological death occurs whenever *reaction* mutates into *response*, because response involves a mini-death of letting go of reaction. We are preconditioned to react to death because of our cultural assumption that death is the ending of life rather than a necessary aspect of life. Understanding psychological death requires knowing the difference between reaction and response. From a psychological perspective, the old dies before the new emerges. We experience ‘death’ many times throughout life, but fail to realize it. When we respond rather than react to a challenge, we have a mini death experience. A challenge can be drawn out as in growing from a child to an adult, or sudden as in loss of a job or the onset of a devastating illness. Changing a reaction to negative events into response requires a psychological death. Transiting from reaction into response enables a reinventing of self – a mini-resurrection.

The important contribution of psychology is a view of death as a *process* that is occurring throughout life rather than the moment the heart stops. In this process, choice plays an important role in transforming death into a tool for a better life. In practice, this means developing the ability to let go at the right time in order to gain a new and better life. For example, letting go of an outmoded factory job to seek new employable skills, or letting go a detached life to enter into the more intense relational life of marriage. All such transitions have an element of death as well as life.

Choice is not an isolated occurrence but is itself a process. We speak of learning to make better choices with each choice being a learning experience for the next. Fundamentally, what makes for a better choice is one stemming more and more from *response* versus *reaction*. Psychology delves into reaction/response underlying human choice. A choice driven by reaction cedes power to an agent *outside* the psyche; a choice driven by response retains power *within* the psyche. For example, a child may react to authority perceived as outside, while an adult may respond based on acquired values. All choices range somewhere between reaction and response. The more a choice originates from response, the more it creates the sense of self; the more a choice originates from reaction, the more it destroys a sense of self. Response is healing and conducive to life; reaction is destructive and conducive to death.

We spend a lifetime transitioning from reaction to response. Progress, however, is not inevitable. While choices may increasingly reflect response, it is also possible to spend a lifetime regressing deeper and deeper into reaction that stifles all sense of self. For example, reactionary hatred can become so obsessive that ability to choose virtually disappears. The role of clinical psychology is to nurture individuals overcome by a history of reactionary choices back to a healthy sense of self.

Death is just one of the countless unfolding events that are part of every life. We are free to choose to react or respond to all aspects of life, including death. Negative experiences, leading eventually to death, are occasions in which we become more conscious of the need to make a deliberate choice of responding or reacting. Responding to a pleasant experience does not challenge choice. Responding to a negative experience requires a deliberate choice to go through adversity rather than be overcome by slipping into reaction.

We have a radical freedom of choosing response/reaction that cannot be taken away because it goes to the very essence of self-identity. That freedom applies especially to the summit of negative experience, namely, death. Since death is a natural process governing all life, the only choice relative to death is in choosing an identity of reaction/response. Because of our radical freedom to choose reaction/response, even death can be forced to enhance self-identity as response in lieu of reaction. The pattern of a lifetime will determine the depth of reaction/response in the face of death. From a healthy, psychological perspective, life is a school to learn graceful dying to which death is a graduation - graceful living is the flip side of graceful dying.

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RESPONSE/REACTION IN A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

Western culture is deeply reactionary/competitive because of its ontological bias that leads to dividing Reality into competing camps as good/evil, spirit/matter or soul/body. Perceiving Reality relationally as a dichotomy of Call/response is deeply alien to the West. Modern psychology, by implying a relational view of Reality, is much more in tune with the Hebraic than the Platonic notion of person. This is not surprising in that Freud had Hebraic ancestry. Hebraic culture centers on *response* as Chosen People to divine *Call*. Failure to respond, not violation of law, is the essence of sin in Hebrew culture. (*Sin* has the root meaning of being *without* response and should not be confused with civic law violation.) The enabling presence of Call/Love means that indifference or reaction now requires deliberate choice. There would be no sin if divine Call did not also convey the wherewithal for response. All sin, therefore, is rooted in indifference/reaction. Love spurned is Love unrequited – this is the quintessence of sin (loss). Response exposes Reality and is a blessing to all; reaction obscures Reality and is a curse to all.

Responding is a learned behavior, whether viewed as the underlying theme of a Chosen People or of a maturing individual. An infant begins life as response, but without consciousness of *self*, as response. An infant can only respond because a sense of a distinct life/self has not yet emerged. Ideally, an infant grows to a sense of self in a loving environment that nurtures an identity of response rather than debilitating reaction. Responding creates an authentic self, while reaction buries a sense of self-experience. Reaction and response are inversely related - as one increases the other decreases. Choice determines the prevalence of either reaction/response. Maturity is in recognizing the freedom to choose reaction/response and consequences that follow.

The defining trait that separates the living from the non-living is the ability to respond to stimulus; action/reaction does not require the presence of life since reaction is simply a basic law of physics. When response is elevated to the level of a conscious self, the identity of self congeals around response. This is the key discovery made by Abraham four thousand years ago, thus initiating the very concept of religion as a relation of a distinct life/self vis-à-vis the divine Life/Self. Response is the human identity juxtaposed to the divine identity of Call.

A *reactionary* view of death as an ending leads to clinging to youth to forestall as long as possible the inevitable. A *response* view of death embraces each day, and the last one included, as simply a growing response to Life. Death is not an escape, as it would be in a reactionary posture, but a depth of response that has reached its pinnacle. The response of death is analogous to a newborn leaving the mother's womb and entering into the unlimited life found in a vast new world. Death is not a punishment, but the inevitable result of responding to greater Life that began with birth. Death is the unknown element in a response to the unknown.

Even if scientists someday found a way to eliminate death, death still would remain an essential part of life. Psychologically, life results from a *choice of responding* versus reacting in the face of difficulty/death. Few have pursued the implications hinted at by modern psychology. Physical death is the catalyst forcing an awareness of our choice to respond or react to the experience of Life. As mentioned, death as well as life begins at the moment of birth and grows in depth throughout life as the experience of Life intensifies – youth has little concept of death or life. Death is what Life leaves behind. A growing consciousness from a natural perspective requires probing life and death simultaneously.

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Biblical View

The biblical notion of death corresponds to modern psychological insights on death with the important difference that the Bible deals with death directly. Psychology only *indirectly* deals with death by delving into the multiple mini-deathlike transitions from reaction to response we all experience during life. Biblical history alone chronicles the human endeavor to *directly* understand death. Hebrew culture explores death as a phenomenon in its own right, whereas all other cultures simply assume death to be the absence of life. Consequently, virtually all cultures except the Hebraic seek an understanding of Life rather than death.

Hebrew culture necessarily leads to addressing death because Reality is assumed to be a dichotomous relation. In such a relation, death and life are equally important as one defines the other. The contrast between East and West could not be sharper in regard to death. A reactionary culture engenders fear of death, while a responsive culture engenders hope. Religion, originating four thousand years ago in the East, is a gradual plunging into death as the arena for understanding Life. Delving into death progresses slowly through the four epochs of religion, namely, the vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal periods. Each succeeding epoch puts death under a more powerful microscope. The following discussion traces the increasingly laser like focus on death as Hebrew history unfolds during the four epochs of religion.

Vital Epoch (2000 B.C.– 1350 B.C.)

Religion, which begins with Abraham (2000 B.C.), grows out of proto-religion. In proto-religion there is no concept of death but only of Life - Life simply assumes a variety of forms in an ongoing cycle of reincarnation. When Abraham introduces the notion of a *distinct* life, a whole new bipolar paradigm for framing Reality begins. A bipolar framing of Reality requires defining death as well as Life in as much as, in a bipolar framing of Reality, death is not the *absence* of Life but the *inversion* of Life – the one will define the other. A *distinct* life vis-à-vis global Life will eventually force the spotlight squarely on death, since death is implicit in the very notion of a distinct life. A bipolar view of Reality allows for only two possible identities: *global* Life versus its *inverse* - initially viewed as a *distinct* life. A sense of a distinct life introduces the enigma of how can a distinct life that is inseparable from global Life be *opposite* Life. This is the great riddle Abraham introduces into human history. By introducing two agents (*global* versus *distinct* life) onto the stage of history, Abraham begins the vital epoch of religion. This distinct-life/global-Life relation devolves over the next two thousand years into the version/inversion, Life/death, Call/response dichotomy.

Coalitional Epoch (1350 B.C. – 1200 B.C.)

Akhenaten (1350 B.C.) of Egypt adds to Abraham's view of global Life a *unification* factor. He perceives Life/Reality as coalescing into a unified divine consciousness from which he derives monotheism for the first time in history. He does not deal with Abraham's notion of a *distinct* life and, therefore, could not focus on the issue of death as such. All material things simply coalesce into a unified divine consciousness. He made no distinction between spirit/matter, soul/body. Life endures as long as it is connected to material. In accordance with this belief, the ancient Egyptians mummified humans and animals by the millions. For them, life of a relative or pet endures only so long as the material of the body remains. *Matter* is *Life* in this mindset. Thus, if the material that makes up the body disappears, the individual simply ceases to exist - 'death' means a passing into non-existence.

Tribal Epoch (1200 B.C. – 1 A.D.)

Akhenaten's insight into material Reality as a coalescing into a unified divine consciousness, as opposed to a general Life Force, is a critical breakthrough needed for expanding on Abraham's vision of a distinct life. More than a thousand years after Akhenaten, the coalescing of material Reality into a unified divine consciousness is applied also to Abraham's notion of a *distinct* life that is *not* divine. Reality thereby becomes a dual coalescence: a divine versus human world. The initial expression of the coalescence of material Reality into a human world takes a tribal form in the calling together of a Chosen People.

A unified *tribal* consciousness is the complement of the unified divine consciousness. Unified consciousness expresses itself in and through the *ability of making choice*: the divine consciousness incarnates in the choosing of a people, the human consciousness incarnates as choosing to be a people in response to the divine initiative – mutual choosing simply highlights the dual coalescence of Reality. Without the unified consciousness of Akhenaten, a unified *tribal*-self would not have been possible and Abraham's notion of a distinct life, implicitly introducing duality of distinct life versus global Life, would not have developed further.

The enslavement of a people in Egypt is the catalyst for extending the unified divine consciousness into a unified tribal consciousness, thereby setting up a dual coalition of material Reality: as a unified human consciousness that is distinct but complementary to the divine unified consciousness. This development set a clear dichotomy between the divine and human dimensions of Reality. In the tribal epoch, human consciousness concretizes as *tribal response* to Life, versus amorphous *assimilation* into Life, as is the case in proto-religion. Abraham's sense of a life distinct from Global Life introduces the dichotomous relation of Call/response as the core of Reality. His life extends through history as the tribal coalition of Hebrews framed in the context of an unfolding Call/response, Chief/people relation.

As human consciousness jells around tribal coalescence, a cultural notion of death develops defined as: *tribal exclusion* for failure to maintain *tribal bonds*. The exclusion takes the form of the divine Chief rejecting the chosen tribe, or the tribe excluding an offending member. This is the first *cultural* definition of death as such in human history – hitherto 'death' is simply absence of life. However, the focus is on *tribal bonds* as the Source of life and not on death itself – the stronger the bonds the more the tribe embodies the Life of the divine Chief. Exclusion from the tribe is the same as exclusion from divine Life - the Source of tribal bonding. A member so excluded simply ceases to exist – reflecting the ancient Egyptian notion that when the material body disappears, the individual ceases to exist. Our concept of death entails a tribal dimension even to this day. *Separation*, associated with death, has tribal roots.

Death, defined now as *tribal separation*, takes on a 'life' of its own, forming a new imaging stream that is fascinating. Angel of death and grim reaper are part of that image stream. Death changes from a passive phenomenon, as the absence of life, to an *active* agent. Death becomes an act of divine vengeance, an instrument of terror to elicit subservience, the very face of evil and the identity of the Prince of Darkness. Modern entertainment capitalizes on the independent reality of death as an underlying theme. Governments still use death as capital punishment as a way of excluding an offender from societal/tribal bonds.

The cottage industry springing from a cultural concept of death owes its origin to the emergence of tribal consciousness. In tribal religion, separation from the tribe constitutes death, rather than the cessation of breathing. Since the tribal life of the Chosen People is thought to be eternal, tribal Life rather than death is a central focus. Life continues to expand, but Life is narrowly defined as *tribal* Life. The depth of response among tribal members is the basis for the eternal presence of divine Call. The Old Testament is a sorting through proper tribal response to preserve Life.

The Ten Commandments spell out the minimal response needed for the continued presence of the divine Chief. Increasingly, death is viewed as the consequence of violating the Law precisely because such violation leads to tribal exclusion or even disintegration of tribal bonds altogether. The meaning of death is never really explored except indirectly as a punishment for violating or neglecting tribal Law. The flip side of death, as punishment, is Life, as reward. Keeping tribal Law faithfully insures reward and avoidance of punishment.

Tribal history explores the depth and breath of the tension between Law/observance and reward/punishment. It remains the task of new prophetic insight to go beyond *tribe* to focus on *self*. At the level of self, death as *tribal exclusion* and the tension between Law/observance leading to reward/punishment makes no sense. Observance of law leading to reward/punishment is critical for maintaining the tribe/family through which a member endures beyond death; how *self* endures beyond death needs new insight into death itself. In a tribal context, death is sidelined as a punishment for bad tribal behavior; at the level of self, death takes center stage.

Espousal Epoch (1 A.D. – present)

In the espousal epoch, death changes from punishment or inevitable fate to deliberate choice. Christ insists that he is going into death by his own choice (John 10:17). His view is diametrically opposed to the view of death as a divine punishment for evildoing. Espousal religion requires free choice on the part of both spouses; the human free response to death complements the divine free Call to Life. Christ's deliberate choice of death transforms human reaction to the curse of death into a response to loving Call. *Response* (versus reaction) turns death from punishment into the birth of *self*. Thus, death occasions the human self, just as Life occasions the divine Self. Where natural birth is gateway to tribal religion, death is the birth into espousal religion – a relation that is a mutual: the human self-gift as death and the divine Self-gift as Life.

Christ makes visible what occurred unseen in Mary's heart. Faced with stoning and exclusion from tribal continuity, she could endure only at a self-level. She chooses to go beyond tribal relation and respond as a self and thus enters into the divine espousal relation. Christ does the same when faced with tribal exclusion and death. His death is the occasion for going beyond tribal to a self-level relation with divine Call. The Hebrews passed through a parted sea as a tribe to find Life in the Promised Land; Christ passes through the parted sea of death to find the fullness of Life. Divine/human espousal union replaces tribal belonging as the epicenter of divine/human intercourse.

Christ's vision of death as divine/human espousal union is the most profound insight ever achieved in human history. Although we perceive it as an event on the calendar, death occurs in epic time. Death is not an entity, but the human side of the divine/human dichotomy. Far from being an ending, death is the response of self to the divine Self, like a bride enveloped in the arms of the beloved. In the espousal relation, Life is divine Call's contribution, and death the human contribution.

The *distinct life* of Abraham is in essence an experience of death, in as much as death is *response* versus Call. Christ deliberately chooses death, hitherto deemed the epitome of weakness and hopelessness by his disciples. Christ often speaks of his death and rebukes the patronizing remarks of Peter (Matt 16:23). His choosing of death is a scandal to his followers, sending them running for cover. The symbol of the cross, representing a free choice of death as total surrender of power in response to Love, remains as a sign of contradiction to human addiction to power in all its forms to this day.

There is an underlying connection between Mary's virginity and death. Fruitful virginity signifies divine initiative and the 'death' of human input - thus divinity and death conjoin. The 'death' of human input for the pregnancy means that Mary responds as the mirror manifestation of the divine Self. Her offspring henceforth manifests not human but divine initiative. Mary is the epitome of espousal religion. Her response is archetypal in that any human *response* makes divine Call visible; the total response found in death makes divine Call transparent.

We sometimes experience the transparency of Call. What we most remember of those who die is the depth of response to Call manifested by the individual, thus what is good about the deceased increases while the bad fades. The enduring good memories of the deceased are actually manifestations of divine Call reflected by a loved one. Death is necessary to reveal Call whose divine face can be seen only through reflection - like the moon reflects the sun. The manifestation of the divine Self is precisely in the drawing forth the human self. In espousal religion, death has a role and is no more associated with pain or punishment than waking up from sleep.

Death, while remaining a natural part of life, now takes on the crucial role of self-creation. The tribal death of vengeance and exclusion is transformed into a self-response of radical reverence toward divine initiative and inclusiveness coextensive with Call. Succinctly put: human self-identity is response/death and divine Self-identity is Call/Life – the two fit together as hand-in-glove. Our life is invitation and death is invitation gratefully accepted.

Think of death as an implosion. The gratuitous divine Self-gift implodes into the human self thus overwhelming the fear, denial and resistance of the beloved. The divine Self is closer than you are to yourself. In death, the general relation of *Call/response* dramatically transforms into a *Love/thanksgiving* encounter between divine Suitor and the only beloved. The experience of death translates into such an overpowering response of thanksgiving that thanksgiving is fixed forever as the human self-identity. Death is the final transformation of a physical body into a eucharis body. The divine loving initiative that is deserving of thanksgiving will never cease, nor will the response of thanksgiving. An identity of thanksgiving turns the fear of the unknown into an endless unfolding of Love. Fear, the product of reaction, melts away when self-identity of thanksgiving centers on the divine Self-identity of Love. Love/thanksgiving is the stillness of epic time.

Growing in a eucharis-response to Love is putting on the death of Christ whereby the true identity of the human self, as thanksgiving, and divine Call, as Love, is revealed to the world - like a candle placed on a hearth for all to see their way through the darkness. We 'love' one another by being *thankful* for one another. The human self can only thank, just as the divine Self can only love. Thankfulness for another nurtures human self-identity and exposes the individual to divine Call, as Love.

Giving thanks is in effect going into death in that a thanks is the affirming of human self-identity. Both human and divine imagery developed over time. Divine imagery matured throughout history from Life→ Law → Love. Thanks, as the human identity in response to *Love*, is as central to Christ, as *Law* is to Moses and *Life* is to Abraham. Just as the Old Testament chronicles the emergence of the Chosen People, the New Testament is the advent of the Chosen Self. The Chosen People become the chosen Hebraic Person when tribal response matures to self-response. The Hebraic person continues Christ's presence in the world as eucharis, just as blood descendants insured tribal continuity. As adherence to tribal Law made the divine Chieftain visible, so *self* as a eucharis communion of 'neighbors' makes the divine Suitor visible. Death, in its new cultural understanding, is a Love/thanksgiving intercourse between the divine and human selves. The curse of death (as an ending) evaporates in the discovery of self as the only beloved of Call.

Reflection on death can easily slip into fantasyland. The Call/response relation that devolved from the tribal to finally reach the level of self is the underlying theme of the Bible. Scripture centers around three death events that progressively lead to the endurance of *self* beyond death. Abraham's death-like experience leads to continuity of his life in and through Isaac; the death-like experience of passing through a parted sea leads to a continuity of tribal life; the death experience on Calvary leads to the continuity of self in the fullness of Life. The understanding of death progresses through a vital→ tribal → espousal self-experience. All three instances are dealing in greater depth with the harsh reality of death. Christ is the first in history to deal directly with death; Calvary is no trip into fantasyland. Death is central to his proclamation of the Gospel. On the day before he died he defines death as his eucharis body drawing 'neighbors' into one. His legacy is: communion with 'neighbors' to form eucharis body is your death that leads to Life.

Paul images the universe in cosmic travail giving birth to the beloved. His imagery is instructive. A fetus is not like an object or tumor, but actually takes over the physical and psychological body of the mother to form its own distinct body and psyche. In the view of Paul, the universe, physically and *psychologically* (in as much as it involves *intent* – see discussion of *intent* in chapter four) embodies the divine Self, as Call. You are not an object/tumor in the body of the universe. Rather, you are taking over the universe to form your own distinct physical and psychic body. You do so via thanksgiving to the divine initiative embodied in the universe.

Death is the birthing moment when the divine and human self come face-to-face, like a newborn placed in the arms of an adoring mother in whom she sees her own flesh and blood. This biblical vision of death is far more satisfying than the cold, ontological view of death as an ending, thus suggesting that we eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Science is more at home in a biblical view. Science is a concerted effort of taking possession of the body-universe to form a body that is common to us all and links the human and divine selves. Add to science the human identity of thanksgiving immersed in cosmic Love and the world will be the meeting of the human with the divine Self.

*****SIDEBAR*****

DEATH AS DISCIPLINE

Christianity originally was called the Discipline because its focus was death rather than life, creed or moral codes. Learning to respond (versus react) to death is at the core of the new espousal religion, just as learning to respond to freedom from slavery is the essence of tribal religion. Death is a transition into the unknown, akin to a plunging into the unknown by an enslaved people called into freedom. The unknown stirs out deepest fears and requires discipline to respond rather than react. Anyone who has faced death or mourned the death of a loved one knows that it is hard to face the pain or even to discuss the stark, painful reality of death without trivializing it or slipping into metaphors/clichés. No words can take away the unknown nor soften the death of a loved one.

It is important to gain insight into death as an *epic* event, which necessarily involves discipline. An epic death does not occur on some date on a calendar, but is the experience accruing from an ongoing discipline needed to respond to Life/Love. Espousal religion means a continuous going into death, defined by Christ as the Way that leads to Life/Love. Love is more than a vague, fuzzy feeling, but demands proper response – there is no such thing as free love or ‘falling’ in love. Love demands the surrender of power whether personal, political, economic, academic, military or power under any other guise. Power divides, thus espousal love demands surrender of power not just by the human but the divine Self as well. The essence of power surrender is in the turning of reaction into response in the presence of espousal Love. Response is positive in that it creates a self, while reaction is negative in that it suppresses a self. We learn this discipline over a lifetime, not just at the time of death.

Response to Love both melts away reaction and brings forth a self-identity beyond reaction. We learn to respond by first recognizing the element of death in all the experiences of life. Every moment must die before a new moment can emerge. Death is gracefully letting go to embrace life anew. Life entails many mini-deaths enabling us to learn to respond more deeply and fully. The death of a loved one is in effect an experience of your own death. Your loved one reflected Love for years - as a precious jewel reflects a beam of light. When the reflecting jewel is taken away, you are exposed directly to an experience of divine Call, hitherto reflected in and through the object of your affection. Your loved one is no longer a filter between self and your other Self. Thus, death, like Love, is a strict tutor and makes no allowance for fence sitting. The death of a loved ‘neighbor’, such as spouse/child, leaves in its wake intense pain and grief. It is at this point especially that we are challenged to turn reaction into response. We see Reality only through images. However close a ‘neighbor’ or possession, all can only reflect Love and are never the *source* of Love. The only abiding presence is Love reflected in and through the inviting world around enticing response. Reaction to loss only blinds the human self to a greater Call.

Death insures that response is not just a mental exercise. The death of a loved one forces the issue of divine incarnation as Love sharply into your consciousness in a specific, concrete way, i.e., as that what remains beyond the death of your beloved. By responding to Love concretely reflected in and through a loved one, rather than reacting to death as the absence of life, sorrow gradually turns into thanksgiving for the gift of the beloved. The attraction of a departed loved one is prophetic of a deeper Love. Everyone and everything in your life has but one purpose: to draw self and the divine Self together toward an espousal union. Had you never experienced the love of a parent, friend or spouse in the first place, you could never have perceived the divine Self as an abiding presence of Love.

In other words, the death of a loved one is really the occasion for discovering the divine Suitor. Finding the divine Suitor is not just a ‘spiritual’ exercise; a spouse/child incarnates divine Presence forming a window into the divine Self. When your own death comes along, you will not be aware of it, rather, only those left behind whose lives you have touched will face death – your death becomes their death. You will be aware only of your divine Spouse in whom you will rediscover your world. The world embodying Love is the incarnation of the divine Self that is as a ‘magnet’ that draws those beloved by you also into death as response. Thus, death is not just a sudden event at the end of life, but spans the entire life in the form of a growing response to Love. In the end, death is like an over-ripe fruit falling from the tree. Transforming reaction into response entails a lifetime of entering into the inviting embrace of the divine Suitor.

Death is alpha spiraling toward the point of encounter with Omega. The discipline of response to Reality/Love is the birthing process of the self. Only by creating a self can the Self of divine Call be known or reflected. Spouse, child, friend and nature concretely define Love in and through which a sense of self is created. Since self is a relation, how else could self be experienced? Or, to put in another way, treasuring neighbor/nature connects the human self to the divine Self made manifest in neighbor/nature. The divine and human selves can never be known directly but only indirectly through reflection – the divine Self reflected as response and the human self as Call. Physical death is not an ending, but a fulfillment of what it means to be a self. To become a self means that no one can go through death for you.

Death is a joining in conjugal embrace of the divine Self of Love with the long sought human self of response – imagery rich in emotion and in stark contrast to Plato’s cold, philosophical imagery of a soul released from the prison of the body. The key to grasping Christ’s approach to death as self-discipline, rather than inevitable fate, is in recognizing the threefold dimension of Love, namely, that Love found anywhere is divine presence, Love is separate and independent from the eucharis response constituting the human self, and nature/neighbor can never initiate but only reflect Love. Just as a successful marriage requires much self-discipline, so, too, responding to divine espousal Love requires discipline. The myriad mini-deaths throughout life of response (versus reaction) lead to the summit response defined as death. All of Scripture is tutorial on how tiny increments of response lead ultimately to the summit response of marriage between the human and divine Self.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Eschatology

Tribal religion envisions eternal life in and through tribal descendants, but espousal religion has no descendants as a basis of eternal life. Espousal religion requires finding Life *in* death not *after* death. However, in our ontological prison, we tend to view death as an event in time that implies the notion of time *after* death. Reflecting on life after death or on the events marking the end of time is called *Eschatology*. Hitherto, the focus has been on death itself as a natural and cultural phenomenon. What about the global events at the end of time? Eschatology cites the occurrence of five events in constructing a vision of end-time. These are: the end of the world, the return of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, final judgment and life everlasting. All five are really different perspectives of the same event. What follows is a discussion regarding each of the five dimensions of an all-consuming eschatological event.

End of the World

The Apocalypse, by John, sometimes called the book of *Revelations*, depicts the end of the world. Many assume the end of the world means simply that time runs out at some divinely ordained date in the future. However, John does not write about the *future* but uses the past as insight into the present. (See sidebar below: Revelation as Insight.) The Apocalypse, as well as all of Scripture, originate within Eastern culture and, accordingly, are framed in epic and not metric time. Epic time seeks only to understand the present using wisdom acquired from past experience – there is no past/present/future as we traditionally view time. The Apocalypse, as well as the rest of the Bible, is a probing into relational (versus ontological) Reality to ascertain increasingly deeper insight into the mutual divine/human presence – like the growing insight into the mutual presence spouses achieve toward one another after many years of marriage. From an epic time perspective, the last book of the Bible is the place to begin for an understanding of all the other books in Scripture. It provides the key to the riddle of Israel's cumulative historical experience.

Superimposing our notion of metric time on the Apocalypse is a grave error that completely reverses the intended hopeful meaning of the book by turning it into an orgy of fear. Many assume John is talking about some future date when vengeance, punishment and judgment are in store for unbelievers, while triumph, reward and everlasting life will be the reward for true believers. Such revenge is sweet. Whenever disaster strikes, such as floods and earthquakes, many justify indifference because the vengeance revealed in the Bible is coming true. All the bad, unbelieving people around are getting what they justly deserve. Besides, viewing the Apocalypse as a future end-time event filled with fireworks from on high and an earth shaking with an apocalyptic battle between good and evil makes for scary and exciting news.

The Apocalypse is filled with metaphor, so it is possible to read about anything into it to suit the widest fancy. The underlying message stands above all symbolism, namely, that the end of world is *fulfillment* that endures as an eternal *now*. With the advent of Christ, we can at last see the whole picture – nothing more can be added to the depth of divine/human mutual presence. John reflects on the history of Israel, using its rich tribal imagery to capture its underlying meaning as prelude to Christ. In his vision, the Chosen People form a spiral through history ending at the Omega Point of Christ's birth. All human history is thus given meaning and is being drawn inevitably into this end-time epic event.

The images John uses in the Apocalypse are well understood in biblical times because the images depict *past* events from which his contemporaries form their tribal identity – much like we draw our identity as a people from the Constitution. His favorite image is breaking open seals in the book of Israel's past experiences to reveal messianic meaning. Other images simply depict biblical events in the past. Thus, the fierce horsemen, taken from the book of Daniel, reflect the conquering Babylonian armies; the seven trumpets introducing plagues recall the plagues of Egypt; and receiving the scroll recalls the Ten Commandments. The beasts of the earth along with the seven bowls of divine fury recall the stormy history of the Israelites as they lived out their response as the Chosen People of divine Call.

It is clear that John is looking to the past and not the future because of his abundant use of past tribal imagery that leads up to a new espousal focus. The espousal religion of Christ introduces a new image stream centered on self versus tribal experience. Images depicting judgment, vengeance, punishment, obedience, war, triumph, reward and the like are past tribal images that a tribal-faith people of his day could readily understand. Apocalyptic depiction of Israel's history serves only as background to the dawning new espousal religion that begins a new paradigm. Tribal history is the setting for the precious jewel of the Hebraic person. The Hebraic person fulfills the aspirations of Hebrew history and, like a vortex, draws all to *self* (versus *tribal* unity). *Self* is the new paradigm for divine/human intercourse. Self is not an object but a relation and, therefore, has no past/present/future but transcends time.

John uses the literary device of a dream to frame the Apocalypse because a dream occurs totally in the realm of the self; a dream is a self that is coming to awareness. Furthermore, a dream is not measured by metric time, and such a format allows for using surreal imagery to achieve a level of emphasis that ordinary narration could never match - regardless how many superlatives are used. A dream serves also as a device, commonly used in an epic-time culture, to lend divine authority to a message or to grasp the meaning of an event too large to put into words.

We all have dreams. Note that dreams are drawn from the *past* and never the *future*. Dreams condense confusing experiences of the past into one riveting experience. A dream is a collage of images produced by the mind in sorting out a complex past. Psychologists advise students to get a good night sleep before a big exam to allow their mind to organize and assimilate disconnected information they have crammed in their head. Our dreams are filled with images shaped by real events in our past life and also reflect our fundamental assumptions about the nature of Reality. John's dream follows the same underlying pattern. The important thing to realize is that a dream can be a useful tool to accomplish a difficult task. It can be a fantasy simply of a restless mind unwinding or an insight into a complex experience, but never a videotape of events past or future. And, the *arena* of dreaming is always *self*.

There is another subtle message in using a dream format for the Apocalypse. Hitherto, divine Call speaks to Moses via a burning bush and to the Israelites by writing on tablets of stone. In contrast, divine Call directly interacts with John through a dream. This is a subtle change, but constitutes a fundamental paradigmatic shift in divine/human communication. Contact with divine Call at the level of self is characteristic of the new imaging introduced by Christ and demonstrated now in the dream experience of John. Central to espousal religion is the ongoing dialogue between the divine and human selves. Divine Call no longer speaks through stone tablets, but through the language of the heart.

The premise of the Apocalypse is that the *whole* of Hebrew history is the coming of the messiah to the entire human race. Christ is the culmination of divine incarnation as a Love/thanksgiving dichotomy that began from the beginning of time, and first brought into historical focus by Abraham as a Call/response dynamic. John's abundant use of Israel's past throughout the Apocalypse underscores the critical role that Israel *still* plays in exposing the messiah to the world - the divine Call is tribal before becoming espousal. John's superlative language reflects his inability to express his excitement at the blossoming of the divine tribal into an espousal relation. The messiah/Hebraic person, like an oak tree in an acorn, is seminally present from the beginning, but needs the growth demonstrated by Israel in response to divine Call.

Christ marks the end of time because he is the fulfillment of all the dreams and hopes possible in the human heart, namely, an espousal consort with divinity. This biblical perception of the end of the world is in sharp contrast to the current popular belief of a global disaster awaiting the world at some divinely appointed time in the future. The startling and disturbing symbols making up most of the book of the Apocalypse reflect a heart expanded by Love. The book is about revealing an experience of Love and not about dreadful calamities to befall the earth. Christ is the fullness of time - the pinnacle toward which humanity aspires. Time stands still in the Christ event. The divine/human relation has grown through the vital-coalitional-tribal-espousal stages reaching the deepest level - that of *self*. It is impossible to go beyond a self-to-self relation, thus the achieving of such a relation marks the end (fulfillment) of the world.

The coalescing of the past into an apocalyptic present is better thought of as the *beginning* and not the *ending* of the world. A world that is only now just *beginning* invites a *response* of excitement and involvement - dispositions clearly manifested in John - in contrast to the modern passive waiting for the end of the world at some future date. The title of John's book, *Apocalypse*, means an *uncovering*, signifying an *opening of one's eyes* like a wide-eyed child on Christmas morning. John is prophetic by pointing out what is happening *now*, namely, the birth of the espousal world following its very long gestational period in Hebrew tribal history.

John portrays a radically new universe using such imagery as "stars falling on the earth like ripe figs". The new world transposes divine Call-imaging from the divine Chief ruling *over* the earth to a Suitor at the *very core* of the earth courting the favor of the beloved. Espousal imagery of the new world not only bestows breathtaking dignity on the human self but also provides insight into the divine identity as relentless Love gestating and giving birth to the human self through the world and throughout history. Everything melts into this awesome realization of divine espousal union that represents the true beginning of the world. How else could John express the dawn of the divine/human espousal world without using dramatic metaphor? Words of a modern song captures the same meaning: "There were birds in the trees but I never heard them singing, until there was you." With the encounter of the divine/human selves, everything else comes to light and begins to make sense.

John introduces the chosen Hebraic *person* as the fulfillment of the chosen Hebraic tribe. The Promise Land that nurtures the divine/human tribal bond becomes the universe fostering the divine/human espousal bond. The Chosen People foreshadows the choosing of the human self to be the only beloved of divine Call. Hebrew history remains as a guiding light to find self as the Hebraic person - defined as a Love/thanksgiving espousal relation that brings history to fulfillment. Thus, the end of the world is the stillness likened to the eye of a hurricane that comes with self-discovery as the beloved of divine Call, while outside the whirling wind of confusion and self-destruction prevails. Past Hebrew history is a going through a whirlwind; Christ arrives as the calm in the midst of the storm.

*****SIDEBAR*****

REVELATION AS INSIGHT

The Apocalypse, often referred to as *Revelations*, more aptly should be called the book of *Insight*. *Revelation* in our culture implies a future event, while *Insight* implies a deeper understanding of the past and present. Psychological anthropology is making evident what the East has realized for thousands of years, namely, that divine intervention is by insight into the present rather than revelation of the future. Each step along the ten stages identified in psychological anthropology requires an insight akin to revelation because there is no clear logic between the steps until *after* the transition is made. For example, there is no obvious connection between *pattern recognition* and *cause/effect* until *after* the awareness of cause/effect develops. In hindsight, the logic is clear, but foresight needs inspiration - the realm of revelation. It is like a flash of light in the mind's heart.

While divine inspiration/revelation may be seen as the spark that drives the transition through all ten stages of psychological devolution, it is clear that we need insight to grow. There is no automatic link between stages of awareness. While one stage builds on another, transition from one to another requires an experience of insight/revelation. Thus, more primitive societies, as well as individuals, are not illogical or backward, but simply have not transitioned into deeper insight. We do not facilitate communication by imputing illogic to one another, as sometimes happens in religious and political acrimony. All are logical within their framework/stage of reference. Communication between humans is more a process of discovery than logic. True education aims to create an eagerness for listening and discovery. The hallmark of divine revelation is that it brings a people/individual into the present away from a fixation on the past or future. The biblical end of the world is incomprehensible to one locked into the past or future. Entering a present that consumes the past and renders the future irrelevant is a challenge and requires a flash of revelation/insight such as that experienced by John.

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Return of Christ

The end of the world heralds the return of Christ. "Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him and they who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth shall wail over him" (Revelations 1:7). John, as well as Mathew (24:30) and Mark (13:26), use clouds, power, turmoil and fear in depicting the return of Christ. These are tribal images and are familiar to the people of the time. Coming on the clouds is imagery conveying divine presence/approval. A cloud on Mt Sinai into which Moses enters signifies entering divine presence to receive terms of a covenant. Also, a cloud leading the Chosen People through a desert signifies divine presence. It is important to recognize that New Testament writers draw on tribal-imagery of the Old Testament and use it to highlight that Christ is the fullness of divine presence. When they speak of Christ coming in the future, it is as if they placed themselves *back* into Hebrew history looking forward to the coming of Christ. They are not writing in a past/present/future framework. Christ fulfills history, thus cannot return to history.

The Apocalypse uses tribal imagery of power and glory only to introduce a radically new, totally antithetical image. Amidst power, turmoil and fear, Christ returns as the *Lamb of divine Call* - an image diametrically opposed to *power* metaphors. Imagery of the *lamb* is found in the Old, but is central to the New Testament. Imagery of eating a lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doorpost in the first Passover is a crucial image of deliverance for the Hebrews. It represents a passing through the mighty power of Egypt to become the beloved people of divine Call. In the new Passover, eating/drinking the body/blood of the Lamb is crucial in passing through the mighty power of reactionary political/religious ire to become the only beloved of divine Call.

While the Passover lamb is an important image in Hebraic tradition, its salutary *gentleness* aspect emerges only in Christ. The Israelites frame history as a chosen tribe interacting with the divine tribal Chief. The divine Chief is wont to express pleasure/displeasure via divinely initiated good/bad fortunes befalling the Chosen People. Tribal religion centers on divine ruling *over* a subject people, commencing in the time of Moses and enduring for many to this day. This Hebraic cultural history is the context of John's dream. But he shifts the contrast from tribe ruled over by Chief to a contrast between the gentleness of the Lamb and the mighty power wielded not by the divine Chief but by human despots. Divine Call is no longer identified with power. Christ, in the gentleness symbolized by the lamb, exposes abusive power as the antithesis of divine presence. The symbolism of lamb versus raw power is the centerpiece of the Apocalypse.

In the lamb image, there is no longer divine Chiefdom but absolute gentleness defining the divine/human relation. In gentleness, there is surrender of power, stillness, mutual respect, deference and unlimited possibility. This imagery of the divine Call/human relation surpasses in depth and brilliance all previous biblical images. It represents the end of time in that it is the ultimate expression of the divine/human relation. A lamb image captures the gentleness that must be at the very core of espousal union.

The lamb imagery reflecting divine helplessness is a stumbling block for the West. We take pride in economic, political, religious, academic, military, and technological power. Competition is the heartbeat of the West. *Lamb* imagery turns the culture of the West on its head. The West made a fundamental error in switching to the philosophical imagery of Supreme Being and the Almighty in place of John's imagery of divine Lamb in defining the divine/human relation. Power obsession goes directly contrary to the trend of biblical history, which traces the gradual divestiture of *divine* power. Note the reducing power in the imagery depicting divine Call: Initiator (Adam)→ Avenger (Noah) → Negotiator (Abraham)→ Liberator (Moses)→ Unifier (David)→ Suitor (Mary)→ Lamb (Christ).

The rainbow following the great flood in the time of Noah symbolizes the divine surrender of power over nature as an instrument of punishment. Each succeeding Call image is a refinement on the previous, leading to the divine surrender of power that ends in a gentle divine/human espousal dialogue. Power is the source of chaos, while gentleness yields the stillness of espousal union. In modern times, the call for gentleness on the part of Gandhi or Martin Luther King in the face of the blind cultural power reflects in some minimal way the Lamb imagery of John. Lamb imagery implies respect for *self* as the foundation upon which human society is built.

Lamb is metaphor for Calvary. Calvary is not only the surrender of human but also divine power. Biblical death means the mutual surrender of the divine and human selves, as in a marriage. Infinite weakness is the only way the divine Self can reach the infinite weakness of the human self. The identity of the human self is freely given *response*, thus precluding the use of force by definition. Surrender of power is required for the human self to become eucharis and the divine Self to become Love. Giving thanks (eucharis) implicitly acknowledges the identity of the human self as recipient, versus initiator of a favor. The divine Self emerges as Love by addressing the felt need that occasion thanksgiving, thus forming an implicit and ultimate covenant between the divine and human selves. An espousal relation can only be as self-to-self, in which power has no relevance. In an espousal relation, neither spouse has power over the other, but together all things are possible. Thus, the 'return' of Christ is in our becoming as a lamb in response to the divine Suitor initiative.

In place of the tribal images of power, judgment, punishment, subjugation and destruction, as commonly found in the Old Testament and in the Western world generally, the image of a lamb projects gentleness, fidelity, approachableness and innocence. Thus begins a radically new image stream in concretizing the relation between the divine/human. The new imagery reflects the mutual surrender of power that brings about the stillness that heralds the divine presence of Love and the human presence of responsive eucharis. It is this new world found in the eye of the hurricane that excites the heart of John and inspires the dream of the Apocalypse.

Christ returns not at some predetermined date on the calendar, but as supreme gentleness, i.e., as the Lamb of divine Call. The infinite weakness of divine Call is at the essence of espousal religion – like a Suitor trying to win over a beloved. Thus, power related images such as mighty-fortress, Christian soldier, crusader and the like are oxymoron in espousal religion. Tribal imagery such as excommunication, reward/punishment and subservience lack the much more refined imagery of spousal union. When we are gentle toward one another, we are affecting the return of Christ in the here and now, i.e., we are drawing Christ into the present. The return of Christ is as much our choice as it is the divine choice. Choosing gentleness toward another is a choice for the return of Christ; the return of Christ is proportional to the rise of gentleness throughout human society.

There is no great mystery in what constitutes gentleness. The issue is choosing gentleness rather than power in dealing with ‘neighbor’. Gentleness increases the quality of presence to one another. A repeated choice of gentleness brings order in chaos, thereby intensifying divine presence as Love. The drying of every tear and the stilling of every heart is the unmistakable sign of the second coming of Christ (Rev 7:17). The end of time produces not terror and chaos, but immeasurable joy and peace. In the return of Christ, no one will be left behind. The gentleness of a lamb is far more attractive than the vinegar of divine vengeance of old. The formerly distant, awe-inspiring, divine Chief is now, in John’s view, meek as a Lamb and approachable by those who choose to enter the world of gentleness.

Christ coming as the Lamb of divine Call is the theme of John’s Gospel as well as the Apocalypse. What John metaphorically reflects upon in the Apocalypse, he reports directly in his Gospel. Unlike the other three Gospels, John’s Gospel comes more from the heart than head; only the relational intelligence of the heart can discern the real from the unreal. For John, Christ is Love incarnate. Christ flees blind, psycho-narcotic addiction to power as incompatible with being the beloved of divine Call. For Christ to come back in a display of power would totally contradict his Gospel image. As mentioned, the central message of the Apocalypse and all of John’s writings is that divine Call approaches as gentle as a Lamb before whom power is an absurdity. John images Christ as the Hebraic Person triumphing not over *enemies*, but over *chaos* in the arena of self; *lamb* imagery is antithetical to chaos in the emerging as a *self*, rather than *between* tribal members. The essence of the Gospel is that order begins in a micro world of *self* and thence extends into the macro world.

Healing at a *self* versus on a tribal level is a barometer of Christ returning. Healing occurs in and through self-responding to Love. None of the miracles of Christ had strings attached or were directed toward a display of power, but all are self-to-self acts of healing springing from Love. The Bible records many healing miracles. Whether Christ performed them directly or via neighborhood communion - the continuation of Christ in history - is not clear. Eastern writers saw no discontinuity of the historical Christ and his enduring eucharis body as a communion of neighbors. Christ is the archetypal incarnation of Love. His continuing eucharis body as communion among ‘neighbors’ is the epicenter of healing of self and thence the human race that transcends time.

The corporeal acts of mercy such as feeding, clothing, sheltering and healing come about as ‘neighbors’ form a communion of sharing. In so doing, the presence of Christ is renewed. Christ, in feeding the crowd with a few loaves and fishes, demonstrates sharing as the avenue for his renewed presence. In the West, we tend to see this as a miraculous increase in the quantity of food due to divine intervention. It is more likely a miracle of a Christ-inspired sharing of private food stores until all are satisfied that pertains to today as two thousand years ago. By surrendering all power on Calvary in response to Love, Christ is now helpless in alleviating human misery. Christ cannot act except in concert with the human self. Lack of sharing among ‘neighbors’ is the root source of human grief and barrier to the return of Christ.

The end of time is taking place now as neighborhood communion. (See previous chapter on *communion persona*.) Such a development does not have the fireworks, disasters, terror and dread that characterize popular imagery of the last days. It will not be the first time believers got it all wrong. The Jews were convinced that a powerful messiah-king would appear to defeat the evil Roman Empire and lead the Chosen People to a golden age of prosperity. What they got was a child born in a stable whose parents had to flee the country in fear for their lives. History seems to be repeating itself in the modern obsession of looking to a mighty display of divine power in the heavens coming to destroy the evildoers and lead the good folks into a golden paradise. The quiet transforming of reaction into response that creates communion with ‘neighbor’ is never going to make headlines. But the end of time is at hand and happening under our collective nose.

*****SIDEBAR*****

HEAVEN AND HELL

The return of Christ is often associated with a calling the good to heaven and consigning the bad to hell. The belief in heaven/hell existed centuries before Christ and has no direct relevance to the Gospel; heaven/hell and reward/punishment is tribal imagery. The basic premise of the Gospel is the divine/human espousal relation is totally gratuitous; any strings attached on either side negate the relation. Thus, heaven is not a *place* but a *state* – like a marital state. Marriage is the mutual self-gift based on choice between spouses with no strings attached. Otherwise, the marriage degenerates into a business deal or a master/servant, reward/punishment relation.

The divine Self-gift is from the beginning. The catch22 is that such a gift is unknowable except through the human self-gift, arising not solely in response to the divine Self-gift but as a free, unconditional choice originating at the very core that creates the self. The unconditional *choice of self-gift* creates the divine as well as the human self as a conscious, dichotomous relation. The result is the state of heaven as in a perfect marriage. Hell is the anguish of knowing what might have been.

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Resurrection of the Dead

An Apocalyptic rising from the dead is not a new idea. The notion of life after death is about as old as the human race. Burial of tools/weapons with the deceased for use in a future life is found in the most ancient burial sites. The understanding of life after death simply evolved over time with greater specificity and imagery. Four distinct types of resurrection developed throughout history, each of which has millions of adherents in the world today. The four types are: vital, tribal, physical and relational.

The epoch of pro-religion reflects the *vital* type of resurrection. From the dawn of the first human up until four thousand years ago, humans believed themselves, as all nature, to be simply part of a vital force. Resurrection (life beyond death) in the proto-religion era consists in being simply absorbed into Life or transformed from one life form to another through successive reincarnations. The continuity is found in *Life* as such and not in a particular life *form*. Millions in the Far East adhere to this notion of resurrection. Birth into the world is a punishment for failure in a previous life to be absorbed into pure Life. Continued failure means rebirth to lower life form. The caste system in India reflects the stages of advancing toward more pure Life.

The *tribal* type of resurrection begins with Abraham. In his day, the killing of the first-born primed the pump of Life to insure fruitfulness of family, field and flock. By not killing his first-born, he primed his own pump, so to speak, in the form of a distinct life. For Abraham, resurrection is tribal continuity. Abraham continues through his seed so that he becomes as numerous as the stars. In making a deliberate choice, Abraham seminally begins a notion of resurrection as continuity of a *tribal-self*. Millions today adhere to tribal resurrection, as self-continuity through offspring.

The *physical* type of resurrection originates in Egypt and is based on the assumption that divinity is incarnate in and through the material world. Continuity of life depends on preserving physical remains. Thus, Egyptians mummified deceased relatives and pets to insure their continuity. Destruction of the physical remains would sever a connection with the divine source of Life and the deceased would cease to exist. The Egyptians are the first to place great emphasis on the material body as key to life after death. This notion is the cultural underpinning of the magnificent pyramids that are elaborate tombs for preserving the remains of pharaohs.

Incarnation, at the core of Egyptian culture, is also a key element of religion. Matter and Life are two sides of the same Reality. Making an essential link between material and Life enabled the ancient Egyptians to deduce that matter and Life coalesce into a unified consciousness, thus concluding that there could be only one Deity. The unified consciousness at the core of material Reality eventual becomes defined as the divine Self. The Hebrews absorbed much of Egyptian culture and eventually added to the notion of the divine Self the logical complement of a distinct human self. As discussed in chapter four, the realization of a human self came to light slowly, having developed through the vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal stages. It is important to note that self cannot rise from the dead abstracted from material reality; the coalescence of all Reality into a unified consciousness is the definition of self.

The emergence of a distinct human *self* vis-à-vis the divine Self introduces the fourth type, i.e., *relational* resurrection. A relational resurrection means that it is the *self* that rises not *from* but *through* death. The body develops/arises as an expression of the self and such a body has dimensions far beyond our notion of body as a skin-bound object. The true body of the responding human self will be one in common with the divine Self, as Call – analogous to the shared body/life in an offspring arising when two spouses are in communion with each other. Self cannot exist in the abstract in as much as self is defined in a *reciprocal relation* of Call/response. The physical world surrounding us embodies the divine Self, as Call, and concretizes the divine invitation for the human self to arise as *response*. As the human self matures to total response, human consciousness expands to full reciprocity with Call.

The human self emerges (rises through death) vis-à-vis the divine Self by transiting through reaction→ response→ thanksgiving→ death. Death is the moment the human self-identity transits fully into eucharis – a thanksgiving that is complementary to, and eternal as, the divine Love initiative. Thus, growth in thanksgiving is simultaneously both a dying and a rising that will never cease. Eucharis life that we experience now continues, and simply increases in depth.

It is fairly easy to see that thanksgiving deepens life. Note from your own experience that the more you are thankful for a ‘neighbor’, such as spouse, son/daughter, friend and so on, the more you are drawn to and can *see* that ‘neighbor’. It is not through love but through thanksgiving that we find our ‘loved’ ones not only now but in a now that never ends. *Reaction* to neighbor blinds and stifles the thanksgiving leading to life. The more self becomes incarnate as thanksgiving, the more the divine Self, reflected everywhere as Call, becomes visible. Thanksgiving is resurrection in progress - open to all who choose to enter. The eucharis gathering at the Last Supper is the real death of Christ but also is his resurrection. Christ is the first to enter thanksgiving/death as a communal, eucharis self in response to Love. He is now the eucharis persona at the vortex of history drawing all into the resurrection of thanksgiving. Death does not disrupt the divine/human, Love/thanksgiving relation any more than birth disrupts the relation between a mother and her child.

Resurrection, as growth in thanksgiving, is alien to the ontological culture of the West. We fantasize on death as if it were an isolated reality. In centuries past, atheists sought to make death permanent by cremating the body so that resurrection would be impossible. The underlying error is in confusing an ontological with a relational body. We tend to view our body as an object among many other objects. In contrast, a relational body is defined as the articulation of a *self*. There can be but one body through which the human self articulates *response* and the divine Self articulates *Call*; the body is the concrete interface between the human and divine selves. While the human self is present in the body as eucharis, the divine Self is present as Love. The human self expands as body via thanksgiving. The body will cease only when divine Call ceases. There is no limit to a relational body except that set by the self.

The point to remember is that thanksgiving *is* resurrection. It may help to express this phenomenon more concretely. Love/thanksgiving are no more separable than giving/ receiving. Our self-identity as response, in a Call/response relation, means we are surrounded with gifts, beginning with a physical body. As the awareness of gifts beyond skin boundaries increases, so, too, does thanksgiving. This growth in thanksgiving is the ‘process’ of your death as a leaving behind a body confined by skin to transit into a eucharis body in response to the body of divine Call vested in the universe. As we awaken to the myriad gifts surrounding us, the self-experience of thanksgiving will continue to expand leaving behind a lifeless skin-bound body for others to mourn. Your legacy of thanksgiving will draw those who mourn to follow, just as Christ does to this day with a legacy of eucharis. Every death is a grace inviting those left behind to discover thanksgiving as the path of resurrection.

Resurrection is a process rather than an isolated phenomenon. Since self-experience becomes that for which thanks is given, there can be no limit or end in giving thanks any more than there can be an end to loving Call. But what about those so mired in poverty and misery that achieving an identity of thanksgiving is virtually impossible? The Gospel finds such an individual closer to achieving such an identity than those with great wealth and power. In Christ’s parable, a crumb falling from a rich man’s table is all it takes for thanksgiving to well up in the heart of a poor beggar. In contrast, the rich are consumed with expectation rather than thanksgiving, or obsessed with fear less possession, power or privilege be lost.

Riches in themselves are not evil; it is rather that riches (power) can so easily be blinding to thanksgiving as the core of self-identity. Obviously, poverty does not guarantee a clear vision of self-identity as the only beloved. It is simply *easier* for one divested of power to see more clearly. Thus, a homeless individual living on the street is invisible to a passerby, but the passerby is quite visible to the homeless. The poor gather around Christ and respond gratefully to his healing words and actions; the rich and powerful spy on him, seeking to discredit and do away with him as a menace to their privileged position of religious, academic, political or economic power. However, these power brokers, much to their chagrin, become instrumental in Christ’s transitioning from a flesh/blood body to a eucharis body. For the powerful, Calvary represents an ending and good riddance, but to Christ it is the beginning of fully assuming his identity of thanksgiving. The Call/response religion, prophetically initiated by Abraham - having passed through vital→ coalitional→ tribal epochs - now reaches its final depth in Christ as an espousal Love/thanksgiving relation between the divine and human self. Christ admonishes that it is easier for a camel to pass through an eye of a needle than one blinded by riches/power to enter the kingdom of divine Call.

Christ's view of death is a shock to his disciples and seems terribly unreal to this day. Transitioning from a physical to a eucharis body seems beyond comprehension. Foregoing a tangible body as an anchor of self-experience to an intangible eucharis body is a challenge. The transition requires the ability to perceive Reality as a dichotomous *relation*, versus ontologically as an accumulation of *objects*. The moment of death will force the issue when self-identity, in order to survive, must expand beyond body as an object.

To emphasis once again: the true death and resurrection of Christ is at the Last Supper. Like an enslaved people passing through death - symbolized by a parted sea – to emerge as the Chosen People, so Christ passes through death via Eucharist to emerge as the only beloved. The context of the Eucharist is the gathering of 'neighbors' who now become his eucharis body/blood and, therefore, nourished by his body/blood. By identifying with the gathering as eucharis, Christ transits into a deeper bodily form that is beyond the reach of his enemies – the eucharis gathering is his resurrection. Abraham sought seminal continuity; Christ turns to neighbor, as a communal-self continuity, thus adding a radical universalism to the tribal vision of Abraham. A eucharis body, incarnating as 'neighbors', enables Christ to be on both sides of the 'divide' - on the one side is his eucharis body as a communion of 'neighbors' and on the other is his eucharis identity responding to the divine initiative of Love. The reactionary tormentors view Christ's death on Calvary as final and good riddance - unaware that the crucified body of Christ has already transitioned into a universal body in and through thanksgiving.

NOTE: In the desire to transform his body into Eucharistic communion, Christ feels inhibited by the presence of a reactionary disciple who would betray him. It is important to note that the betrayer leaves freely, choosing to exclude himself from the eucharis communion – imposition of excommunication by the group is diametrically opposed to its identity as eucharis body.

The Eucharistic communion at the Last Supper is the archetypal expression of church and redemption. Disciples for centuries afterward gather in homes to put on the eucharis body of Christ as their own. The host of the gathering proclaims the eucharis identity of the gathering to make visible the body of Christ as Eucharist. All are invited to enter a communion of eucharis as a 'death' freely chosen that reaches beyond natural mortality to Life beyond our wildest dreams.

Eucharis communion among 'neighbors' is the *Second Coming* of Christ marking the end of time and the summit of history. The resurrection of all on the last day means a drawing of all humans into the present in as much as there is neither past nor future in epic time. Recall that the biblical concept of the *last day* is an arrival into the *present* – divine Call is forever a beginning with no past or future. A perfect response on the last day means the human self enters the eternal beginning of the divine Call – the definition of resurrection. Every increase in response to Call is not only a movement toward beginning but also acts as a magnet drawing all toward the Omega Point.

Thus, the resurrection (gathering) of all on the last day is as much a human as it is a divine choice. The final resurrection does not involve raising many 'bodies' but entails yourself arising as eucharis body that encompasses myriad responses to your divine espousal other Self. Keep in mind that *body* is the medium of self-articulation and is not the cause but the effect of the presence of both the divine and human selves. The body is not an object that contains the self but the actual interface of the divine and human selves. The myriad people of history are an extension of your self-response and give definition to divine Call. The final resurrection means that the response, constituting your self-identity, incarnates as a body that is coextensive with the body of the divine Self made manifest as Call in and through humanity/universe. Obviously that point has yet to be reached. What is missing is the mature human self that adequately reflects the divine Self of Call.

The inability to grasp a relational versus an ontological notion of body has produced some fascinating imagery in the West. Christ appearing on the clouds calling the dead back to life is imagery that has become literal fact for many in the West. Recall the uproar over impending doom in the year 2000. Based on the ontological imagery of the body, the next world is going to be pretty much like the present but without all the grief. Streets will be paved with gold, we will enjoy our favorite foods without putting on weight and there will be no more daily work hassles to put up with – a kind of heavenly wonderland that Walt Disney would love. And, as a bonus, we will have a chance to enjoy the company of the Almighty, but only after we have all our questions answered on issues regarding how the Almighty managed our earthly life. An Eskimo captures this view when he commented that if there are no walruses in heaven, then he does not want to go there. Many like this Eskimo view heaven as a place. When you arrive you will meet aunt Millie, uncle Pete and cousin Sue and go occasionally to the 'White House' to pay respects to the Almighty. Heaven is not a place but a state – a marital state; Millie, Pete and Sue will be the manifestation of divine Call, but now perceived as such with much greater clarity than before.

The Christ event is the resurrection on the last day - as viewed from Hebraic history looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. He is the way, the truth and the life fulfilling Hebrew dreams of a perfect divine/human relation. Christ invites his disciples to follow him and, when asked where he is going, offers no further explanation. They are to follow him in resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is response to Love manifested in neighbor/nature with a thanksgiving larger than death. In so doing, Christ prophetically points out that the deeper the thanksgiving, the more manifest is the Love; and the more evident the Love, the deeper the thanksgiving grows. This very concrete reciprocity that even a child can grasp is the final resurrection of the human race in progress – the alpha of thanksgiving and the Omega of Love spiraling to a point.

Obviously, the biblical imagery of a relational versus an ontological resurrection stretches the Western mind to the breaking point. Death, in a relational sense, is the summit act of thanksgiving in which the human self accepts the identity as the only beloved of divine Call. Unlike an ontological body, a relational body is coextensive with humanity/universe in and through which the human self seeks response and the divine Self seeks engagement. Death, like Life, is not an isolated event in metric time, but the ongoing surrender to Life/Love in epic time. Death is an epic moment of profound self-discovery. Through thanksgiving we take charge of our own body as it dissolves from object to the point of encounter between the divine and human self.

Resurrection means the actual taking possession of a *eucharis* body as the way of concretizing divine Call. It is the *eucharis* body that endures forever. Gradual ‘surrender’ to a more intense Life begins at birth and increases more and more by our own choice of thanksgiving; we are called into the world without our choice but create a self only by choice. A growing intensity of Life, as thanksgiving, never stops. Death is the final definition of the Call/response, Love/thanksgiving relation rather than the end of the relation. Thus, death, defined as a *response* of thanksgiving to Love, endures forever. Death is pivotal in that it incarnates the divine identity as Call and the human identity as response. Death is the polar opposite of Life – both must endure forever since they form the basis of opposite self-identities. Life would be unknowable without death, just as light is unknowable without its polar opposite of darkness. Entering eternal death means assuming a self-identity of timeless thanksgiving vis-à-vis the divine Self as unending Love.

We naturally focus on self-*image* and fail to recognize the much deeper reality of self-*experience*. Religion centers on self-experience and struggles to define its reality beyond image. Such an endeavor is a formidable challenge because, while self-image is a reified form, self-experience is a universal and can never be circumscribed by image – an ocean can’t be put into a thimble. However, religion utilizes three universals, namely, *neighbor*, *love* and *thanks*, around which to build a sense of self-experience. *Neighbor* concretizes both the divine and human self; *love* concretizes divine presence; and *thanksgiving* defines human self-presence.

While image making can never capture the depth of any one of these universals, all three are well within the range of human experience and imaging making. We all have a *functional* self-image, but the only real handle we have on *self-experience* is in concretely probing the depth of self as neighbor, love and thanksgiving. Even a child can grasp a surface notion of neighbor, love and thanksgiving around which to begin a sense of self (versus self-image). Neighbor/love/thanksgiving – the central core of the Gospel - allows us to relate both to the particular and the universal. Thus, the Gospel shows Christ delving specifically into neighbor/love/thanksgiving in pursuing self-realization. The Gospel portrays Christ as archetype, inviting all to follow in as much as these universals touch not just Christ but everyone.

The deepening of *self-experience* is final resurrection in progress. When the arena of religion shifts from *tribe* to *self*, tribal continuity transits to *self-continuity*. Thus, tribal life blossoms as a self that encompasses the fullness of Life (resurrection). A leap of relational intelligence precedes plunging from the more superficial tribal into an espousal faith. The faith issue is going from tribe as the ultimate divine/human relation to a self that subsumes the tribe in a self vis-à-vis the divine Self. By doing so, the human self becomes as eternal as the divine Self. Just as the Chosen People is eternal as a tribe vis-à-vis the divine Chief, so, too, self is eternal as a self vis-à-vis the divine Self in as much as the one now defines the other; the only change relative to tribal religion is in the deeper perception of self as encompassing the tribe.

The reality of *self* is the fundamental assumption underlying all of Scripture. The Bible probes into the logical consequence of having a *distinct life*, concluding that a distinct life makes sense only if the divine/human self meet as final resurrection (fullness of Life). Furthermore, the Bible points to the growing intensity of life as evidence resurrection is in progress, leading to self-realization. Biblical history begins tracing the resurrection of self, starting with Abraham's notion of a *distinct* life that in effect affirms life by ending human sacrifice. The triumph of the Chosen People is the 'resurrection' of Abraham. The resurrection of Christ as the only beloved represents the final convergence on *self*; Abraham's *distinct life* matures to become a *distinct self* vis-à-vis the divine Self. Self (versus chosen tribe) is not an event *in* history but the event *of* history – history's crowning achievement. History from a biblical perspective is analogous to an expectant mother at last giving birth. Born are twins - divine and human selves as mirror images of each other. Contrary to everyone's expectation, *death* is the birth of both the divine and human, as *selves* - with distinguishable identities as Love/thanksgiving. Your depth of self-experience measures your relational knowledge (i.e., faith) and is evidence of your resurrection now in progress.

The Gospels depict the core of espousal religion as resurrection of a human *self* that is on both sides of the 'divide'. Christ begins by emphatically changing the concept of body from what *contains* the self to what *expresses* the self. This view is not far removed from that of modern science. In transiting from infancy to adulthood, an individual has a number of bodies but the same self endures, thus the body does not *contain* but *expresses* the self. Christ takes possession of his true body as a Eucharistic body that embodies his deepest sense of self. A eucharis body allows self-expression to be on both sides of the 'divide'. The Resurrection of Christ is the expression of self in a radically new dimension beyond a historical body. He appears and reappears to his disciples. In these encounters, he walks, talks and eats just as before his death. The Gospels emphasize that his body is real, not surreal or a spiritual fantasy. Biblical resurrection, contrasting with the 'resurrection' of proto-religion that is merely life transiting into a new life form, is a self on both sides of the 'divide' allowing for enhanced self expression; *self* is simply *response* to Life.

As a mother seeks natural, painless birthing, so, too, the human self in death seeks encounter with the divine, gentile Self through a natural, painless birthing experience of thanksgiving. We can choose how we frame death, like a mother can frame birthing as unspeakable pain or joy. Each of us chooses the meaning of death as surely as each chooses the meaning of life. Every transitional event in life, such as birth, maturation or death, serves only to bring out dimensions of a Call/response relationship. The choices we make increase or decrease a sense of self. A choice can be as a *reaction* to circumstances of life or as a *response* of thanksgiving. As the Old Testament explores the notion of tribal responding to the divine Chief, the New explores the notion of self-responding to the divine Suitor.

Resurrection is the gradual in fleshing of the human self, as *response*, and the divine Self, as Call. The human self of response grows to perceive only Call, while the divine Self perceives only response – like spouses grow to have an eye only for each other. Being raised up on the last day means to bring self into total response to Call. When I open myself as response to my 'neighbor', I am being drawn into resurrection, and my response also draws my 'neighbor' in the same direction. Response will eventually overcome reaction and draw all into the resurrection of the '*last day*' – the biblical way of referring to an all-inclusive present, as there is no future in epic time. Response is gateway, as reaction is barrier to presence.

The divine Incarnation is not like a bolt of lightening out of the blue that happened on Christmas day. Divine incarnating has been in progress since time began. Think of divine incarnation and its logical consequence of resurrection like a light bulb growing from dim to bright. Incarnation/resurrection is the divine Self ever increasing in brightness as Love that invites a response of thanksgiving. The increasing brightness has the four levels of intensity, namely, vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal. As Israel is on a mountain showing forth the glory of the divine Chief (Ezekiel 17:22), the spark in the eye and spring in your step show forth the espousal glory of the divine Suitor (Matt 6:22).

Abraham is first to recognize that Life is a shared experience rather than something that flowed as from a divine spigot. Nearly a thousand years later, Moses recognizes that human bonding to be a sharing of divine Life – thus inaugurating tribal religion. Mary begins espousal religion as the divine/human sharing at the level of self, thus exposing the divine Self to the world. The presence of Love hasn't changed over time, but rather the human response to Love has grown. When the Apocalypse is viewed as a whole, John sees the Second Coming of Christ as a world that is forever beginning to manifest Love. We enter such a world through an enlightened self-experience as the beloved of divine Call responding in thanksgiving to a Love that makes time stand still. It is such an experience of Love that possessed John and inspires a dream wildly trying to convey a reality that explodes human imagination.

Final Judgment

Biblical *judgment* refers to final *healing/justification* and not to a legal indictment pertaining to a violation of some natural or stated law. Equating biblical judgment with civil judgment leads to erroneously equating religion with morality and final judgment as a meticulous examination of behavior. The central focus of the Bible is exploring Reality as a *relation* and not as moral laws derived from reason/nature. The biblical perspective is closer to modern physics that views action/reaction as a fundamental law governing all matter. The Bible simply recasts the action/reaction law governing nature as a Call/response interaction of the divine/human *selves*.

The final justification is graphically depicted as a calling together of all the nations of the earth and welcoming into heaven those that had responded to neighbor who was thirsty, hungry, lonely, naked, sick or imprisoned, and rejecting those who had been unresponsive to a neighbor's thirst, hunger, loneliness, nakedness, sickness or imprisonment (Matt 25:31-46). Note that judgment is not based on the strength of tribal bonds evidenced through observing the Ten Commandments, but centers around *responsiveness* by which a *self* is created. Those unresponsive to neighbor failed to achieve the relation implied in a self. There can be no divine relation (religion) without a human self because otherwise there would be no polarity for a relation in the first place.

The final judgment identifies divine *Call* as paradise and those *responding* to neighbor as having found the Way to paradise. The underlying Call/response theme of Scripture is clearly evident in the final judgment scene itself. For Abraham, divine Call is to a *distinct* life; for Moses, divine Call is in forming a chosen tribe; for Christ, divine Call is as neighbor – the ultimate concretizing of Call. Neighbor is the incarnate form of self and, therefore, touches the deepest possible relation – far beyond a tribal relation. A Call/response, centering on neighbor, is the final judgment (justification) because response, as neighbor, is the ultimate challenge in becoming a self. *Neighbor* more than any other image incarnates religion in the here and now. Furthermore, neighbor is a universal, thus response to any 'neighbor' is in effect a response to the divine Neighbor. Just as there are two and only two possible selves – the Self of *Call* and the self of *response*, there are only two possible neighbors. (See sidebar in chapter five: Two Cosmic Views). The final justification/judgment is in achieving a self/neighbor versus member/tribe level of religion.

At the risk of annoying repetition, the final judgment is not a date on a calendar as assumed by the West. The Gospel writer places himself *back* in Hebraic history and is looking forward to the Christ event as the final/ultimate judgment (justification) that defines divine/human relation, versus a long history of previous failure. Final judgment is nailing down exactly how divine Call definitively is entering human history that will end the historic ups and downs of a tribal divine/human relation. The conclusion is that divine Call comes as Neighbor seeking response from neighbor – such a relation is eternal.

The framing of biblical *final judgment* is not as the good versus the bad, but as a responsive neighbor listening to neighbor, versus a reactionary turning a deaf ear. *Response* that creates a *self* requires effective hearing needed to form a relation with neighbor. Mutual *listening* is at the core of the divine/human relation. (See *response-centric* as the fifth characteristic of religion discussed in chapter four.) The divine Self is not as a blind tyrant, but is tuned to the needs of the human self, as in a marriage. A reactionary posture precludes the ability to hear. Dialogue resulting in feeding/clothing elevates action/reaction to a Call/response relation. Growth as responsive neighbor leads invariably to thanksgiving for neighbor and thence awareness of the divine Neighbor.

The imagery of a final judgment merely sums up what has been a constant biblical theme of Call/response leading up to Calvary. The deep and dignified response of Christ on Calvary is the antithesis of a chaotic world of reaction. The effect is immediate: one thief responds and receives the Call into paradise and the other chooses to react with curses. Peter reacts in the form of thwarted dreams of grandiose power, but later responds in a flood of tears. Judas, rather than responding to the inviting friendship of Christ, reacts by hanging self. Call/response is the essence of religion around which not just the final days of Christ but all of Scripture hinges.

Response is both creed and morality around which final judgment turns. Expressed in behavioral terms: response creates a self (creed) and is healing (morality); reaction stifles a self and is damaging. Responding to 'neighbor' not only creates the self but results in the 'healing' of hunger, thirst, sickness and the like. Religion is not an ideology, but is incarnate as a neighbor-to-neighbor healing relation. The imagery of the final judgment reflects divine helplessness implicit in a *neighbor*-based relation. At the neighbor level, one party cannot have dominance over the other; force negates the very notion of neighbor, as simply *proximity*. Thus, the final judgment reflects the divine Neighbor wholly dependent on the human neighbor in order to affect healing in the world. Healing the world is in fact healing the self.

Biblical *judgment* is healing that makes whole. The judges of the Old Testament are healers of Israel. In the New, self is defined as the in fleshing of healing Love, thereby disseminating healing in the social environment like ripples in a pond. The unmistakable messianic sign that final judgment has come upon us is when healing spreads from the self to the surround neighborhood, rather than *visa versa*. Thus, when John the Baptist's disciples ask Christ whether he is the messiah, he tells the disciples of John to go back and report what they are witnessing: the blind seeing, the lame walking, the deaf hearing, lepers being cleansed and the poor receiving good news (Matt 11:4). Christ in himself is the final judgment in as much as he defines in a very concrete way divine incarnation as a healing emanating from self to neighbor. Christ frequently refers to the divine healing (judgment) of the world as the advent of the kingdom of divine Call that is now present among us (wherever *self* is found). The final judgment occurs through being a healing friend rather than seeking a friend.

Divine Call is not to some pre-existing plan concocted in advance. Rather, it is the Call of a Lover to the beloved. In the final judgment those responding enter into joy, while those reacting reap its consequences of hate, dread and fear. We can easily recognize the joy arising in self-discovery and the paralysis of self that comes from reaction in the form of hate, dread and fear. Judgment is manifest in the joy we now experience and not at some future date. The joy of self-discovery reaches wholeness when response is commensurate with the Call to divine espousal union. If the identity of the human self is *response*, it follows that self can be made whole only when juxtaposed to *Call*. Final judgment is the human self of response in sync with divine Self of Call - just as in marriage that implies a self-consuming choice of both parties.

Christ frequently refers to the need to *seek* endlessly (the kingdom of divine Call) and guarantees success (Matt 7:7); the seeking is the finding. Christ identifies with the poor precisely because poverty incarnates a seeking. The seeking may be for food, but the deeper hunger is a responding to Call, as exemplified in the incident of meeting the woman at a well (John 4:9). From this perspective, everyone is poor and the intensification of hunger is a precondition for sensing the divine hunger for espousal union. Poverty in itself is not laudable, but occasions the opportunity of experiencing the hunger at the core of response. The danger of wealth/power is that the edge is taken off the hunger needed for response to Call/Love. Self is not an object, but a relation experienced as a hunger/search for an ever-deeper connection with the divine other Self. The rich man with full barns is satisfied, thus he loses the hunger from which self emerges to form the divine espousal union (Luke 12:20).

Final judgment is not about handing out reward/punishment like a king to subjects. Such imagery is tribal and not espousal. Gospel writers use tribal imagery because a tribal mindset prevailed at the time. To avoid tribal imagery, Christ often speaks in parables – unfortunately, our interpretation is often literal. The notion of *reward* makes no sense in espousal religion. The mutual gift of spouses forming a union is itself the 'reward'. A free self-giving without expectation on the part of either partner goes to the essence of espousal religion. Out of this mutual gift, the self of each spouse is created. We do not deserve the divine Self-gift now or in the hereafter, nor can the divine Self demand an espousal *yes* now or in the hereafter. Free choice is of the essence in an espousal relation and the very cause of mutual self-creation. Reward/punishment implies a contract – a return for services rendered. An espousal relation entails a mutual gift of self. Entering an espousal mindset means realizing that no one, not even the divine Self, has to do a 'damn' thing for you - as one insightful friend loved to put it. The reverse is also true: you do not have to do a 'damn' thing for another, including the divine Self. Obligation pertains to justice - not thanksgiving or Love. Marriage is a free gift of self that reaches to the depth where self is created.

An espousal religion that precludes any expectation of reward seems strange in our ontological/tribal culture. How often have you heard that someone has gone to his/her reward? It is against our cultural grain to suggest that divine Call owes nothing and never will; moreover, you owe divine Call nothing and never will. The relation of Call/response precludes mutual demand. Free *initiative* is always at the core of the divine Self; free *response* is always at the core of the human self. The divine Love initiative carries with it the wherewithal of response that enables but does not force response; the burning love of a suitor may influence, but cannot force response from the beloved. The relation is not one of reward/punishment but reflects the reciprocity of spouses in a marriage. Reciprocity is between the divine Self, as initiating Love, and the human self, as responding thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in effect incarnates the divine Self because thanksgiving by its very nature reflects divine initiative taken.

Divine Self-gift is in initiating Love and the human self-gift is in *accepting* the call as the only beloved. It is hard to imagine how anyone can refuse such a generous offer. Such a bargain is the essence of the Gospel that never ceases to be the Good News. The self, as thanksgiving, emerges with the growing awareness of the divine Self-gift that is unexpected, unearned and totally gratuitous. There is no basis of reward or punishment since self-gift implies, by definition, no expectation or prior contract of any kind. To repeat: neither party has a right to even expect, much less demand, espousal consent. The new covenant, unlike the old tribal covenant, affects only the self. The espousal relation is mutual, spontaneous and free with no strings attached.

Punishment, which comes from tribal imagery, is the flip side of reward. The most severe punishment in tribal society is excommunication from the tribe. Had not Joseph stepped in, Mary, along with her unborn child, would have been excommunicated by stoning and thereby cut off from tribal Life. Punishment is alien to espousal religion; marriage at the point of a gun is no marriage. Refusal by Mary to respond to the advances of the divine Self could never be cause for punishment. Threat of punishment renders espousal religion a sham. Espousal religion precludes viewing death as a punishment; rather, death is the human response of “I do” in the divine/human nuptial. Furthermore, espousal religion precludes excommunication because the relation Call/response forms but one body. ‘Divorce’ may occur by opting for reaction over response, but the choice is as a self and not imposed tribally.

Like reward/punishment, *sin/guilt* that is associated with the tribal stage of religion makes no sense in espousal religion. In the tribal stage, divine bonding is indirect through tribal bonding. Sin/guilt arises from failure to adhere to tribal expectations. In contrast, espousal religion is the divine Self-to-self relation that is based on a simple yes/no – as in a marriage vow. Tribal religion is the dating preceding marriage. At the point of marriage, reward/punishment and sin/guilt are irrelevant because the espousal relation rests wholly on free choice at the core of the self. Such a choice is in effect seeking a self-identity that is ultimately coextensive with humanity/universe. In contrast, tribal choice seeks relation to the divine Chief *through bonding as a member of a group* rather than through discovering self-identity. In an espousal relation, humanity/universe embodies divine Call/Love inviting and enabling the human self to grow in response until the intensity of response is equal to the Call. Note, also, that reaction just like response to the divine advance can intensify over time; such reaction leads to ever-greater suppression of self.

In espousal religion, tribal guilt/sin changes to the presence/absence of *sanctifying grace*. *Grace* means *gratefulness*. *Actual* grace refers to a single grateful act while *sanctifying* grace refers to a habitual state of gratefulness. The opposite of sanctifying grace is not tribal *sin* but the state of *reaction*, which categorically precludes gratefulness. Sanctifying grace is not some ethereal entity that is bestowed as a reward from on high, but is a disposition easily recognized in self. There is no mystery in the act of giving thanks or developing a habitual state of gratefulness. However, reaction is detectable only in the self and never in the neighbor. Gratefulness deepens a sense of self and draws like a magnet. Those habitually in a state of gratefulness are drawn to each other and celebrate thanks (eucharis) as the natural consequence of pursuing an identity of thanksgiving. Being drawn together via thanksgiving is the essence of church. Final judgment (healing) is gathering all into a communal self in thanksgiving to the divine Self-gift through neighbor/nature.

Love and thanksgiving form a dichotomous relation at the core of Reality. Both are within the range of human experience, have infinite potential and require lifelong learning. Love is the incarnate presence of divine Call. Thus, Love goes beyond any vague, fuzzy feeling and demands proper response. The final judgment is having on the proper wedding garments (Matt 22:11). The wedding garments, discussed above, are: the surrender of power, marital aloneness and thanksgiving. Anyone who approaches Love without an identity of gentleness/aloneness/gratitude comes as a thief and a robber - Love will always escape their grasp.

The Gospel parable of proper wedding garments should come as no surprise because surrender of power, aloneness and thanksgiving are the basis of a successful marriage. *Surrender of power* means marrying blind to any monetary/status advantage, *aloneness* means triangles don't work, and *thanksgiving* means never taking a spouse for granted. Remove any of these garments and you will soon find yourself in a divorce court with a broken relationship. Calvary, the vortex of history, is the archetypal event in which the human self is clothed in the garments of surrender of power, aloneness and thanksgiving in response to Love. The espousal relation portrayed in the death/resurrection of Christ is the final judgment (healing) between the divine and human selves. The healing reverses the alienation of Adam who turned response to divine friendship into deceitful reaction.

*******SIDEBAR*******

CHURCH AS FINAL JUDGMENT

The church is the final (ultimate) judgment (healing) in progress by serving as a nursery for the birth and development of the Hebraic self. The Hebraic self, having originated out of the Chosen People, expands to encompass the entire human race. Like the Hebrew tribe of old seeking an identity as the Chosen People, the human self seeks identity as the Chosen Person. Self becomes the Chosen Person by subsuming the human race to form one reality. Humans do not divide into separate species when isolated into different environments for long periods of time as happens with other primates. The human race is one 'tribal' species out of which the tribal-self emerges. As the world shrinks into a global village, the essential oneness of the human race is increasingly visible as a Chosen People/Person among all the species of the world.

As the Ten Commandments concretized divine presence of old, universal human rights concretize divine presence today. Church emerges as responsive deference to the dignity of neighbor vested with human rights. The role of the church is to enhance the visibility of divine presence by fostering human rights just as the Chosen People preserved divine presence by fostering adherence to tribal laws. Church gives concrete expression to human rights in the gathering of 'neighbors' in order for a sense of self, as response, to emerge. All human gatherings whether based on ideology, family, government, education, economics or any other social magnet, in some degree, embody divine Call to the human self as the only beloved. The church is at home in all gatherings as a prophetic vision of the divine espousal intent.

Respect for human rights within the emerging phenomenon of a global village brings healing Love in the world as a foretaste of final judgment/healing. Church is like healing patches on the badly burned skin of humanity. The church is the epicenter of dying through response to neighbor and rising through manifestation of divine presence as Love. When the healing is complete, the divine and human selves will meet in humanity/universe as in one body. It is to such an epic event that history relentless moves.

The Omega Point of history is the equal partnership of the divine and human selves. The church is an ongoing workshop of creating equality among 'neighbors' as an introduction of a self in an equal partnership with the divine Neighbor. Recognition of equality is at the very core of being neighbor. Recall the comment Christ made to the rich man seeking to follow him, namely, that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom (presence) of divine Call (Matt 19:24). The equality, implicit in the notion of neighbor, entails surrender of power (religious, political, economic, academic and the like) over 'neighbor' in order to be in communion with 'neighbors'. One enters the kingdom only as *neighbor*.

We know implicitly that death (i.e. a letting go) is an equalizer; wealth, power or fame has no relevance in death's defining moment. In death, divine Call takes the initiative to be a Neighbor by becoming absolute weakness to entice a *willing* response. The church is as a midwife bringing forth the human neighbor to meet the divine Neighbor. The presence of the divine Self, as *Love* in history, is the direct result of the divine surrender of power over the human self. The human self is equal to the divine based precisely on the willing initiative of the divine Self to become Neighbor. Today, equality is such a common notion that we tend to assume that the notion of equality has always been around. On the contrary, the recognition of a radical equality among humans - and much more so equality before the divine Self - is a momentous discovery. The church is called to spearhead the healing that results from radical equality - an equality that underlies the divine/human espousal relation.

*******END SIDEBAR*******

Life Everlasting

Life everlasting does not mean that life goes on endlessly like a clock that never stops. The biblical notion of life everlasting means arriving at an Omega Point in which there is fullness of Life. *Life* is not a quantity in a linear sense to be measured but a quality without measure. We can sense this element in a relational experience. The success of a marriage is not the number of years spent together but the quality of presence of one spouse to the other. The human *self*, by definition a *relation*, is potentially as rich as the counterpart – the divine Self. *Everlasting life* pertains to the limitless potential in the quality of self-presence vis-à-vis the divine Self.

In ancient times, *life* and *presence* are synonymous. The biblical notion of time is that there is only a present - called the Omega Point. Christ comes as the fullness of time. Our life is a constant struggle to live fully in the present. The more we do so, the greater is the quality of our life. Life is not something off into the future, but an enrichment of the present due to growing understanding and choices we make.

To grasp the meaning of life everlasting, a brief review of the biblical notion of time may be helpful. Since the 365th day is the timeless event of an eternal present, we are always in the epic event of the 365th day. Such an event is so far beyond human comprehension and entails such a quickening of life that it must be absorbed only gradually. Thus, the 364 days of each year before the timeless event are like appetizers; the 364 days of each year following the timeless event are like desserts. Each day both foreshadows (as appetizer) and unfolds (as dessert) – we are constantly sampling the timeless event as coming and as having been experienced, but have not yet been consumed in the joy of full presence. Each passing year intensifies the spiraling toward the festive main course of everlasting Life in the Omega Point.

We experience life as a spiraling phenomenon forming ever-smaller cycles; as we get older years seemingly slip by more quickly. There is an essential connection between the life we experience now, as appetizer foreshadowing what is to be, and the delights of daily life that are also the actual unfolding of the main course. As we approach the Omega Point through cyclic years spiraling toward the timeless event, we become more aware of life as *quality* than *quantity*.

Everlasting life is now in progress and is not to be imagined as something that starts when the heart stops. Everlasting life means an ever-increasing *quality* of life, or, more exactly, an ever-increasing *presence* to Life. Perhaps the best analogy for increasing the quality of life is found in science/technology. Science may be thought of as looking more closely at nature and devising increasingly refined technology for interacting with nature. For example, studying the flight of birds eventually led to humans taking flight. By taking flight, humans gained in quality of life by greater interaction with nature. Likewise, the discovery of the atom as a source of energy has the potential of increasing the quality of life. It should be noted that every response to nature that brings an increase in quality of life carries with it an equal potential for reaction that can reduce the quality of life, as when the atom turns into a bomb. The premise of science is that the closer we look at nature, the more we can refine technology that will enhance interacting with nature, thus leading to increase human quality/presence to life as a whole.

Religion, like science, begins when Abraham looks more closely at Life and fines Life to be *relational* rather than a blind, divine force. The quality of that relation subsequently unfolds through the vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal stages. Neighbor-to-neighbor relation is the final frontier of the divine/human relation. A ‘neighbor’ sparks the presence of the divine Neighbor. Responding to ‘neighbor’ is like fanning the spark until it breaks out in a brilliant flame revealing the divine Neighbor as the hidden Love fueling the fire. The ‘spark’ is what happens in the 364 days foreshadowing the timeless event of the 365th day; the resulting flame is the consuming fire of the following 364 days drawing all into it. A mundane neighbor-experience, as spark/flame, is a foreshadowing/unfolding of the infinite espousal potential between the divine and human neighbors.

Plato described divinity as the darkness beyond the light. This means that no matter how enlightened the mind, there would always be a dimension of the divinity beyond the reaches of the mind. While Plato frames his pursuit of divinity intellectually, biblical history frames the pursuit of divine Call both intellectually and experientially. Passing years is a growth in emotional wisdom. The ultimate wisdom is finding divine presence in the Love arising from response to neighbor. Everlasting life is not an abstraction, but means an ongoing expansion of the quality of Life between ‘neighbors’, the limits being set only by our choice in responding as neighbor.

Entering everlasting life gradually eliminates the need for images. During the 364 days leading to the Omega Point, we need images to foreshadow the timeless event of the 365th day. As discussed in the first chapter, images are like crutches used to traverse through the complexity of Reality. Once in sync with Reality, crutches are no longer needed. While we are in the 364 days leading to the timeless event, we tend to see images as reality; as the timeless event unfolds during the subsequent 364 days, we gradually let go of images to interact directly with Reality. The *unfolding* stage is like a couple deeply in love discovering no need for chatter. Love gives to the human self, freed from the straightjacket imposed by image, the freedom to soar.

Finally, everlasting *Life* means everlasting *death*. Death is eternal because death is *response* to Call from which the human self derives identity – *response* will never cease. Such an understanding is so contrary to Western thought that it may be helpful to reiterate the distinction between *natural* and *cultural* death. Life/death are inseparable in the natural world because life is impossible without death. Using the tool of imaging, humans alone are able to separate death from life. Every culture puts its own spin on the meaning of both death and life. The spin on death ranges from paralyzing fear to joyful response to a greater measure of life.

The history of religion chronicles a delving into death as a passage from fear to joy. Calvary culturally defines death as the moment the human self arrives at a self-identity as *eucharis response*. Self, as thanksgiving, relates to the divine Self as initiating Love, in as much as they form a dichotomous relation with one side defining the other. Resurrection is the inevitable result of the juncture of thanksgiving/Love. The response/Call of Calvary transits to the epic event of death/resurrection. No one has improved on this insight into cultural death. Christ does not trivialize the reality of natural death, but takes the sting out of death by giving a worthy understanding of the event. He reestablishes the essential link between life/death as found in nature by defining the relation as Call/response.

As explained above, when Call is defined as Love, human *response* is defined as *thanksgiving*. In a Love/thanksgiving relation, everlasting life for the human self means simply being consumed in thanksgiving. This should be obvious from a simple analysis of what *thanksgiving* entails. Three elements make up thanksgiving, namely, *implied relation*, *receiving* and *giving*. The implied relation is at the *self-to-self* rather than at the *tribal* level. *Receiving* a gift implies pre-existing need that, when expanded to absolute need, is the definition of death. *Giving* implies initiative that, when expanded to absolute initiative, is the definition of Life/Love. Thus, thanksgiving (eucharis) implies: a self-to-self relation, a fulfillment of need, and recognition of a gratuitous initiative to meet need. Thanksgiving (eucharis) goes to the very essence of the new divine/human relation introduced by Christ. Everlasting life means a forever-expanding eucharis-self vis-à-vis the divine Love-Self that does not start at some future date but is now being realized.

*****SIDEBAR*****

EUCARIST AND DEATH

Many attend Mass to fulfill an obligation. However, the celebration of the Eucharist is a celebration of one's own death as a *passing over*. For the Hebrews, the Passover means deliverance *from* death; for Christ, the Passover of the Last Supper means the *going into* death – a dramatic shift of focus. For Christ, *death is eucharis* and, therefore, death is his choosing and not the result of fate or by the hand of his enemies. This is the first time in history that the meaning of death is addressed directly as it relates to the self. The Hebrews thought of death not in the context of an isolated *individual*, but as a destruction of the *tribe* – hence the Passover represents the preservation of the Chosen People as a whole. For Christ, death is a natural event (even though imposed upon him maliciously) and gateway of *self* versus *tribal* continuity – a startling new insight.

Just as Hebrew tribal continuity is in response to tribal Law, Christ's self-continuity is thanksgiving (eucharis) in response to espousal Love. The gathering of the twelve 'neighbors' concretizes the divine presence as Love – each 'neighbor' reflects Love in varying degree of intensity, with the lowest exemplified in Judas and the greatest in John. Christ draws his identity of thanksgiving concretely from the Love reflected in the gathering of these 'neighbors'. The Love reflected via the actual presences of his 'neighbors' enables him to transform his body/blood into a eucharis body. In so doing, his physical body expands in responsiveness to become a communal body.

The eucharis *body* versus the *tribe* is now the arena for the bonding between the divine and human self. The gathering of fiends into one body in thanksgiving for one another, and through whom Love is concretized in varying degrees, is the essence of church. The sole purpose of organized ministry is to make church possible. Christ now dwells forever as the light of the world, i.e., as a gathering of ‘neighbors’ drawn together as thanksgiving (Eucharist) to create a communal self that reveals the divine Self as an abiding presence of espousal Love. A self, created through the response of thanksgiving, forged in the presence of the divine Suitor, and producing the fruit of the gathering of ‘neighbors’, endures beyond natural death. Christ is the only one in history to equate death with eucharis and in so doing removes the mystery and terror associated with death. It is in this sense that Christ defeats (cultural) death.

The Holy Eucharist (Mass) is the ritualized expression of a human self-identity of eucharis. Ritualizing eucharis without substance borders on mockery. Thanksgiving is the driving wedge of civilization and touches on a universal human instinct. Christ recognized the centrality of thanksgiving in developing a sense of self. His legacy is in pointing to thanksgiving for a communion of ‘neighbors’ as the Way for creating a eucharis self. By ritualizing eucharis, he also connects with the deep-seated instinct for thanksgiving found in all of humanity. Thanksgiving transforms reaction to death to a eucharis response to Life. We can respond to Life only via gratitude.

Christ takes away culturally distorted notions of death as a punishment or curse by giving a very natural event its true meaning, namely, as a surrender to the divine espousal embrace whereby self comes to full flower. This conjugal union is not for public display, hence, for the surrounding ‘neighbors’, the remaining corpse of a loved one represents a door closing upon the divine connubial union. In the first Eucharist, Christ anticipates his own death in the form of a communal-self responding to Love. He calls on all who follow to do in like manner. In death, a ‘physical’ self transits totally to a communal self that endures forever. A communal-self absorbs the human tribe into self in and through an espousal response to divine initiative that incarnates in the human tribe, as Love. Thanksgiving, versus tribal bonds or ideology, is the only universal bond for uniting humanity into the self. Drawing humanity into self as thanksgiving is the path for turning death into Life.

*****END SIDEBAR*****

Recapitulation

The notion of end-time originates from religion and is equated with self-realization. Religion is not about Deity or humanity, but about the divine/human *self* as a relational quality applied to an antipodal (versus mono-polar) view of Reality. Abraham’s notion of *distinct* life introduces polarity as the core feature of Reality for the first time and such polarity is the basis for the very concept of self. The world around us reflects the touch of the human self; we see the human self-investment of many in our home, car, food and clothes we wear. Self-sufficiency is a myth; everything that surrounds us in our daily lives reflects the sweat and toil of hundreds and thousands. The most obscure worker engaged in the humblest of tasks is an extension of my own self in making my world more comfortable and exciting.

The human self-investment in responsive work constantly brings out new dimensions of the divine Self, *as Call*. The world increasingly reflects a divine/human espousal partnership. The true insight into Reality is to see the partnership of *both the divine and human selves* present in everything I touch and in every moment of my life - this is the essence of religion. Consciousness of the presence of a human self without simultaneous consciousness of the presence of the divine Self, and visa versa, is a contradiction in an antipodal view of Reality. Such awareness nurtures thanksgiving that creates the human self and simultaneously reveals the divine Self, as Love – Love radiant in nature and now shining through human responding endeavors. Such an outlook is truly relational (religious) and has far greater depth than simply atomizing Reality. Discovering self is the Holy Grail of Scripture and the Omega Point of history.

End time is an epic event that requires the ability to perceive Reality not only ontologically but also relationally. A relational perception of Reality requires utilizing more advanced intellection tools beyond the reification tool used to frame Western culture. A relational perception of Reality progresses from the physical law of action/reaction→ Call/response→ Love/thanksgiving→ Life/death – with each relational advance involving a deeper incarnation of the divine and human self. Everyone is positioned somewhere along this continuum. The divine and human self directly interact and will never cease doing so. Awareness of *self* devolved through vital, coalitional, tribal and espousal stages with each stage entailing a dramatic expansion of human consciousness. The divine/human encounter is an epic event creating an ever-richer present. End-time arrives when thanksgiving becomes Love and Love, thanksgiving.

Deepening of life in the present means becoming a self not in the Platonic sense of isolation, but in the Hebraic sense of communion. In the time of Abraham, divine presence is identical to overwhelming Reality. Abraham found a distinct human presence versus Global Life that eventually turned into the divine/human espousal presence of equals. Religion is a growing self-experience in that without a distinct self no relation (religion) is possible. In the Old Testament, one chosen tribe is juxtaposed to one and only one divine Chief; in the New, one chosen self is juxtaposed to one and only one divine Self. Tribal union morphs to a proposal for marital union that comes as an offer and not a demand. Response, whereby a distinct self emerges, transforms one from an observer to a participant in Reality with loving Call leading the dance. Turning down the divine Suitor by remaining only an observer of life means missing out on a whole lot.

The eucharis persona is as the eye of the hurricane that draws all to self. Achieving thankfulness to and for 'neighbor' is synergetic. Thanksgiving is contagious and expands in a widening circle until it envelops humanity into the self, rendering the human self a worthy consort of the divine Self. We enter the eye of the hurricane by becoming thanksgiving in the presence of Love. The depth of thanksgiving measures the richness of the Love event – a richness that goes beyond clock or calendar.

Everyone is capable of learning how to respond to Love. When the response is as great as the Love offered, time will end by being absorbed into the present. Human choice is a key factor for achieving the end of time. As death morphs into response to the divine espousal Call, death becomes the birth of the Hebraic person. When we are born, we are expelled from the womb without our choice. Our second birth is by our own choice, as a eucharis response to Love. This transition may occur long before natural death. In due time, the entire human race will be drawn into eucharis in response to a relentless divine Suitor.

The human self emerges (resurrects) over time as *response* to initiating Call. Scripture frames Reality as a dynamic hand-in-glove, verse/inverse dichotomous relation between divine Call and human response. Scripture concretely unfolds the inverse relation between the two complementary self-identities as: Action/reaction→ Initiative/response→ Call/listening→ Love/thanksgiving→ Life/death. Each divine/human identity is the inversion of the other and a step closer to the notion of a relational self. Thus, the identity of the divine Self devolves as: Action→ Initiative→ Call→ Love→ Life, reflecting progressively deeper insights into the divine Self. Likewise, the identity of the human self concomitantly devolves as: reaction→ response→ listening→ thanksgiving→ death, reflecting progressively deeper insights into the human self.

Resurrection centers on *self* rather than on the *body*, in as much as the body is the juncture giving expression to the human as well as the divine Self in a response/Call relation. Resurrection is in and through transforming *reaction* into *response* by which the human self is created - *reaction* is a subtle form of self-destruction. The transforming of *reaction* into *response* begins in Genesis in the promise made to Adam following his reactionary choice. Scripture traces human *response* as unfolding through vital→ coalitional→ tribal→ espousal stages. As response progressively deepens, the imaging of the divine/human *relation* (religion) also deepens as: Creator/creature→ Call/response→ Chief/tribe→ Suitor/beloved. Underlying this unfolding relation is the developing notion of *self*. The conclusion of Scripture is that death is the fullest expression of the human self – in death the divine Self emerges, as Love, and the human self, as thanksgiving. *Self* is the hidden treasure of Scripture and neighbor the field in which to start digging.

To find self is to find your divine other Self; to find neighbor is to find your divine Neighbor; to find self as the only beloved is to find your divine Suitor. At birth, no one gets a product manual for self-development. This book tries to provide a map of connecting dots that will lead to self-discovery – a treasure that literally blows your mind. In finding your true self, as an eternal eucharis response to a divine espousal Call, you find all you could ever hope for, indeed, beyond your wildest dream.

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FINAL NOTE

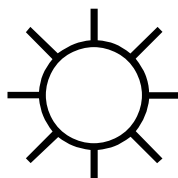
Sharing with one another is the only way out of a hollow life. The miracle of the loaves and fishes (Matt; 15:36) is one of neighbor sharing with neighbor only to discover a super abundance whereby the needs of all are satisfied. The Loaves and Fishes Unlimited Foundation seeks to extent this miracle to our own day and beyond. This foundation provides seed money for a community to initiate and foster sharing among neighbors that is extended to especially include homeless and hopeless neighbors. Proceeds from this publication will go to support the Loaves & Fishes Unlimited Foundation on the worldwide web at *loavesandfishes.com*.

(BACK COVER)

About the Book

You are a treasure beyond your wildest dreams. The goal of this book is to make you aware of *self* as the pearl of great price worth selling all you own to possess it. To accomplish this goal, the book draws heavily on the modern social sciences and sorts through history as *a struggle toward selfhood*. Be ready to have your breath taken away when the buried treasure of self emerges into your consciousness. The greatest tragedy imaginable is to live your life unaware of self. It is like going through life blind having never seen the light of day. Who does not labor to discover self is missing out on a lot. You can accumulate vast wealth and travel to the ends of the earth, but until you find the priceless treasure of self you will never find a home. *Connecting the Dots* is a humble effort to guide you in self-discovery.

TREASURE



FOUND

About the Author

Richard Currier is a priest and instructor in the field of social science. He has authored several books on the subject of self-discovery, including *God as My Other Self* and *Forming a Small Christian Community*. His entry on the subject of self-discovery in the 1972 Chicago International Film Festival was awarded first prize. He is currently working in a foundation for the homeless (found on the worldwide web as *loavesandfishes.com*). The thrust of this organization is that homelessness is about more than a roof over your head, it is about coming home to who you are through sharing with your neighbor.

