

# THE TEST

by

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Once to every man and nation  
Comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood  
For the good or evil side.  
Some great cause, some great decision,  
Offering each the bloom or blight,  
And the choice goes by forever,  
'Twixt that darkness and that light.

*-- James Russell Lowell*

I wanted to make the films so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, "Is there a god or is there not a god,"— that, for me, is the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, "I'm looking. I'm very curious about this, and I'm going to continue to look until I can find an answer. And if I can't find an answer, then I'll die trying."

*-- George Lucas*

The crucible for silver and the furnace  
for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.

*-- Proverbs 17:3*

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## Chapter 1

### A SEEKER IS BORN

*God did this so that men might seek Him,  
in hopes that they would reach out for Him and find Him,  
though He is not far from each one of us,  
for in Him we live and move and have our being.  
(Acts 17:27)*

After mulling the matter for some thirty years, I have decided that life is a test—a test of many things, but most especially of our love of the truth about God. In hopes of helping you pass your test, I have written a little here about my own.

If I had to assign it a time and a place, I would say my test began on a cold winter evening of 1968, in a suburb of Paris, at the top of the Metro stairwell. That night, for the first time in my life, the world began to look strange.

Prior to that, my spiritual life was relatively uneventful. My brother and I had been raised in a nominally Christian home in Northern California. In our tender years, we periodically attended Sunday School at a nearby Presbyterian Church. There I came into contact with the fundamentals of the Christian faith, sowing my youthful imagination with memorable pictures of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, and Jesus with the little children. Occasionally, nearly always in seasons of duress, I would venture a brief prayer to God. Also, from time to time my brother and I would engage in lively discussions with the children of our devout Catholic neighbors. They would assure us that we Protestants were going to hell, or that the end of the world was at hand. Then, after a few moments of vigorous debate in which much heat was substituted for

little light, we would all go out to play.

The problem, however, was that all this religious dabbling was done in a corner, leaving me with the distinct impression that in “real life” spiritual matters were relatively unimportant. My otherwise devoted parents did not pray with us, teach us from the Bible, or discuss ultimate questions.<sup>1</sup> Nor did our other relatives. Nor did our public school teachers. Nor did the surrounding culture, mediated to us by books, magazines (e.g., *National Geographic*), and television (e.g., Walt Disney). So far as I could tell, nearly every authority figure in the world presupposed the truth of cosmic evolution, viewed the Bible as a book of useful myths, and regarded God (if he existed at all) as a practical irrelevancy. Having, then, been raised in an atmosphere of practical atheism, I graduated from high school and set out for college as a practical atheist.

And in 1965, millions like me were doing the same.

### ***Playing at Philosophy***

Spiritually speaking, my first two years at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) were only slightly more eventful. Though the motives behind it were badly mixed, my early decision to become a philosophy major did indeed reflect a measure of genuine enthusiasm for grappling with the big issues of life, and along with it a sincere hope of finding some solid answers. Also, in retrospect I see that my philosophical bent, though faint, was usually towards more spiritually minded thinkers: Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, Anselm, Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Schopenhauer, and others. Atheistic philosophers, with one or two notable exceptions, left me cold.

But again, such pinpricks of light were only tiny marks on a large

and otherwise darkened canvas. Truth to tell, my real attraction was not nearly so much to philosophy as it was to my first philosophy professor. In every way—in beard, brow, attire, demeanor, gait, vocabulary, sense of humor, and perennial cigar—he fascinated me. Under his spell, I had but one desire: to be like him. Omniscient like him, authoritative like him, funny like him, and impressive like him. I also hoped to one day have a prestigious job like him. In short, throughout my first two years in college I was a philosophy major, but not a philosopher. I had little or no love of wisdom, only of being thought wise.

I indulged this two-year charade amidst the rise of the counterculture, a movement that in time would affect me powerfully. It originated on campuses like my own, which enthusiastically played host to a wide variety of popular new ideologies: Neo-Darwinism, Marxism, Freudianism, Jungianism, existentialism, and various expressions of Eastern mysticism. Overshadowed by their growing presence, the old paradigm upon which our nation had been built—an easy-going partnership between sober biblical theism and optimistic Enlightenment rationalism—seemed ready to pass away.

It was during my freshman year that I first became aware of pantheistic mysticism. I heard about it from some of my fellow students who were experimenting with a powerful new drug called LSD. Claiming to have had religious experiences while on this drug, they were now asserting that everything is one, everything is mind, everything is God. Pilgrims to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco—then much in the news—were doing and saying the same. So were the Beatles, who soon would introduce us to their guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and to the mysteries of transcendental meditation. And then there were the pariahs

of Harvard—Timothy Leary and Richard Allport (alias Ram Das)—who, as prophets of the modern revival of pantheism, were urging students to “turn on, tune in, and drop out.” Suddenly it seemed that young people everywhere were pursuing an abiding experience of God-consciousness, and also envisioning a whole new social order built upon it.

As the pantheistic chorus grew louder, I became more and more curious. In particular, I was strongly tempted to try the readily available LSD. Nevertheless, I hesitated. There was, of course, the very reasonable fear of a bad trip, and also of damaging my brain. But there were other, more philosophical objections as well. If there really was a supreme being, how could someone meet him simply by taking a drug? It seemed too facile, and also slightly dishonest—rather like cheating. Interestingly, my esteemed philosophy professor agreed, counseling me to pursue truth—and religious experience as well—through the traditional channels of study and reflection. Therefore, as I neared the end of my sophomore year, I somewhat self-righteously decided to eschew LSD, pan Eastern religion, and focus instead on my philosophizing. However, all the talk of God and personal religious experience had quietly deposited a seed of spiritual hunger in the lowermost regions of my soul. In due season it would grow, rise, and powerfully burst into the light of day.

### ***A Womb of Solitude***

I spent the majority of my junior year in Paris. My friend, Mike, and I arrived in the summer of 1967, but Mike soon became seriously ill and had to return home. All summer long I lived by myself in a boarding house in Vincennes. For some reason I did not have the inner resources to venture out, explore the city, and take in the sights. Instead, the core of

my day-to-day existence became a long trip on the Metro to the American Express office, where I hoped to find a letter from my girlfriend waiting for me. I did make a few acquaintances at a nearby youth hostel, but in the end found the linguistic and cultural barriers too high to create any soul-sustaining friendships. Nor did it help that at that time we Americans were largely *persona non grata*, despised for our current adventure in Vietnam, which, according to many, was darkly motivated by capitalist and imperialist greed. To court friendship with the French was to risk vilification and rejection. Better, then, to withdraw: into my room, into my books, into myself. I was lonelier than I had ever been.

This voluntary solitude was indeed painful, yet today I regard it as the pain of spiritual birth. For during those difficult three months, something good was slowly forming inside me. Living by myself and within myself, I began to discover the thrill of *being* myself. I began to realize, for example, that I was drawn to certain kinds of authors, repelled by others, and curious to understand my reactions to both. I began to take honest stock of what I really knew (which turned out to be very little) and what I didn't know (which turned out to be just about everything). Yet I also felt that in all probability I could find out the truth about life as well as anyone else, if only I would carefully think matters through for myself. At this time I also began writing: poems, stories, letters, and essays. I even wrote a short story about my philosophy professor. Alas, he committed suicide. But when I had thus brought his (fictional) tale to an end, I was free at last from his spell: I could see him as a mere mortal, groping for the meaning of life, just like me.

School started in September, and for the next six months I studied French language, history, literature, and philosophy at the Institut

Catholique. The discipline did me good, supplying goals to reach and work to do. Since the program was designed for foreigners, I was also able to make some English-speaking friends. There was even a romance with a bright and free-spirited American girl, one that in time would confront me yet again with the dismaying depths of my own spiritual poverty. But for the moment, things were going better. I was not so lonely and not so depressed. More than that, it appeared that something was awakening in my heart. I was actually getting interested in philosophy, and even feeling tiny wisps of confidence that I might be able to discover some enduring truth upon which to build my life.

It was right around this time that the world began to look strange. As a rule it happened at night, after my long ride home from school on the train. Emerging from the glare of the Metro into the palely lit streets of Vincennes, I found myself repeatedly brought to a wondering halt. For there, silhouetted against the blackened winter sky, silent and enfolded in winter mists, stood a world full of *things* (sky, trees, buildings, street lamps, automobiles), and that mysterious fullness of things that we call *the world*. The strangeness—the wonder—was not in the way these things looked, but in the simple fact that they were there at all. The natural state of affairs, it now seemed to me, was that there should be nothing. Yet here—spread out before my wondering gaze—was something, and something most impressive! How did it get here? Who or what was keeping it here? Why was it here? The sheer existence of the universe was suddenly speaking to me, but only in a whisper, only in a language I could not yet understand. I remembered the dictum of Martin Heidegger, who said that true metaphysical inquiry begins when, with genuine philosophical concern, we ask the question, "Why should there be

something rather than nothing?" At last I was starting to realize what he meant.

With questions like these occupying my thoughts, I turned to the philosopher who seemed best able to address them: the existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. Earlier at UCSC, I had read Sartre's *Nausea*, in which he describes experiences rather like my own. Now, looking for further insight, I opened up his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*. I decided to read it from cover to cover, every morning before school, for at least half an hour, in a French café—with my girlfriend sitting beside me reading her Simone de Beauvoir. I don't know whether the angels laughed or cried.

In the end, this reading turned out to be utterly fruitless. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, I can see why. Something deep inside me was looking for the spiritual, the mystical. Sartre, on the other hand, was actually giving me brute atheism, and unintelligible atheism at that. But, because his atheism sounded spiritual and mystical, I eagerly read on.

As the months passed, I again grew homesick. With rare exceptions, I found that I did not like the French or things French. My studies seemed irrelevant to my true interests. I was lonely in my boarding house. And in more ways than one, I was again failing morally. Against this gloomy backdrop, friends, family, and the familiarity of California seemed to beckon. At last I reached a decision: I would leave Paris early, return to Santa Cruz, and resume my studies for the third quarter of my junior year.

However, before I left I made some resolutions. I would exercise every day. I would continue reading *Being and Nothingness*. I would abstain from sexual intimacy. I would spend quality time in solitude. I would keep up my writing. In short, I would do all I thought necessary to

maintain the philosophical spirit and to discover philosophical truth.

Did I keep these resolutions? If only I could say I did. But in a way, even that did not matter. For during those nine lonely months in Paris, a new life had been conceived and a new philosopher born. He was not an especially intelligent one, still less a moral one. But for all that, he was a real one. And with his birth, the test of life would now begin.

### *Out of the Womb, into the World*

When I returned to California in the spring of 1968, the nation was in tumult. The shadow of Vietnam lay heavily upon all things. Campus protests had grown in size, number, and stridency. Ever-increasingly, young Americans were lifting up their voices against the “establishment,” decrying its traditional faith, its capitalist economy, and its current self-understanding as the bulwark of freedom and democracy in a world menaced by godless Communism. Some of these voices spoke up in the name of Marx and outward political revolution. Others called us to mysticism and inward spiritual revolution. But all railed against the detested status quo. All agreed that now was the time for a true radicalism; for getting down to the very root of things, and for building a new world order upon what we found waiting for us there.

By and large, I remained aloof to all of this, electing instead to focus on my studies in philosophy. Moreover, I did so with considerable anxiety. I had slightly more than a year until graduation; slightly more than a year to discover some hard truth, fashion a viable personal philosophy, and settle upon a career. In short, I had to *get a life*, and I had to get one quickly.

But it was not to be. Indeed, as the months slipped by, it seemed

that I was progressing backwards. One by one, my resolutions fell by the wayside. Yet again I succumbed to various moral failures. Worst of all, I became increasingly disillusioned with philosophy. By now I had given up on Sartre, over whose indecipherable words I clearly discerned a pall of metaphysical gloom. On the rebound from his existential mysticism, I turned to the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, a linguistic anti-philosopher who did not even try to solve the questions of life, but rather to *dissolve* them—to expose them as mental *cul de sacs* into which we naively drive ourselves by the misuse of language. Yet in time I fled this labyrinth as well, for once again I saw no hope of discovering any real answers to the real questions that really burned in my heart.

Finally, in a gesture of near intellectual despair, I decided to write a senior thesis defending philosophical relativism and determinism. My goal was to show that individual philosophies are never expressions of (unattainable) objective truth, but rather mere ideological reflections of the historical situation in which they arose. However, as the sheer pain of working on this thesis abundantly revealed, my flirtation with Marxism and postmodern skepticism was simply one more exercise in futility. Happily, I was soon able to see this, and honest enough to admit it. So I abandoned my thesis, and along with that any hopes of arriving at a personal philosophy before graduation day. I would have to take the senior exam, not telling my professors what I myself thought about the questions of life, but rather what other men thought, and what I now thought about what they thought. I did so with a bitter and unsparing anger, directed largely against Sartre. I also did so wondering right out loud whether modern philosophy might not make better headway in its vocation if it gave a little more thought to God. I aced the test.

On graduation day I was all smiles but sick at heart. I had worked my way through the system, earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy, graduated with honors, and seemed destined to go on to post-graduate study in law, education, or more philosophy. I had completed the charade, and in the eyes of the world was now on the road to success. But my heart kept reminding me of the terrible truth: four years and thousands of dollars later, I was graduating without a single conviction concerning a single higher-order question of life. In reality, I was a total philosophical failure. Now just one question remained: would I keep up the charade or would I admit that I was a philosophical failure and try to do something about it? As I exited the gates of UCSC once and for all, the terms of the test were becoming crystal clear.

### ***A Seeker is Born***

After my graduation, I remained in Santa Cruz. I took a job in a pizza parlor, and lived with my boss and his wife. I liked it. The rhythm of work, recreation, rest, and reflection seemed solid, even fulfilling. We made an excellent pizza, and it was a pleasure to see people enjoy it amidst music, family, and friends.

I knew, however, that this could not be my life's work. I had to decide upon a direction, a career, a vehicle of service to others. As I mulled my options, the counterculture continued to blossom. A fragrance of things eastern and mystical increasingly filled the air. Communes were springing up around the country. So too were natural food stores and New Age bookshops. Hindu gurus and Buddhist priests were arriving from distant shores. Multitudes of young people were having religious experiences and finding new meaning for their lives. Once again these

things caught my eye. Little did I know that still another birth was about to occur.

It came one evening in the fall of 1969, at the home of my boss. We found ourselves watching a documentary about abstract artist Peter Max, one of the heroes of the counterculture. His colorful posters had become an advertisement for the "new consciousness" that many believed was the true hope and ultimate destiny of mankind.

Max himself had first experienced this consciousness while using psychedelic drugs, especially LSD. But he used them no more. Now, according to the documentary, he had set aside drugs in favor of a better way, a way that would produce a permanent expansion of consciousness. It was the way of *yoga* (Sanskrit for "union"), a mix of ancient physical and spiritual practices designed to lead the soul into a deep and abiding awareness of its own divine nature.

Max himself explained it all to us as we watched him interacting with his guru, Swami Satchidananda. Satchidananda had just established an *Ashram* (meditation center) here in the United States. The long-haired, bearded guru—dressed in a flowing white robe and walking barefoot in the sand—reminded me of the pictures of Jesus I had seen as a child. When he spoke, he seemed to exude an aura of peace, childlike enthusiasm, and confident authority. Undeniably, he looked like a man who knew God. Max, who followed him like a puppy, certainly thought so. As we watched, I found it hard not to envy the young painter. Not only had he found a faith and a direction for his life, but also a trustworthy teacher to help him along the way.

Did it happen gradually or instantaneously? I do not quite remember. I do know, however, that this documentary precipitated a

fundamental change in my own perspective. Suddenly the disparate spiritual experiences of my life congealed into a single meaning. My childhood musings about God and the Bible, my enthusiasm for spiritually minded philosophers, my curiosity about LSD, my strange experiences in Paris, my inscrutable hunger for something more than this world (or philosophy) could satisfy—all these, like the pieces of a broken mirror, somehow arose, assembled themselves, and became a looking-glass. To my amazement, when I looked into that glass I saw not only myself, but also Someone else standing behind me. He had been there—and had been at work—all along.

In seeing him, the practical atheist died once for all. And there, in the place of that death, a seeker was born.

## Chapter 2

### GOOD NEWS FROM A DISTANT LAND

*Like cold water to a weary soul  
is good news from a distant land.*

(Proverbs 25:25)

It was a beautiful spring day in Berkeley, I was right where I felt I should be, my deepest desire was about to be fulfilled, and I was scared spitless. It was one thing to read about Tibetan *lamas* (priests) in books, but quite another to knock on one's door and ask to become his student! But as I reflected on the events of the past few months, I realized I had no other choice. I had invested too much in this moment to let fear rob me of my dream.

The journey to Berkeley had begun several months earlier, shortly after my watching the documentary about Peter Max and coming to a solid faith in the existence of God. I was all questions, all excitement, all hope. I was a newborn seeker of religious truth and spiritual experience. So I did what every newborn does: I cried out for someone to feed me. In other words, I started looking for a teacher, a trustworthy spiritual guide who could help me experience the mystical union with God that all the gurus proclaimed.

Interestingly, I did not immediately seek out Swami Satchidananda's group. Rather, I made some new acquaintances and read some fascinating books that attracted me to Tibetan Buddhism. In time, I heard about Lama Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist priest who had recently arrived from India to establish the Tibetan Nyingmapa Meditation Center in that haven of all things radical, Berkeley, California. Being

radically interested in God, I headed out.

When at last I found the courage to knock on his door, it opened into a whole new world. Rinpoche, as his students called him, warmly greeted me himself, introduced me to his wife and children, and then invited me to join him in the empty meditation hall. The polished wood floor of the cavernous Victorian living room was covered with mats: here the students sat in meditation and listened to his teaching. Ornate tapestries covered with *bodhisattvas* (enlightened men, now elevated to the status of demigods) hung from the walls. On the dais where we visited there were books of sacred scriptures, prayer wheels, and other accoutrements of Tibetan worship. What had I gotten myself into?!

The brief interview began. Rinpoche asked me to tell him the story of my interest in Tibetan Buddhism. After relating it to him, he grew silent, reached for a small container, shook it several times, and cast its contents onto the floor before us. Realizing that he was seeking to divine my suitability as a disciple, I waited nervously.

At length he got his answer and, to my relief and joy, agreed to accept me. He told me about the various gatherings for meditation and then gave me some translated Tibetan scriptures to read, along with a colorful, poster-size picture of Padmasambhava, one of the great Tibetan bodhisattvas. In order to advance to the next stage of my discipleship, I would have to complete 100,000 prostrations before this picture. I assured him that I would.

As I emerged from the darkened house into the light and warmth of the sun, my mind was spinning. What were the other students like? What kind of spiritual experiences had they had? What kind of experiences had Rinpoche had? How long would it take me to become *enlightened*? What

would that be like? And what happens *after* someone is enlightened? But however many my questions, all were overshadowed by a single, joyful fact: like the Beatles, like Peter Max, and like thousands of other young American seekers on the road to the East, I had found my teacher.

Looking back on this episode, I cannot help but smile, since this epoch-making submission to my first "guru" produced a relationship that lasted scarcely more than six months. Indeed, lama Tulku was only one of several teachers to whom I would attach myself in the years ahead. Returning to Santa Cruz, I briefly joined with the followers of Swami Satchidananda. Then, following a weeklong retreat at a nearby monastery in Tassajara, I decided that the way of Zen Buddhism better suited my ever-evolving sensibilities. Accordingly, I joined the Santa Cruz Zen Center, placing myself under the tutelage of a winsome young Japanese priest by the name of Kobun Chino. But after that—despite a general adherence to Zen Buddhism—I would sit, figuratively speaking, at the feet of any number of modern pantheistic writers, including Kahil Gibran, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ram Das, Emmet Fox, and Joel Goldsmith. In short, my behavior in those days pretty much corresponded to my mood: I was always spiritually hungry, always spiritually restless, and always wondering if the spiritual grass was greener on the other side.

### ***My New Worldview***

Throughout this time I read widely in world religions, but almost always with a bias towards pantheism. To my amazement, I soon realized that “the perennial philosophy” (pantheism) had its defenders in nearly every land. From Tibet I received the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, the Tibetan *Book of the Great Liberation*, and a variety of other Buddhist

texts supplied by my first teacher. India gave me the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Biography of Sri Ramakrishna*, and the philosophical writings of his most famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda. China supplied me with Lao Tze's spiritual classic, the *Tao Te Ching*, as well as the writings of his most famous disciple, Chuang Tse. From (or through) Japan came the *Mumonkan*, the Zen poetry of Basho, the philosophical works of D.T. Suzuki, and the deeply affecting sermons of the American émigré, Sunryu Suzuki Roshi. Europe gave me the mystical novels of Herman Hesse, especially his popular classic, *Siddhartha*. I even found pantheists springing up from American soil, and so devoured Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, the essays of Emerson (especially "The Transcendentalist" and "The Over-Soul"), and Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." And there was, of course, the new generation of American mystics who had turned us on to all of the above, including Alan Watts, Richard Allport (alias Ram Das), Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder. Needless to say, the ubiquity, power, and current popularity of these writings only reinforced my confidence in the truth of pantheism.

Immersed as I was in all this reading, a definite worldview began to take shape in my mind. Fundamentally, it was Hindu/Buddhist, though I did not hesitate to borrow freely from other schools of thought. In the end I concluded that the ultimate reality was *Big Mind* (or *Brahman*, the *Tao*, etc.), whom I thought of as an infinite impersonal (or supra-personal) Spirit. The universe, life, and man were all manifestations of this one Spirit, as were the several other spiritual planes of consciousness on which various kinds of sentient beings also lived. How it all began no one really knew, except perhaps the enlightened ones, who had obviously declined to describe the beginning in anything other than poetic idiom. I

did, however, accept the truth of cosmic evolution, having imbibed that assumption from just about every intellectual authority figure I had ever met. As for evil, suffering, and death— I regarded these as painful illusions, the unwelcome byproducts of the dualistic consciousness that grips and actually constitutes each and every sentient being.<sup>1</sup> Like consciousness itself, these enemies were wrought by *Maya*, a mysterious power that had somehow subjected Big Mind to a long and difficult cosmic dream. (Or was it that Big Mind had “purposely” subjected himself to the dream?) The purpose of life, then, was to attain enlightenment: to escape one's painful bondage to dualistic consciousness by awakening to one's true identity as Big Mind. And how were sentient beings to accomplish this? All the gurus gave the same paradoxical answer: freedom and enlightenment for the self can only come through the dissolution of the self. To experience salvation, the illusory man of salt must be dissolved in the ocean of Big Mind.

This worldview had practical implications. Above all, it meant that I must live selflessly, meditatively, and in spiritual detachment from the phenomenal world—ever ready for the gracious moment of mystical union with Big Mind. Happily, I believed that the world had now arrived at a moment in cosmic history when enlightenment was coming to many. Indeed, it would soon come to all, since evolving mankind, amidst many birth-pangs, was now casting off the old paradigms, awakening to its divine nature, and entering a New Age of global unity, peace, and happiness. And if I myself should die before all this came to pass, not to fear: I would surely be reincarnated as a different person, and so rejoin my spiritual brothers and sisters once again for the next step in the great ascent towards the deification of the universe, life, and man.

Were there philosophical problems with this new worldview? Definitely.<sup>2</sup> Did I have any doubts about it? Yes. Still, it hung together well enough, multitudes believed it (or something very like it), and there seemed to be no other worldviews around that were remotely competitive. Therefore, I embraced this one enthusiastically.

So now I knew the truth. Now I had a purpose. Now I had a spiritual family with whom to share that truth and pursue that purpose. How wonderful to realize that I was getting better, the world was getting better, and Paradise drawing nearer every day. Yes, life was good.

Little did I know, however, that my good life was about to be turned completely upside down. The test that I thought I was so soon to pass had, in fact, only begun.

### ***The Way of Devotion***

It all started in the late fall of 1971. Ever the way-taster, I became interested in *Bhakti Yoga*, the Hindu path of union with God by means of an intense personal devotion to one of his alleged incarnations. My friend and business partner, Mike, had embraced this path fervently. Like the saffron-robed worshippers of Krishna that were appearing on street corners everywhere, he and his spiritual community were pursuing *samadhi* (God-consciousness) through enthusiastic devotion to their Indian teacher, a man they affectionately called Babbaji. They believed that Babba was a fully enlightened being, an "incarnation" of Big Mind himself. By worshiping him, they hoped to become enlightened as well.

As I said, I was attracted to this "way of devotion," but not, for some reason, to Babbaji or any of the other Indian gods and gurus. I was, however, drawn to Jesus of Nazareth. At that time, I knew very little about

the details his life. Nor did I have among my close friends a single one his followers, someone who might have introduced me to his Master and told me more about his life and teachings. I did, however, remember a few basic facts from my childhood “training” in the faith. I knew, for example, that Jesus was a real, historical person. I knew that the biblical authors ascribed miracles to him—the most dramatic of all being his resurrection from the dead. I knew that they regarded him as divine, as the very Son of God. And I knew that just about everyone—pantheists included—honored him as a good, loving, wise, and profoundly important spiritual leader.

As I mulled all this, something quite unexpected happened: the rumors about Jesus suddenly struck me as “good news from a distant land,” as a heavenly hint directing me to a way of devotion that I myself could readily embrace. After all, Jesus was a teacher with impeccable credentials, one whom I felt I already knew (at least a little), and one whom I felt I already trusted. If, then, I was supposed to seek enlightenment by focusing upon a human incarnation of Big Mind, how could I do better than to choose the carpenter from Nazareth?

And so, on the strength of these few rumors from ancient Israel, I made a decision. I would dig out my deceased aunt Ethel's old King James Bible, open it up, sit down at Jesus' feet, and hear what he had to say about the ultimate reality, enlightenment, and all the other greater questions of life.

The heavenly Tester, I trust, was well pleased.

### ***A Gift of Tears***

Forever etched in my memory are the simple circumstances of this life-changing season: the quiet, one-room cottage where I lived, the

brown recliner in which I comfortably sat, and the beautiful old Bible—with its marvelous fragrance of India paper and aged leather—lying open in my lap. Then, as now, an atmosphere of destiny hovered over the whole scene. With an unfamiliar sense of reverence and anticipation, I began to read.

My journey into the biblical world started at the Gospel according to Matthew. It also started with my being a committed pantheist. This was, of course, a theological bias that would powerfully affect my reading. It did, however, have one advantage: it left me fully open to the supernatural. Accordingly, as I came daily to the Bible window and beheld the various supernatural signs surrounding Jesus' life, I had no problem whatsoever in believing them. I did not question, for example, his virgin birth, or the occasional appearance of angels, or the miracles he performed, or the amazing fulfillment of numerous Old Testament prophecies in the events of his life. To the contrary, I not only believed these things, but wanted to know how and why they had occurred. Like theists, pantheists too long to see the hand of God at work in the world.

But all was not well. The more I read about Jesus' words and manner of life, the more the signs troubled me. Why? Because I began to realize that all these supernatural phenomena were enlisted in the service of Jesus' worldview, and that his worldview was different from that of any of the lamas, gurus, or roshis I had been following. *Radically* different. Indeed, I soon realized that Jesus did not concur with a single one of their answers to the questions of life. Moreover, far from being deferential to other spiritual teachers and traditions, he seemed both implicitly and explicitly to charge them with error and even deceit, all the while making bold, unmistakable claims to a unique spiritual authority based upon a

unique spiritual relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> The mood of the religious counterculture in Santa Cruz was inclusive, non-judgmental, and laissez-faire. Reading Matthew's Gospel, I saw quite clearly that Jesus of Nazareth was in another mood altogether.

I tried to reconcile all this with my pantheism—to discover a hidden, pantheistic sense for Jesus' words. I wondered, for example, if his teachings—seemingly premised on the existence of a personal God who is both transcendent and immanent, a God who remains metaphysically separate from his creation yet intimately related to it—were just an accommodation to the limitations of his Jewish audience; indeed, to the limitations of the entire human race in a more primitive stage of its spiritual evolution. After all, many modern pantheists had claimed this very thing—Kahlil Gibran, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Yogananda, and others. In the end, however, I found it impossible to escape the impression of Jesus' uniqueness. He simply refused to be reckoned among the gurus. Thus, for the first time in his brief spiritual journey, the callow young seeker was experiencing serious religious and philosophical conflict.

And he was about to experience something more—something that would not only reinforce his sense of Jesus' uniqueness, but forever change the trajectory of his journey towards the truth about God. For now, having made my way through the story of Jesus' life; having tasted of his wisdom, kindness, and power; having gotten the gist of his worldview; and having beheld the many signs that worked together to confirm it, I came at last to the climax: the climax of Jesus' work on earth, and the climax of my first real encounter with it. In other words, I came to Matthew's account of the dramatic events of Holy Week: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his final season of public ministry, his terrible clash

with the hostile religious authorities, his betrayal, his capture, his trial, his rejection by (most of) the Jewish nation, and his crucifixion, death, and burial at the hands of Rome.

Pondering all these things, I found myself in the grip of a strange double-consciousness. I had already read Jesus' own predictions of his imminent suffering, and knew perfectly well that they would all be fulfilled. And yet despite the inevitability of the outcome, I suddenly found myself both amazed and appalled that this good man, who had done so much for so many, should be treated so badly by the very ones he had come to serve.

Indeed, as I read on, it seemed to me that here I was gazing upon goodness itself—the very embodiment of innocence, kindness, mercy, and love. Yet now, for reasons that I could not even begin to understand, this perfect purity had fallen into the hands of stupid, ungrateful, selfish, and cruel men. I knew that he could easily have escaped from this pack of murderers, and just as easily have destroyed them all. Yet here he was, voluntarily surrendering himself to their will. Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had tersely captured the mystery and pathos of it all: "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53: 7). As I read of Christ's passion, the heartbreaking reality behind Isaiah's words went straight through me. Seeing the Lamb of God in the hands of his slaughterers—shearing him of both life and dignity—my heart broke. If only I could have reached into my Bible and rescued him! But alas, I sat helpless. All I could do was weep, moved by a strange, unbidden love that I deeply felt but could not even begin to fathom.

## *A Turn in the Road*

This spiritual experience was a major turning point in my search for truth. It did not bring any new philosophical insights, nor did it transform me into a biblical theist. But it definitely changed me. From that day on, I knew I had been touched by God. Moreover, I knew *why* he had touched me: so that I might further investigate Christ and Christianity. As a committed pantheist, I still hoped that Jesus would turn out to be a guru: the greatest of all, no doubt; but a man like me and my teachers, nonetheless. Yet I could not honestly deny that his teachings resisted this self-serving interpretation. Was I mistaken then? Did the truth about God lay in another (theistic) direction altogether? I didn't know. All I knew was that a gift had been given and an invitation extended. I dared not turn away.

But what was I to do?

My decision came quickly. The very next day I told my friend Mike what had happened. I asked if I might take a leave of absence from the bakery and set out in search of the truth about Christianity. Graciously, he sent me on my way. And since Roman Catholicism seemed to be the oldest and largest spokesman for that faith, I decided to begin my search there. I would contact a local Catholic priest, tell him about my experience, and ask him what it meant and what I was supposed to do.

It was time to seek a teacher once again.

## Chapter 3

### A FURNACE FOR GOLD

*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold,  
but the LORD tests the hearts.*

(Proverbs 17:13)

It was a steep and winding road that led me to Father Gabriel Barry. Literally.

It began, I suppose, at the little Catholic seminary tucked away in the woods behind Dominican hospital in Santa Cruz. The lovely grounds were posted "No Trespassing," and since the facility seemed almost abandoned, I was reluctant to set foot on the property. In the end, however, my keen desire to find a knowledgeable priest overcame my fears, and I ventured onto the campus. After guiltily strolling around for a while, I finally plucked up my courage, entered one of the buildings, and wandered through the vacant halls. At last, from within a small office, I heard some sounds of life.

I no longer recall his name, but the cordial priest was all encouragement to the trembling seeker. I told him my story, emphasizing my deep involvement in Eastern religion, my attraction to Jesus, the mysterious gift of tears, and my desire to understand the meaning of what I was experiencing. When I finished, he seemed genuinely moved by what he had heard, and quite clear about what I should do. I must spend some time at the Benedictine monastery in Big Sur, the New Camaldoli Hermitage. In fact, if memory serves me, he called the hermitage then and there, arranging not only for my stay, but also for a visit with the abbot himself.

Only days later, I found myself on a narrow road traversing a 1,300-

foot cliff overlooking the majestic Big Sur coastline. When at last I reached the top, I parked my car, visited with the guest director, and immediately entered an alien world whose basic forms and rhythms had been shaped some 800 years earlier.

The picturesque monastery, studded with small cells for twenty or thirty brothers, was structured for silence and contemplation. I was assigned a guesthouse where I could read, pray, and take my meals alone. I was allowed to walk the grounds but forbidden to speak with the monks. I was also welcomed to gather with the brothers for their many liturgical services. Though I understood this worship poorly, I participated faithfully—even at 2:00 A.M. matins! Perhaps among these ancient traditions and devoted men I could find the spiritual truth I longed for.

Early in my stay, the abbot visited my room. After hearing my story, he assured me that my experience with Jesus was a genuine gift of God. He invited me to spend some time praying, reading the *Boston Catechism* (a brief summary of Roman Catholic doctrine), and sharing in the liturgical life of the community. Then, after a few days, he would speak with me again. I was, of course, being encouraged to interpret my fledgling Christian experience in Catholic perspective—and was being invited to make this community of faith my own. A bigger decision I had never faced.

The days went by. Though I practiced the recommended disciplines diligently, I had no noteworthy spiritual experiences. Indeed, my heart remained painfully divided. On the one hand, I was drawn to the Catholic Church. I liked its antiquity, its grandeur, its authority, its solemn rituals, its mystics, monastics, and saints—all of which seemed to promise a rich inheritance of truth and security to any potential son or daughter.

On the other hand, I simply wasn't sure that all this was true. The *Boston Catechism* was certainly impressive, and seemed reasonable enough to a biblical neophyte like myself. But was the Catholic take on the Bible really correct? What about Protestant perspectives? More important, what about Eastern perspectives on God and salvation? What about all my friends on "the yogi trail"? Were they really deceived and eternally lost? If my heart was being drawn to Rome, it definitely remained tied to India as well.

And so I remained throughout the entire stay: curious, hungry, hopeful, and deeply divided. Exiting the chapel night by night, I would pause beneath the towering firmament glistening with stars: so peaceful, so beautiful, so silent—and I, beneath it all, so very alone.

Finally, after about a week, I reached a decision. Everything seemed to favor it: my experience with Jesus, the uncanny way in which I had been guided to the monastery, the glory of Rome, and perhaps above all, my deep spiritual need for a place to call home. Yes, I still had many questions and reservations, but convinced myself that under qualified spiritual care these would be quickly resolved. I decided to become a Roman Catholic Christian.

When I told the abbot, he was pleased, supportive, and ready with a plan. In anticipation of my water baptism and formal entrance into the Church, he proposed that I meet regularly with his friend, Father Gabriel Barry, for a private catechism. I eagerly agreed, and soon thereafter drove over the Santa Cruz Mountains to San Jose, where I had my first session with the warm and thoughtful Irish Franciscan. We agreed that he would supply me with books, I would study them, and we would meet weekly to discuss what I was learning. If all went well, I would be baptized, perhaps

as soon as the coming Easter.

Needless to say, when this mentorship began in late 1970, I had the highest hopes. Surely, I thought, everything would now fall into place. Surely my questions about the biblical worldview would be answered. Surely my struggle to resolve the tensions between East and West would be laid to rest. Surely I was nearing the end of the road in my search for God and truth. Surely I was coming home.

And surely—as events were soon to prove—I was greatly mistaken.

### ***Between Two Worlds***

I met with Father Barry for several months, peppering him with inquiries about Catholic answers to the questions of life. The more we visited, the more it became clear to me that the Christian religion was indeed radically different from Eastern religions. Father Barry, remaining true to most of the biblical fundamentals, refused to let me pull pantheistic rabbits out of the biblical hat. Kindly but firmly, he insisted, contrary to Eastern thought, that God is an infinite tri-personal Spirit, comprised of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that he transcends his creation, yet is also intimately and intricately related to it; that Adam and Eve were indeed true historical persons, the parents of the whole human race; that Satan and demonic powers were real and at work in the world; that man, having fallen in Adam, is born with a sin nature, and is guilty of individual sins emanating from it; that human beings will exist—consciously and for all eternity—either in heaven or in hell; and that Jesus of Nazareth—the incarnate Son of God—lived and died to save us from the latter, so that he might bring us safely home to the former.

To my great consternation, I found that I could believe none of it. I

simply could not see the truth—or the falsity—of these, the prima facie teachings of the Bible.

As a result, I found myself painfully suspended between two worlds: On the one hand, there was my homespun Eastern religion, the core of my present spiritual identity and the center of my most significant relationships. How could I simply abandon it altogether, especially in favor of a faith that increasingly struck me as incredible, narrow, frightening, and in some respects even repellent? On the other hand, there was the brute fact of my experience with Jesus. Because of it, I did indeed believe what the Bible says about the events of his life. I had seen his power, wisdom, goodness, and beauty. My heart had gone out to him in love. What did this experience mean? What was I to do with it? What was I to do with him?

Yes, the heavenly Tester had suspended me between two worlds, and was now watching to see what I would do. What should I have done? Today, it is easy to see the answer: I should have accepted his challenge. I should have loved the truth enough to seek it out, whatever it was and however long it might take me to find it. But because I was afraid of what that truth might be—and also of what it might require of me—I did not want to seek it out. Accordingly, I decided instead to break off my relationship with Father Barry and return to the practice of Zen Buddhism.

It was not too hard to construct a rationale for this intellectually dishonest move. To begin with, I seized upon the fact that Father Barry and certain modern Catholic theologians had endorsed theistic evolution. This departure from plain biblical teaching supplied a convenient solution to the apparent conflict between the Bible and Eastern religion. If the Bible had spoken metaphorically about the beginning (as Genesis certainly

must have if cosmic evolution were true), then perhaps it had also spoken metaphorically— and pantheistically—about all the rest: the nature of God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the afterlife, and so forth. Already, I had come upon biblical interpreters who taught this very thing. These proponents of “esoteric” Christianity argued, for example, that Jesus had secretly traveled to India in his youth; that his seemingly theistic teachings actually had a mystical, pantheistic sense; that in fact he was an *avatar*, a *bodhisattva*, an ascended Master: the greatest of all time, no doubt, but one among many, nonetheless. In my eastward leaning mind, all these strands of thought wove themselves into a plausible way of escape. I took it.

If you reckon yourself a seeker, please hear well this true confession: I “believed” all these things, not because I had seen that they were true, but because I *wanted* them to be true. In other words, at this crucial juncture in my “search” for spiritual reality—when the gospel put me to the test by pressing for a deeper commitment to truth—I simply *decided* that pantheism was true, rather than try to discover whether or not it really was. It was a bad decision. Why? Because in that unspeakably consequential moment, I ceased to be a seeker of God’s truth, and became instead a fabricator and defender of my own.

I believe I received a warning against doing so. It came one winter evening, shortly after I had decided to discontinue my studies with Father Barry. I was sitting comfortably in a couch at the Book Shop Santa Cruz, reading a volume of Zen meditations. Suddenly, I became aware of a band playing just outside the entrance to the store. Its members were singing Christian hymns, and intermittently stepping forward to preach the gospel and testify about their personal experience with Christ. The Salvation

Army was at war.

In mere seconds, my soul was also at war. For strange to tell, part of me was actually drawn to these people: I could see that they had deep spiritual assurance, joy, and an unnerving boldness to go public with their faith. Yet another part of me—the ruling part—would have none of it. I had been there and done that. I had rejected the fundamentalist take on Christianity. I had decided that orthodox Christians, while sincere, were sincerely deluded. How naive to think of God dualistically, as though he were a personal being separate from ourselves! Surely these relics of mankind’s primitive religious consciousness were in egregious error. But if such reasonings were true, why did their singing and preaching bother me so?

Yes, on that memorable evening I once again came face to face with the painful truth: I was *still* a man suspended between two worlds. Though I could not see it clearly then, God himself, through the Salvation Army band, was showing me that I had not put the biblical Jesus behind me. Indeed, he was showing me that I must not put him behind me. Rather, I must continue to search until I could actually see for myself which version of Christianity—the biblical or the esoteric—was true.

But again, I did not want to search, because I did not want to see. And so, in order to escape the war within, I rose from my couch, exited the store, walked as quickly as I could past the band, and was swallowed up into the night.

### ***Descent into Darkness***

The decision to re-immense myself in Eastern religion was yet another milestone in my spiritual quest. Prior to that, things seemed to be

going fairly well: I was confident about my journey and optimistic about quickly reaching its happy destination. However, after that decision things became increasingly difficult. Above all, I was continually plagued with doubts about the truth of pantheism, and haunted by suspicions of the truth of Christianity. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, I can now see clearly that my rejection of the orthodox Christ marked the beginning of what can only be called a three-year descent into darkness.

My recollection of those years is spotty. For the most part I remained in Santa Cruz, where my quest for enlightenment involved a daily routine of morning and evening meditation, extensive spiritual reading, long walks in the forest or on the beaches, periodic odd jobs, and occasional volunteer activities. Desiring to make some kind of contribution to the world around me, I again began writing poetry, hoping in this way to win others to an awareness of Big Mind and to the quest for mystical experience. My circle of friends remained small—confined almost exclusively to fellow-pilgrims of the Eastern way. Occasionally we would eat or walk together and discuss spiritual things. For the most part, however, I lived in solitude, believing that this narrow path was most conducive to the “mindfulness” that I hoped would one day soon flower into enlightenment.

Throughout this time I remained fairly faithful to my Zen practice. I did, however, continue to read widely in other mystical traditions. For example, I acquainted myself not only with Hinduism and Buddhism, but also with Taoism, Kabbalistic Judaism, Christian mysticism, Islamic Sufism, American Transcendentalism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and the Unity School of Christianity. I was especially influenced by the writings of J. Krishnamurti, an Indian philosopher who strongly counseled seekers

against adherence to traditional religious faiths and practices, arguing that these only entangled the (already divine) mind in dualistic thinking and desiring. But again, I did not pursue these studies with a spirit of genuine inquiry. Instead, I read selectively, and only in order to confirm what I already believed and what I wanted to believe. The intellectual dishonesty continued.

### *Haunted by Doubts*

Because of this dishonesty, I became a haunted man. The specters that more or less continually intruded upon my troubled mind were threefold.

First, I was haunted by doubts about the truth of pantheism, doubts that came in several different forms. For example, I was often ambushed by the brute physicality of nature. Now even on a good day, it is hard to believe that the world is a dream. But when you can't get warm, or lie sick with intestinal flu, or fall off your motorcycle, it is virtually impossible. Like light and darkness, pain and pantheism cannot long dwell together in peace.

Similarly, I found myself almost always wrestling with the problem of evil. It was easy enough to scan the sky or the sea and say, "Yes, all is God." Or to peer into the throat of an orchid and say, "Yes, we are one." But such affirmations caught in my own throat when natural or moral evil unexpectedly intruded. I remember, for example, an afternoon in a San Francisco cafeteria when I saw a poor man fall to the floor with an epileptic seizure and nearly drown in his own vomit. That lurid scene undid months of meditation and shook my pantheistic convictions to the core. And what about the dismal litany of moral evils: the rapes, thefts,

tortures, murders, sexual perversions, lies, infidelities, treacheries, and all the rest? Was that God too? Was God really a cosmic sado-masochist, cruelly and criminally performing all these evil deeds upon himself? I tried to avoid this dreadful conclusion by affirming, nonsensically enough, that God was “beyond good and evil.” But my heart would not buy it. Deep down, it knew full well that if all is God, then evil is God, and God is evil—at least in part. It also knew that such things could not possibly be. Had I loved the truth, I would have listened to my heart and tried to learn from it. Because I did not, evil became a threat to my pantheistic faith: whenever I met it, I did not try to learn—I ran.

Still more doubts arose whenever I began to feel that I had a moral obligation to pursue a career by which I might better the world. And that happened a lot. To counter these impressions, I affirmed with my pantheistic teachers that all such pangs of conscience were really subtle forms of attachment to the good—an attachment that would only attract its opposite, evil, and further entangle me in the dualistic web of Maya. Better, then, to simplify one’s life, to work quietly and meditatively with one’s hands, and to keep oneself free from complicated moral projects that could only hinder the arrival of enlightenment.

The problem, however, was that my conscience refused to behave as if these notions were true. To the contrary, it kept urging me to get involved, to oppose evil, to promote good. It exhorted me to work for a better world and to eschew cowardly escapes from the imperfect one in which I happened to live. I tried, of course, to silence this voice with various rationalizations. But I could not. Indeed, if only temporarily, I occasionally gave in to it. Once, for example, I applied to a nursing school. Another time I volunteered to serve at Head Start. Still another time I

explored post-graduate training in philosophy. Alas, they were pathetically short-lived ventures, soon cut off by the recurring thought that any such career would only delay my release from the fetters of this world. But the voice of conscience would not be cut off. Moreover, as it continued to reprove me in the depths of my heart, I began wonder if this was not the Hound of Heaven, the voice of the living God himself.<sup>1</sup>

### *Haunted by Jesus*

During this time I was also haunted by Jesus. From the day I said good-bye to Father Barry, I simply could not escape him. It was as if something of Christ had been deposited deep beneath the pantheistic surface of my soul, something inexpugible and undying. To my recurring dismay, I found that any number of chance events could bring that subterranean deposit rushing to the surface.

When I was traveling in Mexico, for example, I spent a few weeks in the little town of San Miguel D'Allende. One day as I was passing the cathedral, I saw an old man at worship. Unashamed, he was kneeling on the steps that led up to the entrance of the church. What impressed me most about him was his spiritual fervor, reflected in the way that he fixed his eyes upon heaven and—with great, sweeping motions—repeatedly crossed himself. Suddenly, I realized that in my own life I had had only one spiritual experience that could even begin to elicit such devotion. Most definitely, it had not come through the practice of Eastern religion.

On another occasion, this time in New Mexico, a group of us were camping. As we sat around the fire, a kindly looking man and his son asked if they could join us. After telling us how Christ had miraculously healed him from a major physical affliction, he and his boy began passing

out gospel tracts. Immediately, I slipped away to my tent and spent a troubled half hour in meditation, trying to stanch the flow of unsettling thoughts and memories that his visit had induced. How amazing! Almost effortlessly, this gentle evangelist had re-opened a gaping spiritual wound, a wound that no kind or quantity of eastern meditation could seem to heal.

Back in Santa Cruz, the haunting continued. I remember, for example, a serious young lady named Winn who frequently practiced Zen with our local group. One day, realizing that I had not seen her for some time, I asked my friend Bob what had become of her. “Oh, Winn became a Christian,” he said. Needless to say, those words pierced me to the quick, eliciting unwelcome recollections of my own experience with Jesus, and of how—unlike Winn—I had declined to leave the world of Zen in order to enter his.

On another occasion, I was strolling along the beach and came upon an enthusiastic group of young people gathered at the sea’s edge. Looking out into the water, I realized what was going on, then immediately cut them a wide swath and quickly passed by. I had no desire whatsoever to get entangled in a baptism.

And then there was George. I met him one day on the campus of our local junior college. Standing in the midst of the quad, he kept raising his hands to heaven and shouting at the top of his voice, “Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, *JESUS!*” When I asked one of his companions to explain, she said that Christ had rescued him from a horrible trip on LSD, and that George had been praising him ever since. In the weeks to come, I would see George again, circulating among the cubicles of the library, quietly trying to win other students to faith in his Lord. He bothered me. True, he

was a fanatic. But his behavior was undeniably that of someone who had had a profound religious experience: the kind of experience that could make a man quit his job, search out a priest, and plunge himself into the study of Christianity.

Yes, George bothered me, and Winn, and the Mexican peasant, and the Christians by the seashore, and Bibles on bookshelves, and crosses on steeples, and programs on the radio and TV, and ads in magazines, and so much more. As I said, I was a haunted man. And the message of the haunter was as simple as it was clear: Come back.

### ***Haunted by Imminent Spiritual Collapse***

The third haunting was the most frightening and painful of all. It came during the final months of my three-year journey into the depths of Eastern mysticism. During that time, I was increasingly haunted by the specter of a complete mental and spiritual collapse.

To understand what happened, you must first understand the premise, goal, and method Eastern spirituality. The premise, once again, is that all is one, and all is Big Mind. This entails that our natural sense of being a little mind—an individual person separate from other persons and other things—is a spiritual illusion, an illusion that keeps us from directly experiencing the reality of our divine nature. The goal, then, of Eastern spirituality is nothing so trivial as a mere calming of the individual mind, as indeed some of its proponents disingenuously proclaim. No, the real goal is the annihilation of the individual mind—the extinction of the human personality altogether—so that Big Mind is all that remains. As guru Meher Baba put it, “As long as the mind is there, the real ‘I am God’ state cannot be experienced. Therefore, the mind must go. We must attain this . . .

annihilation of the mind during this life.”<sup>2</sup>

The method proposed for achieving all this, at least in the Zen tradition, is called *mindfulness*, or *radically detached observation*. Through the practice of *Zazen*, the meditator trains himself to become a passive spectator of all life; of all the upwellings of thought, emotion, and sensory perception that constitute the flow of daily human experience. In so doing, he supposedly trains himself to identify with the secret fountainhead of this flow: Big Mind. Thus, the more detached and “mindful” the meditator becomes, the closer he gets to union with Big Mind.

In order to appreciate the danger of this practice, consider a humble illustration. Suppose you are sitting in meditation and the image of a potato chip floats succulently into your mind. You could, if you wished, immediately begin to imagine how nice it would be to have a whole bowl full of potato chips right after Zen practice. You could also think about where to buy them, what to dip them in, and whom you would like to eat them with. But all such imaginings would be most un-Zen-like. No, you must not let yourself get entangled in potato-chip-consciousness. Instead, you must train yourself to let such thoughts pass by. If clouds float through the sky, what is that to the sky? If thoughts of potato chips float through Big Mind, what is that to him?

This illustration is humorous, but the implications are not funny at all. For now suppose that as you sit in meditation there arise in your mind thoughts about practicing medicine among the poor, or taking a wife and raising a family, or the nature of the afterlife, or investigating the truth-claims of other world religions. If you are a fully persuaded pantheist, you must let these thoughts pass by as well. For why should big clouds bother

Big Mind any more than little ones? And why, by following them into the realm of action, should Big Mind allow himself to get further entangled in the web of Maya? No, the proper strategy is to detach oneself from all such thoughts, questions, and pursuits. For it is only when these die that Big Mind's native self-awareness can once again spring to life.

It is clear, I trust, that such a worldview, buttressed by such a practice, tends not only to passivity and isolation, but ultimately to the atrophy and disintegration of a healthy personality. And for a zealous young seeker like myself—who practiced this kind of meditation with a vengeance—the disintegration was almost unto death.

It began to haunt me in the spring of 1974, when I found myself increasingly plagued with certain frightening mental and spiritual experiences. My memory grew weaker and weaker. I became disoriented and indecisive. I was losing motivation, even for the smallest tasks such as maintaining the garden, repairing fixtures, visiting with friends, or taking walks. Waves of blank fear and anxiety periodically swept over me. At night on my bed, as I drifted off to sleep, I would sometimes begin to “soar,” as if about to leave my body. (Once, in Mexico, I believe I actually did leave my body, though the experience is too bizarre for me to relate here.) Waking from sleep, I would often see faces floating over my head, or human forms darting about the house. Once, as I sat in meditation, I began to sense the limits of my body falling away. I felt as if I were soaring upward and expanding outward all at the same time. In the back of my mind, something whispered, “This is it: enlightenment has come!” But realizing with sudden terror that I—Dean—might actually disappear forever, I quickly opened my eyes, jumped to my feet, and focused intently on my surroundings, all in a (successful) effort to force myself

back into being myself. To this day, I don't know what would have happened if I had kept on.<sup>3</sup>

And so, with the commencement of this final haunting, I entered a season of profound crisis. What were these phenomena? Were they really the death throes of the illusory self, a harbinger of final enlightenment? Or were they instead the warning signs of a terrible danger—signs that Eastern religion was, in the most radical sense imaginable, a dead end?

I was soon to find out, and in a manner that fills me with wonder to this very day.

## Chapter 4

# THE THRILL OF THEM ALL

*"I will come to you."*

(John 14:18)

As I reached the nadir of my descent into darkness, the living God again drew near. The great denouement began in the summer of 1974, when I ran into Linda at a local natural foods restaurant. She and I had been casual friends in college. In the weeks that followed our meeting we spent time together. Soon, a romance blossomed, so much so that we even began to talk of marriage. The conversations were not, however, without serious misgivings on my part. I was a committed Buddhist, she a half-hearted atheist. That unlikely combination was okay with her, but spiritually threatening to me. Was not marriage another entanglement in the web of Maya, a distraction from my supreme goal? Did I really want to postpone my enlightenment, and possibly incur still more incarnations, all for the passing pleasures of domesticity? Yet despite such misgivings, I hesitated to break off the relationship. I rather liked this entanglement. It brought us life, something neither of us had experienced for quite some time.

During the season of this troubled courtship, the Heavenly Chessman put a crucial piece in play: Linda's mother, Louise. About 12 years previous, Louise had abandoned her spiritual roots in the mind sciences to become a Christian. Her atheist daughter, though duly respectful of Mom, would have nothing to do with her faith. I, on the other hand, was interested. Like Louise, I too had studied the mind sciences (pantheistic religions in Christian garb). Like her, I had also found that they failed to satisfy. And like her, I was now beginning to wonder if

orthodox Christianity might be true after all. Whenever she visited, we talked at length and with much pleasure.

But interesting as our discussions were, Louise's most influential gifts to me were two books: *The Hiding Place*, by Corrie Ten Boom, and *Ben Israel: The Odyssey of a Modern Jew*, by Art Katz. In the former, Corrie tells how her family—all members of the Dutch Resistance—sheltered persecuted Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland. She also relates the terrible price they paid for doing it. This amazing story—so full of the clash of good and evil, vital biblical faith, amazing providence, and even divine miracle—seemed to open a window on heaven. Unsettling glimpses of a living God, active in history, again sent tremors through the foundations of my pantheistic soul.

The other book, also an autobiography, had, if possible, an even greater impact on me. Here I was introduced to Art Katz, a young, disillusioned Jewish intellectual, tramping his way across Europe to Israel, searching for he knew not what. The more I read, the more I began to realize the true import of his story: Someone was searching for him! How did I know this? Because, in a manner bordering on the uncanny, Art's path was continually intersecting with Christians. Moreover, whenever it did, these outspoken believers would unfailingly urge him to see in Jesus of Nazareth the truth and spiritual reality that he was so desperately trying to find. The story of Art's eventual encounter with Christ in an out-of-the-way Pentecostal chapel in Jerusalem is, I think, one of the great modern testimonies of Christian conversion.

To my mind, these books had the ring of truth. Moreover, they prodded me to see my own spiritual odyssey in a fresh perspective. Could it be, as Corrie and Art testified, that there really is a living God, an

infinite personal Spirit? Could it be that he is active in people's lives today? Had his invisible hand been secretly at work in all my religious questing? Was his Spirit behind my previous experience with Jesus? And (heaven help me) was it his age-old enemy—playing upon my own pride and spiritual dishonesty—who had kept me searching for God in the barren deserts of Eastern mysticism these four long years?

Having so zealously cultivated my pantheistic faith, such questions were indeed difficult to ask. Yet moved by a strange mixture of pain, dread, determination, and rising hope, I decided that I had to get the answers once for all. The seeker within—long slumbering and nigh unto death—was born again.

### ***Into His Marvelous Light***

The remainder of the story is quickly told, for, as I have since learned, God is quickly found by those who are willing to submit themselves to his truth, and who make no attempts at all to negotiate the terms of surrender.

I took a leave of absence from my relationship with Linda, who graciously honored my request for time and solitude to explore these new ideas. I then arranged to meet with Art Katz during one of his upcoming speaking tours in California. As I awaited his arrival, I visited Christian bookstores and began to read voraciously. There was, for example, a book about the “Jesus Movement”—a Christian revival then in progress among countercultural youth. This study impressively confronted me with modern miracles and powerful, life-changing conversions. I also read some books on biblical “eschatology”—theological discussions of future events surrounding the second coming of Christ. Through these writings I began

to understand for the first time what Christians meant when they spoke of “the fear of the Lord.” And there was, of course, the Bible itself, whose identity as the Word of God became increasingly clear to me through my discovery of various Old Testament Messianic types and prophecies.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Last but not least, I finally came into contact with some real flesh and blood Christians, folks like Arnie the carpenter whom I met quite “by chance” on a job site. Hearing the story of my search for God, he eagerly welcomed me into his home, taught me from the Scriptures, and lent me a number of helpful Christian books.

Sometime in early September of 1974, the great transition occurred at last: I became a believer, not in the Christ of the gurus, but in the Christ of the Bible. It happened as I read the Scriptures, read Christian books, talked with Arnie, and began to launch some pitifully inept prayers towards heaven. Amidst it all, an otherworldly light gradually filled my mind, opening it up in such a way that I could actually see, through the words of the Bible, the awesome spiritual realities to which those words had been ever pointing.

In essence, the heavenly sighting involved two great revelations.

First, it seemed to me that I could now behold the entire course of cosmic history—not in detail, but distilled into key transitional events that rose up like giant pillars all along the highway of time. They included the Creation, the test in Eden, the Fall, the Flood, the tower of Babel, Abraham, Moses, Israel, Christ, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the expanding Church, the Lord of glory at his awesome return, the Judgment, and the everlasting Kingdom to come. In all of this, I also caught a glimpse of the Author of cosmic history—of him “who was, and is, and is to come.” I will never forget how this tiny peek at the

immensity of time and eternity drained, as it were, every drop of color from my spiritual face.

Yet as impressive as this initial revelation was, it was all in preparation for a greater still. For no sooner had I beheld the panorama of cosmic history, than I found myself lingering before what manifestly lay at the center of that history: the Cross of Christ. And there, as one seeing the unseen, I beheld and understood the towering verities of the gospel.

Above the cross, I saw God the Father: infinitely holy and sovereign, gazing down upon the slumping body of his Son—hating, sentencing, and punishing sin.

Upon the Cross, I saw the Son himself—the Father’s gracious and merciful gift of love—willingly enduring the dreadful consequences of that sin out of love for God and God’s people.

Before the cross, I saw my own sinful self, and along with that, heaven above, hell beneath, and me suspended precariously between the two. I also saw the terrible urgency of calling upon the Savior, whose touch alone could seal me to the one and rescue me from the other, forever.

In short, through this climactic spiritual revelation of the Cross, God altogether opened up the way of salvation—and my desperate need of salvation—before my astonished eyes.

It had happened at last. Over the course of a few brief days filled with vision and insight, the battered seeker and mystic had finally reached his goal: he was enlightened. Not as he had once hoped for or expected, but enlightened nonetheless. For now—with his personality very much intact, and his every faculty trembling with the fear of the Lord—he had seen, under heaven’s light, the truth about God, and God’s true answers

to the questions of life.

### ***Unless You Become as Children***

Yet for all this enlightenment, one crucial ingredient was still missing: I had not (so I thought) been “born again.” Though I now fully believed that Jesus was God’s Son, and though I had prayed (more than once) to receive him as Savior, I had had no experience of his coming to me; I had received no felt assurance that my sins were forgiven, and that he now lived inside me. My friend Arnie kept insisting that the true mark of salvation was not an emotional experience, but simple, God-given faith in Christ—a faith that he clearly saw in me. Today, I would probably agree with Arnie. But back then, when I had only just awakened to the shockingly dangerous universe I inhabited, I felt myself almost palpably dangling over the fires of hell. If God were suddenly to let go, where would I land? Arnie’s assurances notwithstanding, I felt I needed to grab onto something quickly!

And so, one Friday evening near the end of September, I paid a first-time visit to the Drug Abuse Prevention Center. It was located just down the street from me, in the old Twin Lakes Baptist Church building. Founded by the Reverend Gene Dawson—a Pentecostal pastor with a heart for youth—the DAPC was essentially a Christian commune. Its ministry was primarily to the casualties of the counterculture, young people living on the streets who were, more often than not, involved with drugs. Under Dawson’s skilled leadership, many of them had found Christ and were now turning their lives around. At the time, I knew little about the DAPC. Still, I sensed that it might be just the place for me to find my own experience with the Lord, and along with that, the assurance of

salvation that I so deeply desired.

Picture, then, in a moment dripping with high irony, the proud philosopher, poet, and mystic—the man who would be God—entering the foyer of the church and nervously looking about for someone, anyone—even a streetwise child—to take him by the hand and lead him to the feet of the King of the universe. As it happened, a streetwise child was exactly what he got.

After reconnoitering for a moment, I found my courage and approached a burly young man who looked to be in his mid-twenties. I introduced myself and briefly explained my reason for coming. “Hey Joe,” he immediately yelled at the top of his voice, “come over here! This guy wants to get saved!” The gentleman-philosopher in me expected a little more in the way of intellectual ice breaking. I had to admit, however, that this plainspoken youth had definitely gotten to the heart of the matter.

And thus began the evening that I now mark as the beginning of my Christian life. Joe, it turned out, was something of a leader in the DAPC family, and also the adopted son of the Reverend Dawson. He had been rescued from much and given much. To say that he was fervent for Jesus would be an understatement of epic proportions.

Joe greeted me warmly and invited me to come with him to the back of the large sanctuary, where we could visit in private. He listened respectfully as I related the story of my last four years, told him of my recent awakening to Christ, and expressed my desire to be born again. When I had finished, he matter-of-factly rehearsed the biblical story of redemption, emphasizing that man’s part in the great transaction is simply to call upon Jesus in faith, asking him to save us.

“Well,” I said, “I believe all that, and I want him in my life. So what’s

next?”

Joe’s reply was simple: “Let’s pray.”

His prayer, however, was anything but simple. He slid off the pew onto his knees, motioning for me to join him. When I did, he said, “I’ll pray for a minute, then you go ahead.” I agreed, and Joe began. Never in my born days had I heard the likes of it. No time taken to quiet himself, no hushed tones, no air of formality, no lengthy scriptural quotes—just the booming voice of a profoundly grateful young man, pouring out his heart to the Lord he loved.

He thanked Jesus for saving him. He thanked him for his adoptive dad. He thanked him for the DAPC family. He even prayed—much to my astonishment—in a strange language different from his own, exercising a spiritual gift that Pentecostals call glossolalia, or “speaking in tongues.” Finally, arriving at the business at hand, he prayed for me, thanking Jesus for his work in my life and asking him to save me that very night. He then turned to me and said, “Now go ahead, brother, just tell him what’s in your heart.”

Well, at the end of so long a journey, in the presence of such unusual company, and at the feet of the High King of heaven, it is not so easy to “just tell him what’s in your heart.” But here is something encouraging that I have since learned about Jesus: on occasions like these, he only requires the tiniest step in his direction before he himself arrives on the scene to guide his tottering child into his waiting arms.

And so, almost before the first stammering sentence was out of my mouth, I felt myself altogether enveloped in the presence of the Spirit of Christ. And though I am reluctant to do so, I feel constrained to say that his presence was extraordinarily powerful; that it had a palpable physical

impact. Indeed, beneath the weight of it, I immediately sank face down to the floor, feeling as if my body—quickly growing numb to its surroundings—were now super-charged with a current of spiritual electricity. This, I understood immediately, was the power that had created the universe, that now held it together, and that could—if its divine custodian so desired—destroy it in an instant. It had altogether pinned me to the floor, yet I felt neither pain nor danger, only infinite love.

And in this experience, it was the love—not the power—that stood out. As I have said, I hardly knew where to begin my prayer. But as Jesus' presence enfolded me, I realized above all that he was coming to me in love, embracing me in love, reassuring me in love, and rejoicing together with me in love. And so, being fully persuaded of his love, I completely broke, and with a flood of tears began pouring out my own heart in love to him. Skillfully and tenderly, the Savior was leading his penitent son to confess his sins, and to leave them, once and for all, with him.

What exactly I said, I cannot remember. I do know that I dwelt much on my quest for enlightenment, for there, in the presence of the Holy One of Israel, I felt almost palpably the absurdity, arrogance, ugliness, and cosmic impropriety of my trying to become God. Yes, I had acted partly in ignorance, but I still saw it as a monstrous sin. Therefore, I pleaded with the Lord to forgive me for it, keep me from it, and help me to walk humbly before the one true God all the rest of my days. I was not on my face for nothing.

How long I lay thus—held in Christ's embrace, confessing my sins, receiving his love—I do not know. However, when the great transaction was finally concluded, the weight of his presence began to lift. As it did, I

regained consciousness of my surroundings and soon realized that Joe was gone. So I arose—visibly shaken, I'm sure—and sought him out. When at last I found him, I sheepishly asked what had happened to me.

“What happened?” he replied, with good-natured incredulity.

“Brother, you just got saved!”

It was more of the signature DAPC bluntness, and once again it registered as a shock to my system. Yet deep down I knew he was right. For on this night, everything had indeed changed. Once and for all, I had exited the shadowy world of pantheism and entered the sunlit world of the Bible. Like the youth at the DAPC, it was a plainspoken world, where men talk bluntly about God and Satan, good and evil, heaven and hell, the saved and unsaved. To a recovering mystic, it did indeed sound strange. But it was a world I would have to get used to, for it was the world in which I now lived.

After thanking Joe and arranging to visit with him again, I left the building. Outside, the air was warm and the sky cloudless. I stopped, looked up, scanned the stars, and realized with amazement that I had just met the One who created them all. How could I get to know him better? Would there be more experiences like this? What did he have in store for my future? Yet even as such questions multiplied in my mind, one thing—like the stars above—was already fixed and crystal clear: I had come the end of my journey. I had sought the truth and found it, I had sought God and found him, and I had sought and found them both in the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Here was the end of the line. Henceforth, there would be no new teachers, no greener spiritual grass, no further religious stops. Yes, I had much to learn, more to experience, and many things to do. But now, after four long and difficult years as a seeker, I rejoiced to know that by

God's grace I had become a finder at last.

### *The Thrill of Them All*

Today, more than thirty years later, I look back with amazement at all that has flowed, river-like, from the fountain of that one evening. I was soon baptized. I had the joy of seeing Linda come to faith in Jesus, and also of seeing him bring us together in marriage. Shortly after my conversion, my brother, his wife, and Linda's sister also entered the Lord's fold. I began to meet and walk with my new family in Christ: a skilled and patient pastor, a close circle of new Christian friends, and a loving church family—all of whom stood by my side during a long and exceedingly difficult season of spiritual healing. There was work (in another bakery!), and later seminary, and later still a growing family, along with a miscellany of jobs and ministries by which I have tried to serve the Lord down through the years. And so, I trust, my life in Christ will continue: service, struggle, occasional failure, and eventual victory—always by his grace, only by his grace, even to the end.

And the end, for us “baby-boomers,” is not so far way. Indeed, these days I find myself thinking of it often, and also of the words to an old song we enjoyed many years ago:

When my life is through,  
and the angels ask me to recall,  
the thrill of them all,  
I will tell them  
I remember you.

With wonder and gratitude, I find that I can sing this song with true gusto, for already I am quite clear about my own “thrill of them all.”

But first, let me tell you what it will *not* be.

Most certainly, it will not be my “career”—an odd, serpentine affair whose mark upon the sands of time will likely disappear mere seconds after I do. Nor will it be the rich years with my dear wife Linda and our five precious children, though the thrills they have brought me are more than the hairs of my head and the sands of the seashore. Nor will it be the warm memories of fellowship with those few men whom I reckon as true bosom friends. It will not even be my humble but cherished insights into the Word of God, or the delightful opportunities I have had to share them with eager and grateful students of Scripture.

No, for me the thrill of them all will always be that fateful Friday night at the DAPC, when “The Unknown God” became my heavenly Father; when he called for the best robe, put a ring on my finger, and crowned a poor, faltering philosopher with the true wisdom from above; when he granted a muddle-headed mystic that he should be lifted up into the waiting arms of his beloved Son, and thereby ushered once for all into the presence, knowledge, and family of the living God.<sup>3</sup>

And now, dear fellow seeker, please hear well these few closing words. As long as eternity rolls, I will gladly confess to anyone willing to listen that my search for God was really his search for me. It was, as the Bible puts it, a gift, lest any man should boast. Yet for this very reason I will not hesitate to say, even now, that my erstwhile search for spiritual truth and reality was by far the noblest and most meaningful thing I ever did with my life. I am pleased and proud to have given myself to it, and heartily commend it to one and all.

And if, on that soon-coming day, I should be privileged to hear the Savior’s words, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” I will know exactly

what he has in mind. He will have in mind the thrill of them all: the years I took—and the night I passed—the test.

# NOTES

## *Chapter 1*

1. *A Furnace for Gold* is the autobiographical portion of a much larger work, called *The Test: A Seeker's Journey to the Meaning of Life*. In it, I identify nine ultimate questions, or "questions of life," that put our love of religious and philosophical truth to the test:

- 1) What is the ultimate reality?
- 2) What is the origin of the universe, life, and man?
- 3) What went wrong: Why are evil, suffering, and death in the world?
- 4) What, if anything, can be done?
- 5) What is the meaning of life?
- 6) How shall we live?
- 7) What happens when we die?
- 8) Where is history heading?
- 9) How can we find trustworthy answers to the questions of life?

Answers to the questions of life comprise the building blocks of our worldview—the way we look at reality as a whole. Plausible answers to all or most of the questions give a plausible worldview; true answers give the one true worldview. In *The Test*, I argue that true philosophers are folks who will not rest content till they find the one true worldview.

## *Chapter 2*

1. My thinking on this matter came largely from Vedantic Hinduism, which teaches that the phenomenal world—including evil and suffering—arose when Big Mind (Brahman) fell from "his" original unity into a host of sentient beings, beings whose existence and nature are determined by dualistic consciousness. In other words, because of Brahman's fall, all sentient beings experience reality in terms of dichotomies: subject-object, mind-matter, true-false, good-evil, pleasure-pain, life-death, and so forth. Like flies in a spider's web, the sentient beings are stuck in them. At the start of their journey, they therefore naively cling to one or the other side of the dichotomies. In time, however, they begin to realize that they cannot have one without the other, and so begin asking how they might escape this terrible bondage. Finally, they realize that they are not the

ones seeking to escape, but rather Brahman himself, who is struggling to cast off Maya; who is struggling to wake up from the dualistic nightmare that binds him to suffering (*dukkha*) and keeps him from enjoying his original unity and bliss.

2. For a thorough exposition and critique of pantheistic worldviews, see chapter 4 in Dean Davis, *In Search of the Beginning: A Seeker's Journey to the Origin of the Universe, Life, and Man* (Pleasant Word, 2007).

3. See Matthew 12:36-42, 17:1-13, John 5:24-47, 10:1-39, 14:1-6.

### *Chapter 3*

1. To read a cherished poem that resonates with seekers everywhere, see "The Hound of Heaven," by Francis Thompson, available at [www. poetry.elcore.net/](http://www.poetry.elcore.net/)

2. Meher Baba, *The Path of Love* (Samuel Weiser, 1979), p. 38. G. Feuerstein and J. Miller agree with Meher Baba's description of the goal of Hindu spirituality, frankly admitting that it seeks ". . . a progressive dismantling of [the] human personality, ending in a complete abolition. With every step of yoga, what we call 'man' is demolished a little more."

Cited in J. Ankerberg and J. Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Harvest House, 1996), pp. 228-30.

3. I am now convinced that at least some of these phenomena were traceable to the activity of evil spirits, to whose existence virtually all world religions bear witness. This is because Eastern meditation is more than a simple repudiation of our God-given faculties and inclinations, leading to various kinds of psychological damage. Rather, it is essentially a spiritual foray into the supernatural, undertaken with a view to making contact with the Big Mind who is supposedly the fountainhead of all phenomena, including the phenomenon of the human self. But the Bible—along with the cautionary voice of reason and conscience—assures us that there is no such god, and that such a foray is therefore a misguided and even blasphemous attempt on the part of man to become something

that he is not and never can be. The living God cannot bless it. Yes, he definitely desires to meet with his human creatures and to satisfy their spiritual longings. But he also solemnly insists that the meeting must occur in humility and simple faith upon the one ground that he himself has appointed: Jesus Christ, (John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 2:20, Colossians 2:18). To attempt it elsewhere is only to venture onto the terrain of "the god of this world"—and therefore to risk meeting both him and spiritual disaster, (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, 2 Corinthians 2:14, 4:4, Colossians 2:18-23).

For more on this subject, see chapter 4 of *The Test*.

## Chapter 4

1. While Jesus honored the Hebrew Scriptures as trustworthy divine revelations, he also taught that they were incomplete—that the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets were all awaiting fulfillment, a fulfillment now being accomplished by him (Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:44-49, John 5:39-37). This is why Christians, following the lead of the apostles, speak of the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament; as the inspired record of the life of God's people under an *old* covenant (or agreement) that mystically anticipated its fulfillment—and also its obsolescence—in a *new* (Jeremiah 31:27*f*, Hebrews 8).

The mystical, forward-looking character of the Old Testament is vividly seen in the abundance of its delicate and beautiful Messianic *types*. A Messianic type (Greek, *typos*: form, figure, symbol) may be defined as any Old Testament person, place, object, event, or institution that symbolically points ahead to the person and (redemptive) work of the Messiah. Both Jesus and the apostles taught that he himself is that promised Messiah, and that all of the Old Testament types find their fulfillment in him.

A single example will give a feel for the nature of such types. In the Old Testament book of Numbers we learn that the Israelites, recently escaped from Egypt, were grumbling against God in the wilderness (Numbers 21). As a result, God judged them by sending poisonous serpents into their camp. When the people cried out to God for mercy, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and suspend it on a pole. Looking upon it, those stricken by the serpents would be healed. Jesus saw this entire episode as a type of himself and his work. Like the serpent, he too would be lifted up on a pole, bearing the sins of his

people, so that all who look upon him in simple faith might experience forgiveness, spiritual healing, and eternal life, (John 3).

Other types of Christ include Adam (Genesis 2, Romans 5), Noah and the Ark (Genesis 6-9, 1 Peter 3), Melchizedek, the high priest of Salem (Genesis 14, Hebrews 5, 7, 11), Abraham's son, Isaac (Genesis 22, Hebrews 11), the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12, Matthew 26, John 19), the *manna* that nourished Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 16, John 6), the rock that gushed forth water in the wilderness (Exodus 17; John 4, 7), and Jonah—the prophet swallowed up by a great fish (Jonah 2-3, Matthew 12).

On my first reading of the Bible, I was profoundly impressed by a number of these Messianic types. Subsequent study of many more has convinced me not only of the truth of the gospel, but also of the divine inspiration of the Bible and the absolute sovereignty of God over all history.

2. Old Testament Messianic prophecies are explicit predictions of the person and work of the coming Messiah. Again, both Jesus and his disciples affirmed that the Messianic prophecies have been, or will yet be, fulfilled in him. Christian interpreters argue that the entire course of Jesus' life was foretold in Old Testament prophecy: his divine preexistence as the Son of God (Isaiah 7, 11), his virgin birth (Isaiah 7), his birthplace (Micah 5), his miraculous ministry to the downtrodden (Isaiah 61), the minute details of his atoning death upon the cross (Psalm 22, 69; Isaiah 53), his resurrection from the dead (Psalm 16, Isaiah 53), his ascension into heaven (Psalm 24, Isaiah 53), his heavenly reign and eternal priesthood (Psalm 2, 110; Zechariah 6:13), and his coming again in power and glory at the end of the age to raise the dead, judge the world in righteousness, and recreate the universe (Isaiah 11, 63, Malachi 3). Like Messianic types, Messianic prophecies confirm not only the truth of the gospel, but also the divine inspiration of the biblical books in which they have been preserved.

For more on Messianic types and prophecies, see chapter 8 in *The Test*. See also the article, "One Shot, One Book, One God," available at [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org).

3. Acts 17:22-34, Luke 15:11-32, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 2:18, 1 John 3:1.

