JUDGEMENT’S DAY

[Full Text Version]
Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank God for blessing me with the opportunity, ability, and insight to write this book. And I would like to dedicate the book to my grandfather, Rev. H. Raymond Woodruff, who was a great inspiration to many, especially with his hope of world peace. While there were times in my life where I questioned whether God existed or not, I have realized that God must exist many times over through the task of researching and writing this book. Hopefully, through your reading of this book, you may also find God, or have your faith in God renewed. May this book bless you as a source of wisdom and encouragement for acting with goodness for all in mind.

This book has been made possible by the advancements in technology of computers and access to the World Wide Web through the Internet. Where it would have previously been an insurmountable task to gather, process, and write all of the information presented in this book in an intelligible manner, it was made possible today especially through the use of the internet for research and the feasibility of writing with an electronic word processor. Though I have also read and referenced numerous hardcopies of books written by various authors, websites such as Wikipedia.org have been immensely useful in gathering and sorting through the enormous amounts of information that is available today.

It should be mentioned that it has been through the work and dedication of countless individuals that all of this information has been gathered before me. I have tried to give credit to the sources of all non-original quotations, but it would be impossible for me to credit all of the sources referenced, as I have delved through uncountable resources in the process of composing this work. My apologies for not properly citing all of the individual sources of the plethora of information presented herein.

Many revolutionary thinkers have contributed to my own thoughts, and through this ever-flowing interaction of thoughts, which are nobody’s possession, we are all interconnected. Thus, it would be somewhat of a falsity if I were to try to claim complete personal ownership of this work. For that reason, and also to facilitate open sharing, I, Colter Dallman, the writer of this work, state: This book must maintain an open copyright and therefore it may be reproduced and distributed by any individual or company for profit or for free without any threat of persecution under copyright infringement.
Preface

At the time of writing this book, much of the world has been either under stress or in direct turmoil. The world has repeatedly seen political unrest in underdeveloped countries, as well as in some of the largest and most developed countries. This unrest is usually in response to a sense of oppression of the common people under unjust dictatorships which have ignored peaceful calls for action. The unrest usually starts as peaceful protest, but when the people’s issues are not properly addressed it can turn into riots and sometimes it can even escalate into violent revolts. Other times, dispute or violence has been intentionally stirred up between the peoples of a nation by their corrupt leaders as a crude tactic to keep the people divided so that they will not unify toward true progress.

Though violent riots are only more upsetting and should always be avoided, it has been inspiring to see people gather peacefully in attempt to influence their governments to be more truly representative of them with clearly defined points to be addressed. But, in sad cases, the leaders have called for the protestors to be dispersed by force, rather than addressing the concerns of the people like they responsibly should as government officials. As a result of such cases, we have seen civil unrest escalate into violent revolts and organized resistance against the ruling party. In such incidents, there has been blood spilled in the hopes of bringing a higher quality of life to the future of the common people. In some cases, we have seen that revolutions can be successful in removing corrupt totalitarian leaders from their positions of authority and reversing oppressive legislation.

Though courageous movements by the people can be inspiring, they are worrisome when they turn violent. They are worrisome not only because of the immediate violence and bloodshed itself, which is naturally appalling due to the involved level of human suffering and most upsetting because it should have been avoidable, but also because sometimes after the oppressive regimes have been ousted from power they have been replaced with little better representation for the people. Despite the risk of the new ruling party also falling to similar corruption to the previous party, the activists’ hope for positive change has often been fulfilled with the fairness of the new legislation improving the conditions for the people.

While such revolts have obviously been most immediately distressing to the residents in the involved countries, such violence has also been concerning to citizens of other nations around the world. Though it may seem that the people of more stable countries have been indifferent to the turmoil in less stable countries, the hopes and prayers of many enjoying
peace have been for those suffering the violent crises of war in their home lands. In some cases in which brutal regimes have made war on their own people, this support has been represented by military aid to protect the civilians. However, it has sometimes been difficult for outside nations to decide if they should involve themselves with internal conflicts in others.

In the background leading up to this current time of revolutions, an exaggerated threat of terrorism has been contrived in the most developed nations, particularly in the United States of America. This has included especially the terroristic events of September 11th, 2001 (now commonly referred to simply as 9/11) that were attributed to have been organized overseas by Islamic extremists and executed by hijackers to somehow attack the American way of life. But while pervasive propaganda has taught that all of the 9/11 events were entirely carried out by some terroristic hijackers, many details regarding the official story have been brought under serious question. Issues regarding the largely silenced questions regarding 9/11 inconsistencies, which have repeatedly been brought up by both legitimately concerned laymen and well-informed experts alike, have been collectively termed the 9/11 Truth Movement.

The alarming truth regarding 9/11 includes the fact that many stories were fabricated and a great amount of investigative evidence was either ignored or destroyed to cover up what really happened. As can be found in the details presented by Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, the World Trade Center buildings must have been internally rigged to fall long before any jumbo jets hit them, because such steel-frame buildings do not collapse like that from fires. The pre-planned orchestration behind the World Trade Center building collapses becomes most obvious when accounting for the total demolition-style collapse of a third World Trade Center building called Building 7, which was not hit by any plane and had only minimal fire damage. But again, even for the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center to have fallen in such a fashion as they did, vast strategic structural weakening below the impact sites was required for those buildings to have collapsed under the weight they otherwise held up.

Indication to account for such structural weakening has been linked to a highly curious and so-far unexplained bit of evidence in the form of the nano-thermite that was found from samples around Ground Zero. Nano-thermite is a complex military-industrial compound that burns at temperatures much higher than jet fuel, and thus temperatures which are actually capable of causing the major amounts of liquid molten steel that were produced at the World Trade Center site. (Burning jet fuel reaches temperatures which could weaken steel, but cannot account for the liquid molten steel beams that would have otherwise held up the buildings.) There is absolutely no reason for nano-thermite to have been found around Ground Zero other than high-level foul play being involved.

Quite simply, the events of 9/11 were not attacks planned by Islamic extremists, but rather they were heavily framed to look that way by secret organizations that plotted to use
terror for their own private agendas. Anyone who personally researches the matter in a genuine and honest attempt to find the truth will find there is sufficient evidence to conclude that 9/11 must have been much more than mere hijackers, but rather an elaborately planned and orchestrated inside-job with operatives involved at high levels within the United States government and elsewhere. Building 7 is just one of many indicators that a pre-organized plan was knowingly lied about by government officials, who claimed it collapsed from fires. Much more evidence, such as that presented by Pilots for 9/11 Truth, shows that government officials were provided false information regarding other parts of the 9/11 story.

Still, even the Americans who did trustingly accept the repeated story that everything that happened on 9/11 was somehow all orchestrated by hijackers have known that the connecting story behind invading Iraq and then Afghanistan did not add up to legitimize war. The public was misled several times regarding the reasoning between the events of 9/11 and the invasion of the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan. As more Americans start to get an idea of what really happened, they legitimately begin to lose trust in their own government—trust which will only be able to be regained once the United States government honestly re-examines the 9/11 events and the malpractice involved with the original investigation, truthfully revises the official stories, and retracts or reforms the related legislation that was passed so that the civil rights protecting due process are reinstated.

For reasons such as these, when the observers in developed countries watch the uprisings in underdeveloped ones, they hope vicariously for their liberation from corrupt and secretive regimes. They hope that the newly empowered leaders will be less oppressive than the last and pray they will find lasting peace. But even more, they hope that their new leaders will not become involved with or fooled by secret plans to manipulate them, as though they were pawns to be used to profit some special agenda—like happened to everyone who has been negatively affected by 9/11 and the so-called “War on Terror”, which has been a terror in itself. Altogether, the citizens of the world hope for peace through governmental honesty and freeness from corruption.

More recently, there has been focus on the supposed threat of Iran’s nuclear facilities in the news. It seems that certain interests always want the public to be afraid of something to continually keep them on the offensive. In this case, Iran has been made out to be a threat to the world, though what Iran truly seeks is merely to stop being bullied and freedom from invasion. Even if Iran did possess a nuclear weapon, it would make no sense for them to use it, because that would immediately make them a target for all the world powers to destroy. For these reasons, it is totally irrational when publicists try to make Iran’s nuclear facilities out to be a crisis that could lead to another world war. So long as people keep a level head and avoid being sensationalized for war, such worries should dissipate.
Every time the international viewer takes to heart the threats of terrorism and rumors of war, they are being manipulated through fear. It seems that the media heavily incorporates fear into everything as to keep the viewers watching. Fear tactics are used to try to pressure people into acting certain ways—generally, ways which are profitable to those selling things—and works to keep people from talking about certain topics which are not viewed popularly for fear of ostracism. People must no longer let themselves be manipulated by fear, but instead bring themselves to be free from fear. All this takes is to face any fear for what they are, evaluate how those fears are unreasonable, and grow fearless from them. Without being manipulated by fear, the current general trend of using worry to try to influence people to blame one another for problems that may not even occur will finally be put to rest.

When the media giants are not invoking fear, they commonly distract viewers with irrelevant news and sometimes manipulate the portrayal of the real issues in the world—often in ways that try to prevent people from thinking for themselves. In programming other than the news, shows temporarily stimulate the senses and emotions until the viewers become partially numbed to the more genuine experience of real life. Deep down, those viewers know that form of entertainment is often off beam, because it tends to continually leave them more superficial and dissatisfied. Yet they are tantalized by it, so they often keep watching and soaking up advertising. In its currently intended form, the programming leaves the viewer hooked just enough to keep them watching through the commercial breaks.

It has been through the commercials that the viewers have basically been washed of any idea that they should try to make a difference in the world, but instead should only think about what they want to add next to the list of things they own or consume. In the topic of politics, the media televises material that is most clearly intended to influence the viewers to fight against one another over issues. Most often, instead of realizing they could choose to be active participants in trying to solve any actual problems they face, the viewers are instead taught to emptily blame each other for problems. The viewers have basically been systematically programmed to feel that they are doing their part to make conditions better by pointing the finger to blame others for all of the problems they perceive, though themselves continuing unchanged to only be concerned with what they want.

And so, while television can be used for both entertainment and as a resource to share important information and valuable knowledge, it has been heavily influenced for the purpose of expanding consumption. And sadly, many of the efforts of advertising have been willing to subliminally make the viewer feel unhappy with themselves and their lives, just in order to get them to buy more things. Some advertisers have figured out that when people already truly have everything they need, the way to get them to buy more things anyway is to make a sense of void in their lives for their product. So, when they advertise, they portray it as though the
individual is somehow flawed or lacking something without their product. In this way, they can influence people to buy things that they don’t necessarily need. While it is not wrong to have or buy things that one wouldn’t necessarily need, it is sad that some advertisements have been intended to make people feel incomplete as though lacking things they don’t need.

Considering this effect media advertising can have to make people feel less satisfied with their lives by replacing appreciation for what they already have with want for something else, it may be a good thing that some regions have not yet been reached and manipulated by the media. At least those who have not yet become consumers of the media maintain the understanding that if they are truly lacking something, they naturally know it without any advertisement to alert them to it. While it is not inherently wrong that media advertisements convince those who already have everything they need to spend yet more on themselves in the continual onslaught of materialism, the reality is there are people in the world who truly are in absolute need of things. Knowing this, those with excess resources ought to consider putting something feasible toward improving the quality of life of those in need through developing humanitarian efforts. Though such a suggestion may seem unconventional, those who practice it will ultimately find that it is one of the most rewarding things one can do.

The most common immediate response to such a suggestion is that people have their own problems to worry about. While there are some stresses for many in developed regions, in other places people are at a lack of the necessities needed to live—such as dependable access to drinking water, which is something entirely different from merely lacking things one thinks they might like. Generally speaking, the stresses on those who have everything they need to live could be considered unnecessary stresses. But they are stresses nonetheless. Many people with everything they need burden themselves with self-conscious stress, such as worry over the physical appearance of their bodies. On top of this, the construct of social status has been used to make people feel pressured to purchase trendy apparel to be socially acceptable. Amongst the continual spending to keep up with such unnecessary stress, many in the developed world end up with little left after paying the bills on a monthly basis.

These stresses are worsened by the spread of fearful rumors that national economies might fail and somehow take down the world economy. The creation of such ideas puts the worry of future scarcity into the minds of even those who are currently well-off. To manipulate the markets, the people have been purposely conditioned not to realize that it is the simple trade of goods from one place to another that truly creates the world economy, not the numbers on stock market screens. It seems that no one realizes that as long as everyone tries to fulfill some productive role in society, the trade of goods will continue and people will be able to continue to prosper in the abundance that truly exists in the world.
Through the power that has been placed in the trade markets, the masses have been brought to believe that the trade numbers make a difference to the actual amount of goods available in the world, when they really only represent the going rate of shares. One must know that all of the trade numbers on the screens could disappear and it would not mean that all of the goods in the world would disappear too. Finally, what people should really know is that the fiat currency that is money is the greatest sham of it all. Sure, stable monetary currency is needed to facilitate the trade of goods, but it truly has no value in and of itself. While banks and trade systems do work to serve a role in financing real projects and keeping the trade networks running, they themselves do not really produce anything.

In almost every country there are corrupt political scandals left and right. And in the modernized nations, much in politics seems to be steered by corporate lobbyists whose jobs are based on caring about only what will make greater profits for the companies. The lobbyists are thus basically paid representatives to push for making more money for the already wealthy. Yet no one lobbies for the people who are trying to just make an honest living and raise their kids in a healthy world. What this means is that in countries with lobbyists and widespread media representation, politics have successfully become highly susceptible to influence by those able to make large financial contributions.

But at least in the free and reputable countries the citizens of the general public can exercise their power to vote and trust that all of the votes will be justly counted. This is something that still needs to be ensured in some developing nations. Yet, so long as the campaign system is not reformed to be based on stances regarding issues rather than on advertising, the common people will only be able hope that their elected representatives will not sell out their morals once in office to pay back those who funded their advertising, and that instead they will maintain strong ethics and do what is best for everyone.

Now, in the regions that have developed infrastructure and organization to get them beyond the problems of not having enough food and water, new problems are emerging. In the rich countries, instead of people being plagued by thirst and hunger, there are epidemics of obesity and heart disease—many cases of which are the result unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles. It seems that only a small portion of the public has heeded the common educational wisdom that diets based on natural foods combined with regular exercise lead to better health. And, though it may seem clichéd to the youth, the wise eventually learn that it is true that the best wealth is health.

Only recently has it seemed to dawn on people that the fast-food restaurants could be selling more healthy food and that healthy lifestyles are truly the best and most efficient medicine. Furthermore, it seems that people are lately re-awakening to the wisdoms of traditional medicine, which oftentimes offers the most efficient and non-damaging treatments.
Sadly, this awakening has had to come at the expense of the pharmaceutical industry literally making a killing through selling pills which often only mask problems and frequently cause damage to the body and even death if misused.

Contrary to the current trend, real medicine does not consist of merely prescribing pills, but rather figuring out what is ailing people and fixing the source. A truly informed and caring physician will make wise lifestyle recommendations to try before resorting to a prescription for common ailments like mild depression, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and chronic pain—such as quitting smoking, improved dietary choices, adding some form of exercise, a better routine for sleeping, stretching such as yoga, and the magnificently beneficial practice of meditation. Truly, when one really considers the facts of the matter, medical ailments are generally not the result of lacking the right pills—even though it is true that certain health conditions are fixable by temporary medication and that sometimes prolonged medication is actually beneficial for proper treatment of certain chronic issues.

What can be attributed to have caused all of this confusion? At the most basic level, the increased focus on money and profits has gone hand-in-hand with the increasing sickness of the people. Though money has been continually glamorized and glorified by all facets of the media to the common people as the means to happiness, we have repeatedly seen examples of rich people who are completely unhappy with disastrous lives, such as celebrities who become addicted to drugs such as alcohol and whose relationships fall to infidelity.

Through many examples of cases where too much money has actually worked to destroy happiness, people are slowly beginning to wake up to see that focusing on money beyond what one needs for a comfortable life has largely been an empty façade. As many have learned for themselves during their own lifetimes, true happiness comes from taking pride in doing one’s work well—regardless of the role one might serve—and from being a good person. But moreover, what makes people truly happy are genuine loving relationships. Those things, along with faith, are truly the things of the highest value in life, and they are priceless.

But while it is true that money cannot buy happiness, it is also true that people do need to have their basic necessities fulfilled to be happy. Furthermore, inequality breeds dissent, and this is why people are least satisfied with life in areas where there is the greatest inequality. For this reason, the widening gaps between the rich and the poor are good for no one. We have seen this issue mobilize into the rallies, riots, and revolutions that were the first topic to be raised at the outset of this preface. Intriguingly, while there are many who have hoarded more money than they would need to be comfortable for many lifetimes, there are many more who do not have enough to be comfortable for a day. There is some truth to the fact that working hard and not being wasteful are factors the poor can use to help themselves, but the problem of inequality is clearly more complicated than a lack of effort on the behalf of the poor.
In many developed countries including especially the United States, the greatest portion of the revenue goes to military spending which funds conquests to which most of the citizenry is adamantly opposed. Yet, the political disputes have been steered to center over cutting social spending to things such as basic public healthcare. This has occurred despite taxes being kept low for the unfairly rich while the poor and jobless are continually the scapegoats depicted as the source of all problems—though most would happily work to make an honest living if given the opportunity. Some of the wealthy may not believe it, but most people are intelligent enough to understand that work does need to be done by those who are able to maintain a thriving society, without having to be starved and homeless first.

As a testament to inequality, enormous aircraft carriers constituting moving military bases navigate the seas around the many areas in the world that continue to exist in conditions of true absolute poverty due to lack of development. Yet, by the means described above, those with everything they need in the developed nations are brainwashed to feel as though they don’t have enough to be happy. There is all of this inequality in the distribution of money and finances, though there is more production in the world per person than ever before.

Perhaps the saddest occurrence involved in all of this subject matter is when those calling the shots in the corporate world cut corners and concede to avoidable pollution of the environment in pursuit of more so-called “profit”. In those cases, the well-being of the future inhabitants of the Earth is being sold in order for those temporarily in control to see higher profits in the short term, and otherwise respectable industries are given a bad name. It is plain to realize that such irresponsibility has got to end if this civilization plans on continuing for any significant amount of time into the future. Though some pollution must occur in the process of upholding a thriving society, acts of irresponsible pollution should not be carried out in lazy disregard or in the name of profit, because they damage the very environment on which we and all of our children depend.

While all of these problems are depicted to be too big and complicated to solve, the average person knows deep inside that somehow most of the problems we see could be easily avoided. In many cases, it is clear that we are actively carrying out programs which only make problems worse. For example, the drug cartels succeeding in the lucrative international drug trade have only become more profitable and violent thanks to the so-called “War on Drugs”. The War on Drugs is really a war on the people, as are basically all wars, especially considering that its most significant proven effects have not been decreases in drug use, but rather increases in criminal activity, violence, and imprisonment. One would have thought this clear lesson was already learned from the absolute disaster that amounted from the prohibition of alcohol in the United States in the 1920’s.
The War on Drugs is a fantastic example of systematically making things worse. Because of the heightened risks of harsher punishments for merely buying and selling drug products, the drug cartels have dumbly figured they might as well also risk involvement with illegal weapons trade and human trafficking since they have already organized their criminal activity for the drug trade. Thus, more intensely fighting the drugs causes those involved to participate in worse, and the people who think they want to become intoxicated still manage to do so anyhow. But as a result of fighting a War on Drugs, good honest police officers with loving families end up dying in bloody shoot-outs over drugs while the corrupt ones simultaneously accept bribes to let them through elsewhere.

Truly, the best way to keep people from doing drugs is to educate them with true information about their harmful effects. Through such awareness, the demand for the harmful drugs is cut off at the source. Honestly, when persons are informed about the massively detrimental effects that drugs of abuse have on the body, the fact that they are hindering through addiction, and that they do a person no good anyway, they know well enough not to do them. One might site the evidence of the massive alcohol and tobacco industries, which are currently flourishing despite their well-known detrimental health effects, as evidence against this; however, the fact that they have both been heavily glamorized by the media thoroughly overshadows the knowledge that they are unhealthy. Though the previously glamorized cigarettes have now widely fallen from grace, alcohol abuse continues to be proudly supported despite its extreme healthcare costs and societal tolls.

Yet, while huge profits are being made perfectly legally on alcohol and tobacco, people continue to be imprisoned for possessing cannabis. This is especially unjust considering that cannabis has many medicinal usages and literally no one dies from cannabis consumption, but thousands upon thousands die from alcohol and tobacco. Furthermore, despite the fact that cannabis produces impairing intoxication when smoked or eaten after being cooked that can be detrimental and addictive, research has recently found that eating raw cannabis has plentiful health effects without so much intoxication and risk of addiction. Considering the many extremely impressive health benefits of consuming raw cannabis, including its anti-cancer effects, it is actually a crime against humanity for it to be illegal.

It is plainly absurd that in many places in the world it is currently illegal to possess naturally medicinal plant products which have been officially recognized by countless doctors for their medicinal properties. It should be shocking to realize that there are thousands of civilized, non-violent people detained in jails, prisons, and penitentiaries merely for being involved with the production and trade of entirely natural plants which have medicinal uses. Although it is not very appreciable to them, because they have had their freedom removed, the detained have their entire lives comfortably paid for by tax money. Politicians talk about
reducing social welfare programs that give financial assistance to people who need it, but they are willing to pay full welfare to have people locked up for trading natural substances. The world has become a very, very confused place.

But despite all of the world’s obvious problems, there is considerable progress being made on many fronts for which we can be thankful. For example, medical advances have improved the lives of many and are becoming more economical and available to the average person. Included in this have been tremendously helpful vaccines which have been developed to provide immunity for otherwise incurable contagious viral diseases and new tests for the early detection of diseases that have slow onset. Such testing has allowed for early diagnosis and treatment of some diseases to begin years before the symptoms would have even become apparent. It is good to know that our medical advances are helping to prevent and alleviate much suffering that simply had to be accepted in the past.

Poverty rates are declining in many places around the world through structural and economic developments, and availability of education is increasing all around the world. Girls and women are continuing to gain more equal rights through equal access to education and employment; and as this occurs, birth rates go down—which is especially important in areas that do not have enough basic necessities for those who are already living there. Successful developments such as building clean public water sources has helped alleviate human suffering greatly. There is much hope for continued increases in other humanitarian efforts, as well. It has been shown time and time again that the power of caring and empathy between human beings can empower us to overcome almost any adversity.

One most exciting front is in our new electronics technological horizon. Communications electronics have allowed the interconnectedness between persons around the world to increase at a rate far faster than ever imagined. The increased globalization facilitated by electronics has allowed the exchanging of information from around the world to move at nearly the speed of light. Communications developments such as internet-capable cellular phones are becoming more economically viable and widespread, making internet access to the World Wide Web commonplace to more and more people. Through the use of such technologies, people can now communicate with each other in live transmissions from opposite sides of the planet—something that is remarkable to think about even for those who have become used to it.

Today, computers the size of one book are capable of storing amounts of information that would have previously only been storable in monumental libraries. Additionally, websites like Wikipedia.org have allowed free access to great stores of knowledge in external databases. This means that people can remotely access information that does not even have to be stored on individual personal computers. The internet gives people the unprecedented ability to learn
answers to nearly any question they might have—and accurate answers, at that, so long as the individual takes the time to carefully analyze the many results.

Search engines make the average internet user today momentarily comparable in knowledge acquisition to the most learned people in the world. Because of this, nearly anyone with internet access can become well educated in nearly any topic they choose to research. The only thing that is required is the ability and desire to read (and to analyze differing opinions with a balanced mind that doesn’t necessarily have to be too certain about anything). Plus, because much is available in audio and video now, information has become available for even those who have difficulty reading. Basically, what has happened with computers in just the timeframe of one generation is that anyone with an electronic device capable of viewing the internet has been given access to the bulk of all of the world’s knowledge.

Through this development, people are learning up-to-date information and general awareness is increasing in every category imaginable. Along with this, past ignorances are decreasing. For instance, more people are becoming informed of the fact that although burning fossil fuels clearly does pollute the air and may contribute to raising global temperatures, global warming and the increased incidence of extreme weather that may go along with it is not entirely due to our burning of fossil fuels. Such increases in awareness are optimistic, because they help people be reasonable with one another and reduce blind blaming. Further regarding this, it is refreshing to know that our technological developments are bringing increases in energy efficiency in leaps and bounds. And there has been great exploration and development of alternative energy sources as we have begun to plan for a more efficient future for our planet and everyone living on it.

The most important thing is not merely that we are learning about things, such as the effects our activities are having on the environment, but that we are actually beginning to act on our increasing wisdom. People are genuinely trying to be more efficient. While things like recycling are not new, our increased cooperation and coordination in such efforts continue to impress. And while our rampant advances have had their drawbacks, such as the improper disposal of the amassing waste produced from obsolete electronics, more and more people are becoming environmentally conscientious and making better decisions today than they did yesterday. People have really begun to wake up to the fact that we are going to be living on this planet for a long time, and therefore we really do need to take care of it.

Awareness about the importance of sustainability is spreading and even the large corporations appear to be making efforts toward environmental consideration. Even if this is simply to appease the consumers who are gaining conscience, it is nonetheless a step in the right direction. And while much of this is happening through the success of free markets operated in the pursuit of profit, a purer type of altruistic development is also progressing. Our
means of sharing with one another reach farther than ever before, and even though there are more people now, each individual today has been empowered with the ability to make a bigger difference than ever before.

As global coordination has increased, we have begun to share our best advancements. In the process, many great minds have started to form a picture of a much improved future for civilization on our planet. For a long time people have envisioned a future in which there is less hardship, and it is finally beginning to emerge as a reality that can now be achieved through focusing more effort on more collaboration. Simply, the future society in which there can be vastly increased cooperation is here today. In the modern world, we have found that almost anything that can be dreamed can be accomplished, and a more harmonious way of life for the world is definitely a dream worth pursuing. Through progressing toward less corrupt systems and embracing human equality, global unity will increase and a better world for all will finally be able to truly blossom.

Though some people continue to have disputes due to upholding the false belief that some groups are subordinate to others, most people are coming to see that we are all really one big family. Hopefully, we can use our skills and technology to educate one another and increase reasonable thinking everywhere and reducing ignorances such as thoughtless racial or religious prejudices. Despite the fact that there continue to be some remaining instances of acts of intolerance, throughout the world people have shown that we are capable of a broad social and spiritual acceptance which encompasses most everyone. Surely, there is still a lot of progress to be made before we will have an ideal civilization, but we now have the greatest tools for cooperation available in all of our history to help us achieve it.

Information is being shared with the greatest of ease through the use of technology, and the distribution of telecommunications is reaching more and more people. With the combination of the internet and social media now available on mobile devices, the capabilities of free-walking telecommunication has been boosted to previously unimaginable levels. We are beginning to be able to share information and collaborate better than ever, and in the wake of this it seems that progress in human rights is inevitable.

There is reason to have confidence that we will be able to use our abundant resources, information, and technology with the guidance of philanthropy and the oversight of rationality to actualize our full potential by working cooperatively toward shared goals that will increase the quality of human life all around the world. Surely, we have it within us to make courageous decisions to improve the world. There are many ways the average person can make the world more heavenly—from simply being kind in interactions with one another to perhaps skipping on some extravagance and instead donating the money it would have cost to a humanitarian organization that provides assistance for people in need. Of course, while it has been made
possible today to make a difference in lives around the world through money, people can still simply volunteer their time to improve things locally.

Perhaps we will even be able to one day collectively grow beyond our naturally self-serving egocentric mindsets. But even if we cannot, everybody with the ability to influence—which includes everyone—can at least start making more conscientious choices toward positive change through loving more and hating less. If we can do that, we will be able to make great progress, even while still acting without neglect for our own personal interests. We merely must remember not to ignore the questions of how our actions affect others today, and also how our actions can influence the future for later generations on this Earth.

As we continue to more genuinely accept ourselves and each other, we will be able to become more truly happy. People will find that while getting nice things for themselves is enjoyable, the truest and freest happiness comes from acting with true consideration for the well-being of others. By this, acting for the benefit of others is also acting for the benefit of oneself. As people living today come to realize this, all will begin to see that with cooperation there is no distinct dividing line between improving the lives of others and improving our own lives, but that the two blend together as one.

And so we will instill smart changes in our lives that will make for lasting improvements for everyone on the planet continuing on into the future. If nothing else, even if one chooses to merely live for today, it would be foolish for them to forget that they too will live in part of tomorrow’s world. So let us hope—for each individual today, as well as for the larger society and for the future generations that will inhabit the Earth—that all may find it within themselves to do their best to act out of good friendship with one another.

To make the changes that we need to, we must let go of the debilitating ideas that many have been led to believe. For instance, we must refuse to let ourselves be discouraged by false, exclusive statements, such as: “There is no way to feed everyone.” And we will have to get over negative mindsets, like thinking: “People will never get along.” That type of thinking, in itself, is what has been our greatest hindrance and is really the only problem left that is preventing us all from truly thriving together. This is a turning point for humanity, and we have everything we need to change away from our petty grievances, greed, and suffering toward more harmonious cooperation, prosperity, and limitless joy.

We all just need to make the decision to begin to act with consideration for one another and to wisely guide our activities according to their effects on one another. The time for the great awakening is truly here and now: All you have to do is choose to be an active participant in it. We should begin now to develop more peaceful and sustainable living with one another. It has been too long that there has been fighting and arbitrary division in this world. But it is never
too late to stop fighting and begin to work together to clean up our messes. So let everyone use this opportunity, in which we have advanced our communication and interaction to the global scale, to really make a lasting change for humanity.

Let everyone put blind and careless opinionating behind them and make a good quality of life for themselves and the whole world a fundamental guide to actions today. If everyone made it their wish to simply share in existence with one another non-judgmentally and to help one another peacefully enjoy life, everyone could enjoy a much more beautiful experience of life together. We really can all enjoy life today and have an optimistic outlook to the future, so long as we are conscientious of how we choose to treat one another. If one is led to question the validity of that statement, it is that which has led them to question it in the first place which should be more thoroughly evaluated. To put it bluntly, we are all participants in shaping each day and the future, and we should proudly embrace that responsibility while still being able to truly enjoy life.
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Introduction

In nearly all of the stories that have been passed down from the earliest civilizations, there is usually one thing in common: They have a story of how everything was brought into being. It seems a story of origin has always been one of our most important questions to have answered. Many of the ancient creation stories share the ideation that before anything which exists today came to be, only the thought of the Holy Spirit existed. The Holy Spirit—which is now understood to be God by all those who have come to realize that they exist thanks to It—decided in divine thought rather than there being nothing, it would be good for a reality to exist in which other spirits might have the opportunity to exist. So the Holy Spirit manifested as God the Sovereign Creator and began the process from which the entire universe came into existence from nothing. It is an overwhelming commonality between most creation stories that the key ingredient in the beginning of this process was the creation of light—which is frequently depicted as bringing forth light to make distinction from darkness.

In modern times, scientists have used the approach of analyzing the existing universe, through fields of study such as astronomy, to try to get an idea of how the universe may have started out. After developing an understanding of the current state of the universe through gathering much observational information and processing it through scientific analysis, scientists have combined their learning from many different fields of expertise to develop a model which extrapolates backwards in time to the beginning of this universe. Through such efforts, they have developed the understanding that there must have been a starting point, over thirteen billion years ago, from which everything in this universe was set into motion. At the original starting point, it appears that everything which is spread out in the universe today must have come from one extremely condensed point. The event in which everything came out of that point—which has been termed a singularity—has been named the Big Bang. When the Big Bang occurred, time began as space expanded out of the singularity, and all of the energy that makes up matter today burst forth in the form of pure radiation, or light. After things cooled down from the extremely hot start of the Big Bang, some of the original energy that had been in the form of radiation became deposited into particles containing rest mass. In other words, all of the matter in the universe, including the matter which composes our bodies, came from the original light of the Big Bang.

What this means is that modern science has uncovered from the study of the laws of physics which govern our universe that the central component of many of the most ancient creation stories is true: Everything that we observe around us is composed of the light that came forth from the beginning of creation. Going a step further in relating the ancient creation stories to modern science, we find that the laws of physics (as well as all of the harder to define actions of metaphysics) which define the universe and its existence must be what the Spirit of God surmised for creation in the beginning and set forth with the creation of light. With this understanding, we find that God created everything that exists today through creating the laws of physics—because it has been through the laws of physics that
everything in the history of the universe has occurred. And thus, everyone who has ever lived has been granted their life’s existence through God’s creation of reality.

In most of the ancient stories of origin, it is after the creation of light that the creation of the Earth is mentioned. Adding more detail to this from the study of particle physics, most of the matter which composes the Earth had to have been formed inside of stars from the fusion of the simpler elements that formed from the Big Bang. In fact, our entire solar system formed primarily from the remains of an exploded star which existed before the Sun. This has all been learned from studying the science of the laws that govern the interactions of matter and energy in space through time. To think that such foundational parts from ancient creation stories, which were originally passed down by people who had little to no knowledge of such things as particle physics, have come to be supported by our most advanced physical sciences is intriguingly remarkable. Such convergence is an authentication of these stories being divinely inspired, even if other details in the accounts are less scientifically accurate. More information about our current knowledge regarding the history of the universe and of the Earth will be covered in greater detail in the first few parts of this book.

Skipping forward over a vast amount of evolution to today, we are now the creators of things. Indeed, we now create things out of the very environment from which we emerged. We have been able to do this because our environment is plentiful in resources. For instance, we have found there to be multitudes of stores of resources in the ground. But despite the richness of the elements in the ground, it is the air and water that are the most vital to us. Second only to the air that we breathe; our fresh water is our most precious resource. In fact, we are mostly composed of water. It is now known that our earliest evolutionary ancestors first lived in water, but through a great number of small evolutionary steps over a vast amount of time, life took to carrying water within itself on to land. All along, all that was needed for living could be found in the bountiful environment.

Of course, it has only been relatively recently that we have found that we can create just about anything we can imagine out of the materials contained in the crust of our Earth. Still, we have had to come to terms with the reality that all of these materials are limited and there is only so much that the Earth can provide. Though we originally had no clue of how big our Earth was, we have now found that it is smaller than we once thought. And while we once thought there was no end to the sky and the oceans, we have now come to find that they are both finite, and that pollution builds up in them over time. Furthermore, there are now so many people living on our planet that we have begun to change the environment from what was naturally shaped over huge amounts of time. Realizing the truth of the impact of our activities on our planetary environment is absolutely humbling, and many have yet to fully come to terms with it.

The good news is that we have discovered this rather quickly, and as mentioned in the preface, there have been many developments in the means of making changes to our current patterns. It has only been around a hundred years—the course of just a few generations—that personal vehicles fueled by gasoline have become widely commonplace. And already we have developed technologies to make personal vehicles run partially or purely on electric power. Furthermore, ways to create electricity without burning fossil fuels and emitting greenhouse gas emissions have been invented and could
become the primary means of electricity production relatively soon. So long as these new energies are allowed to be developed unimpeded, we should soon be able to use electricity and transportation without so much burden of polluting the environment.

It is interesting to consider that while the problem of air pollution is really quite new, problems such as hunger and war have been with us for thousands of generations. There have also recently been more problems with running out of fresh water in some places, due to various local population densities having consumption beyond what the land can support. Problems such as these—as well as those others mentioned in the preface—are covered in more detail later in the book, and optimistic suggestions as to what can be done to solve them are discussed. The type of thinking required to peacefully overcome the difficulties and complications that face humanity today are the real focuses of this book.

Over time, great amounts of information have been stored in countless books. Especially recently, many books have been written which discuss how we might go about solving our problems. But while this book is only one of many, effort has been made to include the most vital information that one ought to know about the world within this one volume. It is important that people discover the current state of the world and share it with others, because by doing so we can work out solutions to our problems. As one reads this book, it is invited that they critically think about what is being discussed as to foster true progress.

As is important with life in general, everyone absolutely must think for themselves. People have been living in an era where misguidance has been spread in bulk to the multitudes. As was already mentioned in the preface, many people have now even been tantalized and led to be unhappy with themselves, let alone unhappy with others. Worst of all, people have been systematically taught to pursue the wrong goals, which is really what is at the bottom of much of the distress in the world. Far too many people in the world today have lost their moral compass in life in the midst of the mess created by materialism.

Sadly, not only has materialism made messes of individual lives, but it has also led to messes in the larger world. Due to the draw created around materialistic consumption and the emphasis that has been placed on money, people have been led into destructive behaviors we would be better not to participate in. Some have even theorized that recent warfare has been contrived to bring certain people and corporations within the population increases in wealth through military contracts and corporate expansion. Obviously, if this is the case, the premise of economic expansion has mutated to become detrimental for humanity. Still, no matter the extent of our problems, we will always have the capacity to overcome them. Because we contain exceptional abilities, including both the versatility of intelligence for adaptation and the compassion needed to rightly guide it, we have the aptitude for limitless positive change. All that we must do to truly utilize our potential is to break through the old mindset of competition and instead focus our efforts on cooperation.

Most of our problems come from one issue: We have become confused about what is truly of importance in life. Due to the unequal sharing of resources that has occurred as a drawback of our current monetary system, many have come to think that money is the most important thing in life.
Conversely, money merely represents value and is useless by itself, so it really deserves to be nowhere near the top of our priorities. In truth, what is really important is priceless, such as true acceptance and honest loving relationships. It has become clear that too much focus is being placed on money when people become depressed from thinking they do not have enough of it, even when they already have enough to live comfortably and therefore everything they need to be happy. It is plainly disheartening to see that many people have been so tantalized by the media portrayal of wasteful opulence that they have come to feel they cannot be happy without being rich, which is absolutely untrue. With lovingness, a person can be happy and satisfied with life even if they have little more than the necessities.

Something priceless has been robbed from a person when they are led to forget that they truly can be happy without being rich. It is similar to when persons become addicted to drugs and begin to feel that they cannot have fun without them, though they know they were originally capable of enjoying life sober. Just as people have been led to believe that ingesting substances will make them feel better, they have been led to believe that getting more things will make them feel better. And sadly, just as ingesting substances can be addicting, gaining material possessions can be addicting. Surely, it is certain that some material things are necessary for an enjoyable life; but ultimately, the pursuit of happiness through material things will be a vain pursuit. Like drug abuse, it makes people dependent upon things that previously weren’t needed for happiness and leaves their lives and world in ruins.

In reality, people are beings with souls, even if some deny it to be true. For, while God created the laws of physics that determine all of the interactions of matter within the universe, matter itself cannot make choices, because matter does not have free will. Rather, our spirits are what have the free will to make choices, and it is merely through the matter of our bodies that the choices of our spirits are carried out. Something critical to consider here is that, because our spirits are not made out of matter which can be destroyed, they cannot be destroyed like our bodies can. This is how, despite the fact that matter is impermanent and all bodies are mortal, the metaphysically extant spirit is indestructible and everlastingly immortal. Therefore, as has been rightly understood and proclaimed by the world’s many spiritual traditions, our souls are the eternal entities which will be held responsible by God for making the choices that were carried out by our bodies while alive.

One can gather from this that God is the Lord of Spirits, and will have sovereign judgment over all of the spirits which are the ends that have come about through the life that has occurred by God’s means of the creation of the universe. This information is much more valuable than any amount of money. While bribes may get people places while living, the soul will not be able to bring money with it to bribe God in the afterlife. Indeed, in the judgment of a person’s soul, the money they had in life will mean little to nothing compared to their influence on the lives of others. What will really count is whether a person made the world a better place or a worse place through their actions. Especially considering the fact that all matter is impermanent, it can only make sense that a person’s material possessions, such as money, will ultimately only be of significance in how they were used to affect other living beings with eternal spirits.

In accordance with this, the key is simple: caring enough to find the right motivation for action in life through altruistic spiritual direction. Unlike taking substances or buying things one does not need,
which generally only provide a temporarily good sensation, finding spirituality actually gives a person lasting wholeness. With the right motivation—which is caring about others—an individual can form the right goals, choose the proper actions to accomplish them, and then eventually receive the right reward. In this, everyone should intend to grow spiritually and to help others, rather than emptily setting out in the selfish pursuit of personal gains. Everyone knows at the center of their being that the difference between altruism and selfishness is what constitutes the differences between good and evil, but sometimes people become influenced by outside sources to lose sight of that inner truth.

Our true nature can be seen in the classic portrayal of our cultural stories. It is a recurring theme in the stories used for entertainment that the bad guys are always doing evil in the greedy pursuit of money and power, and the good guys are always selflessly trying to help protect the well-being of others. It is plain and simple that this reflects what we know in ourselves. Yet, people support this society in which some can get rich while others starve, simply out of hoping that they might be able to become those few that get rich. But then those few that actually do successfully get rich become obsessed with their riches and it usually doesn’t even make them truly happy anyway. Instead, they become worried about losing their riches and grow resentful of the poor. And, of course, the poor naturally detest the rich for not sharing their excess with them, as any child knows would be right for them to do. So, it seems that this system only results in most everyone becoming unhappy. Can’t everyone see that this is a miserable way of doing things?

One can easily envision a better functioning society than the current one. A society based more on altruistic sharing instead of such crass greed would result in far less inequality, and thus much less unhappiness. If people did more sharing with one another, the world would not seem so cold and uncaring, and not so many people would become so bitter and heartless towards others in response. Truly, the world could be run better out of love than out of hate. And not only would a world run on love run better than one run on hate run better, but it would also be much happier. A change to such an improved world could be considered a new era for humanity. In this new era, societies would wake up to realize that everyone in the world really is on the same larger team, and therefore everyone should cooperate more toward shared goals of common wellbeing, instead of viewing life as some kind of competition with one another.

Though it may seem cliché, in reality it is true that everyone can be winners by taking on the viewpoint that life is not some kind of competition, but rather a freely given opportunity by God for each individual to personally improve over time. And still, the time we are given in life for development can be enjoyed. Truly, life was meant to be enjoyed from the start, and it was intended to be enjoyable for everyone. Sure, there will always end up being some who—out of some faltering or misguidance in their own lives—end up becoming careless towards others, but no one should let fear or hatred of those few ruin an otherwise enjoyable life. From birth, people do naturally care about others, and it is only through mistreatment that this beautifully engrained characteristic is lost. If the vast majority of people would chose to embrace their innate inner caring and let helping one another bring them to action, as we naturally do have the capacity for, it would be much more like Heaven on Earth.
Civilization really could be held up through individuals working out of the idea of maintaining a prosperous society just as easily as it is held up by individuals working out of self-interest. Indeed, one would think that such a stimulus for action would be far more proficient than the every-man-for-himself type mentality—especially now that we have already used that old method to figure out how to make things more efficient. In a more ideal civilization, people could be much happier about working because they would know that they were working as part of a system intended to benefit everyone. Therefore, in this way of doing things, not only is a more truly productive civilization established, but it also allows more genuine happiness for all of the individuals involved.

While the way of selfishness has produced much for the world, it has also shown itself to result in great waste. In the wake of the glamorization of money, lavish wastefulness has grown from greed. In the money system, it has led people to participate in fraudulent financial schemes and exhibit plainly shameful dishonesty. In industry, it has lead companies to participate in planned obsolescence, in which products are produced intentionally to become obsolete or to fail so that new models will be bought. Of course, it is more responsible to the people for people in the money system to be honest, and it is more responsible to the environment for industry to create products to last in which the parts that wear out fastest are easily replaceable so that the whole unit does not have to be wasted. It is time to see a rejuvenation of the good wholesome education in the world, including the old ideas of honesty and of reducing waste by reusing perfectly good used items and recycling worn out ones.

The whole idea that a healthy economy consists of massive production of products for needless consumption is detrimental to the environment and also to the common people, just like wars. If one really thinks about the problem of there not being enough jobs, they will find that it is not really the problem that it has been depicted to be at all, but rather a blessing in disguise. Honestly, how could it really be a problem that there is not enough work to go around? What that means is that all the work that needs to be done to provide a living for everyone in the society is being done! A reasonable solution to the issue is that the work that is being done by those currently working can be divvied up and spread among the people that aren’t working.

If the current work being done now were shared more evenly, everyone could then work less! This would mean that everyone would have more free time. People could use their free time to do whatever they choose to—whether they wish to sit and poison themselves with toxins and arguably pointless television programming or videogames they happen to enjoy or to do more productive activity like reading, exercising, meditating, community development like planting trees or tending gardens for themselves and others, cleaning up litter in their environment, or spending time creating their own art. Indeed, any person can proudly and happily do any mix of those things. And for people in a society with not enough work to go around could put in effort toward helping people in other societies in which there is need for development.

The technology is now available to where if it were shared altruistically, it could make the lives of all the people of the world easier. Though it has been depicted by some that it is smart to only care about oneself, it is truly the foolish who are only motivated by the pursuit of profit to do things and the wise who will work to help others. For, those who only do things to profit themselves will continually be
led by that leash of selfishness—and, eventually, if they don’t free themselves from that leash, it will pull them down to a place no one really wants to end up in. So, while it may be contrary to current popular belief, the wisest care about others in the world and act on that caring. It is time that people not be tricked into being abashed about caring about the good of the world—for, in all truth, that is one of the few things in life about which one should really be proud. It is time that good honest people decide to throw down the shackles of self-consciousness that others fueled by selfish judgment, or even some subconscious worry of that, has placed upon them. This applies to all those who have continued to be ruled by that corrupt social enforcement and who have not already loosed those chains.

The time ruled by hogging spoils and shamelessly using people merely as a means for profit, rather than ends in their own happiness, is over. It is due time that society evolve beyond that type of thinking. It seems to be one of the best kept secrets that wishing upon others the same good that you wish upon yourself is the way to having a spirit that is at peace, but there is no good reason that should be a secret! It is this plain and simple understanding that we can enjoy life best when we wish for all others the same things we wish for ourselves—physical sustenance, peace, love, and appreciation—which has been thought to be some elusive enlightenment. (It has been a misperception that an honest respect for the pure truth in that last sentence is not equal to the rigorous enlightenment that has been portrayed as unattainable by the average person for some inexplicable reason.)

Many individuals have already made the progression to such an awakened understanding themselves, and they have been trying to wait patiently for the larger society to also wake up and realize it. Now, in the new era, this understanding will no longer be some unsung secret to inner peace, but instead it will be beautifully shared common knowledge—which, when acted upon, will bring to the world a degree of widespread harmony the likes of which humanity has not yet seen. And the world will continue to see vast innovation and progress, but instead of only benefitting a few it will be shared more cooperatively for the good of all humanity.

People have been led to go about their lives wasting their days in the pursuit of treasure that they will never be able to keep. It is time to stop esteeming that nonsense. In the new era, people will enjoy the true satisfaction of working in pursuit of helping each other, and from this they will gain real everlasting reward which the soul will be able to keep. Rather than wanting to hurt one another, people will come to the realization that it is more rewarding to aid one another. After gaining greater insight, they will realize that not sharing is actually stealing from themselves. Then, by acting out of genuine caring for the well-being of others, people will solve problems previously thought unsolvable. And in doing so, they will overcome the very negative thinking that had previously made them bitter and hateful toward one another. This will be the actualization of the new era.

The spirit is ultimately the only thing that holds value, and this is a time of a great spiritual awakening. Because it had been through denying this reality that humanity’s truest potential was previously hindered, the horizon of the new era will be vast and endless. Instead of bringing strife between one other, people will bring balance to themselves and each other. Instead of wasting energy fighting against one another, they will return to attunement with nature and each another. And by doing so the transition to the new era should actually be able to be made rather smoothly. The information
and directions needed to accomplish the transition to the new era are before your very eyes, right now. Reading this book will help you make the new era a reality. Indeed, the transition has been underway in the world for some time now already. If each individual lets no one convince them that accomplishing these things is impossible, the success of such a better civilization will be inevitable.

While some might view this type of talk as dreaming, there is nothing more real than the reality that the world collectively shares the future. And though some have said out of pure negativity that we will never be able to get along, the future truly needn’t be marred by continual conflict. In fact, it will only be marred by conflict if individuals choose to continue to be led into bringing conflict along with themselves into the future.

One day, the people of the world will be able to forget everything about the game of tug-of-war that life has been made out to be. Countries will no longer be tricked into opposing one another, and instead they will view one another as teammates to cooperate with toward a global success for all. By making this simple change in worldview, humanity will be able to develop and finally grow from an immature civilization composed of factions verses one another to a mature civilization that is composed of independent parts all in supportive contribution to the intercombined whole. Maybe, just maybe, everyone will be able to realize we were all really just independent parts of one larger whole all along, and had merely been confused to think we were not.
Part One

Our World:

Interpreting What’s Before Our Eyes
Chapter 1

Earth

(Our Wondrous World)

So here we are, alive and breathing. It is truly great to simply be alive and breathing. Though it is not a common consideration in our daily lives, it is a wonderful thing that our world has an atmosphere made up of air which fills our lungs with the elements needed to replenish our tissues. It can be a rare occurrence for us to actually take notice of the many things it takes for our lives to be continually sustained. For instance, we would rarely take note of things like the fact that the air pressure around us keeps us from exploding, as would basically happen if the Earth’s atmosphere were to vanish and stop protecting our bodies from the vacuum of space, or that if gravity were to suddenly stop working, we would all float off the ground and spin away from this Earth with everything else not attached to it.

Now, it is not surprising that none of us think of these things very frequently, because they are accepted to always hold true and thus we don’t really need to think about them in our daily lives. We need not worry about such things as gravity stopping working because God ordained the laws of physics to be constant and unyielding. Because of that fact, our mere existence and living is proof in itself of God’s existence. Knowing this should make one feel a little more comforted. Creation was God’s gift to us so that we might be able to enjoy reality. Therefore, the experience of life is a free blessing. All gifts come from God, down to the mere ability to take a deep breath or a drink of water. Every meal is a blessing, as well as the mere opportunity to pray, meditate, or otherwise give praise.

The realization that there are human beings on every continent all around this wonderful planet sharing in this experience of life is really quite amazing. More amazing yet is the fact that we have made connections to one another all around the globe, making our whole planet not only one shared world, but also an integrated one. People are no longer isolated from the rest of the world, not even by the greatest obstacles, including the widest oceans and tallest mountains. We overcame such obstacles long ago through the inventions of transportation such as boats and airplanes.

More recently, through the creation of wired and now wireless communications, we have succeeded in making it possible to communicate almost instantaneously with people nearly anywhere in the civilized world. This is something that most people never could have dreamt possible before it really happened. And, though our world is not yet one of peace, with much conflict and inequality left to resolve, we have better conversation between our societies than ever before in the past, and for the most part our interactions are getting better. It is a beautiful thing to be able to see and share in all of the cultures of the world at once with the ease with which we can today. It is interesting to think how far we have come to reach this state of affairs. But to really appreciate it, we have to consider what our ancestors had to make it through in the past on the way here.
By trying to look at the world through the eyes of early humans living up to a couple hundred thousand years ago, we might be able to describe the basis for the common experience which all of our ancestors shared. Now, as one might imagine, growing up as early humans wasn’t the most comfortable life conceivable. But we thankfully were always blessed with the ability to think and use problem solving skills to overcome adversities. Thanks to our development of the ability to walk upright, which freed up our hands to become dexterous with thumbs, we have been able to manipulate our environment to suit our needs like no other animal native to this Earth. Furthermore, thanks to our creative minds, we have been able to adapt from the natural wilderness to our now commonplace offices. Truly, the human mind is one of the most powerful gifts held among all of the living creatures in the known universe. Though we haven’t always been this smart, we know we had to start somewhere.

So, let us think of some of the common experiences that the earliest humans of the world might have shared. To do this, one can imagine what the first things they would have noticed in the world would have been through their own observation, having never had anyone explain any of it to them. There are many basic things that virtually all humans must have shared in their existence, going all the way back to our most ancient ancestors. These include the same things that are common to all of our experience today. The first thing any conscious being must notice here on Earth is the day itself.

There is nothing more clear to see than the difference between night and day. We and all of our ancestors are basically obliged to know that at dawn the Sun rises, and at dusk the Sun sets. We would also all come to notice that the Sun always comes up in the east. Of course, at first, we would have had no name for the east. Rather, the east would simply have been designated as the general direction in which the Sun rises. Next we would notice that through the morning, the Sun rises slowly upward, until it is at its highest position overhead at midday. And then it continues on toward the opposite side from which it rose, always coming back down and setting in the direction we now call west. Sunsets, as well as sunrises, would have then been particularly remarkable to early humans as something of the most beauty to behold. After sunset, of course, night would fall until the Sun rose again.

At night time, in the absence of the brightness of the Sun, one can see countless stars. Little did early humans know that each of the stars was just like the Sun, except at a much farther distance. Then, at night, rather than the Sun, it became the Moon that we would notice dominating the sky. The Moon and the stars helped us by providing enough light during the night for us to make out what is around us. But besides that, they have also been something quite entrancing in and of themselves to simply gaze upon. Eventually, the phases of the Moon were found to be useful in keeping track of time.

To the early humans, the stars had to have been one of the very most magical things to take in. Many stargazers would agree that this still applies today, but before light pollution made them hard for those of us in cities today to see, every clear night would have been a brilliant show of uncountable twinkling lights. Many tales were spun about the constellations that could be drawn if one looks with imagination to connect the dots among the bright stars. Further, many great societies would eventually study the stars and measure their motions to incredible accuracy. More recently we have found out that it is from the stars that the elements in our very own bodies come from, making their existence and ours all the more fascinating.
What other things would early humans have particularly taken note of in rudimentary life? First off, they would have had to have made a living. Our earliest ancestors roamed as hunter-gatherers on the earth for millennia, not very unlike most other animals. They moved along without much speaking, searching for food that was edible to them and finding a nice place to lie down. Along with this often came the need for fitting shelter, which had to be found or constructed frequently when on the move, but could also be kept for regular use in places where food sources were more stable.

With these needs always requiring maintenance, one might figure that it did not matter much what early people thought of life, because they were simply kept busy staying alive. Yet, because the early humans depended more on the Earth to provide them with what they needed, it very well could have been that these early people actually had more time to think about the true nature of life than we do today—especially considering they had not made so many distractions for themselves as we have for ourselves nowadays. Earlier people probably took more time to enjoy the smaller things in life, such as appreciating the natural details of the environment and one another. Of course, just as we are today, they were first and foremost led along in their motions by pursuit of satisfying their own physical needs, the needs of their families, and the needs of their communities. These are the basic drives to sustain enjoyable life as a person living in any type of society.

There are several most basic needs which we most obviously share with all our ancestors: We all must breathe, drink, eat, and sleep. The near constant requirement of breathing is most essential, then the thirst to drink, the hunger to eat, and the need of sleep for rejuvenation. Of course, after the bodily development of puberty, the more or less required need to satisfy the physical drive for sex is added to these others. But beyond these more obvious physical needs, there is something which is commonly overlooked as a basic need: each of our intrinsic need for therapeutic social interaction. It has been learned that good social interaction is something that is absolutely essential for healthy emotional development and continued mental health.

Beside our basic needs being physical requirements, they are also sources of pleasure to us. Nonetheless, we have come to find that it is the higher level things in life—such as love and the sense of accomplishment gained from helping others—that are truly the most rewarding. Still, as a fact of life, the ground-level physical requirements of the body have to be fulfilled in order to perform the higher order achievements. So, as we have been in the process of developing, it has been our basic physical needs that have been the primary drives behind the things we do. Steadily through time, however, we have become better at having our lower needs fulfilled; and we have been able to spend more time doing the more satisfactory, higher level activities.

Many people today have extra time after doing what is needed to sustain themselves physically for activities of interest. This free time can be filled by doing things simply because they are enjoyable to us, such as participating in cultural activities or finding intellectual or spiritual growth through reading. Though reading and writing are essential in most lives today, this advancement was not produced until quite recently in our development. Still today, some people have not been lucky enough to have free time for hobbies after taking care of what must be done for their sustenance. Oddly, for others on the opposite side of the spectrum, activities originally developed for mere amusement or entertainment in
idle time have in some ways hijacked our instinctual programming to become obsessions which individuals feel drawn to as though they were essential requirements for fulfillment.

We have found that just as we share our most basic physical requirements with many of the other animals with which we share our environment, we also share common instincts with them. This is because we got our primary instincts through evolution just as they did. Because of this, basically all living things naturally have innumerable common experiences through life. Originally, we were exposed to the elements in the same way as all the other animals, and we still are at times when we are not protected from it with shelter. One of the biggest experiences of our environment, of course, is the weather. People have always known weather for its great power over us. This is especially made clear to us when there is extreme weather. We can find ourselves battered by precipitation in strong wind, scorching in the heat of the sun, or freezing in the cold.

One does not have to spend much time living to realize that we are really quite fragile and that we are entirely subject to the forces of nature. Our flesh can easily be cut, torn, and bruised, and many are even easily burned simply from too much exposure to sunlight. Thus, pain—in addition to thirst, hunger, and tiredness—is common to our lives, and was especially so in the past. This can make life a true struggle at times, and especially so with our strong emotions. However, if not for also having the risk of experiencing pain and suffering, we would never have been able to experience pleasure and happiness. Indeed, every singly type of negative experience in life can be viewed as the only way for us to be able to appreciate the opposite positive.

There would be no enjoyment or appreciation of getting to eat and drink if not for also having to be able to experience hunger and thirst, and there would be no satisfaction in rest if not for tiredness. To truly be able to appreciate anything, we must be exposed to the possibility of lacking it. Therefore, life is a means of being able to enjoy, or otherwise there could really be no such thing. So, we must take the good with the bad and try to be appreciative of it all. All that we experience comes by way of a few unremitting forces of nature which rule the entire universe, our bodies included. The laws of physics have dictated everything that occurs in reality; though, for the longest time, we had no clue as to what exactly those laws were.

Overarching the forces of nature is time, though we may never entirely understand it. What we do know of time is that the present is continually progressing forward, toward the future and away from the past. Interestingly though, some well-informed scientists have pointed out that there is no reason that they can find by the laws of physics for why time should only go in the one direction. Still, and despite any wishing of our own, it is entirely clear that there is no use in arguing with the fact that it does. It would only make sense that the reason that time only goes in one direction in this physical universe is because God ordained it that way.

We have seen that all things develop over the course of time. In our lives, after being born, we grow from infant, to child, to adolescent, to adult. Eventually, we all have to face another fact of time: Every body that lives will someday die. While this is true for all things that live, it seems a cruel rule of life for those with more advanced emotions to have to learn. Indeed, it can hurt greatly to have to give
up someone to death. Dealing with death can be grievous, but it is simply the price to play. Though we can never directly see someone who has died again in this life, that does not mean that we won’t ever be able to see them again. Because no spirit can ever be destroyed, as was discussed in the introduction, you may be able to see your loved ones again after you yourself have also passed on—depending upon their and your intentions in life.

But despite death, life is beautiful, and there are vast amounts of life in our world. We see innumerable plants which grow from the ground, and creatures which move upon it and within it, as well as ones that fly in the sky, and ones that swim in the waters of rivers, lakes, and seas. All of the life works together to form balanced ecosystems which support one another in harmony. The great variety of living things is astounding, and many of them have colors that are truly delightful to the eyes—especially in flowers and birds. Some birds can boast the colors of a dozen varieties of flowers, with the pheasant, the peacock, and the parrot, being known especially for their many colors. This variety in life makes it more interesting.

Some creatures can even change their colors on demand, such as chameleons which can magnificently change the color of their skin to match their environment. More colors yet can be found in the oceans, with corals and tropical fish have colors of stunning clarity. Some aquatic life in the oceans can even dispel light from themselves, with some flashing what would otherwise seem to be artificial neon colors in the sea’s darkness—though these few unique species of life have rarely been seen by human eyes. Likewise, fireflies can emit their own light. Judging from the vast differences in life we see on Earth, the great possibilities of evolution are hard to fathom. Detail regarding the evolution of life on Earth is discussed in the third chapter of this book.

Let us, for now, move back to the discussion of the human experience of the nature of life. We can continue by returning to the age-old talking point of the weather. One thing early humans were bound to learn to study regarding the weather was what would come of the clouds. For, they were sure to find that while they could not control the weather, though some may have developed some feeling of influence over it through superstitious ritual in early religious thought, they could at least watch the developments of the clouds in the sky to try to be a step ahead of the changes in the weather soon to come. This way, they might not be caught by total surprise when the ever-important changes in the clouds made their immediate presence clear through precipitation.

As the earliest peoples surely discovered, the clouds that float in the sky come in many forms, and their forms can give clues to the coming weather. This was probably the first form of the far more advanced meteorology forecasters use today to predict the weather. Surely, the most important quality of the clouds has always been that they bring precipitation, by their suspending water molecules up in the sky, seemingly in an act of defiance of gravity, and then dropping it seemingly randomly. As any child can observe, the precipitation can come down from the clouds in any fashion from a light misting to a drenching downpour. Of course, depending on the conditions, precipitation can come down in many forms besides the more regular rain—including sleet, snow, and hail. As hail can be very destructive, especially on agricultural crops, it was surely thought of as some kind of punishment from above to the early humans. (However, today we have figured out the science of how hail forms, and have even begun
to develop ways to affect it through things like the aerial spraying of elements. Where affecting the weather was attributed to God or gods in the past, now we have become able to influence it ourselves—though it is generally not a good idea to try to tamper with nature.)

Within the more minor changes in the weather, such as those indicated by individual clouds, our weather patterns are also experienced to change in greater cycles, called seasons. The seasons pass in a predictable course of cycles, all over the world, again and again in the same order each year. Most likely, the course of the seasons are what made early humans first begin to pay attention to years in the first place. Especially in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, where there are stronger seasonal effects, including very cold winters in which it snows, it has always been very important to pay attention to the changing of the seasons—as to be prepared for the winter. Even in the more central latitudes, knowing the time of the seasons would have been important for those who planted and harvested crops.

Because of how critical it is to have proper timing in the seasons, developing a system with which to gauge the changing of the seasons would have been very helpful to early people. As careful stargazers of the ancient civilizations noticed, different stars show up in the night sky at different times throughout the year. This was most easily notable by recognizing certain constellations only appear during certain seasons. These particular constellations would not be seen throughout the rest of the year, but would eventually come back again after the course of a yearly cycle. Once this pattern was recognized, the days could be counted between when a certain star or constellation became viewable in one year and when it became viewable again in the next. If one were to keep track in counting the number of days of this cycle, they would find that each cycle took just about 365 days. However, this counting method would have been difficult, because 365 is quite a large number.

One way to keep track of the year, instead of counting the days, would have been to build a structure that would maintain a point to a certain star at one time in the year and wait until the cycle brought it back to that same position. Doing it this way would relieve the individual of having to count to such a high number of days. We have found ancient evidence that this was indeed done in many places throughout the ancient world. For example, pyramids in the awe-inspiring and mysterious ancient city of Teotihuacan, in the Basin of Mexico near the modern-day Mexico City, have markings which line up with certain constellations coinciding with important times of the agricultural calendar.

Another way to measure the passing of the year similar to watching the celestial movements in the night sky would have been to note the position of the Sun during the day. If one carefully takes note of the Sun’s apparent positioning in the sky, they will find that it moves in its position relative to the horizon slowly throughout the course of the year. This is now understood to be due to the tilt of the Earth’s rotational axis relative to the Sun as it revolves around it throughout the year. In fact, the regular variation in sunlight exposure caused by the planet’s axial tilt and its revolution around the Sun is the very cause of the differences between the seasons in the first place, though this explanation would have been very difficult for early humans to understand. The times when the Earth’s axial tilt is the most extreme relative to the Sun are called the summer and winter solstices. Something interesting regarding this is that when it is winter solstice in the northern hemisphere, it is summer solstice in the southern
hemisphere, and vice versa. The two times per year that are halfway between the solstices are known as the equinoxes.

People have also built structures to keep track of the passing of time according to the Sun’s movement between the seasons. By making a permanent marker from one place on the ground to note the precise location of the Sun on a solstice or equinox, people could always know when that solstice or equinox occurred. With such a method to note these regularly occurring events in the year, it could be known when the seasons would again be changing, and the people could make important decisions accordingly. Many ancient societies developed and used this method of keeping track of the seasons. Indeed, we have evidence that proves some of them built structures which included such purposes, such as the famous site of Stonehenge, in today’s English county of Wiltshire in the United Kingdom.

Though the site of Stonehenge existed with wooden markers at least hundreds of years before the large stones were placed, modern dating methods show that the heaviest stones were moved there around 2500 BC. Because of the extreme size and weight of the stones used for Stonehenge—some of which weigh up to 50 tons (100,000 pounds or 45,359 kilograms)—and the additional fact that they were transported great distances of miles upon miles over land at a time when the people had no heavy machinery, Stonehenge has for a long time been one of the most anomalous sites on the Earth. It has long been questioned as to whether the builders of Stonehenge received assistance with the site from extra-terrestrials who could have used advanced technology to move the stones, because it is extremely hard to fathom humans moving and precisely positioning stones weighing tens of tons by hand.

The cycles of the Moon were also used to keep track of periods of time, including seasonal time-keeping. This was perhaps more common to earlier humans, because lunar cycles are relatively easy to identify, with one full Moon occurring roughly every thirty days. Because the phases of the Moon can be identified with the naked eye, they do not require the building of any physical structures to monitor, as is the case for the fine tuning needed to denote the precise location of the Sun on a solstice or equinox. Of course, it was also a bonus that a person will not go blind from spending too much time looking at the Moon, as can happen from staring at the Sun! Many early societies based their calendars from the lunar cycles. However, it is difficult to make a yearly calendar based on the cycles of the Moon, because they don’t occur in an even number of cycles per year. Since there are approximately 12.37 lunar cycles in one year, using lunar cycles results in inconsistencies. This is why there is so much variation between the many separately developed lunar calendars.

Mapping out the motions of the stars, Sun, and Moon to make a regular calendar was a great achievement of some early societies. It was a much greater task, however, for people to figure out the explanations for the motions of the objects in the sky. While it is now common knowledge that the year is specifically one revolution of the Earth around the Sun, it took us an extremely long time to attain that understanding. Looking back, it is easy understand why it was hard to believe that the Earth revolved around the Sun, and not the other way around. Since it was plain to see that the Sun rises and sets in opposite directions, and that it apparently moves in an arching motion over the Earth throughout the day, it seemed obvious that the Sun moved around the Earth.
The discovery that it is the Earth that moves around the Sun marks one of the most prominent counter-intuitive changes in human perspective ever. This change in perspective was a very hard one for people to take, but it taught us an important lesson: It showed us that something that many people feel entirely certain about can turn out to be entirely incorrect. You see, though it naturally feels that the Earth is steadfast, and that all other that are moving around it, it only appears this way from our own frame of reference. And, especially since Albert Einstein’s revelation of the Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, we have come to know that no one frame of reference has any privilege over any other. Put simply, we have all slowly had to become aware that differences are always relative.

It was quite difficult for us to imagine that it is the Earth which is moving around the Sun, because everyone naturally has a view of life in which it seems that everything is always moving around us. And, as it naturally seems that things move relative to us, with us always being in the center of our own observational view of things, it also naturally seems that things move relative to our world. However, just as a child comes to find that the world does not revolve around them, we as a civilization have had to find that the universe does not revolve around us. Instead of the Earth being the center point of the universe around which all other things revolve, we now know the Earth to be just one of several planets that revolve around the Sun.

Still, it is interesting to think that even knowing that the Earth revolves around the Sun still does not explain for us why the Sun rises in the east and sets in the west. After all, the Earth does not revolve around the Sun daily. Since the Earth is roughly 150 million kilometers away from the Sun, it would have to move unfathomably quickly for that to be the case. In fact, the Earth has to move at over 100,000 kilometers per hour (62,137 mph), relative to the Sun, just to encircle it once over the course of a year. Now, this is on a scale which is almost beyond the human imagination.

Though early humans probably would have guessed that the Sun and the Moon were both the same size and the same distance from the Earth, due to their appearing to be the same size in the sky, the Sun is actually immensely larger and immensely further away. It is an extremely curious fact, however, that the Moon—which is actually a fourth of the size of the Earth—happened to be at the perfect distance to appear the same size as the Sun when viewed from the surface of the Earth. This intriguing phenomenon can be magnificently viewed in the occurrence of perfect solar eclipses.

As most of us now know, the real reason that we see the Sun rise in the east and set in the west is because the entire Earth itself is rotating. Originally though, we simply never would have imagined that the ground, which seems to be unmovning below our feet, is really moving at a swift rate of 465 meters per second, at the equator, toward the east. Since the Earth’s diameter is 12,756 kilometers at the equator, this is how fast the surface there must be moving to make one full rotation in 24 hours.

As the Earth rotates, sunlight continuously shines on the half which is facing the Sun as daylight, making for the sunrise and sunset to be continually moving over the ground. This, of course, is the reason for the different time zones we have standardized around the Earth. Knowing all of this today makes us feel for Copernicus, and also the Greek astronomer Aristarchos of Samos much earlier, who were met with disbelief from even educated people of their time when they presented the idea that the
Earth revolved around the Sun. But it is not surprising that people were slow to believe, considering how long it took for people to even accept that the Earth’s surface formed a great sphere—after the misinformation that it was flat had become the culturally accepted norm to believe.

Now, beyond gaining the understanding that the Earth is just one of several planets revolving around the Sun in our solar system, we have further come to understand that the Sun is just one a star, much like all of those others that twinkle in the night sky. Complicating things somewhat, we have also figured out that the Sun and the stars we see in the night sky are all a part of an enormously large disk-shaped grouping of stars called the Milky Way Galaxy. Furthermore, all of the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy—the number of which is in the hundreds of billions—are also moving about the center of the galaxy as the entire galaxy rotates. And further yet, the Milky Way Galaxy is also moving about in space, relative to the hundreds of billions of other galaxies. A basic description of how we came to know this, along with our understanding of how it all came to be, will be explained in the next chapter.

But for now, let us move back to the subject of the Earth, as it holds plenty of interesting characteristics in itself to be discussed. As people have experienced the nature of our planet over time, we have uncovered more and more of the wondrous qualities that it holds. As anyone who lives will come to know, some things in nature just stand out from the rest. This would have been especially true of our oldest ancestors, whose views of the world were more limited to their direct surroundings. Without having pictures and video, a person would have had to actually go someplace to view it with their own eyes, and the mobility of early people was mostly limited to walking.

For those who lived on the plains, it would have been remarkable to follow rivers upstream to find their sources in the mountains, or downstream to find their ends in the oceans. While some people always would have been accustomed things like mountains and oceans due to living near them all their lives, for those not accustomed to them, their first sights of either are most extraordinary. There is great majesty in the sheer size of the mountains and the sea-line where the shores form a boundary between the continuously moving and seemingly endless ocean and the land which people naturally know much better. Several of our planet’s most distinctive features are discussed next, with proper examples given of each to depict the sheer variety in the wonders of our world.

Mountains, by all people’s standards, are one of the structures on the planet that really stand out. While their formation would have been quite mysterious to early people, we now know them to have formed long, long ago from the forces of the massive tectonic plates which make up the crust of the Earth pushing upon one another. As these tectonic plates—the size of which can be as large as entire continents and seas—pressed together, enormous amounts of pressure built up, eventually causing the ground itself to crumple upwards to great heights.

On nearly all of the continents which make up the land surface of the Earth, the tectonic plates have produced spectacular mountain ranges. The tallest mountain of all the Earth’s mountain ranges is Mount Everest in the Himalayas in Asia. Mount Everest’s peak reaches a breathtaking 8,848 meters (29,029 ft) above sea level. Hundreds of climbers have climbed to the wintry peak of this tallest
mountain, as if to feel that they had conquered it. But, sadly, more than a hundred who have attempted to have died in their efforts to do so.

Other mountains are not made by tectonic plates, but rather by volcanoes. Volcanic mountains form from the build-up of molten rock, called magma, which comes up from deep within the Earth’s molten mantle at places where there are fissures in the Earth’s outer crust. Interestingly, many volcanic mountains are actually in the ocean, some of which have built up enough from the ocean floor to crest above the surface of the water to form islands. Several of these islands are viewed as tropical paradises. For this reason, many tourists with the surplus resources to do so have vacationed to them.

Another most impressive natural sight on Earth is that of waterfalls—places where rivers flow over ledges, forming displays of falling sheets of our life-sustaining freshwater. The largest of all the world’s waterfalls is on the Zambezi River in southern Africa between the countries of Zambia and Zimbabwe. Now known as Victoria Falls, this waterfall was originally called Mosi-oa-Tunya, or “Smoke that Thunders” by the indigenous people there due to the mist that the falls create and the roaring sound they produce, which can be seen and heard from far away. In total, this waterfall is 1,708 meters wide and 108 meters tall, forming the single largest sheet of falling water in the world. While smaller waterfalls produce a more soothing effect, the sight and sound of huge waterfalls such as Victoria Falls never fail to leave people in awe, and may very well be the greatest example of the tremendous power of gravity that one can witness on Earth.

Unlike mountains and large waterfalls which are formed by purely geological forces, there are also massive structures on this Earth which have been built by the force of life. Coral reefs, which are formed from the slow accumulation of millions of tiny, hard-bodied aquatic creatures called corals, exist of in many shallow seas and can grow to great sizes. The largest reef system on Earth is the Great Barrier Reef off the northeast coast of Australia. At a massive total of 344,400 square kilometers, this combined system of 2,900 individual reefs is an example of the impressive building power of life. Reefs are known to harbor a multitude of different species of life. Because of their great variety of life, reefs exemplify the beautiful diversity of the underwater ecosystems of the oceans. One of the most striking features of the life in coral reefs is the great variety of bright colors.

Since coral reefs typically grow at a steady rate over vast amounts of time as an indicator of a good healthy environment, it was alarming to marine biologists to find that many reefs have recently begun to quickly die out. Because of their sensitivity to changes, reefs could be considered as one of our best detectors for early warning signs of problems with the environment. We must consider that the same things that threaten the many species of life which are housed by coral reefs could ultimately also threaten us. Upon researching the concerning trauma indicated by many of our world’s reefs, it was determined that contributing factors include recently warming oceanic temperatures and increasing levels of pollution. Considering these damages caused to our reefs are indicative of our own effects on the Earth’s ecosystems, we should recognize that we must be more cautious. Otherwise, we will see more similar problems occurring in less and less fragile ecosystems.
Another fascinating example of huge ecosystems bursting with great varieties of life are tropical rainforests. The tropical rain forests have been nick-named “the lungs of the Earth” for their especially massive amounts of photosynthetic activity, which takes the greenhouse gas of carbon dioxide \((\text{CO}_2)\) out of the air and converts it into the oxygen \(\text{(O}_2\) we need to breathe. The largest of the Earth’s rainforests is the Amazon Rainforest, which is situated around the Amazon River in north-central South America. This enormous rainforest spans over 5.5 million square kilometers (1.4 billion acres) and is thought to be the home of richest biodiversity on Earth.

Though the rainforests used to cover around 14% of the planet, in recent times almost half of the Earth’s rainforest has been cut down to where they now only cover around 6%. This is concerning considering the significant role they play in recycling our air, and the fact that they protect millions of species of life. In fact, there are estimated to be millions of species of life in the rainforests that have not been discovered or studied yet; and such species are often unique and valuable to the advancement of science. These factors make loss of the rainforests to deforestation a loss to humanity. However, significant conservation efforts are being made and the planting of trees elsewhere in the world can offset the loss of those being cut down in the rainforests.

Much to the opposite of the tropical rain forests are the Earth’s deserts. Though deserts do harbor many specialized species of life, they are wastelands compared to the rainforests. Due to high temperatures and chronic lack of rainfall, deserts are not very hospitable places for life. Many deserts only get significant rainfall a few times a year. Some deserts hold huge fields of sand dunes, which are formed through the erosive power of great winds.

The Grand Canyon in the Colorado Plateau, found in the USA state of Arizona, is another great example of the forces of erosion. This immense gorge, which was cut out by the Colorado River in North America, is 446 kilometers long, up to 29 kilometers wide, and attains a depth of up to 1,800 meters below the surface of the ground. The sedimentary layers that are exposed through this erosion are a vivid example of the historical evidence studied by geology. As the river was cut deeper and deeper into the sedimentary layers it exposed older and older rocks, with the bottom of the gorge revealing sediment from up to two billion years ago. It is quite an overwhelming sight to see and a common tourist attraction for its scenery.

A much different type of formation on the Earth are the polar ice caps at the north and the south poles. The Earth’s ice caps are composed of thick sheets of frozen water which form at the poles, where the temperatures are extremely cold due to the polar regions not receiving much direct sunlight. These ice sheets have varied greatly in size over the millennia, as the Earth has gone through many temperature fluctuations, but they are now reaching record lows for modern history. The ice sheets were the largest during the cold cycles, titled ice ages, but are now known to be shrinking due to increasing global temperatures. The increased rate of melting of the ice caps is an example of the fact that the Earth is undergoing global warming, and is a subject that has brought on much concern. Global warming does pose certain potential problems that warrant concern, but change is always occurring and there are many factors which should be taken into consideration. (The causes of global warming and related issues will be covered in more detail later in the book.)
Along with the ice caps, one of the most majestic of the natural wonders of the world occurs at the poles of the Earth. These are the glowing lights called auroras, which can appear in the skies toward the north and south poles. When the lights appear in the north—where they are more commonly seen, due to the northern hemisphere of the Earth having more continents than the southern hemisphere—they are called Aurora Borealis, or the Northern Lights. When appearing in the south, they are called Aurora Australis. Auroras most often glow in a neon green color, but also can glow red and sometimes blue, and move in streaming motions in the sky. When appearing at night, aurorae put on a brilliant show that can be seen by observers spanning over great distances.

For the longest time, the source of the awe-inspiring aurorae was entirely unknown and plainly mystifying. However, science has now revealed what it is that produces them. We have found that the aurora occur when charged particles from the solar wind funnel into the Earth’s magnetic field, which dips inwards at the north and south poles. It is then when the atoms of the thin gases in the upper atmosphere are stimulated by the charged particles of the solar wind that they emit the light. Aurorae have been called nature’s fireworks, and they prove themselves as natural entertainment for most all who get the chance to witness their display.

In the distant past, very few people were able to get a glimpse of the various natural wonders of the world, except those viewable directly around the location in which they happened to live. For this reason, few people in ancient times had the chance to see more than one or two of the world’s impressive natural sights in their whole lifetimes. It is a great change that has occurred to where today even a child can view images from regions all around the world in one sitting. This, of course, has become possible through the capturing of images by photography and videography. These technologies were developed just a few generations ago and have only recently become widely available. Now, thanks to these technologies becoming digitized and wirelessly transferable, a person today can even view video footage online that was recorded in outer space from the International Space Station (ISS), including a fantastic vantage point of the aurorae discussed above. This is incredible because the chance for any one person to see such things today has occurred from the combined discoveries and work of countless lives.

In this, we find that the advancement of practical science through our accumulation of knowledge is a wonder in itself. It is something we have accomplished through our use of language—especially written language—for the transferring of information from one to another. Since we began writing, our recorded knowledge has exponentially grown as we have learned and written more and more about the world. The amount of information we have gathered in this way is truly remarkable. And we only first started writing around six thousand years ago, which is really quite recently in human history, considering that we have found evidence of anatomically modern humans that dates to nearly 200,000 years ago. (Details regarding the emergence of our species are discussed in chapter four.) Today, with the use of our creation of computers and the World Wide Web, one person has access to nearly all of the information that all of the people in the world have gathered thus far.

Of course, there was a long road of accomplishments that led from our beginning writing to viewing digital images from a space station on globally linked computers. Some of the first areas of
advancement through sharing accumulated knowledge of the physical sciences and technology were that of great building accomplishments. Where past societies have completed some greatly impressive building projects without the use of modern technology—such as the Colosseum from the Roman Empire and the Great Wall of China by the ancient Chinese—these building projects do not stand close to what we have accomplished more recently with the collaborative efforts of modern engineering.

It is notable, however, that there are some cases of building massive structures with stone that were accomplished in ancient times when humans had not yet developed any industrial technology—having only hand tools and not yet even possessing the wheel and axle—which we might still not be able to reproduce with all of our modern equipment today if we tried. Such ancient sites include not only the well-known pyramids of Egypt, Chichen Itza, and Teotihuacan, but also the similarly unprecedented evidence of structural feats at other sites such as Baalbek, Ollantaytambo, Puma Punku, and Machu Picchu. The incredible evidence of these sites indicates that the ancient human civilizations that built them must had some kind of outside assistance from others with advanced technology.

Indeed, when considering the knowledge and planning required for the precise astrological alignment of some of these structures (such as the proportional measurements engrained in the immaculate design and construction of the Pyramids of Giza or the architectural design of Chichen Itza to make a remarkable shadow effect on the equinoxes), along with the extreme technology that would have been required to shape and cut some of the stones (such as the precision-cut interlocking right angles of the huge “H-stones” of Puma Punku), and the extreme weight of some of the building blocks which logically would have been cut into smaller pieces if they were really moved by human labor (such as the 800 ton building stones at Baalbek), it becomes obvious that the only logical conclusion is that these structures required the aid of advanced technology—technology which had to have been based from civilizations much longer established than the human civilization on Earth at the time.

Still, getting a glimpse of the great feats of modern engineering would have blown the minds of people from even the most advanced past civilizations. It has been the harnessing of the fossil fuels we have found in the Earth’s crust—which are actually made from the geological condensing of decomposed bodies of previous plant and animal life—that has especially aided our modern constructional achievements. With metal machines powered by internal combustion engines using gasoline or diesel fuel, which we make out of the fossil fuel called crude oil, we have been able to lift immensely heavy materials to great heights. But it should be noted that in addition to our utilization of machine technology, our greatest construction accomplishments would not have been possible without the sharing of knowledge and the cooperation of many different types of people.

While all of human civilization prior to the 1800’s had only built a few structures over 150 meters (492 ft) in height, we have now built over a dozen buildings taller than 400 meters (1312 ft). Some of the buildings which have held the title of tallest building in the world at the time of their construction include: the Empire State Building in New York, USA at 381 meters (1,250 ft) in 1931; Willis Tower in Chicago, USA at 442 meters (1,451 ft) in 1973; the PETRONAS Twin Towers in Kaula Lumpur, Malaysia at 452 meters (1,483 ft) in 1998; the Taipei 101 in Taipei, Taiwan at 509 meters (1,670 ft) in 2004; and the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, UAE at a baffling 828 meters (2,717 ft) in 2010. Each of these
buildings have stood as testaments of the advances in architecture, building materials, engineering, and construction techniques in recent times—as one can notice with the heights increasing over the years. Of course, the height of our buildings is no longer really a true testament to advancement, but rather the efficiency of the structures. Moving into the future, the water and energy consumption of our buildings, as well as their waste management systems, will be more practical measures of the advancements of engineering as we continue to progress.

Besides our advances in building structures, we have also used engineering to undergo massive projects to adapt to the physical world—and, in some cases, to adapt parts of the physical world to us. Surely, one of the first constructional adaptations humans made to the environment, after building shelters, was the creation of man-made bridges. We have built countless bridges over springs, ravines, and rivers throughout the ages. But it took us a long time and a big leap to make the advancement to constructing bridges over things like major ocean harbors, as we have done more recent times. One of the most named bridges in the modern world is the Golden Gate Bridge, a suspension bridge in San Francisco, California completed in 1937, which stretches 1.28 kilometers (0.8 mi) over the waterway entrance to the San Francisco Bay.

Currently, however, there are many road bridges which have far greater spans. Some examples of impressive road bridges around the world include: the South Kanpur Bypass in India, which is 25 kilometers (15.5 mi); the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway in the USA state of Louisiana, at nearly 39 kilometers (24.2 mi); the Jiaozhou Bay Bridge in China, at 42.5 kilometers (26.4 mi); and the Bang Na Expressway in Thailand, at 54 kilometers (33.5 mi). But more impressive than the now commonplace roadway bridges, are the tremendously more efficient high-speed rail trains, which can travel safely at over 250 kilometers per hour (155 mph).

To state it plainly, we have also used our technological advancements to tunnel through mountains and underneath seas—achievements that would have been entirely unbelievable to people in ancient times. Many of our man-made tunnels today are tens of kilometers in length, having a variety of different purposes, from aqueducts to railway and passenger car transportation. One of the most famous undersea tunnels is the Channel Tunnel, which was dug under the British Channel and opened in 1994. Having a length of 50.5 kilometers (31.4 mi), the Channel Tunnel’s opposite ends connect the United Kingdom and France, which are otherwise separated by the Strait of Dover. (It is actually three tunnels, two housing huge railways which transport cars, buses, and other vehicles at very high speed; and one between them for service and emergency vehicles.) But the Channel Tunnel is not actually the world’s longest undersea tunnel. The Seikan Tunnel, which was dug under the Tsugaru Strait of Japan, houses a railway that is a total of 53.85 kilometers (33.46 mi) long. These tunnels make transportation much easier and faster than using ferries or boats to transport goods by water, and are evidence of the possibilities of modern engineering.

Perhaps the greatest example of our modifying the naturally existing environment to be more efficient is the Panama Canal. This 77 kilometer (48 mi) long canal was cut across Panama, in Central America (where a thin stretch of land connects the continents of North and South America) to form a passageway for ships between the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. A total of around 4,200
workers were involved in this great undertaking, and it took 10 years to complete, opening in 1914. Since its opening, this canal has provided a tremendous short-cut for ships, saving them the previous 13,000 kilometers (over 8,000 mi) trip around the southern tip of South America. The use of this canal makes much of the international shipment of goods immensely more efficient, and eases the burden of air shipment by planes and the much slower shipment of goods by land. The completion of the Panama Canal will probably forever be hailed as one of the greatest geotechnical construction projects ever completed on the planet.

Yet, probably the most impressive of all of humankind’s technological achievements has been sending things off the planet, into space. To date, we have put thousands of man-made satellites into stable orbit around the Earth. Though it has become commonplace to speak of satellites in the modern world, it is truly a wonder that we have the capability of such feats. These satellites are placed carefully into orbit by very precise calculations. The complexity of our satellite system has grown to where we have created three categories of distances of artificial satellite orbits, named Low Earth Orbit (LEO), Medium Earth Orbit (MEO), and High Earth Orbit (HEO). Satellites in the LEO category are up to 2,000 km above the Earth’s surface; MEO satellites are between 2,000 and 35,786 km out; and satellites further than that are considered to be in HEO. Today’s computerized satellites fulfill a great variety of tasks—from communications, to navigation, to environmental monitoring, and much more. The satellites that comprise the global positioning system (GPS), which has revolutionized navigation, operate in MEO around 20,350 km from the Earth’s surface.

Moreover, it is almost unfathomable to think that we have successfully had people living in space for years now. The International Space Station (ISS), which has been a combined project between the world’s five national space agencies, has been continually inhabited since November 2000—at 340 km (211.3 mi) above the Earth’s surface. But, to put all of this into perspective, the people in the ISS are only a small fraction of the 384,000 kilometer average distance to the Moon. Arguably, humankind’s greatest feat through the use of technology so far was our successful transportation of humans to the Moon and back, as was first accomplished by the Apollo 11 mission of the USA’s NASA in 1969 and then repeated by five more landings, with the last being in 1972. Our feat of landing people on the Moon is so remarkable that, though there are all types of confirmed evidence of the Moon landing including retrieved Moon rocks, there are still some people who refuse to believe it ever truly happened. Beyond this achievement to reaching our own planet’s Moon, we have also stretched our reach beyond the Earth’s gravitational field by sending numerous space probes to other planets and moons in our solar system, and even a few that will soon exit our solar system completely.

The wonder produced by these amazing projects inspires questions regarding how exactly we could have come so far to accomplish them. Contracting this line of thought to one’s own local personal surroundings, one could ask how the objects within their view around them have been produced. Ask yourself how the things you can see in your direct surroundings were made and how they got to where they are now. You might begin with this book you are reading. If it is a print copy, where was it printed and pressed? And how many people do you figure were involved with its transportation from there to you? If it is a digital copy, what kind of electronic device are you viewing it on? Who all was involved in
designing the technology to make that electronic device possible? And where did all of its components come from. And who put them together?

Now, especially if you are viewing this book on an electronic device, you can probably see many things around you which have components that have travelled to you from a wide range of different locations from around the globe. You might even be wearing clothes that have come from multiple continents. In our global age, it is likely that you have numerous things which originated on a different continent and were shipped there from overseas by several different means of transportation technologies. No doubt, it took a lot of factors, including detailed and compounding coordination between many different people, to produce all the things around you and to get them there.

While we’re being inquisitive into things, we might think to ask some much bigger questions. For instance, one could think on a far larger scale and wonder about the origin of the whole planet. How did the Earth come to exist in its path revolving around the Sun? And what was the Sun’s origin, for that matter? To follow this line of questioning as far back as possible, we might ask how the universe itself started out in the beginning—as was alluded to in the introduction of this book. Many people have asked these questions through the ages, and many people from many cultures have been given creation stories to answer them. But in this modern age, we have much more tangible explanations than those given by mythology. Over the past few hundred years, there has been major scientific collaboration and advancement in the study of the universe, or cosmology, and we have learned a vast amount about the universe that was previously unknown to us.

As already briefly touched on, modern scientists have even figured out that we can use the studies of cosmology in coordination with particle physics to help us analyze what must have occurred in the very first moments after this universe came into existence. A depiction of our current understanding of the processes which must have occurred to transition from the beginning of the universe to its current state is provided in the next chapter.
Chapter 2
The Universe
(What We’ve Come to Know of the Cosmos)

By means of everything we experience in life, we continually see the evidence of what has resulted from the ordained laws that govern the universe. But it wasn’t until relatively recently in our history that we uncovered what those most basic laws of the universe have been all along. Today, through analyzing the actions of matter and energy around us objectively through scientific study, we have come to find that all actions can be broken down to just a few basic laws that govern all of the physical processes that are carried out within the cosmos. In fact, all actions can be broken down into just five phenomena: inertia, gravity, electromagnetism, the nuclear force, and the weak interaction.

But long before we understood the laws of science, they were already working in everything around us—and also within us. Indeed, we came about through the workings of these very laws which we have now striven to understand. Beginning with simple observation, and eventually through the actual manipulation of components such as metals, our knowledge of science slowly grew. Eventually, we discovered chemistry and worked out formulas through mathematics to describe it. As we continued to reduce chemistry to simpler and simpler parts, we figured out that it is tiny molecules and atoms within substances that interact. The existence of atoms was something that had been hypothesized many centuries ago, but that we had yet proven until quite recently. With this information, we became able to define the instrumental parts of the processes of chemistry which we had been manipulating. For instance, we learned why exactly it is that certain materials burn at different temperatures and what makes different metals melt at different temperatures.

After many centuries of scientific study, we have simplified all of the physical laws of the universe down to the mentioned fundamental phenomena—inevita, gravity, the electromagnetic force, the strong nuclear force, and the weak nuclear force—and defined them in their simplest mathematical equations. Through the study of science, we have come to understand that the nature of the universe upholds these fundamental forces constantly. The laws of physics are always the same and apply to everything within the universe at all times. In fact, understanding this simple ultimate truth is the most fundamental part of developing a scientific viewpoint of why things happen as they do in the first place. And now, where we had previously had to depend on passed down stories explaining things such as how the Earth and the objects in the sky came to be, we can use science to explain the processes which really must have brought them about.

To get to what we know about the beginning of the universe, we must start out with the stars. This is fitting, considering we came from them (as will be explained shortly). It was from information we gathered from observing the stars that we were first able to gauge where everything must have begun.
For, it was from hints that we identified from starlight that we first found reason to believe that everything which is spread out in the universe today began together in one place. This information came in the form of slight shifting in the precise wavelength of light which comes to us from the stars. With the information we learned about light’s differing wavelengths, we have been able to find that light coming from a source which is moving towards the observer will have a slightly shortened wavelength, toward the blue side of the color spectrum of visible light. Oppositely, light observed from a source which is moving away from the observer will have a slightly lengthened wavelength, toward red side of the color spectrum of visible light.

Edwin Hubble was the first astronomer to use this information, which is called red-shifting or blue-shifting of light, in studying light from galaxies outside of our Milky Way. When observing the wavelengths of light from galaxies, Hubble found that light coming from basically every galaxy he observed was red-shifted, indicating that all of these galaxies were moving away from us. Furthermore, when he calculated the distances of the galaxies and compared the distance to the degree of red-shifting of its light, he found that the further away from us the galaxy was, the faster it appeared to be moving away from us. This was an interesting result, which at first thought would lead one to believe that all of the galaxies were moving away from the location of the Earth, as if we were at the center of the universe with everything moving away from us. But after further consideration we found that this effect must not be special to the Earth, but rather that most galaxies must be spreading apart from one another equally.

Since the passing of Edwin Hubble, we have continued to discover more and more galaxies. The Hubble Space Telescope has been very helpful with this, because it can gather light in space, without it having been diffracted by the air in our atmosphere, as occurs with ground-based telescopes. With our advanced telescopes, we have been able to see that the number of galaxies in the universe is at least in the hundreds of billions. Now, considering each of these galaxies hold hundreds of billions stars, along with the information that we have found many stars have planets, it is extremely likely that there is a lot of life in this universe besides just on Earth!

Through analyzing the observed trend, in which most galaxies are currently moving apart, it became obvious that the galaxies must have been closer together in the past. And if we were to reverse the current paths of the galaxies, as to go backwards in time, we would see all of the galaxies moving toward one another, getting closer and closer together as they moved further and further into the past, until they all eventually collided together. From this, we figured out that everything must have come out of one place in the past.

However, through evidence we have gathered since then, such as the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB)—which is a composite of the oldest light with the longest wavelengths coming to us from all directions in the sky—we have been able to tell that there were no galaxies or even stars near the beginning of the universe. When the radiation in the CMB was released in the early universe, there were only atoms of the simplest kind—hydrogen (H) and helium (He)—spread out diffusely. From that diffusely spread out gas, gravity slowly lumped that original H and He into clouds.
It was from these clouds that the first stars were born, after they underwent compression by gravity. As the clouds compressed under more and more pressure, the atoms in their cores started to undergo nuclear fusion, which ignited them to begin releasing the first starlight. We have also figured that the lumping of gas which formed the first stars actually went on within far greater conglomerations of gas which ended up segregating into the separate galaxies in which the first stars were born. These galaxies kept their stars within them through the binding of gravity, but the galaxies kept spreading apart until they were eventually separated by great voids of space in which there is an almost total absence of stars. And this is what we observe to the universe to be like today.

Through the development of particle physics, the learning of which has been greatly aided by the smashing together of atoms in particle colliders, we have been able to extrapolate even further back in time, to before the CMB radiation was released. Before that time, we have learned there could not have even been atoms, but only the smaller particles which compose them—positively charged protons, negatively charged electrons, and neutrons which have no electrical charge—and radiation (which includes all wavelengths of light, including those outside the visible spectrum). It is hypothesized by particle physicists that before the CMB was released, radiation could not travel freely through space like light does today. This was due to the universe being so dense at the time that the particles were so close together that any light would have been continually scattering from colliding with the particles.

It wasn't until the universe had spread out enough in its expansion for there to be enough room for atoms to form. (Atoms are formed through the electromagnetic force holding electrons around the nucleus of the atom, in which neutrons and protons are held together by the nuclear force.) At that time, light was first able to fly freely through space. Even stranger yet, prior to the formation of particles, there was no matter at all in the universe, but only radiation. The first particles were formed from the energy held by this radiation. (We have found that energy and matter are two forms of same thing, and that small amounts of matter hold huge amounts of energy, as described in Einstein's famous equation: $e = mc^2$.)

It is clear to us now that the universe has been expanding ever since its start. However, it is clear that it was originally expanding at a much faster rate than it is now. As was mentioned briefly in the introduction, this is now described by the Big Bang model, which describes how all of the material in the universe came out of one singular point. Since that time, the universe has been expanding. From the evidence we have, it appears that the event of the Big Bang must have occurred an extremely long time ago. The current estimate of the age of the universe agreed upon by most cosmologists at the time of the writing of this book is 13.7 billion years. However, time passed at a relatively slower rate towards its beginning. Interestingly, prior to space expanding out of the Big Bang singularity, time as we know it did not pass. Thus, as far as this universe is concerned, time started at the Big Bang.

Since all things were unified at the Big Bang singularity, we cannot tell anything about what existed before it. It is simply as far back in time as our science can take us. Thus, questions about what existed prior to the Big Bang, or why the laws of physics that govern the universe are set at what they are, generally come down to the question of whether the universe is cyclic, and the debate of whether or not there was something responsible for setting the universe into motion. In addition to this, some
theorists have come up with another proposition regarding these questions, proposing that our universe might possibly be part of a multiverse in which many universes exist concurrently.

These questions will always be debatable to living beings within the universe, because there can be no scientific evidence of anything prior to the Big Bang, or of anything responsible for the universe’s existence, or of any other universes outside of ours. Science is also fundamentally unequipped to say anything regarding whether there is any purpose for the cosmos. It is like coming to a window that simply cannot be seen through with science, but may only be perceived by the mind. Due to science’s inability to answer these questions, people often seek answers pertaining to them in spiritual sources. However, some things regarding the universe can be said without having to refer to any spiritual or religious sources.

First off, it is obvious that this universe is set-up in a fashion which allows for the conditions which make the emergence of life possible. In this universe, all of the factors involved—the forces (gravity, electromagnetism, the nuclear force, and the weak interaction) and the proportions of ingredients (space, time, matter, and energy)—are optimally balanced for stability, and provide ample time for the formulation and evolution of living things. If there were different forces of physics, or if they were out of proportion to the slightest degree, it would be far less likely that intelligent life could exist.

For instance, if the strength of gravity were stronger by a few factors, the universe would have contracted under its own gravity shortly after its beginning, leaving no time for life to form and evolve. Or, if the electromagnetic force were much weaker, atoms and molecules might never have formed. The same arguments can be made for the more complicated nuclear force and the weak interaction, which are equally important for maintaining the building blocks of life in our universe. For these reasons, it seems entirely clear that the particular arrangement of the forces and the elements in this universe was ordained by an all-knowing Creator prior to the outset of the universe altogether, with the goal of having a universe with a set of laws that were optimum for biological life to evolve. Therefore, the Creator—Whom we now call God, the Great Spirit, or other renditions thereof—created a system from which life could come about that might become intelligent enough to turn around and recognize that there must have been a Creator of the laws of physics which constitute the physical universe, as well as the metaphysical and the interactions between the two.

Furthermore, it makes the simplest logical sense that there is just one universe, since we have evidence for only one. However, it is very plausible that this one universe could be cyclic—retaining the same set of laws and ingredients, but having endless cycles of new universes. This has been theorized by some highly informed theoretical physicists, including Albert Einstein, though it has been disputed by others for various reasons. Contrary to the idea that there is only one universe, which is cyclic and was designed by God, however, some theorists have seemingly gone out of their way to make the multiverse proposal.

They have done this by imagining that there could be multiple, even infinite, universes in existence at the same time, and that all of these universes have randomly assigned laws. By proposing this, they have come up with an idea that seems to give a plausible explanation for how a universe with
the perfect laws of physics in the perfect balance for life might come about without a Designer. They propose that if there were infinite universes, random odds could generate one this perfectly balanced.

Using this multiverse theory, they propose that there are infinite universes with randomly assigned laws of physics and proportions of elements and that we just happen to be in one universe that luckily hit the right combination for the formation and evolution of life. In other words, they think we just happened to get lucky, and that out of infinite random combinations, our universe hit the magic combination that allows for the possibility of life and even enough time for the evolution of intelligent life. This view would seem to say that our existence is a fluke in the otherwise infinite number of chaotic universes with no life. This proposal, however, is highly over-inventive.

The degree of fine balancing required for the laws that have allowed life in this universe has practically zero probability by random chance, especially considering that any number of different forces could have randomly emerged. Even if random chance somehow landed on the same forces we have in this universe—which are required for a universe to have any resemblance to this one—it would still not produce conditions suitable for life if the strength of any one force were slightly out of proportion with the others, as already stated. This makes it extremely improbably for this universe to have come about by mere chance. To put this into terms that could be understood today, the odds of a universe so perfectly balanced for life as this to come about by random chance would be far more dismal than any lottery drawing that has ever been conceived by humans.

Thus, the idea that we are in one of infinite random universes seems to be an unnecessary stretch of imagination, especially since we have no real reason to believe that there are any universes besides this one. To reiterate, it seems to me that the proposal of multiverse theory hinges mostly on the strong desire that some individual theorists have for a theory which can, in any plausible way, eliminate the logical necessitation for a Designer to have purposefully chosen the specific laws and ingredients of our universe prior to setting the universe in motion. Lastly, this proposal does not really avoid the idea of a Designer anyhow, because such a multiverse could just as well have been created by a Designer with the intention of at least one or more universes allowing for life to form.

Moving back to into the discussion about what we do know of this universe, it can now be discussed how we all came from stars. It is quite interesting to note that the vast majority of the elements (that is, the types of atoms) that compose human beings today, and even most of the elements that compose the Earth, did not exist in the early phases of the universe. The first atoms were of only the most simple types: Hydrogen (H), Helium (He), and some Lithium (Li). By the laws of physics we have come to know, the rest of the elements—including Carbon (C), Oxygen (O), and the vast majority of elements in all living bodies—could only have been created through the nuclear fusion which occurs in the cores of stars. Most all of the more complicated elements that exist outside of stars today had to have been released after their formation within stars by supernovae, in which stars collapse and rebound in a massive explosion. So, it is true that we are all indeed composed primarily of stardust.

Further yet, we have discovered that basically everything in our solar system—the Sun, planets, moons, asteroids, meteors, and comets—came from the remains of a previous star, which must have
gone supernova at the end of its life and left behind a cloud of dust called a nebula. In fact, it is likely that the remains of several other stars also contributed to some of the components of the Sun’s pre-solar nebula. Around 99% of the exploded remains of the previous star were brought back to the center of the nebula by gravity, where they were re-compressed and reignited to create our Sun. It has been primarily in this fashion that stars have recycled to make new generation stars ever since the formation of the very first stars in the universe.

The planets form from the slight amount of remaining materials of the nebula formed from a previous star that do not re-aggregate into the new generation star. Generally, these components slowly come to form a disk around the new star at the center from which the planets form. The reason a disk is usually formed out of the more spherically shaped remains of a star is theorized to be due to the fact that most stars have their own axis of rotation. The planets accumulated out of this disk, called a proto-planetary disk, as the tiny bits of dust collided and stuck together, creating bigger and bigger clumps from smaller ones which crossed paths and collide, unifying into planetary bodies under their own gravity as they grew. Most of the moons formed in gravitational orbits around the planets through similar processes to how the planets form around the star.

Some evidence of such processes can be seen in our solar system today in the rings of Saturn—one of the four gaseous planets in our outer solar system (the other three being Jupiter, Neptune, and Uranus; with the rocky inner planets being Mercury, Venus, and Earth). Saturn’s rings probably originate from dust that never aggregated into a moon. Thus, when viewing Saturn’s rings today, we just may be viewing something giving resemblance to the Sun’s proto-planetary disk as it appeared over five billion years ago. Neptune also has rings around it, though they are not as easily visible. (Neptune’s rings are perhaps more intriguing, however, as they run perpendicular to the planetary plane, and indicate Neptune’s intriguingly unique axis of rotation.)

Likewise, there are left-over pieces from the proto-planetary disk that apparently never formed into a planet which make up the asteroid belt between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Asteroids sometimes collide together and send pieces out of stable orbit, as has been evidenced by the meteors that turn into what we call “shooting stars” when they happen to enter the Earth’s atmosphere and burn up spectacularly. When these pieces do not burn entirely before striking the Earth, they are called meteorites, many of which have been found by both common people and scientists.

There are also a few other odd bits and pieces left over from the early solar nebula which orbit the Sun at distances further than the planets. Many of these objects outside the orbit of Neptune are classified in what is called the Kuiper belt. This now includes the parts of Pluto (which used to be considered a planet by the scientific community, but is no longer) and other icy objects similar to comets. The icy comets, however, are believed to come from much further away than the Kuiper belt, in what is called the Oort cloud.

The Oort cloud is thought to be a roughly spherically shaped halo of icy comets roughly a thousand times more distant than the Kuiper belt objects, at the farthest reaches of the solar system. When these icy bodies happen to leave the Oort cloud and fly into the solar system toward the Sun, we
can observe them as comets having tails that always point away from the Sun, due to having pieces blown off of them by the solar wind, which is strong in the inner solar system but almost entirely diminished at the vast distance of the Oort cloud toward the edge of our solar system.

From the evidence we have, it appears that the Earth was mostly done forming around 4.5 billion years ago. The other planets were likely formed around roughly the same time. While the Earth was still very young, there appears to have been a delayed period of marked asteroid, meteor, and comet impacts. This has now been named the late heavy bombardment. This battery of the Earth and other inner planets, which occurred approximately 4.1 to 3.8 billion years ago, has been hypothesized to have occurred due to gravitational disturbances in the asteroid belt. We would see the many craters on the Earth from the late heavy bombardment, but factors such as the Earth’s atmosphere, oceans, tectonic activity, and erosion have covered up the impact sites from that early time in the history of the Earth. Considering that huge impact craters can be covered up by the sands of time, it is interesting to consider what else in the history of the Earth may have been covered up.

Interestingly, it has been proposed that it was through the impacts of icy meteors and comets of the late heavy bombardment that much of the Earth’s water may have been brought to it. The scientific reason for why the Earth was showered with icy objects, possibly from as far out as the Oort cloud, is yet uncertain. As the number of impacts subsided, the still partially molten crust of the Earth solidified, the oceans formed, and the atmosphere stabilized. The occurrences of these things have been absolutely crucial for the existence of life as we know it on this planet. Thus, these final steps in the Earth’s formation process set the stage for the genesis and evolution of biological life on this planet.

Archeological evidence shows that there was life on Earth starting quite early in its history. In fact, it seems there was life on this planet just as soon as it was in a state suitable to sustain it. But living organisms on the Earth had a long journey through many evolutionary changes before eventually resulting in us. Still, it seems that the developments of life on Earth came remarkably efficiently, considering the vast timeframe required for biological evolution. The major milestones that we have evidence for regarding the story of the evolution of life on Earth are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Life

(The Evolution of Living Things on Earth)

Luckily for us, the materials deposited in the Earth during its formation included everything required to compose living organisms. But, besides its composition, the Earth also has many other attributes which make it conducive to life. The Earth is nicely situated at a suitable distance from the Sun, proportional to the amount of radiation it releases, in its *habitable zone*—the range of distance from a star where liquid water can remain stable on an orbiting planet’s surface. If the Earth were too much closer to the Sun all of the water would be boiled, and if it were too far away all of the water would freeze. Along with this, the Earth’s rotational axis is at a fair angle to the Sun, so that as it rotates almost all of it can be warmed. It is also important that the planets spins at a rate fast enough to keep it evenly warmed. If it were to rotate much slower, life on Earth would be harder because there would be greater variance in temperature, with days getting hotter and nights getting colder.

Another crucial part of keeping the temperature on the surface of the Earth regulated is the tectonic plate system. The tectonic plates that make up the Earth’s crust are composed of the lightest material components of the Earth, which floated to the surface during the Earth’s formation. When this outer layer cooled and solidified, it formed a type of protective barrier over the Earth’s extremely hot interior—allowing for a surface temperature which is suitable for life. But the hot liquid interior of the Earth also has its beneficial qualities.

The innermost layers of the Earth are responsible for making the Earth’s magnetic field, which is created by the movements of liquid molten metals in the Earth’s outer core around it’s pressurized solid liquid-crystal inner core. The Earth’s magnetic field is surprisingly crucial for the survival of life on the surface, because if not for the protection provided by the planet’s magnetic field, many types of space radiation that are damaging to proteins—which are the most basic component of all living things—would freely pummel the Earth’s surface. Furthermore, if not for the Earth’s magnetic field blocking much of the radiation that is produced by the Sun, the planet’s atmosphere could be stripped from it almost entirely and there would be little to no air to breathe.

The size of the Earth is also helpful for retaining the planet’s atmosphere, because of the gravitational field that it creates. If the planet were too small, there would not be enough gravity to keep the air from floating away. And if the planet were too large, its gravity might have a crushing strength that could make life on the surface harder to survive. The gravity from the Moon in its orbit is also conducive to life, as it creates tides and cycles by which life can gauge life sequences such as migrations. On the larger scale, it is also important to note that our solar system is located in a stable place within the galaxy. Planets around stars located in more heavily active parts of a galaxy, such as
near to its center where there is a supermassive black hole, would probably experience too much turbulence and radiation for life to survive there, even with all these other factors present.

If the Earth did not have its magnetic field to protect the atmosphere, or if there were more turbulent radiation bombarding through it to whisk it away, the surface environment would not be conducive to holding liquid water, which is the main requirement for life as we know it. Water is abundant on Earth, so much so that we have nicknamed it the “Water Planet”. Pictures of the Earth from outer space quickly reveal that this is a fitting name, as it appears to be mostly blue, due to the prevalence of the oceans, which cover some 70% of the Earth’s surface. We have to be thankful for the presence of water here, as it is used in our bodies as their single greatest component.

The significance of water for life is represented by the evidence that the earliest life on Earth has been found in rocks that had then existed under shallow oceanic waters. This evidence indicates that there was bacterial life in the shallow waters of Earth’s oceans as early as 3.5 billion years ago—around a billion years after the Earth formed. Our evidence of this first life comes in the form of structures called stromatolites, which are believed to have been deposited by colonies of bacteria. There are also contenders for the oldest evidence of life on Earth in microfossils that are believed to have been sulfur-using bacteria from around the same time. But just because we haven’t found any older evidence does not mean that life couldn’t have existed before then.

It has been suggested that the Earth’s first life may have actually started out at the bottoms of the oceans at hydrothermal vents. Vents similar to the ones which exist now along the mid-oceanic ridge under the Atlantic Ocean, where tectonic plates spread apart, could have been present many places in the oceans of the young Earth. Marine biologists have recently found there to be thriving ecosystems living at these vents, ecosystems that are based upon simple microscopic organisms that live off nothing other than heat from the vents and chemical compounds in the water. Good reasons to believe that the first life on Earth might have begun at the bottom of the ocean include that life could have lived there before conditions had stabilized on the surface. Where life would probably not have survived near the surface until after the completion of the late heavy bombardment due to the impacts, life on the bottom of the ocean would have been protected beginning in much earlier times.

It is possible that life could have begun at deep sea vents or at sea shores from previously non-living materials. It is also possible that the first life on Earth came from previous life elsewhere in the universe. But, either way, the first life in the universe would have had to have come from non-living materials, having no previous life to build from. Thus, the first living things would have had to form from very basic pre-existing materials. The most basic of such components would have been amino acids, which have been referred to as the “building blocks of life” due to their presence in the proteins of all living things. It is theorized that if amino acids combined into proteins and came into contact with nucleic acid molecules—which make up RNA (ribonucleic acid) and DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)—in the right sequence, they could form a means of genetic replication.

If such genetic material and the right proteins were to be present around a form of metabolism to produce energy (such as photosynthesis or chemosynthesis) they could have been packaged together
within with some form of membrane, all of the most basic components for a living cell would be attained. This is one way that life could theoretically be formed out of originally inanimate matter. Such a process in which biological life arises from non-living materials is called abiogenesis. Again, because there were only non-living materials present at the start of the universe, we know that abiogenesis had to have happened at some point for there to be living things in the universe today. It is most probable that abiogenesis has happened many places in the universe.

While the odds of abiogenesis happening are very low, if all of the proper materials are present in a place where conducive conditions exist for a long amount of time, it becomes much more plausible to eventually occur. It could take hundreds of millions of years for the correct molecules to end up in the right arrangement and to be encased in some kind of cell membrane along with a means of metabolism, but once it occurred, it would be off to the races. Once living cells begin arranging their own organic molecules and reproducing themselves, more and more organic molecules are brought into existence—making further genesis events far easier to occur. Consider the fact that the water coming out of thermal sea vents rises up into the colder waters and is eventually distributed throughout the oceans. So, if the first living cells arranged themselves at sea vents, it is certain that some of these organisms would end up being washed up and away from the vents. Then, if the remains of these organisms ended up accumulating at the shorelines on the ocean’s surface, it would make genesis of life there much easier, having already pre-made ingredients.

The truth is, it doesn’t make much difference exactly the first life came about. In one place or another, it happened. All it took was the right combination of ingredients to come together under suitable conditions. Once a mode of metabolizing energy was housed inside a cell membrane along with a strip of genetic material composing directions for replication and the proper proteins to carry out that replication, energy derived from the environment could be used for a living cell to grow and reproduce itself. From that point forward, every time the living organism reproduced itself, its genetic material would begin to change, bit by bit, due to imperfections in the genetic replication process. From the alterations in the genetic code, there would become slight changes in the life produced from it. These changes from the original organism would end up creating new organisms which might go about their life processes in subtly different ways. This would eventually result in organisms which were better able to utilize available resources or better able to reproduce. Then, such an increase in productivity would help the new organisms survive better and continue on those genetic differences. In this way, more advanced life is bound to emerge over time.

The process by which new species emerge over time through small changes in previous ones has been called evolution. As was already mentioned, we have uncovered many extremely old fossilized remains of life on Earth. By using scientific methods to determine the time that the fossils were formed, we can date the time in which those organisms lived. Then, by organizing the fossils by the time in which they were formed, we can see the order in which they lived. What we have ended up with from organizing the fossils we have found by time the time in which they were formed is called the fossil record. By studying the fossil record, we can see how the living things on Earth changed over time, and thus study evolution.
The fossil evidence we have found on the Earth indicates this process of evolution did, in fact, occur here over time. After life had existed on Earth in the simplest form for at least 1.5 billion years, the first major milestone in the advancements of life occurred: the single-celled organisms began to show separate structures within them, called *organelles*. Whereas the previous cells only had their contents loosely packaged in a single mixed fluid, the more advanced life that emerged began to have their genetic material packaged in a nuclear envelope, instead of having the genetic material floating around in the mix with the rest of the cell’s parts. This made the reproduction of the new organisms more organized, but they were still unicellular.

The first evidence we have found of multi-cellular organisms shows up in the record after another few hundred million years. It is clearly plausible that slight changes led to single-celled organisms growing more cells instead of replicating altogether. Another theory is that multi-cellular organisms came from a process in which colonies of separate organisms carrying out specialized duties vital to the survival of the group incurred genetic material from one another and developed specialized cells. But it was not until just over a billion years ago that lasting fossils were formed of life-forms that reproduced through sexual reproduction. This type of reproduction—in which offspring are created through the combination of 50% of genetic material from each of two parent organisms of different sex within the same species—increased the rate of genetic change significantly. Following this change, life would begin to diversify and evolved at a much faster rate.

While evolution has now been accepted by scientists as a basic fact of nature, it was first proposed as a theory. (It is still called a theory because of how hard it would be to directly prove within the lifetime of one individual. Because natural evolution happens extremely slowly over time—taking many generations for small changes to occur and even longer for new species to develop—it is basically impossible for anyone to physically watch it happen to directly prove it.) More specifically, the theory of evolution by natural selection—which was revolutionarily established by Charles Darwin in 1859 in his book, *On the Origin of Species*—proposes basically that species change slowly over time, with new species originating from previous species through advantageous specialization to fill niches in nature.

Despite how obvious evolution is to us now that we have accumulated vast amounts of evidence for it in the fossil record and through genetic science, it was highly questioned when Darwin first proposed it. At that time, most people believed that the current types of living things on Earth had existed basically since the creation of the Earth, which was popularly believed then to have been only roughly six thousand years old. This was because before we began to uncover and study evidence of past life scientifically, people had only inherited stories telling of where the life on Earth started out in the past. Because the explanation for species by evolution was contrary to the popularly upheld belief at that time, people did not readily accept it.

Thus, the theory of evolution was not well received at first. In fact, the proposal bothered many people at the time. The notion was not particularly fancied by people who had already taken up conflicting explanations for the origin of different life-forms through the interpretations of certain religious teachings. For people who had previously been taught that God created life in its current form, rather than being taught that God created life through evolution over time, the proposal of evolution
was received as an insult to their religion. So, the true science of the theory of evolution was received defensively due to the fact that it challenged the particular rendition of what had been taught and agreed upon previously among peers.

Because of the powerful tendency to agree with one’s social group, as well as the tendency of the ego to protect past beliefs, many have continued to hold to what those of their social group taught them rather than thinking critically for themselves in light of scientific evidence. In this way, the denial of evolution has since become emblematic for a despairing fissure between religion and science. However, this apparent fissure between science and religion is superficial and is entirely unnecessary. This misunderstanding, which many continue to struggle with, will hopefully be cleared up through the explanation given by this book.

To contrast a religious creation story from the theory of evolution, an example can be made of the story of how the different species were created from Zoroastrianism, a religion that was founded on the teachings of a man called Zarathustra, or Zoroaster. Though Zoroastrianism is a minority religion today, it was once one of the most predominant religions of humankind. According to some renditions of the Zoroastrianism creation story, all of the creatures on Earth were created by two great beings: Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. Ahura Mazda, being the benevolent being responsible for creation, created all the “good” creatures and humans; and Angra Mainyu, being the creator of evil, created all of the “noxious” creatures, such as snakes and flies.

Of course, this version of the creation of the different species does not exactly add up. Firstly, we see a progression in the fossil record, in which more advanced species developed from life that existed prior to it slowly over millions of years, with different species evolving in a progression of one after another in stages, rather than appearing fully formed as though created from nothing. Secondly, all of the different species evolved simply to fill niches, with none being inherently good or bad. But at the time when Zoroastrianism was a large religion, this evidence was not known. And one could guess that the suggestion of evolution would have been disputed by the Zoroastrians, because it did not agree with their religion’s account for how the different species came into being. Indeed, the idea of evolution was reacted to in just such a way by many Christians in Europe when it was introduced, and for the very same reasons—despite the evidence that had been found by then to support it.

But since those times, as has been noted, evolution has been accepted by most biological scientists and the scientific community in general. And now that we have discovered the genetic components of RNA and DNA, we now understand the primary ingredients by which evolution occurs. We have discovered that every living organism on Earth has a genetic makeup stored in either RNA or DNA, and that all of the primary characteristics of a species are determined by shared genetics, but small variations in genes between all of the individuals within a species make each individual genetically unique.

Difference in genes can make individuals of a species more likely to survive, or less likely to survive, depending on what the differences are. Through the course of nature over time, the genes that make individuals less likely to survive diminish and the genes that make individuals more likely to survive
carry on, and the genes within a population of a species therefore changes over time. Differentiation in species can occur especially when populations of one species are separated from one another, and over time different species can develop out of one previous species through this process. Increased variance in the genes of an individual can also occur through genetic mutation, in which an alteration in the genes of an offspring occurs which was not inherited from the parents. Because of their random nature, major genetic mutations usually result in a decreased chance of survival; but sometimes they can be advantageous and lead to new species. It has been found that species change more rapidly, and hence more new species develop, when there are major changes in the environment. This trend shows itself clearly in the fossil record with regard to mass extinctions and the major evolutionary changes that followed them.

Some differential evidence for evolution can be found in other types of geological evidence stored in the sedimentary layers of the Earth’s crust. For instance, molecular components in ancient rocks can indicate that the composition of the Earth’s atmosphere has changed over time. This type of geological evidence shows that the Earth’s early atmosphere had almost no free oxygen (O\(_2\)) in it. This means that the first microbes would have had to be anaerobic (having metabolisms that do not require O\(_2\)). This corresponds with our fossil evidence, as remains from an ancient type of phototrophic bacteria called cyanobacteria used carbon (C) atoms from the carbon dioxide (CO\(_2\)) in the air to harness the energy of sunlight. In the process of photosynthesis, freed-up O\(_2\) is released into the air. According to the dated geological evidence, it appears that significant amounts of O\(_2\) became present in the atmosphere by at least two billion years ago. Thus, differential evidence indicates that ancient photosynthetic bacteria produced the O\(_2\) in the atmosphere over the course of millions of years.

This information is both interesting and humbling, because it means not only that we humans could not have lived with the Earth’s original atmospheric composition, but also that we advanced life-forms have to thank meager bacteria for altering the planet’s original atmosphere to first make available the most crucial component which we need to inhale to survive today. Ironically, O\(_2\) was probably poisonous to the early anaerobes that had first proliferated on Earth, because they originally evolved in an oxygen-free environment. Thus, it is plausible that the oxygenation of the atmosphere could have actually resulted in the deaths of huge populations of anaerobes, with many species totally dying out and becoming extinct. Of course, the aerobic species would have then proliferated.

Though we do have evidence for some details about the earliest life on Earth, including such clues about their characteristics as have been discussed, there is not a super-detailed fossil record to be found today of all the earliest changes of biological life’s evolution. This is mostly due to the fact that all of the early organisms were miniscule and had only soft parts which were quickly decomposed, therefore leaving extremely few direct fossilized specimens behind to be found. Additionally, the majority of the fossils that did form are very likely to have been destroyed by the great amounts of tectonic activity and erosion that has occurred since then. Because of this, much of what we know about the evolution of the earliest life on Earth has been gathered from secondary evidence, such as the structures which they left behind and their effects on the environment.
The fossil history becomes much more detailed over the past half a billion years or so, after more multicellular organisms evolved which grew to larger sizes and started leaving more fossilized evidence. Some of the most interesting fossilized remains of multi-cellular organisms on Earth come from what was the seafloor around 550 million years ago. From this time, we begin to see specimens of small creatures emerging which appear coral-like, worm-like, jellyfish-like, and mollusk-like. These are some of the first results of evolution's more complicated branching out from the simpler original life forms. And this is just the start of great variation in life on Earth. Much more variation soon followed during what has been named the Cambrian explosion of life—named after the Cambrian Period, which began 542 million years ago. (In the geological timescale, which scientists developed to identify the chronological history of the Earth, time is divided into sections such as periods.)

The beginning of the Cambrian Period is significant because it marks where early life really began to evolve at a great rate into creatures of many diverse forms. One set of fossils from the middle of the Cambrian Period, called the Burgess Shale, is a great example of this. The Burgess Shale field holds tens of thousands of magnificently preserved fossils of creatures that lived on the seafloor right around 505 million years ago. Interestingly, the fossils in the Burgess shale were found in the Canadian Rocky Mountains—showing the vast geological changes which have happened on Earth since that time. In fact, a person familiar with only today’s globe would not even be able to identify the continents and oceans as they existed on the Earth half a billion years ago.

The Cambrian creatures represented in fossil beds such as the Burgess Shale include the first crustaceans, sponges, and insect-like arthropods called trilobites. We also see the first evidence of predatory animals, which hunt and eat other living animals, appearing during the Cambrian Period. Perhaps most intriguingly, we find the first evidence of a species with a bony-like covering for its spinal cord living at this time in a fossil of a species that has been named Pikaia. This Pikaia, a small worm-like swimmer in the ocean, is the oldest known evidence of what could be the common ancestor of all species that would develop spines (that is, all vertebrates) on Earth. It is thought that Pikaia is the first of the lineage that would eventually evolve into fishes, then into amphibians, then into reptiles, and then into birds and mammals. What this means is that the fragile little Pikaia, which would have been easily preyed on by the invertebrate predators of the time, may have been our humble little ancestors. Nonetheless, because even the Pikaia evolved from earlier simpler life, we also share ancestry in the most ancient tree of life with invertebrate species.

But while the fossil record shows us examples of life’s variety and abundance, it also spells out the classic tale of tragedy and survival through extinctions. As most everyone finds out at some point in life, things tend to come in booms and busts. During the steady times when the climate is stable, life flourishes, but when major changes in the environment occur abruptly, many species cannot survive in the changed conditions and massive populations of species die out completely. When such a devastating change occurs, it is called an extinction event, and there have been many of them throughout the history of life on Earth. The only part of mass extinctions that can be viewed as beneficial is that the species that are able to survive in the changed conditions end up proliferating greatly, essentially filling in the extra room and open roles left by the species that died off.
The effects that mass extinctions had on ancient life remain important to life today because they triggered changes that led into the success of the species that currently live on the planet. As human beings are included in this, our success has been dependent on the sequential occurrences of the mass extinctions. Still, while we must be thankful that the extinction events of the past happened in the course that they did, we wouldn’t exactly have wanted to cheer them on. If any one of the mass extinctions were too big, it could have killed off all of the advanced life on Earth, perhaps leaving only bacteria alive and setting the evolution of life on the planet back a few billion years. Luckily, that did not happen, and instead the order and degree of severity of the mass extinctions eventually resulted in our magnificent development as intelligent life. Thus, in a certain view, the mass extinction events played out with beautiful spacing and intensity, creating a constructive sequence which could be compared to an elegant musical overture after the fact—though they were obviously devastating to the life on Earth at the time they happened.

One of the first mass extinctions we have solid evidence of occurred towards the end of the Ordovician Period, which ended about 435 million years ago—just after the time it has been estimated that the first life moved onto land through a process in which seedless land plants evolved from green algae. While the direct cause of the Ordovician extinctions is unknown, it has been linked to significant climate changes which happened in at least two marked phases. It appears the first phase coincided with global cooling and the second phase of this early mass extinction came with a period of global warming, during which polar ice melted and sea levels rose drastically. Due to life being less versatile at this time, the changes led to major die-offs of species. Some estimates of the Ordovician extinctions mark the death toll of this event to have killed up to half of all life on Earth at that time. The positive side of this is that it left extra room for the development of vertebrates at that time, giving them a crucial opportunity for advancement during an age which was otherwise dominated by invertebrates.

The next major mass extinctions came toward the later part of the Devonian Period, after life had roughly 65 million years to recuperate from the Ordovician extinctions. This time, there was not a single marked extinction event, but rather a long period of time lasting at least several million years over which many extinctions occurred. There was especially severe damage to the reef-building corals that had emerged by this time. It is uncertain what may have caused the late-Devonian extinctions, but evidence shows that it struck in many pulses, over a stretch of up to 20 million years. Because this extinction was not abrupt, it is most probable that it was caused by a gradual type of change, perhaps ecological in nature, meaning they were caused by effects that living organisms had on the environment. The best-evidenced hypotheses involve processes which caused a depletion of oxygen in the oceans, causing massive kills which interrupted various parts of the food chain throughout the duration of this prolonged extinction.

Amphibians, which had first emerged in the fossil record during the Devonian, became more prevalent after the late Devonian extinction. The first amphibians must have evolved from fish in a slow and complex process in which they developed lungs in addition to the gills which were their primary means of absorbing oxygen while in the water, probably originally through mutation. The ability of the first amphibians to breathe in oxygen from the air would surely have been beneficial to these early amphibians if the oxygen supplies in the ocean water became scarce for some time. In that case, this is
one prime example where changes in the environment spurred along evolution through natural selection. This is especially important to us, as amphibians played a crucial role in the transition of life from the oceans onto land. During the time after the late-Devonian extinction, more types of amphibians evolved which spent more and more of their lives on land. However, amphibians were always tied to aqueous environments, as they continued to have to return to water to lay their eggs.

At some point in time, around 300 million years ago, there was a critical change in genetics for some lucky amphibians. This change made their eggs able to be laid and hatched on dry land. Surely, there were transitionary species of amphibian whose eggs were able to handle partial dryness; and eventually a species emerged which intentionally laid its eggs on dry land, making for the brink of the first species of reptiles. It was hugely advantageous for the first reptiles to be able to lay their eggs on dry land, because there would have been far fewer predators on land to eat them at that time. The oldest known fossils of reptiles are of lizards which grew to just about a foot long, whose fossils have been found in hollowed stumps of the large trees of the forests which had developed on land and become prolific by the middle Devonian.

Then, around 250 million years ago, at the end of the Permian Period, another extinction event occurred and caused devastation the likes of which was unprecedented. This time, the extinctions happened extremely quickly. It is believed that up to 95% of the species in the oceans and 70% of land-dwelling animals were obliterated by this extinction event. This extinction event even involved mass extinctions of insects, which had first developed in the oceans, and then took to land over 400 million years ago. There is reason to believe that it was the impact of an asteroid or massive meteor that caused this most severe of all extinctions. Evidence for this includes the presence of a specific type of carbon molecules—called fullerences, which are known to result from meteors—in sedimentary rocks coinciding with the time of this mass extinction.

We know for sure there was a huge amount of volcanic activity at this time involved with shifts in plate tectonics, which could have been sparked by a major impact. The extreme volcanic eruptions put vast amounts of dust and noxious gases into the atmosphere and blocked out much of the sunlight plants require to survive. A die-off of the plants then caused deaths by starvation on up the food chain. Such darkening of the sky would have been worsened if a meteor impact were involved. Even if the impact landed in the ocean, the vaporized water would contribute to blocking out great amounts of sunlight. Lastly, once the sky did eventually clear, the massive amounts of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by the volcanoes probably caused rampant global warming that would continue extinction-causing conditions over the species which had survived the earlier events.

The end-Permian extinction has been used as a natural divider to mark the beginning of the next era in the geological timescale, the Mesozoic Era (which includes the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods). Not only would there be great changes in life in this new era, but the face of the Earth itself would also change drastically. This is due to major changes that were to occur on the Earth’s surface via plate tectonics. At the start of the Mesozoic Era, there was one huge continent (termed Pangaea) and one ocean (termed Panthalassa) which covered the rest of the Earth. But the supercontinent of Pangaea began to break up during the Mesozoic Era. Evidence of the tectonic changes that would eventually
result from the breakup of this supercontinent is easily identifiable today on world maps and globes in the puzzle-like fit some continents show to one another. This is especially obvious with shapes of the sides of South America and Africa that face one another.

At some point, rifts were formed in the previously solid piece of land and the continents that formed began spreading apart. Today, the rift that split North and South America from Africa and Eurasia is still slowly spreading in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, causing it to continue to grow larger while slowly forcing the Pacific Ocean to shrink over time in the process. Many earthquakes have occurred from sudden releases of the dynamic pressures that all the tectonic plates place on one another. Thus, the continued periodic occurrence of earthquakes, in addition to the ever-standing examples of mountains, serve as reminders of the incredible geological power of plate tectonics.

Many things changed as life on Earth recovered after the end-Permian extinction killed off the vast majority of species of life on the planet. While the catastrophe left behind a vastly reduced number of strains of life to re-populate, there was at least plenty of opportunity for their development. This meant that many new species would come out of the lineages of the survivors, though it would take millions of years for the recovery to take off and tens of millions of years before it would flourish as it had previously. Of course, natural selection played its ever-present role in evolution, leading to the old niches being re-filled by new species. Reptiles would come to fill many roles on land, and also dominate the oceans as massive predators during the Mesozoic. This began the era of the dinosaurs. Though the dinosaurs came in many shapes and sizes, with some of them being rather small, they have become known for the enormous size that many of them attained.

The largest of the dinosaurs were actually plant eating herbivores such as *Brontosaurus* and the enormous *Supersaurus*, which grew to over 36 metric tons (36,000 kilograms or nearly 80,000 pounds) and 33 meters (108 ft) long. Probably the most well-known dinosaur species has been the carnivorous *Tyrannosaurus rex*, which grew up to 4 meters (13 ft) tall, at the hip. Another well-known predatory dinosaur species is the *Velociraptor*, which is thought to have had the intelligence to hunt in packs. More interesting and well-known dinosaur species include: *Stegosaurus*, which had massive plates on its back that served as armor; *Triceratops*, a type of horned dinosaur that had three horns protruding from its face; and *Parasaurolophus cyrtocristatus*, which had a type of nasal passage capable of producing loud trumpeting sounds. There were also flying dinosaurs, which evolved from dinosaurs which had first developed the ability of gliding. One of the most amazing flying dinosaurs was the *Quetzalcoatlus*, which had a most impressive wingspan of 12 meters (40 ft).

While many of the animals of the Mesozoic were new renditions of pre-existing forms of life, there were also major advances in entirely new types of life. A more advanced type of land plant called angiosperms—which include all species of plants that have both flowers and seeds—emerged during the Mesozoic. These angiosperms would later come to be the dominant type of plant life on Earth. Another major feat of evolution that occurred during this time was that birds evolved from reptiles. This means that birds today can interestingly be considered living descendants from the dinosaurs.
But the most significant advancement from this time was the evolution of the first mammals from small, mammal-like reptiles. While both birds and mammals are markedly different from reptiles, amphibians, and fishes in that they are warm-blooded (having the ability to regulate their own internal body temperature rather than it being determined by the environment), only mammals carry their offspring inside them until birth instead of laying eggs. The earliest known fossil of a mammal in the fossil record was a small, rodent-like tree climber that has been named *Eomaia*, which is Greek for “dawn mother”. The development of carrying offspring until giving live birth seems to have led to a stronger attachment between parents and offspring among mammals than among other species. The warm-blooded characteristics of mammals and birds would be very advantageous in the millennia to come after the major catastrophe that occurred at the end of the Mesozoic Era.

The mass extinction at the end of the Mesozoic Era, commonly referred to as the K-T Extinction, happened just around 65.5 million years ago and is known to have wiped out the dinosaurs. The majorly accepted theory for the cause of this extinction is that it was caused by the impact of a large meteor, asteroid, or comet. The evidence for the K-T Extinction being caused by a major impact involves the appearance of the element iridium—which is rare on the surface of the Earth, but common in many meteorites—in the geological record in many geological sites around the world from the same time period that the extinctions occurred. The theory is that this iridium was blasted into the atmosphere along with large amounts of dust and ash and distributed around the globe before settling down into sediments and being buried in the Earth’s crust. There have also been finds of shocked quartz, which can be produced by the pressure of major impacts, in many places from around this time. And, in the case of the K-T Extinction, a prime candidate of an impact crater has been found.

Just off the northern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, there is a buried crater that has been dated to the approximate time of the K-T Extinction. The crater is called the Chicxulub structure and it is an average of 180 kilometers (112 mi) wide, which is large enough to account for this most recent mass extinction. The crater is elliptical in shape, showing that the impact occurred at an angle, and the impact would have hit in the ocean there at that time. This means that there would have been a great amount of water vapor produced, which would have contributed to a darkened sky, and also would have caused super-tsunamis, which there is significant evidence for from around that time. The impact likely also played a role in setting off increased volcanic activity at that time, which would have meant for further devastation and contribution to major temperature changes.

With the end of the Mesozoic Era, the time of the dinosaurs was brought to an abrupt end, and the current Cenozoic Era was born. During the Cenozoic, mammals have come to be the dominant species. After surviving the temperature changes the Earth went through, thanks to their warm-bloodedness, they slowly filled in the opened niches that had been occupied by large land reptiles during the previous era. It is very fortunate that warm-blooded mammals and birds had evolved by the end of the Mesozoic, because their ancestors would be extremely vital in the survival of life in the millennia to come when temperatures raised and then dipped during the Cenozoic.

Had there not been mammals and birds by the time of the Cenozoic cooling, basically no animals would have been able to survive the below freezing temperatures that began to frequently occur in
large parts of the world. Some mammals even moved into the oceans and filled the predatory niches left open from extinctions there. Where there were previously huge reptilian predators in the warm oceans around the globe prior to the, there are now carnivorous whales with the ability to swim into the frigid waters near the poles to hunt. Obviously, the warm-bloodedness of mammals and birds was a naturally selected advantage after the steadily warm Mesozoic ended and the temperature changes of the Cenozoic began.

For some time at the beginning of the Cenozoic, temperatures rose from the Mesozoic level. After a period of steady temperature increase, temperatures suddenly rose sharply, reaching a maximal peak around 55 million years ago. Geologists call the high temperatures of that time a hyperthermal state. The abrupt increase in global temperatures is thought to have been caused by a scenario in which slow and steady temperature increase went on until a crucial temperature was reached, triggering a major release of greenhouse-gases such as methane into the atmosphere and causing runaway global warming. (This is the scenario that some climate scientists have proposed could happen in the future if global temperatures continue to rise at the present rate, though the Earth is currently a long way from a hyperthermal state.) The drastically rising temperatures of that time were also accompanied by increased extinctions, though it has not been classified as a major mass extinction.

A major factor in the changes that caused the Earth to cool later during the Cenozoic was changes in the arrangements of the tectonic plates, which caused major changes in the oceanic currents. When Antarctica broke away from South America and moved over the South Pole, it caused a change in oceanic currents which brought cold water that usually remained at the bottom of the Antarctic Ocean to the surface. Further cooling occurred when North America and South America merged together from their previous separation, stopping circulation between them of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. As temperatures dropped, ice caps began to gather at the Earth’s poles, where there are decreased amounts of direct sunlight.

This marked the beginning of the Pleistocene Ice Age, which began around 2.5 million years ago and has been characterized by many glacial cycles. Glacial cycles include the advancement and retreat of glacial covering on the poles marked by cooling phases, called glaciations, and warming phases between them, called inter-glaciations. These glacial cycles led to the evolution of the specialized mammals that currently live in the polar regions, such as the arctic foxes, polar bears, and several species of the flightless, swimming birds called penguins.

While the Cenozoic has been dominated by mammals, they have not been immune to extinction during this era. In fact, many mammals have come and gone during the Cenozoic. Some of the most remarkable larger mammals that have evolved and become extinct include: giant ground sloths, which weighed up to eight tons (16,000 pounds); large hornless rhinoceroses, which grew up to 5 meters (16 ft) tall; and giant deer that had antlers which grew to span around 3.65 meters (12 ft) from tip to tip. Saber-toothed cats, which had two huge teeth that hung out of their mouths up to 50 cm (19.7 in), successfully lived in numerous different species, but all have gone extinct. One of the most well-known recently extinct large mammals were the woolly mammoths. These large, hair-covered types of elephant were probably one of the preys of the saber-toothed cats. The woolly mammoths died out just around
10,000 years ago, and their extinction is one of many since then in which overhunting by humans is known to have been a factor.

Increasing temperatures since the last glacial may also have been a factor in the demise of the woolly mammoths. The glaciations have also impacted human evolution, especially involving *Homo neanderthalensis* (more commonly called Neanderthals), a species similar to *Homo sapiens* but built thicker and thus having an increased ability to withstand colder temperatures. Neanderthals lived in the region that is now Europe during the more recent times of the Pleistocene Ice Age, but went extinct after the most recent major glaciation.

The last major glaciation of the Pleistocene Ice Age peaked around 18,000 years ago, and since then the Earth has been going through a warming phase. Models have predicted that this interglacial would naturally continue for the next 50,000 years, but the next glaciation will probably be greatly delayed due to recent increases in greenhouse-gases in the atmosphere from our burning of fossil fuels. In addition to being prolonged, this warming phase will also likely be much hotter than the previous ones. The change in global weather conditions due to global warming has been titled *climate change*. Though there has been a great deal of public worry about climate change, it must be taken into consideration that the Earth has gone through many temperature changes, and the Earth currently would be in a warming trend regardless of human activity. The causes of warming are complicated and involve many factors, including solar activity, in addition to atmospheric composition.

While some people in higher latitudes that receive cold winters might welcome warmer temperatures, it is not something that would be invited by the vast majority of people in the world, because rising average global temperatures are believed to have detrimental effects including increased incidence and severity of extreme weather conditions. Rising temperatures are especially harmful in areas which are prone to droughts; and with many areas already dealing with dwindling water supplies, this will surely be a great area of concern for future inhabitants of this planet. Global warming is also a concern to some because of its effect of rising sea levels. But again, sea levels would be rising in this interglacial period regardless of human activity, so those with electricity and vehicles powered by fossil fuels are not to blame for it.

Still, we humans definitely have been responsible for causing some environmental problems in recent times. Some biologists have even gone so far as to say that humans are currently involved in a new mass extinction process. While this may seem overstated, it is true that the rate of extinctions has been dramatically higher than normal in recent times due to human activities including: overhunting, destruction of habitat, environmental degradation, and pollution. Thankfully, since we have recognized the damages that our activities cause, we have begun to make many conscious efforts to be better shepherds over the Earth. There have been many environmental conservation efforts launched recently that have helped to protect natural habitat and preserve the balance of nature.

It is a good thing that we have begun to be more cautious with our activities, because the human population has recently increased in proportion drastically—from the less than 1 billion in all of history prior to 1800 to over 7 billion in 2012. While this is quite an alarming change in population size,
we have more recently developed contraceptives and conscious efforts to reduce birth rates and population experts have projected that the population increase will level off as education and use of contraceptives becomes more prevalent. If we plan to continue living comfortably on this planet over the next couple hundred years, let alone any real extended time into the future, we will have to become more efficient and decrease our individual impacts on the global environment greatly.

In the next part of the book, the evolutionary details involved in the emergence of humans—the most intelligent and resourceful species to emerge on this planet—will be discussed. More specifically, we will be investigating the reasons for why we humans developed our defining traits in the first place. After getting a clearer view of ourselves, we should be able to develop a better understanding of what has led us into our current state of affairs around the world. Then, later in the book, we will be able to use this understanding to evaluate the problems that remain in our civilization and the ways in which we might make progress toward a more stable and harmonious future.
Part Two

Us:

Our Origins and What’s Shaped Us
Chapter 4
Our Emergence
(The Evolution of Humans)

For the most part, all of the processes involved with the evolution of the previously mentioned species apply to humans, as well. Just like the other animals, we came about through a long, slow process of evolution through natural selection. (This should not be misinterpreted, however, to mean that humans are merely animals, because we truly are eternal spiritual beings having souls—as all living beings with the ability to comprehend the Spirit surely are.) Interestingly, it seems that in the case of human evolution, there has been an exception to what some have called survival of the fittest, because modern humans are not descendant from the physically strongest upright walking species to have evolved in the history of this planet. Considering this, intelligence must be included in fitness. Still, we humans are certainly not the only species that has outlasted physically tougher competition through the use of intelligence.

It is also interesting that we humans have actually surmounted evolution by natural selection in many ways, as we have been involved in the creation of new species through intentional domestication of varieties of plants and animals. This type of influenced selection of traits for purposeful genetic change has effectively made us the designers of species on Earth that were not exactly the result of natural evolution. Included in this domestication has been raising particular strains of crops, as well as different breeds of dogs, cats, and livestock. Of course, we have more recently developed the greater scientific understanding needed and technology necessary to genetically modify living organisms, therefore directly creating new species out of previous ones. (Still, because God was the original Designer of all the laws of science that we have used in this process, we must ultimately recognize God for the ability to make such alterations.)

To begin a discussion about the evolution of humans, the furthest back in time that one would need to go would probably be to where we see hominids show up in the fossil record. The first true hominids—which include the primates whose lineage would eventually lead to both humans and the great apes—existed just after the split from the last common ancestor shared with orangutans, about 12 million years ago. This, by the way, came after a much earlier divergence from the common ancestor shared with the monkeys, which is estimated to have occurred over 20 million years ago. (Here, it may be worth doubly noting that saying this does not mean we evolved from the monkeys, but simply that human beings do share common evolutionary ancestors with them in the distant past.)

Then, possibly as early as 8 million years ago, there was a divergence in the hominid lineage into the evolutionary lineages that would lead to the branch of species that became the great apes and the branch of species that would lead to humans. The branch of hominids that did not become the great
apes, but rather out of which humans would eventually emerge can be called the hominin branch of species. The earliest definite fossils of a true hominin have been dated to at least 6 million years old. Later, in fossils from around 4 million years ago, we begin to see the first evidence of hominins that walked upright on two legs. Walking upright on two legs is a trait called bipedalism, which has many evolutionary advantages. This trait is especially advantageous because it allows the hands to be free to carry things while walking.

It is in the differences between the several species of bipedal hominins that lived on Earth but went extinct and those who lived on that we will find the most relevance to where our modern human traits came from. Perhaps the greatest difference between the ancestors of modern humans and the other bipedal hominin includes the use of tools. In the most basic understanding, the bipedal hominins which emerged in the fossil record with evidence of the use of tools have been classified into the genus Homo, which has included over a dozen species. Thus, the first species of the Homo genus must have had dexterous hands, giving them the ability to handle tools.

Simple stone tools emerge in the geological record around 2.5 million years ago. The first stone tools consisted only of small stones which had been intentionally broken and chipped on one side to make a sharp edge. Surely, other even simpler tools were used earlier, such as unaltered sticks, bones, or rocks; but those tools did not leave evidence of intentional manipulation and crafting as the first stone tools clearly indicate. The first tools were actually a huge technological achievement made possible through the gift of creativity to identify objects as possible tools rather than just parts of our surroundings. The earliest identified species to match the use of tools and to be included in the Homo genus was Homo habilis, fossils of which exist from as early as 2.3 million years ago.

The earliest use of tools was probably a precursor to the idea of possession. As species became more dependent upon tools for survival, it would make sense that the tendency to obsess over items was actually naturally selected and evolutionarily carried on. The most classic stone tool was the handaxe—which is basically a stone which was broken and sharpened on one side and smooth to be held in the hand on the other. The handaxe, which was a more advanced rendition of the sharpened stones that compose the oldest known artifacts on Earth, would be the most advanced tool used for many hundreds of thousands of years.

The earliest members of the Homo genus—such as Homo habilis and Homo ergaster—lived in Africa during times when the continent was shared by several other hominin species of primates that walked upright. The other bipedal hominins of that time primarily consist of the most recent species within the Australopithecus genus and the species of the Paranthropus genus. Because we can see from our own success that walking upright is advantageous, we might expect there to be other species of living primates using this ability today, but there are no others that possess this trait remaining here. This is curious, especially since we have found that some of these species must have coexisted for hundreds of thousands of years.

Of all the differences involved, probably the most major difference had to do with the fact that the other bipedal hominids were the prey of predatory animals, whereas our human ancestors actually
became predators themselves through the use of tools as weapons. If there were times of warfare among several species of bipedal hominins, it would have likely been the most aggressive species that eventually won out. Thus, the eventual extinction of any and all species aside from humans that had adapted the functionally similar trait of bipedalism is probably evidence of where the human instinct of violent aggression came from. Because this would indicate that the trait of human aggression became engrained evolutionarily over a million years ago, it would make sense that it is a very deep-seated characteristic which many continue to struggle with today.

In the times when our ancestors in the Homo genus were up and coming among the other existing upright walking species, any primitive aggressiveness would have most likely led to violence against the less similar bipedal species the Australopithecus and Paranthropus genera. Then, after the extinction of those species, any aggressive thinking within the species of the Homo genus would have turned to violence among them. Many species would evolve within the successful Homo genus, and it would be common for them to find each other in direct competition for resources and habitat. So, further selection of any innate tendency for violent aggression would have continued to be influential in which species of the Homo genus in Africa survived and which ones went extinct.

In the times when our ancestors within the Homo genus came into conflict with others, the characteristic of us versus them thinking would have been selected for the survival of one species among inter-species violence. For instance, if the members of one species tended to view the members of the other species as lower beings than themselves, it would have been easier for them to commit atrocities against them. In such violent evolutionary circumstances among slightly different species, bias and prejudice would have been traits naturally selected for survival. The surviving species were likely the ones that took care of their own with the most compassion, and yet took on outsiders with the greatest ferocity.

As one can begin to see clearly from this discussion, the traits we have which are maladaptive to society today such as discrimination are resultant from survival mechanisms developed in more primitive times of evolution. Now that we modern humans are the only remaining species, these less friendly remainders of evolution have led to the same type of mistreatment of members of our own species, turning into violence amongst ourselves. Examples of such primitive instincts have been depicted most obviously in the warfare that has plagued humanity up to even modern times.

So it seems that when we do not consciously supersede what remains in us of such aggressive and judgmental mentalities, they tear us apart from within our own species. Still, so long as we are able to mindfully overcome such primitively aggressive tendencies, we will be able to peacefully exist with our common people who now identify with separate ethnic, religious, and national groups. All we must do to accomplish this is expand the compassion that we have for our own kin toward all, and we will stop acting aggressively towards others.

Some early Homo species began to leave the fierce competition grounds of Africa by moving out into the surrounding lands where there weren’t so many other upright walkers to compete with. The earliest major Homo species to do this really well was Homo erectus, a species which evolved in Africa as
early as 1.8 million years ago. Though it was previously believed that we humans evolved from *Homo erectus*, it now appears clear that we had a different lineage from this species. While other species fared well out of Africa, *Homo erectus* spread the farthest. We have found fossil evidence of them in locations as far as present day India, China, and even some Indonesian islands.

Scientists believe that the earliest fossils that could be recognized as part of our species of *Homo sapiens* first emerged about 200,000 years ago in Africa. This is theorized based on the structure of fossilized skulls structure similar to that which we have today dated to around 195,000 years ago. However, it is admitted that these remains are not entirely the same as modern humans. While the skeletal structures from such ancient humans may have been similar to our skeletal structures today, things like the structure of our brains, development, and superficial appearance have probably changed significantly since our anatomically modern skeletal structure was attained. This is part of why scientists have named our currently existing species of people today the more specific *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Nonetheless, these older fossil remains have been considered to be the earliest of our human species, which has continued to evolve and progress over time since then.

Fossil finds indicate that the earliest *Homo sapiens* had probably spread across the whole of Africa by about 140,000 years ago. Then, sometime around 110,000 years ago, we began to spread out of our home continent of Africa. Though there is some conflicting evidence and alternate theories, the most currently accepted theory is that modern humans basically spread out of Africa throughout the world. It appears we first moved east into Southwest Asia around 100,000 years ago, reached what is now India about 75,000 years ago, and as far as the region of China sometime around 60,000 years ago. Humans also spread southward from Eastern Asia into the Indonesian islands, landing in Australia by 55,000 years ago. This shows that early humans were seafaring, with watercraft that could carry them over water for tens of miles at a time.

*Homo sapiens* likely encountered *Homo erectus* in many places throughout these regions as we spread out. Because the *Homo erectus* had developed the use of weapons such as sharp tools made from obsidian, battles with them would have been difficult and dangerous. However, because *Homo erectus* had less advanced intelligence to use for problem solving than *Homo sapiens*, as well as apparently lacking the ability to throw objects overhand as we do, they were consistently overtaken for their habitat. Still, it is entirely possible that we *Homo sapiens* could have lost our fair share of battles, especially if we were outnumbered. Nevertheless, in the end, as is obviously needless to say, *Homo sapiens* continued on evolutionarily and *Homo erectus* went extinct.

Yet, it is worth noting that *Homo erectus* lived on this Earth for over 1.5 million years without causing any considerable damage to it, while we *Homo sapiens* have only been around for a fraction of that time and have already polluted nearly every land and body of water on the planet, not to mention the entire atmosphere. So, when considering the effects our species has had on the global environment of our own host planet, our advanced intelligence could actually end up being to our own detriment—unless we begin to use it more carefully with regard to our collateral effects on our habitat.
It may have been when *Homo sapiens* entered Europe around 40,000 years ago that they first encountered an even stronger species—the previously mentioned *Homo neanderthalensis*, or Neanderthals. *Homo neanderthalensis* was a species very similar to *Homo sapiens* that had basically evolved around the region of Europe during the time *Homo sapiens* were evolving in Africa—both probably originating from a common ancestor species, perhaps *Homo heidelbergensis*, which existed around 400,000 years prior.

Neanderthals may have actually had larger brains that modern humans, though the facial characteristics of the Neanderthal skull was built differently, giving their faces a look more similar to that of *Homo erectus*. Judging from skeletal remains, Neanderthal bodies were very similar to ours, but they were built more sturdily, having larger joints and shorter limbs. This indicates that Neanderthals had greater physical strength than humans, and that they were better equipped physically for surviving cold weather. However, humans were probably able to run faster. And perhaps more significantly, it seems that Neanderthals, like *Homo erectus*, probably lacked the ability to throw well over-hand. The humans ability to throw projectile weapons gave us a considerable advantage by allowing us to both hunt and fight from a distance.

After migrating into Europe, it appears modern humans shared the region with Neanderthals for thousands of years. Humans and Neanderthals surely came into contact with one another over this time in many different circumstances, but we have not been able to determine much about our relations from the remains. While evidence indicates that there was mingling between the two species, it is likely that Neanderthals usually kept their distance from humans most of the time. The fossil evidence shows that the Neanderthals’ territory was slowly marginalized over time until being completely overtaking by humans and going extinct about 25,000 years ago. The fact that Neanderthals must have required many more calories than humans to survive without starving may have been a major factor in their extinction after humans began competing with them for the same food sources.

Around 20,000 years ago humans traveled from northern Asia into North America by foot. This was made possible by a land bridge called *Beringia* that was exposed to connect modern-day Siberia and Alaska when sea levels were lowered during the last major glaciation. (So much of the world’s water was frozen into ice at that time that sea levels were some 130 meters lower than their current level.) It is theorized that this could have happened from humans following large game they were hunting, such as wholly mammoths. Over the course of a several thousand years, humans travelled into uncharted territory in North America and southward into Central America. Eventually, some would even make it all the way to the southern tip of South America, marking the time when humans first covered all of the continents of the Earth (except Antarctica).

As noted already, it is sure that our species has continued to change over time since attaining the basic modern human anatomy. The changes which happened within regional populations around the world, being almost entirely superficial, have resulted in the different races we see within the larger human race today. As we have continued to advance behaviorally over time, relatively minor cultural differences have emerged in different regions. These include variance among things such as languages and religions. The dawn of behavioral modernity is especially noted by the more prominent emergence
of creative artifacts in the archeological record around 50,000 years ago. This increase in culture was probably due to common developments across cultures, but may also have been spurred by changes within *Homo sapiens* populations as we continued to attain more advantageous characteristics beneficial for intellectual social cooperation.

It was around 15,000 years ago when people first began to domesticate crops and livestock to raise for food, making us the first species from this planet to establish our own food sources. This would allow us to set up more permanent establishments, as opposed to the previous lifestyle in which our ancestors ranged after wild game and roamed to gather food. Our great success has been due to a wide array of factors, but most marked was the intelligence which gave us the ingenuity to use tools and to develop language. Still, it was first the ability to walk upright and the development of opposable thumbs which gave the physical capabilities that would end up allowing things like controlling fire, which was a major precursor to further technological development.

The first *Homo sapiens* would have actually been a minority within the *Homo* genus. Because of this, they probably would have learned much from the more established species such as *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis*. Evidence indicates that it was actually *Homo erectus* who first used controlled fire half a million years ago, though *Homo neanderthalensis* and *Homo sapiens* would eventually master fire more completely for things such as cooking. There is also evidence that *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis* both made and wore clothing, hunted large game, and lived in communities. All of these traits indicate these other species must have also developed significant communication skills and culture.

While there were still other species in the *Homo* genus to compare, early humans probably felt the need to set themselves apart from the other species. This may have been part of the origin of art including craftwork, music, and dance. Still, it is also possible that species prior to humans had already begun such artistic activities. There is evidence to show that Neanderthals had created and worn jewelry, indicating that they also may have had the creativity for other art such as music.

Some of the first representations of human art can be found in cave paintings from as early as 30,000 years ago. Many of the earliest cave paintings were representations of large wild animals that would have been hunted at the time, showing how important hunting was to these first painters. Some of the other earliest surviving art was created by carving ivory and antlers, as well as sculpting figurines from clay which were hardened by baking them in fire. Of course, there were likely sculptures from clay and carvings of wood much earlier that would not have been durable enough to survive the test of time for us to discover now without preservation.

Other artistic creations, including the rendition of song and dance probably emerged earlier, but it is difficult to tell as these forms of art would not have left any artifacts. It is interesting to wonder when the beginnings of the many distinctive cultural arts that we humans have now come to know and love for the feelings they incite in us may have first begun. As noted earlier, it is once more artifacts signifying creativity begin to show up in the geological record that “behavioral modernity” is considered
to have emerged in us humans through culture, though it is clear that there was a gradual accumulation of modern culture over time.

The cultural arts are the result of our actively creative minds and our drive to express ourselves. It is probably safe to say that we humans have the greatest emotional complexity of anything to ever originate from this Earth. Having emotions is truly a blessing, though it at times can feel like a curse because of the suffering they can lead to in our minds. While it is our emotions and mind that make us feel distinctly different from animals, we must understand that these things also came to us through an evolutionary basis. It can be interesting to analyze our mind and emotions in an evolutionary light; but beyond being interesting, getting a solid understanding of our emotions helps us to better recognize why it is that we experience them. This can be helpful in coming to terms with how individuals in social groups treat one another, and the strong feelings that social interactions can provoke.

For example, there is a good evolutionary explanation for the feeling of embarrassment, which can be completely overwhelming to us at times. Why should little things like being made fun of invoke such strong feelings in us, for some even making it feel as if the whole world were closing in on them? It may seem entirely unnecessary to have to feel so badly from being singled out or even just from a simple feeling that we fit in; but there are some good reasons as to why such feelings would have been evolutionarily advantageous. Being part of a cohesive group has been important for our survival, especially in the past when individuals were more vulnerable to the natural dangers in the environment.

Individuals in evolutionary times who did not care about how their peers felt about them would have been more likely to act in ways that might get them kicked out of the group. And those individuals would have been far less likely to survive on their own against the elements in the wild. Having strong social emotions that kept individuals really wanting to be accepted as part of the group would was conducive for their survival. Thus, having some socio-emotional feelings to tell us when we weren’t getting along well with the group gave us a stimulus to moderate our behavior as to remain accepted by the group and therefore more likely to survive.

Today, of course, being in a social group is not as essential for our survival as it was in the primitive past, and being kicked out of a group can be taken with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, as is obvious to anyone who has been or felt ostracized, this does not mean that those same old emotions won’t still stir up a sense of unease if we feel not accepted by a social group with which we have identified ourselves or one we thought we might like to be in. It is nice to know where the negative feelings associated with being unaccepted came from as to help us understand why those feelings come up in us and help us more easily to get over them, though knowing this fact will not necessarily prevent a periodic sense of anxiousness.

The evolution of other distressing emotional responses such as the feelings of shame and guilt came along for the same reasons. They are socio-emotional responses that were evolutionarily adaptive because they helped to keep us in tune with what’s expected by our social groups. Nevertheless, just because such emotions originally evolved for social interactions does not mean they do not represent the higher truth that there is such a thing as right and wrong. For example, an individual may feel guilt...
for doing things that are actually socially accepted. In this case, the individual is upset with their own actions because they were against their own values, which they know have basis in something greater than themselves. Thus, an individual can feel that something is wrong even if their social group does not see it as such.

On the other hand, one should be reminded that it is possible for a social group to influence a person to feel guilt or shame for doing things that are actually not wrong. Regarding this, it could be said that staying true to one’s own values is ultimately more important that worrying about the superficial norms of the social group; however, both are good to keep in mind for any individual’s own mental well-being. This matter of guilt and shame is complicated, because it can be hard for individuals to distinguish between what truly is shameful and what one should truly feel guilt over. Basically, what it comes down to is to differentiate between what is a social norm and what truly is right and wrong.

While some of the social norms of today are completely removed from the environment in which our ancestors evolved, many of the most deeply engrained and lasting social norms certainly have had an evolutionary basis. Furthermore, while some social norms have evolved out of biologically adaptive characteristics, others have come about from a different type of evolution, called cultural evolution. Cultural evolution involves changes in social interaction which are not actually included in true evolution by natural selection. Rather than being genetic changes slowly over the course of many generations, cultural evolution happens on a much shorter time scale and can change many times even during the course of one generation. Cultural evolution includes trends in behaviors that come to be expected through periods of time as “normal” behavior. Clearly, different populations have had different results concerning what is considered normal throughout different times and places.

Some of the earliest social norms were exhibited by spiritual traditions, which are a type of cultural evolution. Probably the earliest physical evidence of spiritual norms has been represented by fossils formed from burial remains. Intentional burials can be regarded as evidence of spiritual beliefs because they show respect for the dead and indicate there was consideration of what happens to a person after their body dies. Interestingly, some of the earliest evidence we have found of burials actually come from Homo neanderthalensis.

While it is possible that the Neanderthals buried their dead in the ground with no spiritual intentions, burials from early humans were markedly more symbolic. This is indicated by the fact that many burials included artifacts that seem to have been intended to go with the dead instead of being taken by the living. The earliest items included sea shells, pearl-decorated clothing, and beaded jewelry made from ivory. To have put such adornments in graves with the dead shows that these people had cultural norms which included giving respect to the deceased and symbolizes they had an idea of the hereafter in mind.

As we evolved, we gained the ability to grasp the idea of spirituality through the emergence of higher reasoning skills, giving us the capacity to consider the possibility that our spirits continue on after the body dies. Along with this, we began to grasp the concept of our Higher Power and formed views of the afterlife. While some have confused the fact that spirituality and religion have been made possible
by evolution to think that they are merely fictional developments of the mind, in reality what happened is that evolution elevated us to where we became able to ascertain a view of what truly exists beyond this physical life.

Once we had become able to grasp the idea of the Divine, we truly reached the pinnacle of evolution, and in a higher reality attained the level of existence which was intended from the outset of the universe in the first place. The Divine created the universe in the hopes that life would evolve within it to have the ability to grasp the concept of creation and appreciate existence, as to one day turn around and give praise to that Divine Source which had been there all along. While this is seems to be beyond the realm of understanding to less intelligent creatures, it has clearly come about in the case of us humans, and probably other species of intelligent life in the universe.

Through our emergence as a product of evolution, we have gained the capacity to unlock the question of existence and answer it with the true answer, which is the Creator and Holy Spirit that is now known to most as God. However, this understanding was finally arrived upon after many progressions within our spirituality. The earliest developments of spirituality, which would lay the foundations for the organized religions to come later, are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5
Origins of Spirituality
(The Precursors to Religious Thought)

We seem to have a natural affinity for spiritual thought. We seek connection between our inner selves and the larger reality and find understanding in the meaning of experience. As was just noted at the end of the last chapter, we even have the ability to perceive the existence of the Divine. It is clear that each person reading this is capable of reaching thought about the immaterial spirit, but it is hard to tell how far back this goes in our history of development. In fact, it is impossible to tell when this first began because mere thoughts leave no physical evidence. But we can be sure that spiritual beliefs must go back to a very long time ago.

One could imagine that we would have been capable of such notions from the very dawning of our species, and perhaps even species prior to us. As alluded to in the previous chapter, we have found evidence that people have given ritualistic burials to their dead for a very long time. Fossil evidence of intentional burial with artifacts has been dated back to over a hundred thousand years ago. Just as we give notice to the spirits of the deceased passing over into the afterlife in most funerals today, it is likely that these early burial ceremonies gave reference to the spirits of their dearly beloved moving into the afterlife then, as well. Needless to say, at some point this understanding became one of the most central aspects of human life.

This surely had to do with the fact that we developed the capacity to understand complexity and began using logical processes like inductive reasoning to plan for the future. And having the ability to link cause and effect and draw conclusions about the source of things gifted us with the ability to think back to the Creator. So we have been able to use our minds to perceive forward and backward in time, and at both ends we see our Higher Power, which is quite humbling to understand. Along with this, our intellect has allowed us to perceive that we have spirits which can exist after bodily death. This is a conclusion that has been around since prehistoric times, and has been involved in spiritual beliefs throughout history.

While some conclusions we draw about unseen things can be products of our imaginations, this does not mean that we don’t also pick up on unseen things that truly are there. In fact, there are many incidences in which the only logical conclusion is that some of our experiences reflect essences aside from our own. Just as we have been right about ideas regarding scientific processes that must occur which we cannot observe directly, we are also probably right about spiritual processes that we have figured must occur but cannot observe directly. Furthermore, with so many people having intuitional feelings regarding the soul’s existence beyond the physical body, it seems that it must have real basis somewhere in a higher reality.
Some of the earliest lasting evidence that could be considered proof of human spirituality includes some of the most basic forms of early art, similar to the cave paintings and figurines that were already mentioned. The earliest creators of spiritual art probably used it as something physical to focus on while trying to connect with the unseen. To explain how the example of early cave paintings may have been spiritual, it would make sense that for the early people who depended on hunting to look to a picture of wild game to pray for them to come so that they might be able to get more food again at times when that blessing had been absent and the people were hungry. This could be considered the first use of idols. Though the original artists would have understood the idols had no power in and of themselves, belief could have formed later that it was actually the objects which answered prayers when it so happened that a wish directed at them came true.

Now, as for knowing when people first made such imagery, it is very unlikely that the oldest lasting cave paintings and objects that we have uncovered were actually the first ones created. Paintings in less protected natural spaces were surely created, but perished over time. Additionally, objects were probably made much earlier out of materials that perished easily and would not have been preserved for us to find today, such as drawings on leather hides or soft clay figures. The first such spiritual symbols may have been as simple as making drawings in the dirt, which would have washed away quickly with the passing of time after their use was through. Spiritual imager would have aided spiritual though at first to having some ideology to focus thoughts upon, though the intended target of those spiritual contemplations would have been unseen.

Aside from the natural images which were commonly depicted by people in ancient times, there are also some ancient images which would not have been expected in the natural environment from that time. For example, a 12,000 year old painting found near what is now Val Camonica, Italy appears to depict human-like beings wearing suits having transparent domes over their heads. This is quite interesting because the painting was painted thousands of years before people would have developed transparent materials such a glass and plexiglass. Such imagery, as well as other examples found in ancient artwork, seems to indicate non-human visitors to Earth in the ancient past. These visitors have been referred to as ancient astronauts. There are examples of ancient figurines which appear to depict extra-terrestrial beings in attire similar in appearance to the modern spacesuits that human astronauts wear into climates dissimilar to the one in which we evolved.

There are also some ancient spiritual traditions which include depictions of beings wearing what could be interpreted to be representations of spacesuits. Still other ancient accounts can be found which make clear reference to visitors in flying vehicles. In many of the most ancient mythologies, these vastly advanced visitors compared to the pre-historic people were regarded as “gods” who augmented civilization by sharing spiritual wisdom including different conceptualizations they had developed in their own attempt to understand and describe the afterlife along with practical teachings such as civil order and planting and harvesting domesticated crops at the proper times of year. In many ancient tales, these “gods” performed roles as rulers, and genealogies were kept to try to indicate what were regarded as royal lineages from such “gods” who may have had hybrid offspring with humans in some cases such as that of the Inca god-rulers and the giant Nephilim of the Holy Bible.
More widely recognized evidence of involvement of advanced extra-terrestrial species in the history of spiritual developments has already been touched on in the previous mention of the otherwise hard to explain ancient monuments—including the Pyramids, Stonehenge, Puma Punku, the colossal Olmec stone heads, and the Moai of Easter Island—in which extremely heavy stones were moved long distances at times when human civilization had not yet even developed the use of the wheel and axle. These sites are of interest here because all of them mentioned are known to have held spiritual significance that was passed down from ancient times.

The highly curious fact that no written records are found regarding the construction of sites like the Pyramids and Puma Punku, though planning and calculations would clearly have been required for their building, indicates that such required blueprints were either intentionally destroyed or never in human hands in the first place. This would make sense if the intention was not to leave any undeniable evidence of the involvement of extra-terrestrials in Earth’s history, but rather only mysteries for us to later figure out for ourselves. More evidence, such as the images of the Nazca Lines, has become clearer since we ourselves have taken to the air. It is as though there were some kind of test given to us to see how long it would take for us to figure it out. Sadly, this realization by the larger public has been slowed due to many people in the mass society being influenced to ostracize individuals who have taken the hints as though they were crazy, despite their true rationality, due to social stigmatization of the idea.

Drawing truly from many evidences, the most informed and inclusive conclusion regarding many ancient mythologies that point to extra-terrestrial involvement is that these accounts depict genuine events when other-worldly visitors really came down to Earth and interacted with humans in the past. Since then, these tales were deemed as “mythology” and disbelieved over the course of time. It is curious that there has not been more recent direct interaction with civilization, or at least not that has been made publicly known. Perhaps the visitors interacted with us to help us develop civilization when it was safe, before we had developed more dangerous weapons, and have been staying out of our affairs since then—letting us learn from our own mistakes, as all parents must do at some time when they let their children out into the world.

In addition to the apparent involvement of extra-terrestrials in Earth’s ancient pre-historic times, there has also been much more recent evidence in the modern world to show that the Earth has been visited by intelligent life from elsewhere in the universe in more current times. This evidence includes thousands of living eye-witness reports from individuals who have seen unidentified flying objects (UFO’s) in the sky, as well as hundreds of crop circles. While a few UFO’s and crop circles have been identified as hoaxes, there are many for which hoaxes have been ruled out. The aeronautical feats displayed by many UFO’s and the intricacy and complexity of many crop circles are indicative of very advanced technology which we humans have not yet been gifted to possess.

While some fear the possibility that extra-terrestrials may have become involved in our world’s affairs with intentions of imperialistic control and manipulation, it is apparent that many of the past intelligent visitors to Earth from other star systems have had altruistic intentions. There is evidence that extra-terrestrials appear to have had peaceful interactions that led to ancient spiritual traditions throughout the world in the past. This indicates that they have wished not to harm us but to help us—
perhaps curiously investigating and benevolently seeking to help us along in our development without interfering too much in our personal growth process. In some cases, it seems these interactions led to humans confusing the visitors with the Higher Power they represented, which led to people referring to them as “gods” and forming idols in their image to worship. One particularly well-known visitation toward the dawn of history to a certain group of freed slaves led on the Exodus from Egypt was a well-enacted interaction obviously intended to clear up that confusion.

In any regard, it would appear that our visitors have been careful not to leave behind any of their advanced technology upon their leaving—perhaps as to watch and see what we could develop with unhampered creative ingenuity through engineering of our own. Once we had developed technology like theirs, we might no longer confuse them as being “gods” but simply understand they harbored more advanced technology because their civilizations had understood science longer than ours. Still, many claim there have been some artifacts found—for example, at a crash site in Roswell, New Mexico. The logical conclusion to this is that the general public has been intentionally deceived about the existence of intelligent extra-terrestrial species and vast disinformation has been spread by people in the power positions capable of influencing what the general public believes.

As already noted, it is painfully obvious that many people have been led into denial about this truth through the social stigmatization of the idea that believing in the existence of extra-terrestrials is somehow crazy. But the truth will be unveiled eventually. There are countless resources online—such as The Disclosure Project—which any individual with access to the internet is free to view if they would like to research for themselves about the claims made herein regarding this topic. Though this tangent is getting away from the topic of this chapter, which is spirituality, it has been relevant to the discussion here for several noted reasons.

While some people have been confused into thinking that the existence of other intelligent species would be contradictory to the existence of God, due to certain portrayals of religious doctrine which have stated that the whole universe was made for people on Earth, this is an entirely mistaken conclusion. It seems that, much to the contrary, extra-terrestrials have actually tried to awaken our spirituality, which is a crucial component needed to truly understand God. Still, while extra-terrestrials may have played some parts in our development and religion, it is also possible that we have helped awaken them to the larger understanding of the Holy Spirit and the truthful reality of the existence of souls and an afterlife. While the subject of beings from other worlds is innately fascinating, we should now return to the basics of the more accepted origins of spirituality for the logical flow of this book.

Most of where we begin to find the earliest agreed upon developments of spirituality come from when our spiritual thoughts became shared between individuals and groups and passed down as spiritual traditions. Some of the earliest forms of spiritual tradition were types of ancestor worship, where people actively remembered their deceased ancestors as the basis of their belief system and would often try to communicate with them. Whether or not ancient people had any true success in communicating with passed spirits is questionable; but, to be fair, we have no evidence to prove it did not occur or that it is impossible.
Over time, certain individuals within groups became designated as those who were responsible for hosting communication with the spirits. These individuals were also put in charge of other early religious-type beliefs, such as remembering the creation stories which were passed down orally by traditional story-telling from generation to generation. An example of this exists in the medicine men of the native tribes which have preserved more ancient types of culture into more recent times. The early medicine men were honored as spiritual leaders and sought for wisdom, with their area of expertise regarding things such as rituals that were believed to channel healing spirits to cure ailments or to enact the power to bless important events.

It was out of the tradition of medicine men that the first priests would form. The roles of priests would expand with civilization to include performing mass ceremonies. This is one of the roles of spiritual leaders that continue today. As was the case for the early medicine men, traditions today continue to have spiritual leaders lead ceremonies intended to signify God’s blessings to important transitional life events. Over time, some within certain priest classes realized that the more complicated they made their rituals, the more power they were perceived to have. And the more organized the systems of priests became, as well as the processes involved with them, the more the spiritual systems became like the most dogmatic organized religious systems of today.

In many ancient cultures, people were led to believe there were entities which had powers over the forces of nature. Some of these entities became known as gods. In ancient mythology, people often believed that there were different gods for different phenomena. There were various pantheons created to explain this in different mythology. Some of the characters of the different pantheons seem to have had origin in the imaginations of those who created the tales, while others may have been based from actual bygone individuals who claimed various powers.

Some of the first gods to be worshipped in many of the earliest civilizations were sun-gods. For example, the god Ra was one of the original sun-gods in ancient Egypt. Another early Egyptian god was Osiris, who became proclaimed to be god of the afterlife. Osiris, possibly the original figure that started the trend of mummifying dead bodies, also became mythicized to have power over fertility, the flooding of the Nile, and the growth of crops. Because early people did not understand the scientific foundations for these phenomena yet, all of these unexplained things were easily attributed to be caused by the will of godly entities. Obviously, we have narrowed down the things that we cannot account for through science since the early civilizations, as we now understand the science behind weather patterns that produce flooding, the germination of crops, and conception.

Over time, people’s beliefs have progressed from many gods who were believed to influence separate phenomena by their will to the understanding that one God, the Holy Spirit, is the Creator of the laws of science that rule the living and is the Lord of Spirits who determines the afterlife for all souls that have emerged in the universe. One example of the change to this vital recognition in Egypt was that of the Pharaoh Akhenaten, who threw aside polytheistic worship of past rulers recognized as “gods” and more wisely promoted monotheistic worship. Sadly, after his demise the idolatrous worship of multiple deities was reinstalled and the people were again misguided to give the God’s true worship to deities
who were icons of past rulers. Nonetheless, Akhenaten’s vision was an impressive breakthrough for the understanding at the time and a gift of wisdom for those who comprehended it.

For many of the primitive polytheistic civilizations, it was believed that performing ritual offerings would appease the gods. These offerings often came in the form of offering sacrifices of goods to one deity or another so that the various gods might be generous with their powers—bring rain, help the crops to grow, to give success in war, and so on. When their wishes came true, they thanked their gods, and when they didn’t, they believed they must not have performed their rituals properly or that they had done something wrong for which they were being punished. In many early religions, a common type of sacrifice was the act of animal sacrifices, often times even live sacrifices, which meant they publicly killed the animal for the supposed deity they were attempting to appease.

This practice became horrifically worse when taken to the next level, upping the ante to the behavior of live human sacrifices. It was picked up on that this type of ultimate sacrifice had the strongest effect. On the brighter side, festivals and celebrations were also popularized by early spiritual and religious traditions. Often times these festivals were practiced during certain times of the year when people together practiced rituals that they hoped would bring plentiful harvests or fertility. At other times and settings, festivals have served as times for remembrance and celebration of the presence and power of the Divine.

Though performing rituals actually does nothing to increase the likelihood of good fortune to one’s people, there have been real benefits to the survival of people having to do with their spiritual beliefs. For example, having faith in God can help people survive tough conditions by giving them the hope and confidence they need to get through difficult circumstances. Furthermore, the altruism and common good will shared by religious communities increases the chances of survival of the whole by facilitating cooperative efforts.

One detrimental effect of spirituality in the form of organized religion has had on humanity is the belief that God can be on one side or the other of war. The idea that God wishes for war has been present in many battling civilizations throughout human history. Ironically, there have been many cases in which people on both sides of a conflict have been sure that God was on their side and in favor of them over others. Indeed, the harmful thought that one group can be God’s chosen group has been a major contributing belief to nearly all religious violence.

Religious ideology has also sadly gone towards support of the idea that one group has the authority to rule over other groups. Still, there has been much violence and oppression without any regard to religion or belief in God. Indeed, many violent conflicts can be said to have occurred due to a lack of truly good spirituality in the instigating warring parties. An analysis of some of the violence in the history of human warfare, including some developing contributions from organized religions and other powers, is the topic of the next chapter.
Chapter 6
Our Violence
(An Analysis of Our History of War)

As was keyed in on in the discussion of evolution, human beings have had aggressive tendencies engrained in us from the start. The conditions in which we evolved involved direct conflict with other species similar to ourselves with whom we had to compete with for food and resources. So the ability to become violent was advantageous for survival, at times. Such violence was, of course, only necessary in situations where it came down to kill or be killed, but it seems to have spread further than that.

Since it was the lineage that led to our species which outlasted all the other walking primates, it is undeniable that some roots of primal aggression remain in us. Our fighting instincts have surely subsided since we have advanced through our primitive evolutionary environment into more peaceful times, but the periodic continuance of warfare has shown that the potential for violence within us can still be stirred up. More peaceful inhabitation of the Earth by our species is entirely possible, but it appears some have had a hard time taming the primitive aggression in ourselves so far.

In the evolutionary times in which our species emerged, it was very important to be able to differentiate between ourselves and the competing species. So it was beneficial for us to develop a sharp ability to recognize and categorize differences between ourselves and others, especially characteristic body and facial features. We now use this acute perception to notice the small differences between members of our own species, and we continue to categorize. We have developed an entirely automatic tendency to classify people that look similar to ourselves as “us” and ones that look different as “them” seemingly for any visual differences we can arbitrarily distinguish. It is sad that our evolved tendencies have made us far more prone to notice minor differences than to see the overwhelming similarities which make us the same.

Through differentiation after early humans became geographically separated from one another, we began to acquire more physical differences. We acquired such differences in the pigment of our skin, hair, and eyes that they would be striking when previously isolated cultures came into contact. Since worldwide travel and immigration have become routine, many people have gotten used to seeing people of all different body types and shades of color—though some people have been slow to let go of discrimination based on such things. Despite the fact that most of us now understand that behavioral traits are much more the result of cultural learning than they are of genetic inheritance, skin color and ethnicity continue to be sources of prejudice in the world.

When one acts on assumptions made about another person based primarily on the color of their skin, it is called racism. Racism has historically been a major cause of division in the United States of America (USA). This has to do with the fact that slavery there used to be based on skin color, where it
was basically socially accepted for white people to consider black people as their property. Though slavery is now understood to be entirely unethical because no person should be considered the property of another, its practice was common in the past. For various reasons, it just turned out that one of the last places to openly condone slavery was in some southern states in the early United States. That all changed in 1865, when slavery was abolished in the USA after the American Civil War.

Much progress has been made since then, in America and worldwide, in the subject of human rights. Though there were people who knew it deep down already in the days of slavery, it has become common knowledge now that skin color doesn’t necessarily mean anything about a person aside from just what it is, the color of their skin. Anything beyond that is an assumption which may not necessarily be true. Now, there are plenty of other things beside skin color that have been sources of assumptions and prejudice. Some other major categories which have commonly been used to make assumptions have been nationality and religion, though individuals within those categories do not necessarily fit the stigmatizations of their larger groups. Even common assumptions based on the category of gender have been proven to be wrong in many cases.

The topics of differences between groups have been important to people from the beginning of civilization. This has especially been the case for religion and war—as evidenced by the fact that they are the two main topics of almost all of our earliest written history. Because these subjects dominate the earliest writings, we can reasonably assume that they were most significant to the people that wrote them, much like we can assume that the cave paintings of wild animals were most significant to the artists of the hunter-gatherer groups that drew them. Still, just as hunting existed long before the first cave paintings of it, spirituality and warfare existed long before the first writing of them.

Early on, in the times of hunter-gatherer groups, warfare would have been limited to small battles. But as the first city-states emerged and rulers began to set up more expansive territories, larger scale organized battling emerged. When civilization really started to advance and metallurgy began, the scale of violence increased to warfare in which people were killed in much larger numbers. This was not only because more weapons could be made much faster with metals, but also because metals began to be turned into coins for standardized currency. It was the advent of money that made for the birth of empires, in which large territories came under the rule of a political group holding power over the common people by paid force.

In empire societies, elite classes emerged through the power of central governments which oversaw commerce within the region. The heads of these central governments were able to make the rules, so long as they had the power to enforce them, which was made possible through the handling of money. The emperors, through their ruling body, would then typically enforce a tax on the people of the region, which would be punishable by imprisonment if not paid. And as greed grew from power, empires would set their eyes on conquering more territory to amass more wealth and power through taxation and military enlistment. So armies were built with soldiers trained to take control of others by force.

Though militaristic history has been glamorized by the civilizations that employ it, the history of battling for territory between empires of people on Earth is truly horrifying in all of its detail. Armed
with military advancements, empires would go about enacting conquests, bringing more territory and people under their control—so to gain more resources, utilities, and citizenry as a means of gathering wealth for the elite. Though some empires were able to spread prosperity to people through sharing technological developments and safety through the protection of the rule of law, others were more focused on oppression and manipulation than protecting human rights and sharing advancements.

In the age of empires, there would be instances where territories claimed by one empire would be invaded by another empire in attempt to transfer the wealth of the territory to that group’s ruling body. In the cases where civilizations that did not yet have military advancements like swords and chariots were attacked by more advanced militaries that did, brutal massacres occurred. These types of massacres would happen again when certain societies developed explosive gunpowder and firearms before others. With the use of guns, the numbers of casualties of war would increase drastically.

As a general trend, as warfare technologies increased, the death tolls went up. This played out in a sadly repeating story in which one group would develop greater technology and use it to overtake over others for their goods and lands. Particularly when aircraft were introduced to warfare, the number of civilian casualties increased in an unforeseen way. With the hellacious use of exploding bombs and missiles, soldiers and peaceful civilians alike would be blown to pieces indiscriminately. This continued with the escalation in weapons technology until nuclear weapons were developed and the destruction of entire cities by single bombs was made possible.

Through warfare, it seems that we have used our intelligence in one of the most backwards ways possible. There have been so many casualties in war throughout history that it would be an insurmountable task to count all of them and add them up. But even if all the casualties, maimed, and otherwise injured from all the wars were to be tallied up and combined and listed, it would not give any real idea of the amount of pain and suffering caused by war. When such terrible things are spoken of in statistics, the atrocities are masked and the terrors of each single experience disappear in their numerical representation.

Just beginning to think about the details of the crimes against humanity that people commit in war can bring a feeling of disgust to the stomach. But while it is discomforting to bring up specifics of war, it is something that must be recognized so that we may learn from it—as to address it and then hopefully be on our way to putting it behind us for good. A few major historical conflicts will be mentioned here for the basis of a brief and directed discussion. While it is understandable that old hostility can remain between people anywhere there is a history of violence and misdeeds, we must understand that violence only begets more violence through retaliation until the fighting parties decide to one day grow beyond it and let the circle of hatred finally dissolve so that peace can grow.

The history of warfare on Earth is so extensive that it seems nearly every piece of ground has been battled over at least once, which is already more than enough. The record of war goes back the furthest in the Middle East and the lands surrounding it, where military dominion has traded hands over and over again. There have been numerous different civilizations involved in this, with the earliest groups including: Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks, Persians,
and Romans. These early societies fought back and forth and their fighting empires underwent interchanges including periods of expansion, contraction, and eventual collapse.

There are many tales from the wars of the various early societies which came and went through the course of time. Probably the most pervasive and lasting sub-theme from warfare in the region of the Middle East has been violent conflict between Jews, Christians, and Muslims who for various arbitrary reasons have believed themselves erroneously to be the sole rightful owners of the city of Jerusalem and the land that surrounds it. The long-standing conflict in this region—most recently represented by what has been called the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict—provides a clear example that violence between groups tends only to lead to more violence.

The recorded history of conflict over the land that is now Israel goes back prior to 1200 BC, and is as yet unresolved at the time of this writing. In short, Israel was founded as a holy land after a group of slaves liberated from Egypt of mostly Hebrew descent were led there through the desert wilderness by a man named Moses following guidance from above, though there were already some people in the region. The group that Moses led there became the first Jews, as the rules of Judaism were handed down to Moses and to his people during the course of that journey.

After the settlement of the lands of Israel by Israelite communities which were governed by judges and kings, the Israelite civilization became the target of attack by other groups. The extremely ancient city of Jerusalem was declared the holy city of the Kingdom of Israel and of the religion of Judaism by King David around 1000 BC. The First Temple was built and Jerusalem remained as the center of the Kingdom of Israel and then the Kingdom of Judah for centuries, until it was conquered and taken into Babylonian captivity by 586 BC. After fifty years of Babylonian captivity, the Jews were invited back and they rebuilt the Second Temple, which remained after its completion in 516 BC until 70 CE, when it was destroyed by the Romans. In the events that would eventually follow, Jews were subsequently banned from entering Jerusalem for large periods in time.

Jerusalem was influenced to be a secular city for a time during Roman captivity, but it became a holy city of Christianity when it was recognized that Jesus Christ was crucified there in the fulfillment of prophesy. Jerusalem would later come under Arab rule and was then recognized as a holy city of Islam by Muslims, as well. So, Jerusalem was been recognized as a holy city by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. At times, the city has been peacefully shared by populations including people of all three of those faiths, but it has also been the site of much violence.

A major set of conflicts with religious overtones involving Jerusalem was that of the Crusades. The Crusades were a number of religiously oriented military expeditions from Europe into the Middle East which came in several phases spanning over five hundred years. What might be considered the start of the Crusades was when a group of Christian Western Europeans decided to make a conquest to liberate the holy city of Jerusalem from Muslim control in 1095 CE. In the First Crusade, what started out as something like 100,000 troops trekked from Europe to Jerusalem over the course of three years. The crusaders underwent great difficulties on the journey, which included starvation, and less than a fourth of the number that originally set out arrived at Jerusalem. Upon entering the city, it is said the crusaders
ruthlessly killed all the non-Christians inhabitants and took their property as theirs. A Second Crusade was started in 1147, a Third Crusade in 1187, a Fourth Crusade in 1202, and so on, with eventually nine Crusades embarked on in all.

It is extremely sad that the religious violence of the Crusades were carried out in the name of Christianity, especially considering that Jesus Christ had adamantly preached a message of peace. The fact that the religion that was supposed to be founded on Christ’s teachings was used as an excuse for war is an example of how the teachings of that religion became confused from the original message over time through dogmatism. If there is any good that came out of the needlessly repeated violence of the Crusades, they were useful in that they connected Europe to the discoveries and advancements which had been made in the Middle East but that European civilization was lacking at the time.

The next major series of military invasions to be highlighted in this analysis of our violence is the European conquests of the Americas. After the seafaring mission in which Christopher Columbus and his fleet discovered the “New World” of the Americas in 1492, groups of Europeans began to colonize the newly found lands. This colonization effort lasted for over four hundred years. Because the Europeans had weapons and armor far more advanced than the natives of the Americas, any resistance to their rule was generally squashed in massacres. In some occurrences, native peoples would kill their infants and themselves in order to avoid future enslavement. It is now entirely obvious that the mistreatment involved in the conquest of indigenous peoples in colonizing their lands was a horribly wrong abuse. The same could be said for the horrible abuses committed in taking and mistreating slaves in the pursuit of wealth elsewhere throughout history. The condolence that can be said of the colonization of indigenous lands by groups with more advanced technology is that it did eventually result in progress in civilization. Still, this should have been done more carefully to avoid violent abuse.

Many particular battles and wars could be highlighted among such conquests to exemplify the crass violence that has been committed between and within groups. For the purposes of this discussion, the topic will now skip back to Europe and forward to the 17th century (1600’s), this time to cover internal conflict there. Though there is a long history of warfare in Europe, a particularly extensive violent conflict broke out there in 1618 that lasted until 1648, fittingly coming to be called The Thirty Years’ War. This violence, like much of that discussed so far, had its roots in religion. As with the Crusades, Christianity was again involved in the violence. However, this time the fighting was among fellow Christians. At the onset of the war, there were religious disputes among the European powers having to do with divisions between Protestants and Catholics.

Though what led up to the Thirty Years’ War was complex, the violence could be said to have started with the Bohemian Revolt, which was spurred by an event in which an assembly of Protestants at the Bohemian Chancellory in Prague had two Catholic Lord Regents and their secretary thrown out of the third story window of the meeting hall. This single act of frustration can be said to have led into decades of bloody warfare. But of course, as goes for most wars, there were also plenty of political sentiments involved with this war. Over time, the war incurred several major interventions from outside parties, and eventually the majority of the European powers at the time became drawn into parts of the extended conflict.
The devastation of The Thirty Years’ War was immense, with thousands of villages and towns being destroyed. The total number of casualties has been estimated to have been somewhere around 8,000,000 lives, though it is hard to number the indirect casualties because pestilence of disease and famine set in toward its end. One of the primary battlegrounds for the war ended up being the land that is now Germany, with a huge number of casualties happening there. To add insult to injury, Germany was separated into many territories after the end of the war. This could be hypothesized to have played a role in setting the tone in the background behind the later consolidated Germany becoming a major belligerent in the world’s two global wars which came later.

Only a few wars had occurred in the history of the world prior to that time with worse death tolls, including the bloodshed of: the An Lushan Rebellion in China, the extensive Mongol Conquests, and the Conquests of Timur. Interestingly, around the same time as the Thirty Years’ War, there was warfare in China in which the Qing Dynasty led conquests of the Ming dynasty that would last even longer and result in more than twice as many casualties. Though these other historical conflicts have surely involved equally dreadful details, they did not become as influential in world history as the few that have been picked out for discussion here.

The Thirty Year’s War had an effect of fixing territorial borders between neighboring European states and strengthening the sovereignty of their individual governments. This was not necessarily a problem, except that afterward nations would also begin to put more focus on national armies under their respective governments, setting the stage for more international conflicts. This continued strengthening of armies with nationalistic ideologies was furthered through later wars, including especially the Napoleonic Wars.

The Napoleonic Wars contained a series of wars which occurred from 1803 to 1815 between the French Empire led by Napoleon and the surrounding coalitions. Though there is not a clear line as to where the previously ongoing French Revolutionary Wars ended and the Napoleonic Wars began, the date of 1803 is generally agreed upon because there was a renewed declaration of war between France and Britain at that time. At first, Napoleon’s armies were successful in trying to bring much of Europe under one rule through military force. However, this brutish technique failed—as it always has through the repeated examples of history—after Napoleon attempted an ineffective invasion of Russia in 1812. Napoleon’s army suffered a final defeat at the culmination of a series of battles at the decisive Battle of Waterloo in 1815, which marked the end of the Napoleonic wars.

The next major war to be mentioned here is the one that would become so extensive that it would be called a world war. After another equally widespread war came to pass, it would be termed the First World War. This war, which lasted for well over four years and involved major powers from all around the world, was triggered on June 28th, 1914 when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated. This assassination was used to get Austria-Hungary to provoke a war with Serbia. There was confusion at the outset of this war, especially since the major European powers had been trying extensively to keep a balance of power in the region.
The major parties that became involved in the war aligned with two opposing sides: the Central Powers (including the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) and the Allied Powers (including the Russian Empire, the United Kingdom and the British Empire, France, Serbia, Italy, Romania, Belgium, Greece, Japan, and the United States of America). Because many of these powers had colonies around the world, much of the rest of world became quickly involved in the conflict. Though the soldiers were initially voluntary, the war eventually included mass conscription in which soldiers from some countries were drafted into military service. Thanks to the longer list of Allied Powers which became involved, the Central Powers collapsed swiftly in 1918 and the treaty of Versailles was signed in June 1919. This, for the most part, marked the end of the First World War.

Especially due to the advancements in the destructiveness of weaponry involved, this war amounted to an enormous number of casualties in a very short time. There were nearly 10 million military casualties, over 20 million military wounded, and some 8 million military members went missing. And of the millions of the military personnel who survived, many suffered from psychological ailments due to the traumatic stresses they experienced. This is not to mention the tremendous toll on civilians, hundreds of thousands of whom died from tactics including genocide and starvation due to blockades. Furthermore, millions of civilians suffered worldwide from infectious diseases which spread with the increased travel and set in due to deprived conditions.

After the First World War, the League of Nations was set up under the hopes of preventing another terrible war of that kind. However, the continuation of issues such as patterns of blaming and contentious nihilism that grew in the world after the war eventually led to the Second World War. This war would become the largest and most destructive war that the world would ever see, eventually resulting in over 70 million fatalities globally. As with the First World War, nearly all of the major world powers at the time would become aligned to two opposing sides. This time the two sides became called the Axis and the Allies.

The Axis was especially led by Germany, which fell under the influence of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Third Reich that removed democracy and made the country into a totalitarian state. The callous evil that was deeply seated in Hitler’s type of thinking is most clearly exemplified by the horrifying details of what occurred at the genocidal concentration camps of the Holocaust. Under Hitler, Heinrich Himmler and the Nazi SS ordered millions upon millions of innocent people to be rounded up and imprisoned into internment camps where many were harshly treated as test subjects and then exterminated. This cruel imprisonment and killing was based upon ethnicity and other categorizations that were entirely unjust. But it was all somehow accepted by the mass public based in the groupthink that was developed through sensationalizing propaganda.

In the Tripartite Pact of 1940, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan joined Nazi Germany under the ideology that war could be used for the goal of world peace through strict order. Despite the obvious backwardness of the idea of peace through violence, more nations were influenced to join the Axis. Eventually, basically all of the rest of the world’s most powerful nations at the time ended up joining the Allies to stop the insane warpath embarked on by the Axis and their supporting nations. Even the Soviet Union, which had originally sided with Hitler under the tyrannical leadership of Joseph Stalin, joined the
Allies against the Axis—despite the fact that there were shared ideologies between Hitler and Stalin which had led to similar crimes against humanity committed by the totalitarian management of the Soviet Union. The multiple genocides and the further increased destructiveness of weapons technology involved in this war resulted in tens of millions of civilian casualties, contributing largely to it being the single most deadly conflict in the history of the world.

By the end of this Second World War, people had created nuclear weapons: explosive bombs packed with radioactive materials which detonate to release the massive amount of energy that is stored in matter itself. The destructive power of nuclear weapons was displayed in the shocking leveling of two cities with only two bombs: the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945. The good that can be viewed from these bombs’ massacre of civilians was that they put an end to the violence of the deadliest war in the history of the world quite quickly. It was after this abrupt end to the Second World War that the United Nations was established to foster cooperation between nations and to inhibit future violent conflicts.

The extensive and horrendous war crimes which occurred during this war were investigated during the Nuremberg Trials. One lesson that the world supposedly learned from the Nuremberg Trials was that the torture and killing of innocent people is never to be acceptable, not even for military personnel following orders in war time. The Holocaust is well-known today as one of the foremost examples of wrongdoing the world has ever seen. It should be clear now that the idea that one master race should rule the world by force was horribly flawed thinking. If there is a lesson to be learned from this, it is that military violence and civil abuse backed by a judgmental mindset of prejudice and blame is clearly not the way to a more peaceful and ordered world.

Not long after the Second World War, with its ending demonstrating the explosive force of nuclear weapons, what came to be called the Cold War began. Citizens of both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as citizens of their associated nations, were led to live in fear of a catastrophic deployment of the nuclear weapons that their governments were wastefully creating, dangerously testing, and stockpiling for no good reason. Though that nuclear apocalypse thankfully did not happen, the Cold War ideology of communism versus capitalism became an instigator for secondary conflicts, such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War (which involved one of many known deceptive “false flag” operations in world history in the Gulf of Tonkin incident). Free nations such as the United States became involved in these wars, both of which started in the 1950’s, in order to protect free citizens of democracy from invasion and takeover by communist governments which were known to be oppressive and threatening expansion.

More recent crusades, such as the War in Iraq and the War in Afghanistan, have been fought under much guise of stopping terrorism. However, that mentality is clearly confused considering there is hardly any worse terrorism than bombing and militarily invading countries. There was much fighting in response to Iraq being occupied, and at the time of this writing there is much continued fighting in Afghanistan and bombing in Pakistan. While there have been good arguments made for much of the work in Iraq and Afghanistan, including stopping corruption and advancing human rights, it seems only obvious that there will be backlash brought upon occupiers unless their assistance has actually been
requested by the people of that nation. This is not meant to disrespect the troops who have faithfully and valiantly served their countries under the trust that they were fighting the good fight—for those who have sought freedom and justice truly have had their hearts in the right place. It is valiant for men and women to dedicate their lives to serving and defending their country, but it is obvious that soldiers on both sides of all fights have seen it that same way.

Many soldiers in these wars have believed that they were fighting to bring justice to those responsible for the events of September 11th, 2001—especially the destruction of the World Trade Center buildings. However, those (three) steel-framed buildings never would have fallen if they were not rigged internally first; so the Middle East is not where people should look if they are seeking to bring justice to those truly responsible for the fatalities and injuries involved with those collapses. Though the 9/11 events occurred some time ago, they remain a very serious issue considering all of the injustice that has been done in response to the untrue official story that was released to the public regarding them. This issue will remain a lingering problem until the 9/11 events are responsibly re-investigated. Such a responsible investigation must include research into the fact that it could not have been a jumbo jet that hit the Pentagon, contrary to the story released to the public. To really get to the bottom of the orchestration of the 9/11 terrorism, a public investigation must be conducted into the matters which the individuals who died in the Pentagon blast were researching.

All of this talk of war leads one to step back and wonder how it could be that people could be influenced to treat each other so badly, especially to abuse and kill one another. The answer to this quandary may be more concerning that the question itself, because it is actually shared psychological mechanisms within all of us that can lead people to commit violence against one another. One of the main psychological mechanisms that attributes to violent acts against others has been identified as the in-group bias. Any time a person is included in a group, the individual has a tendency to find comradery within their group and to form positive views about that it. An interesting side effect of the in-group bias is the tendency to form less positive views about other groups, oftentimes generalizing others outside of the in-group negatively, for no reason except increased support between peers in the group through esteeming one another to feel they are better than others.

After defining individuals outside one’s group as inferior to those in their group, it becomes easier to treat them badly. This is made most obvious in war. It is interesting that any time groups are divided they all seem to do this—resulting in each of the groups being composed of members viewing themselves as superior to the other groups. It is ironic that this would not happen if the groups were not superficially divided, because if all were able to see one another as members of the same larger group, as we all truly are in reality, we could all view one another in the same positive light. Thus, becoming aware of the in-group bias can be a major step toward curing it. But it is a tendency of the ego to try to defend itself and its reasons for dividing others into out-groups. This often problematic tendency stems from a subconscious defense mechanism of the ego to defend itself as more right than others.

Through another bias mechanism that has been identified as the confirmation bias, people selectively take note of any bits of information that seem to support views they have previously formed, as to confirm themselves as right. This tendency of each individual to reinforce their previously formed
views is so strong that people will actually block out contradictory evidence that might threaten the opinions to which their ego has previously grown attached. This tendency to hold on to old notions is a confused maladaptation of the psyche that is counterproductive to progress, because progress can only come through change. So it is sad that the most common reflex of the ego is to lash out in response to any questioning of opinions it has formed and declared rather than reconsidering them.

Because the subconscious functions to protect itself from any potentially negative thoughts about itself, it will often resort to finding the easiest excuse to blame any perceived problems on others. This universal effect leads even the main offenders to believe that the problems are everyone else’s fault. Though it would be better to focus on solutions rather than trying to find fault and placing blame, the subconscious ego reflexively projects fault onto others and thus makes them targets. In doing so, the ego forms for itself enemies to fight to avoid looking at itself introspectively. These personal processes within all individuals form the underlying roots which have contributed to many conflicts.

Considering all of the violent atrocities that the people of Earth have put each other through, one must come to the reckoning that there must eventually be some type of higher power to bring final justice to those who have brought undue suffering to others during this life—especially those who have seemed to get away with it. For, it would simply not be right for horrendous acts to go forever without some kind of equalizing retribution. Thus, logic can only conclude that God will provide retribution for callous wrongs committed in this life and thus serve justice. It is ironic, however, that religions have actually contributed to horrendous acts of violence through prejudice. Considering this, one must understand that it has been a misconstruing of religion through the in-group bias which has led to religious warfare.

It is contradictory that religion has been involved as a source of prejudice and conflict while they have simultaneously been sources of understanding and peace. Interestingly, religions have been somewhat reinforced by conflict because they are helpful to turn to in times of strife for comfort. The many factors involved in the creation and sustained use of organized religions from the previously mentioned origins of spirituality are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 7
Religiosity
(Our Use of Structured Systems of Belief)

The affinity we humans have developed for spiritual thought, coupled with our strong ability to organize, has led to structured systems of belief over time. Since our brains have allowed us to perceive higher meaning, we have sought to form religious systems to reflect our comprehension. After having different influences, we have creatively used our intelligence to develop different religious systems to fulfill our drive to express our thankfulness for existence and respect for God. After receiving the gift of thought, we now seek to grasp an understanding of the higher structures of the cosmos, even unto its Designer and what we believe should be expected of us.

Spirituality and religion evolved along with one another over a long period of time, and our beliefs about the supernatural changed somewhat as we continued to learn more about the reality in which we exist. Many individual teachers have been influential in this development, with many separate organized religions being based on the different understandings provided by them. Some of the most prominent teachers from history have founded the basis for several of the largest organized religions existing in the world today.

Though individuals can use their own experience to develop their own understanding, the major religions have served as sources of answers to many of the most ultimate questions our curiosity has led us to ask. Some of the greatest questions we seek answers to include: “Why does the universe exist?”, “Is there a purpose to my life?”, “What is that purpose?”, and “What happens after death?” We are compelled to have these big questions answered, and it seems that most individuals must have them answered to some degree so we can move on with our day-to-day activities of living. Most basically, religions have evolved to give people dependable answers to such questions upon which their members can agree upon. The differences in the answers that have been provided to these questions by the various religions have to do with the fact that they were developed within different cultures, and those cultures found slightly different answers suitable.

Besides answering our deepest questions, organized religions have given people a venue for interaction with our social peers. We are naturally social beings and our interactive ties to others are important to us. Moreover, because everybody wants to be a part of something, getting together with one another to share thoughts makes us feel good. The many separate religions have served to facilitate public social relationships among different civilizations over the course of time in every part of the world. As a common unifying factor, religions have generally provided a practical role of giving moral structure to society and helping societies get along through unifying them.
In addition to fulfilling communal functions for society, the religions have helped individuals develop a sense of clarity about existence and our role in it. By providing resolute answers for people, religiosity has served to give a basis of certainty in a world that often seems uncertain otherwise. So the organized religions have intentionally grown to give individuals and societies strong foundation through rigid ideologies. This has led to members of religions being strongly convinced of particular ideas in order to maintain solid group cohesion. Of course, as different religions have become intermixed among societies over time, this characteristic of religiosity which was intended to function to help individuals be at peace with themselves and others has led to strong arguments between individuals of rival religions, and even between individuals from differing sects of the same larger religion.

So while strict religiosity has served to maintain peace through founding and sustaining shared attitudes and beliefs, it has also resulted in some conflict. This detrimental effect of religion has led some to argue whether religions are really good for us. It has been pointed out by many that people do not necessarily need strict religiosity, which has been proven by individuals choosing not to participate in any organized religion. It is obvious that we need some source of morals and ethical principles in life, but it is wholly possible for individuals to arrive at solid morals and ethical principles without organized religion. For the most part, the religions have converged on the same ethical and moral principles that individuals can develop on their own. This includes things that are apparent with experience, such as the simple understanding that one should not treat others as they do not like to be treated.

Still, religions are beneficial because they provide wisdom for people without them having to learn the hard way from their own insight through personal trial and error. While the wise rules of the various religions differ, the wisdom that is common between most of them is that sentient beings are meant to be good to one another, that the experience of life is sacred, and that we should have respect for the Divine. The one most overwhelming commonality between all religions is that they are shared through cooperation and passed down between generations. To facilitate this, they have generally developed structured systems and standardized scriptures to refer to so they can be taught reliably from generation to generation. In this way, organized religions have continued their own existence through maintaining tradition, and most have held great importance to families as such.

With this understanding, we can begin to address the question of why religions have been defended so strongly. People have tended to hold their religious heritage in the highest regard, some even considering it so important that they will fight to protect it. The one prime reason that people clinch so tightly to religion is that it is very important for individuals to have spiritual wholeness. The need to have our most important questions answered is so strong that once people have found a set of answers they feel suffices them, they tend to grow attached to those particular answers and want to keep a hold of them just like they are.

Further, there seems to be a sense of urgency, in some religions anyway, to spread one’s own belief system to others. Because we are spiritual beings, and because we know that it feels good to sense spiritual wholeness, we feel that we would like to share it with others once we have found it. This is a compelling example of human compassion. Still, it has gone too far in the cases where people have tried to spread and impose their organized religion on others through violence.
Of all the factors that can become involved to turn religiosity into violence, the most basic is pride. It is important to us to be right, and our subconscious desires to have the fact that we were right reinforced. This effect of pride especially plays into religiosity because it has continually reinforced the idea that the adherent is right. It is natural to want to be right and a good stimulus for learning, but pride goes too far when individuals feel they must be right above all others. If one’s beliefs are correct, they are correct despite what anyone else thinks. This means there does not need to be argument to try to force others to see things the same way. In the cases that it becomes the subconscious will to enforce one’s own beliefs on others, pride has gone too far. Still, when one does have a good message to share, it is worth sharing freely without force.

The different religions have tried to develop the glimpse of the Divine that one can capture through open spirituality into a more complete view. And individuals generally cherish the view that they develop over all others. Perhaps it was meant to be this way, with each of us innately valuing our own picture of the Divine. Still, it is possible for that view to change over time. There is a fragile balance between how much religion should try to force any particular model; because while religion can play a useful part in helping individuals to develop their own spiritual understanding, it could be said that by dictating beliefs to the adherents, the structured religions have an intrinsic hampering effect on truly free individual comprehension of the Divine and what spirituality truly is. The idea that religiosity only exists in certain buildings or clergy or dogmatic objects or rituals is a misguidance of what religion is truly about. Those things are merely representations of authentic spirituality, which must exist in the belief of the individuals to really mean anything.

It is artful how the different religions have painted their pictures, literally and figuratively. This has been done by a number of different symbols, which can be identified for most religions. Religions are symbolic in many different ways, and this is often expressed by their art—whether it is poetic, visual, or choreographic. Carl Jung put this into words in his piece of writing for Man and His Symbols, saying: “Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. This is one reason why all religions employ symbolic language or images.”

Furthermore, because spirituality regards elements of a dimension transcendent to this one which cannot be seen directly from this physical realm, religiosity must include faith. In other words, because God and the afterlife cannot be seen directly, it is required that one takes on an element of faith to believe. Though beliefs vary between religions, they all carry some degree of faith about them. In general, religion itself is a form of recognition for a Higher Power to all individuals—though some have not fully grasped that the Higher Power aspired toward in all religions is the same God that created the universe and dispenses all reincarnation and the afterlife.

Though we cannot have directly unquestionable proof for God and the afterlife while in this life, certain proofs have been given through the fulfillment of prophesy through the ages among particular religious traditions. All fulfilled prophesy has been a gift given by the Holy Spirit so that our faiths could be supported. The fact that one God can exist while many various faiths have developed into many
different religious traditions is hard to understand, but it can be grasped by considering the fact that faith has had to come about physically through many different vectors.

Religions tend to both accrue influence from the cultures in which they evolve, as well as invoke influence on the cultures in which they exist. This can include the clothing the adherents wear, the food that they eat, and how they go about their business. The degree to which religion is involved in social norms and facets of life varies among religions, with some religious people seeming happy to have many choices dictated by religious law, and other religious people enjoying more freedom from particular rules and instead following general principles to guide their free choice. In such ways, the religions have come up with unique styles, and thus have influenced variety in the cultures of the world. As such, the religions of the world can be looked at as different components to the well-blended dish of life.

The next part of the book delves into some of the particular beliefs of many of the world’s major religions. It is a great thing that we are now in a position where we can learn about the various religions that have developed in the world, and to have the opportunity to analyze the differentiation between them. It is something we have been gifted with the chance to do simply by our placement in time, now that all of the wisdom of the different religions has become accessible everywhere in the connected world. It is beneficial to learn about the different religions because it ultimately must be more enlightening than learning through only one limited perspective. And after learning, any individual can still choose to practice one particular faith.

Despite the fact that most religions make themselves out to be entirely complete within themselves, the most scholarly individuals realize that one’s personal understanding can always be expanded through learning. For that reason, it is wise to learn about other religions, so that one may discover the larger truth. Though diverse learning has been warned against by some dogmatic traditions by those in positions of power to try to preserve that power for themselves by instilling fear in the followers against questioning their supremacy, individuals should not need to be fearful of learning about the religions. Simply, if one’s own beliefs are true, they should not feel threatened and can only be added upon and enriched. Thus, through reading about the different religions, one can only broaden their own horizons. That is the purpose of the next part of the book.
Part Three

Our Religions:
The Various Results of Our Pursuit of Answers through Religion
Introduction to Part Three: Our Religions

Our world civilization has always been greatly varied religiously. This part of the book is intended to give a brief yet critical look into each of the current major religions in the world. For the reasons of brevity, there will not be too much detail discussed for the practices of any one religion, but rather an analysis of their most important details will be covered. Being such, it is obvious that the description of any one religious tradition provided here will not be extensively thorough.

The descriptions given here will be done simply to mention what the different religions offer in comparison to one another. Due to the vast complexity of all religions and the great variances in beliefs and customs between and within religions, further study by the reader would be needed to thoroughly understand the smaller differences and the richness of the particular religions. The greatest point to be made here is that there are many different faiths, but that while the traditions vary widely, there are some central commonalities that can be found among them.

It is worth noting the great numbers of people alive today who practice the different religions for perspective and to point out that if God chose to accept only members from one religious tradition, no matter which religion was picked, the majority of all humankind would have to be denied. That simply would not make sense considering that God surely has compassion for everyone within creation. This thought should make an impact on the religious thinkers from any line of faith who have thought that only one religious tradition can be acceptable.

As with the rest of this book, the chapters in this part have been ordered and grouped solely for the means of logical organization to the text. Also as with the rest of this book, effort has been put forth to keep the discussion relatively concise, so many of the smaller religions, as well as many of the smaller differences between the sects within religions, will not be covered.
Chapter 8
Abrahamic Religions
(Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Latter-day Saints)

All of the religions in the family of Abrahamic religions are strictly monotheistic, believing in only one God who created the universe. In the Abrahamic faiths, there are not various gods for different phenomena, but rather only one God from whom all blessings flow. In these religions, which comprise the largest number of religious people worldwide, God is referred to as masculine. He is called by many names, such as God the Almighty, God the Father, and Allah.

Many prophets have written in the scriptures of the Abrahamic religions. Other scriptures for these religions include commentaries by the followers of God’s servants, especially including Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them both. There are many specific details in the writings of the prophets and supporting scriptures of these religions, which readers can refer to if they wish to see them in full. Merely a few of the most crucial excerpts of the scriptures will be discussed in this book, along with brief mentions of the practices and ideologies of the religious traditions that have preserved them through time.

The Abrahamic religions are more specifically religions that trace their example of faith back to Abraham, a man declared to have been a person whose faith in God should stand as a model. The most widely available account of Abraham today emerged in the writings of Moses, who received his account of Abraham from Lord Yahweh and wrote it as part of the first scripture of Judaism. Later on, Jewish scripture would make for the foundations of Christianity after the fulfillment of prophesy by a Jew who would become known as Jesus Christ. And because Jesus Christ is central to the Latter-day Saints, they too can also be considered of the Abrahamic faith. The religious tradition of Islam, which was largely established through the Prophet Muhammad, also links itself to the Abrahamic faith. (Bahá’í Faith has also been considered as an Abrahamic faith, but because of its more modern creation it will be covered in the chapter on new religions.)

The major religions in the Abrahamic family today, in the order in which they were founded, are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Latter Day Saints movement. These will be covered in subsections within this chapter in this chronological order. The largest of these religions is Christianity, with around 2.2 billion adherents according to estimates recent to the time of this writing—making it also the largest religion in the world. Most current estimates place Islam as the second largest religion in the world at this time, with around 1.7 billion adherents. Judaism, after over three thousand years of existence, is estimated to have over 14 million followers. And there are tens of millions more in the Latter Day Saint movement. When combined together, those currently of the Abrahamic faiths comprise nearly 4 billion people, over half of the population of the Earth.
Judaism

Judaism has traditionally been said to have begun with the Torah, which can be taken generally to mean Jewish religious law, but more specifically refers to the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books were the first compositions of what would be added upon later to become the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh. The Jewish Tanakh would be translated and adapted to compose the Old Testament of the Holy Bible in the continuation of the monotheistic faith it endorsed. It is generally believed that Moses began writing the Torah after meeting Lord Yahweh on top of Mount Sinai during the exodus he led of a group of Hebrew slaves from Egypt toward Israel sometime around 1450 BC. While the writing of Moses beginning partially into Exodus came from his own personal experience, the previous history of the world—including the vastly abbreviated and figurative creation account depicted at the outset of Genesis—was given to Moses by Lord Yahweh.

Abraham is mentioned in Genesis after a creation account is given and a depiction of the Great Flood is covered. (The creation account and Great Flood will be discussed shortly.) Abraham is noted to have been a righteous descendent of Noah, a man who was spared from the destruction of the Great Flood by following instructions to build an ark (Genesis 6:13-8:19). Where Abraham is first mentioned, he is actually referred to as Abram (Genesis 11:26), but several chapters later it is written that (Genesis 17:5): “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” (Unless otherwise noted, quotes from the Holy Bible will be from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, which is the result of an attempt for an accurate translation of the original standardized scriptures into modern terminology.)

Abraham’s righteousness is recognized in all three of the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The original version of the story which stands for Abraham’s example of righteousness in Judaism and Christianity comes from the narrative in Genesis 22:1-15. In this narrative, God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham’s actions sufficed to show God that he would have been willing to sacrifice his son merely because He had asked it, though God did not make him go through with it. It was then promised to Abraham that his descendants would be blessed because he had humbly listened to the guidance that was provided (Genesis 22:15-18). Now it truly has come to pass that Abraham was indeed made the spiritual father of a blessed multitude—as can be noted from the billions of practitioners of the Abrahamic faiths in the world today.

The story in Genesis, however, goes back to long before Abraham. Let us start with the outset of Genesis—the words which laid the founding scripture for all the Abrahamic faiths:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.
Here, we immediately see that God is singular and capitalized, as opposed to the mention of gods in the non-monotheistic religions. This shows from the start that it should not be confused that there is only one Holy Spirit that is God and that God is responsible for the creation of the entire universe. In recognition of this, all worship should be directed to the Spirit of God and not to other miscellaneous deities. This understanding is continually reinforced throughout the writings of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Bahá’í Faith, and many other spiritual traditions.

The reader can draw a mental note to the discussion in the introduction of this book regarding how the Big Bang matches the phrase: “Let there be light.” From this association, it seems that at least this part of the account given in Genesis accurately corresponds with the understanding of the beginning of the universe that has been developed independently through scientific study. It seems clear that there was influence in the Genesis account from a highly knowledgeable source regarding this parallel from the Big Bang, which people were still nearly 3,500 years from understanding.

However, the rest of the Genesis creation account provides details which do not match the true order in which the universe must have physically developed that has been derived through scientific investigation, as was explained in the earlier chapters of this book. Some of the more fundamentalist followers of the Abrahamic faiths have ignored the realities of modern science in order to continue to take the Genesis creation account literally, which shortens all of creation from the Big Bang to the inhabited Earth in six days. This literal interpretation has led some to the conclusion that the universe is only roughly 6,000 Earth years old. However, when one rationally considers all of the scientific evidence that has been collected, that literal interpretation simply does not make sense.

This misunderstanding is cleared up with the logical understand that the creation account of six “days” given in Genesis is allegorical, not literal. The account given to Moses for Genesis must have been intended simply to give a brief summary of how things came into being which would suffice for the curiosity of people at the time. It was perhaps one of the best explanations that had been given to people up to that time and helped to make sense of things. It would have been difficult to give a better explanation that would have still been compatible with the understanding humans had at the time—considering more accurate details would have required depictions of time before Earth days and years even existed.

Without the knowledge of genetics and an understanding of the enormous scales of time over which evolution occurs, trying to describe evolution to Moses at that time would probably have been entirely incomprehensible and misunderstood. Furthermore, it would have made sense to the people at the time to say that God had made the Moon and the stars to give light upon the Earth to explain them in relatively, though the stars were really older than the Earth. With this context considered, it makes sense that Genesis was stated the way it was, though our current understanding based on the compilation of huge amounts of solid scientific evidence provides a more accurate picture.

This means there surely is truth in the account given to Moses, despite the fact that not all of it is absolutely literally true. Here, it should be noted that the truth of history stands true no matter what is written anywhere regarding it, and no matter how many people believe it or disbelieve it. There has
been bitter dispute regarding this matter for a long time, and it is a sensitive subject to some because people can tend to take offense to any questioning of the absolute supremacy of the writings of their religion. However, to take every word of one book as unquestionable truth over all other books for reason of faith is a questionable idea, because it leads to closed-mindedness which is hindering. All accounts should be analyzed objectively. The truth will stand forever as the truth, no matter how much faith anyone has in any book. Likewise, lack of belief in true writings will not make them any less true. So, there is really no reason to be sensitive or argumentative about it.

When authenticating the reality of the Genesis account, many people have focused on the story of the Great Flood. The first evidence found to support the truth of a Great Flood is that a catastrophic flood is a commonly shared story from a multitude of cultures. More recently, geological evidence such as abrupt changes in sedimentary layering indicative of sudden massive flooding has been found to be physical proof for a widespread flood, though not one that would have literally flooded the entire Earth and every mountain on it. The account given in Genesis tells us that the Great Flood was an intentional act. The reasoning for the flood is stated in Genesis 6:11-12:

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

It is worth noting, however, that the Great Flood is brought up in Genesis directly after the mention of giant Nephilim, which were said to have been the offspring of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” (Genesis 6:4). An interestingly more detailed account of this given in the recently rediscovered Book of Enoch relates the giant Nephilim to have been the offspring of the “sons of the heavens” and the “daughters of men”. In that version of the story, it is described that the reason for the Great Flood was the injustice that resulted from the misguided giants consuming many resources and teaching people things such as superficiality and war. By the Book of Enoch account, those teachings and the immorality that followed were mistakes the flood was intended to wipe out.

But because Noah found favor with God (Genesis 6:8), it was decided that Noah would be forewarned of the flood and instructed on how to build an ark (Genesis 6:14-16) so that he and his family would survive. Noah followed all of the instructions and brought pairs of land-dwelling animals of many types, along with food for them, so that they would survive the flood and continue on their species (Genesis 6:19-21). When the flood came, the ark worked and Noah, his family, and the animals rode out the flood and then set forth back out on the ground to repopulate the land after the flood had subsided and the ground had dried (Genesis 8:19).

As has been noted, the Great Flood was meant to purify the Earth of the wickedness and injustice that had become widespread upon it. Here, it could be pointed out that since the time of the flood, the world has obviously again fallen into much violence and corrupt injustice. Many have taken to carelessness towards one another and even turned towards hate. It seems some have even stirred up war for their own greedy pursuit of worldly goods, caring nothing for the great suffering it causes. Let us all hope we can clean up our acts on our own this time. After all, if we do make ruins of the Earth and
continue to view one another as enemies, we will have to live with it, because it was also promised that the Earth would never again be flooded to such an extent and (Genesis 8:22): “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

After the Great Flood is described, a history of the descendants of Noah is given. Skipping ahead many generations through Genesis and into Exodus, the writings have finally gotten to the point where Moses was actually given them on Mount Sinai. It was around the time that Moses was given the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai that he also received the story of Genesis from Lord Yahweh. Moses’ first account of the Ten Commandments he received is given in Exodus 20:1-17:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. [1] You shall have no other gods before me. [2] You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. [3] You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. [4] Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. [5] Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. [6] You shall not kill. [7] You shall not commit adultery. [8] You shall not steal. [9] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. [10] You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

Now we see Lord Yahweh referring to himself as the “Lord your God”. Though it has been a traditional religious belief that it was God Himself who delivered these commandments, one can notice that the context required for God to give these commandments is quite peculiar. In Exodus 19:3, it is written: “Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain.” Moses is told that he and Aaron should go up to Mount Sinai, but that the other people were strictly not to go up the mountain. Then, in Exodus 19:16 it says: “[T]here were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that the people who were in the camp trembled.”

In Exodus 19:18, it states: “And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.” So, it seems that Lord Yahweh must come down out of the sky in flames and smoke and land
on a mountain so that it shakes—though God Almighty would not require such things to appear out of nowhere if He truly could act outside the bounds of the laws of physics. It is further curious that the rest of the people were not allowed to see Lord Yahweh with Moses. The only rational conclusion that can be made is that this was the way it needed to be done for Lord Yahweh to deliver a message to Moses and to make an impression on the people as to believe it was God Almighty—though God in truth is the Holy Spirit that created the universe and is always present in all places and at all times.

If one reads the above quoted passage carefully, they can find that Lord Yahweh never exactly called himself God. He never directly said “I am God” or “I created heaven and earth”, but rather such things are associated. It is also key to note that Lord Yahweh, upon descending from the sky and declaring himself the god of Moses and his people—though concealing himself in a thick cloud from being seen and only allowing Moses to see his back (Exodus 33:23)—called himself “a jealous god”, which would indicate other “gods” besides him.

It is interesting to really consider the details of the Genesis account that was delivered to Moses by Lord Yahweh at this time. Regarding this, it is particularly interesting that God is referred to as plural in several places in Genesis. It may have slipped by the reader, but as early in Genesis as the twenty-sixth verse, God is referred to as speaking in plural (Genesis 1:26): “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness[.]’” This plurality becomes more clear after the metaphorical story in which Adam and Eve were brought to a higher level of knowing, where it says (Genesis 3:22): “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil[.]’” This plurality is more obvious in earlier Sumerian accounts of many of the same stories retold in Genesis.

Now, as has been pointed out many times, it is clear that God is the singular entity that is responsible for creating the universe, so it is very odd to have God referred to as plural. One logical conclusion that can be made of this language in a close analysis of Genesis is that a group, or groups, of innovative extra-terrestrials worked to advance humanity in ways which allowed us to become a more moral species. Through giving Moses the Genesis account in the particular phrasing that it was given, these sub-creators carefully articulated that they had played an assistive role, though also providing that they had gained the foresight to explain that God is One and to give all credit for creation to God.

When one carefully reads the particular story in Genesis of the creation of human beings, there are some apparent contradictions. First, in Genesis 1:27 it says: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Then, in the second chapter of Genesis, it says that the “Lord God” made a man and then made a woman later from one of his ribs (Genesis 2:7-22). Because the rib can interpreted to be symbolic for a source of DNA, what this can be interpreted to mean is that God made Homo sapiens naturally through evolution—as has been discussed regarding unmistakable fossil evidence—and then later Homo sapiens sapiens were made through genetic alteration, perhaps to develop larger brains during gestation (which would increase the pain of childbearing) and to appear differently in image. Genetic alteration would be the only physical way to make sense as to why Adam, who would have been the first genetically altered man, lived to be nine hundred and thirty years old (Genesis 5:5), though natural humans normally have a lifespan which rarely surpasses one hundred years.
There is evidence even in the Genesis account to say that there must have been other human beings on Earth already in the time of Adam. This is shown in Genesis 4:17, where it says that Cain had a wife, though it was not written that Eve had yet born any daughters, and that Cain built a city, though there hardly would have been any need for a city if there were only one small family on Earth. Thus, even according to Genesis, there must have been other humans before Adam, which would agree with evolution. So, it seems that Adam must have been a creation from altering the naturally existing humans on Earth by sentient beings with advanced knowledge of science who were not native to the planet Earth. These beings, at least in the English translation of the Torah’s Genesis, referred to themselves collectively in under the blanket term “Lord God” as to foster proper monotheism.

Thus, from critically analyzing the narrative given in Genesis with an investigative mind, it is ascertainable that Genesis—one of the oldest and most widespread religious scriptures in the history of the Earth—has been holding mention of intelligent extra-terrestrial species, hidden in plain view (though not as clearly as the pyramids), ever since it was written some 3,500 years ago. Indeed, the Sumerian accounts from much earlier times were more explicit in their details regarding the process in which numerous “gods” were mentioned creating man. It must have been known all along that we would one day become knowledgeable enough to understand and accept this. And now that we humans have both left this planet and also genetically altered species through our own scientific advancements, we can fully comprehend it.

What this means is that what was originally portrayed in Genesis through a metaphor of the tree of knowledge has finally been fulfilled: We truly have now become like those “gods” that played roles in establishing us. Hopefully, they can now accept us as their equals under God. After all, for any advanced species to become surely wise, they must realize that the Creator of the universe is the Parent of all the living, making us all the children of God. Thus, we all have the same Higher Power who knows all and under Whom all the living exist, eventually to be Judged by after death. So we truly are not intended to judge one another, because the Sovereign Holy Spirit over all of us will take care of that.

It is clear that the Ten Commandments were given with the intension of providing some good, resolute guidance to Moses and his people at the time. They did not have any creed or law and were falling to errors that happen when people do not have any type of moral guidance. So the Spirit of God acted through Lord Yahweh to help them by giving them a set of commandments which rightly inspired monotheism. It was declared that if they would act by those rules they would do well in life and have fewer errors and disputes than if otherwise. These commandments surely have included some solid advice, which was offered to be followed as guidance to help people steer clear of misdeeds against God and against one another in life.

After the deliverance of the Ten Commandments, there was much more dialogue and numerous commandments given to Moses by Lord Yahweh, so that they could be given as guidance to the children of Israel. Many of these regarded proper sacrifices and offerings that are no longer practiced. In ancient Judaism, it was customary that all of the commandments given by Lord Yahweh were to be kept strictly. However, today they are not all kept so strictly, because some of them have been found to be barbaric, including such rules as putting a child to death for striking their mother or father, stoning adulterers to
death, and others of the like. Of the many laws not included in the Ten Commandments that continue to be followed today in Judaism, the dietary laws are very prominent, including not eating pork products and keeping food kosher.

It is apparent that in handing down the commandments, Lord Yahweh became a spokesperson of God. For, when he delivered the Ten Commandments, he delivered them in God’s name. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Ten Commandments were the ultimate commandments of God Almighty, the Creator of the universe. Rather, Lord Yahweh probably did his best to make them in accordance with his best understanding of God at the time. This may come as a blow to many of those fundamentalists who have formed the idea that Lord Yahweh is the same exact thing as God, but that is not even how the details are written in Genesis. As any can read, it does not state at the outset of Genesis that Lord Yahweh created the universe, but that God created it.

It has been argued, and with some good argument, that there is room for improvement in the Ten Commandments. For example, it might have been an improvement to say: “You shall not torment or torture.” Furthermore, and getting more critical, there were many words spent with the Lord talking about himself and few instructing altruism. But while the Ten Commandments could have been more encompassing of good moral instruction, it was apparent that some kind of guidance was needed then and there, and the Ten Commandments were wisely devised to be delivered as one clear message to the world rightly promoting only monotheistic worship in that opportunity through inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, while it can be argued that these commandments could be improved upon, it remains to be true that they have provided a solid source of good general rules to follow and to reflect upon to help people build their own understanding of what is truly right and wrong.

If one continues reading in the Torah, and further on into the twenty-four book Hebrew Bible (or Tanakh) from which the Old Testament of the Christian Holy Bible originates, they will find that it is filled with a great deal of violence. The books of the Tanakh can be broken down into three groups: The Five Books of Moses, The Eight Books of the Prophets, and The Eleven Books of the Writings. The times in which the prophets and other writers of the Tanakh wrote were rough, with many wars, and thus it includes talk of many enemies.

Perhaps it was because of the toughness of the times that there was so much written about vengeance among the other good writings in the scriptures promoting benevolence. The prevailing theme is that those who have faith in God and practice the ways of righteousness such as that taught in the commandments will ultimately be the ones who are rewarded. In countless verses, the Lord is on the side of those fighting against those who mistreat them. This tone was meant to promote a strong message against oppression.

Just as the Ten Commandments were inspired by the Holy Spirit and delivered through Lord Yahweh, many other messages inspired by the Holy Spirit were delivered through prophets. One of the greatest prophets of all time, for certain, was Isaiah. Through Isaiah, the Spirit of God worked both to clear up some confusion regarding the old ideas regarding offerings and also to prophesize the future. In
Isaiah 1:11, it was declared that offerings such as burnt fat and blood of bulls were of no delight to God. And instead, the things that were truly important to the Spirit of God were declared (Isaiah1:12):

[C]ease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Some of the writings of Isaiah were assuredly inspired by the true Spirit of God. Clear evidence that the source of some prophesy to Isaiah truly was God the Creator of the universe can be recognized in that credit for the expansion of the universe is claimed long before people knew of it—for example, in Isaiah 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, and 45:12 which says: “I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.” Such mention of stretching out the heavens mentioned indicates oversight of the Big Bang and the resulting expansion of the universe, which can only be credited to God. While there are surely many other prophets of God in the Tanakh, Isaiah most certainly was one whom the Spirit of God chose to bless and bestow with a greatly important message.

More wisdom inspired by the Holy Spirit and the monotheistic concept of God put forth by Lord Yahweh can be found in Psalms, Proverbs, and others. For example, Palms 51:10-13 says:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee.

Of course, to fully cover the teachings and tradition of Judaism, the other sacred Jewish scriptures besides the Tanakh must be mentioned. Second to the Tanakh is the Talmud, which contains primarily the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is a text that was written to preserve a set of oral debates regarding Jewish religious law that were held by Rabbis after the time that the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, in an effort to continue the tradition of Judaism without the central temple for gathering to discuss the scriptures. This Mishnah is sometimes called the “Oral Torah” when the term Torah is being used broadly for all Jewish scriptures. The Gemara consists of secondary written Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah, which study the debates more comprehensively. One of the greatest quotes from the Talmud is: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.” Several other writings can be considered Jewish texts. Included in these is the Kabbalah, which contains what has been considered Jewish mysticism.

Altogether, the Jewish scriptures amount to a very large amount of readings to be studied. There are many religious laws in Judaism to be found in all of these scriptures. These laws include traditional Jewish clothing and dietary rules. Of the most basic dietary laws of Judaism, all practicing Jews must refrain from eating pork and shellfish at all times. It seems that shellfish was likely not condoned simply because many people can have allergic reactions to it. But the true reason for not eating pork has to do with the emotional irritation it can cause through the accentuation of distressing
moods (the likes of which pigs have). It has been a misinterpretation to think that the prophets were
told not to eat pork because it can cause food poisoning sickness if not cooked properly. When the voice
of God spoke to the prophets, it was not told to them that they should not eat pork because it could
make them sick, but rather they were told it would be an abomination to them, and cooking it properly
does not change that.

The scriptures of Judaism also describe the lunar calendar which Jews have traditionally kept
despite its irregularity. In the Jewish calendar, the day is considered to go from sunset to sunset, and the
week is said to begin on Sunday. Thus, Jews have practiced the hallowed seventh Sabbath day of the
week to go from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. This is different from how most Christians
uphold Sunday as the Sabbath day. What can be learned from this is that the particular day for the
Sabbath is not as important as remembering God’s work at least one day a week. It should be
understood that the reason for not working on the Sabbath was not that it is truly sinful to work on
some certain day of the week, but rather that it was an important part of continuing this monotheistic
tradition to keep the true message of monotheism alive through keeping the Sabbath holy by things
such as attendance of synagogues and later church service attendance.

While many of the religious writings of Judaism focus on commandments and traditional
religious laws, they also contain spiritual discussion, most of which centers on acting righteously in the
face of adversity and praising God. Here, it could be noted that while God is generally referred to as
masculine in the Abrahamic traditions, there has been some tribute given to the feminine attributes of
God in the tradition of Judaism. What is being referring to here is the concept under the name of the
Shekinah, which can be considered to represent the feminine presence of the Divine. With this taken
into consideration, when the Shekinah is invited into the hearts of the practitioners of Judaism, respect
for the feminine contribution of God is included along with the worship of God dedicated by way of the
masculine Lord Yahweh.

While keeping the Sabbath day hallowed is following traditional Jewish religious law, it can also
be considered to be celebrating a religious holiday. There are many major Jewish religious holidays in
addition to the weekly Sabbath that could be discussed. For the purposes of discussion here, only the
yearly High Holy Days, Hanukkah, and Passover will be briefly mentioned.

The yearly High Holy Days, or the “Days of Awe” in Judaism, are set out as days to pray for
forgiveness for wrongs against God and wrongs against others in the previous year and to meditate on
correcting those ways in the following year. The Days of Awe include the Ten Days of Repentance, which
starts with Rosh Hashanah, which has been called the “Day of Judgment”, at the outset of the civil year
in the Hebrew calendar and ends with Yom Kippur, which is also known as the “Day of Atonement”. On
Yom Kippur, remembrance of repentance and atonement has been practiced by fasting for a full day
while traditionally wearing white to represent the wish to be forgiven by God, praying that one’s
transgressions may be washed clean so that one’s name may be written in the book of life signifying
admittance to Heaven.
Hanukkah is another holiday practiced in Judaism. Hanukkah is traditionally celebrated around roughly the same time of year as Christmas is for Christians, but it is practiced in remembrance of the rededication of the Second Holy Temple in Jerusalem, rather than in celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Hanukkah is a celebration of eight days, in which candles on candle stands called Menorahs are lit each night. The lighting of candles on Menorahs by many Jewish families who place them in windows facing the street has led to Hanukkah being called the “Festival of Lights”.

Another major Jewish holiday is that of Passover, which is celebrated for seven or eight days depending on the tradition to commemorate being freed from enslavement in Egypt. By Gentiles (non-Jews), Passover has sometimes been called the “Festival of Unleavened Bread” because no raised bread is allowed to be eaten by Jews during its duration. To discuss Passover, the two major branches of Judaism must be recognized, due to the difference in the food that is traditionally forbidden to eat during Passover.

The two major branches of Judaism today are Sephardic and Ashkenazic. Sephardic Jews generally claim ancestry from the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe, while Ashkenazic Jews have ancestry in Eastern Europe and Russia. The two follow slightly different traditions within the larger religion of Judaism. The bread that is technically not allowed to be eaten by practicing Jews during Passover is chametz, which is any bread made with the “five grains”—generally wheat, spelt, barley, oats, and rye. While Sephardic Jews maintain that only chametz cannot be eaten during Passover, Ashkenazic Jews claim that neither chametz nor kitniyot—which includes any products of corn, beans, peas, lentils, and rice—can be eaten.

Regarding the strict rules of Judaism, which are sometimes hard to understand to people outside the faith, it should be considered that it has been through strictly maintaining tradition that this religion has remained as one of the world’s oldest practiced religions. However, as is found with most long-standing religions, Judaism has broken into several separate denominations which uphold slightly different interpretations of the scripture and vary in tradition.

Today there can be considered to be three major contemporary Jewish denominations: Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, and Conservative Judaism. Basically, the general interpretation of scripture has become less strict and the degree to which the religious laws are followed has become more permissive over time, and the contemporary denominations have formed in response to this. In general, the Orthodox group maintains the most literal interpretation of the scriptures and upholds traditional rules the most strictly. On the other side of the spectrum, the Reform group is generally the most liberal in interpretation of scripture and application of traditional rules. The Conservative Judaism group is more moderate, between the other two. The Conservative group agrees with the Reform group that it is primarily the ethical considerations of Judaism that should be upheld, but they maintain the traditional Jewish law more closely to the stricter Orthodox group.

While it is accepted in some cases to convert to Judaism, it has traditionally been a religion which goes along with heritage—meaning that traditionally for one to be considered a Jew they must have been born a Jew. This could be considered a problem for a religion, especially to those who feel...
that any religion should have open membership, regardless of heritage. However, this is not viewed as a problem at all to those who would prefer to keep Judaism a small religion.

Of course, the Abrahamic faith would be opened up to Gentiles with the creation of Christianity, some years after a Jew from Nazareth named Yeshua was crucified by the Roman authorities just outside of Jerusalem around 30 CE. Some Jews came to understand Yeshua to be the Messiah while retaining their Jewish customs and laws, becoming called Messianic Jews, and others would eventually convert to the new religion called Christianity. While Yeshua originally upheld Jewish law and tradition along with the culture he was born into, his teachings have bloomed into an entirely different and much larger religion than Judaism.

Christianity

The name Yeshua, of course, became translated to Jesus, and this is the name that he is commonly referred to by today. Jesus of Nazareth became known as Jesus Christ after some of his followers began referring to him as that, the most noted being Paul, several years after the crucifixion of Jesus and his subsequent disappearance from the land of Israel. Many Jews living in the time of Jesus believed him to be the Messiah or Savior, and he is now well-known as Jesus Christ throughout the world. Jesus Christ was so influential that the Julian Calendar, which was renovated into the Gregorian Calendar that is used in most of the modern world at the time of this writing, set its start to the birth of Jesus, making dates prior to then known as B.C., for “Before Christ”. However, modern scholars believe that Jesus was actually born between around 5 BC.

There is much to be said about Jesus and the different beliefs that people have had about him. Most Christians have traditionally followed the canonized scripture of the Holy Bible, which includes a translation of the Hebrew Bible as its Old Testament, and a New Testament, which includes the four gospel accounts of Jesus Christ which have been titled Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as several other letters referring to Jesus, God, and the practice of religion. The Holy Bible has customarily been considered the ultimate source of information for Christians regarding Christ.

In the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ is called both the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God”. Many have believed Jesus to have been fully human, yet also incarnated with the Spirit of God—even though Jesus usually spoke of God as his Father sovereign over him. Regarding God, Jesus is reported to have said, “His form you have never seen” (John 5:37)—yet he has also been quoted to have said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). This is what was later referred to in the Revelation to John as the double-edged sword that is the tongue of Christ, which is most accurately interpreted to mean that God’s Spirit was in Christ and therefore God acted through Christ, though Christ was a human being that was constrained by his physical form. (This concept is admittedly difficult to grasp through reason, which is why it has been said to be only truly acceptable through faith.)

Christ has traditionally been viewed in Christianity as part of the Holy Trinity of: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This trinity of God can be understood by thinking that everything is from the Father, through
the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity of Christianity was preceded by Roman triads and reflects many other divine trinities in other faiths, which can be recognized as parallels to the Holy Trinity of Christianity if the mind is opened to this possibility. While the Unitarian movement of Christianity has proposed that the idea of the Holy Trinity should be relaxed in order to better embrace a more unified conception of God, in accepting the understanding that trinities are simply symbolisms with which we try to make sense of the works of the singular God, both can be recognized as true.

While the Holy Bible has traditionally been thought by Christians to be the ultimate source of truth about Jesus and God, there have been many other writings about Jesus that were not included in the Holy Bible. It is interesting to note the differences between the writings that were included in the Holy Bible and those that were not. In general, it appears that the gospel accounts selected for the Holy Bible include stories in which Jesus performed miraculous signs which defied the laws of physics, while most of the writings about Jesus that are not in the Holy Bible, as well as some of the letters within the Holy Bible, place acclaim in the teachings of Jesus and make no mention of miracle accounts.

While the Holy Bible surely holds much truth regarding Christ, it is wholly possible that some parts of it are untrue. After all, it cannot be denied that there are many discrepancies within the Holy Bible. Some obvious inconsistencies in the New Testament involve the number of times the cock crowed for Peter after denying Jesus (once according to Matthew 26:34, Luke 22:34, and John 13:38, but twice according to Mark 14:30) and different accounts regarding the birth of Jesus, the situation at the tomb when the body of Jesus was not found to be dead after he was crucified, and many other discrepancies which prove that it is impossible for every word of the Holy Bible to be absolutely true. Though such inconsistencies do nothing to discredit Jesus being Christ, they do draw attention to the fact that the Holy Bible does include untruths, proving at least parts of it cannot be considered to be unquestionable as the literal Word of God.

To find the most accurate description of Jesus, one must look to history and details in resources other than only the New Testament, because the writings that were put into the New Testament were selected by only one faction of early Christianity. In attempt to give a complete description of Jesus, we should first look to the times in which Jesus lived. By providing context into the situation of the times that Jesus lived in, we can get a more comprehensive understanding of Jesus.

In the times in which Jesus lived, the land of Israel was occupied by Roman authorities and undergoing a clash of cultures. In the historical study of Judaism at the time of Jesus, the followers of Judaism were having a hard time holding their religion together because of the integration of the spreading Greek and Roman culture, which has been called Hellenization. Under an increasingly secular society, and in attempt to sustain itself, Judaism splintered partially into separate factions that held different opinions of the best way to keep the Jewish religion and culture alive.

Some of the distinct Jewish groups in existence around the time Jesus lived would have included the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, and the Essenes. Most of the Jews at the time probably remained unaffiliated with these factions, but rather followed Judaism in the best way they could in their own lives in the changing society. The Sadducees took the role of cooperation with the Roman occupiers and
embraced the changing status quo of the times. The Pharisees, on the other hand, tried to conserve Jewish law by stricter education and observance of the Torah. The way in which the Zealots planned to keep their religion and way of life was through resisting and fighting the Roman occupiers. The Essenes took the approach separating themselves from the changing society altogether, going into exile into their own communities secluded from the occupiers. The Dead Sea Scrolls that were found relatively recently in history are the writings of the Qumran branch of the Essenes.

With this background, there is context to discuss the role Jesus played. Like most of the other Jews at the time, Jesus was not a direct part of any of those particular factions of Jews listed in the previous paragraph. However, he is known to have interacted with some of these distinct factions of Jews at the time. For one, he is known to have become upset with the Sadducees for changing money in the Temple and to have expelled them from it in an event referred to as the Cleansing of the Temple. This was a bold move on the part of Jesus, considering the Sadducees were the closest to the Roman authorities, and it likely set a grudge against him that would be a factor in his crucifixion. For another, he is known to have discussed scripture with the Pharisees who were considered the authorities on scripture at the time (and who judged Jesus to be a sinner). Along with consulting scriptures, Jesus thought for himself regarding ideas of what is right and what is truly wrong, in order to decide how he should act.

What we know about Jesus on the most basic level is that he was a carpenter who was baptized by John the Baptist and began a walking ministry around the age of 30 years old in which he taught with authority. In short time, he had a group of followers who walked with him and listened to his words concerning things. His closest followers later became known as the Twelve Disciples. Jesus gained a reputation for helping people and speaking in wise parables to the people. As the reputation of Jesus grew, crowds began to gather to see him. This gathering of crowds, along with the Cleansing of the Temple event in which Jesus criticized the status quo for the way they were doing business, put Jesus under the eye of the Jewish and the Roman authorities.

Jesus went into Jerusalem in a week that there were to be crucifixions, knowing that there were both Jewish and Roman authority figures out to get him, and put himself into a situation where one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, identified him. It is written in John 13:21-27 that Jesus knew Judas was going to do this and even told him to do it. After Jesus was arrested, the authorities were said to have taken him and put him on trial about the claim that he was the “King of the Jews”. Obviously, the Roman authorities were not going to put up with any other kings aside from Caesar in Rome, and they were instructed to stop any potential uprisings against their occupation. It was decided that Jesus would be crucified in the place of one of the other prisoners, Barab’bas, who was planned to have been crucified that day. Jesus was then publicly mocked, physically abused, and nailed to a cross for an excruciatingly painful execution to suffer what many have deserved but that he did not.

Most traditional Christians understand Jesus’s crucifixion to have been a willing sacrifice. It was not a surprise attack when Jesus was taken by the authorities, but an event that Jesus knew was coming. It is clear that Jesus knew he would be taking this step already the night before, as he commemorated that night’s meal as the Last Supper with his disciples. Though some stories have been told in which
Jesus is said to have broken the laws of physics, it became clear that he could not defy the laws of physics when he was unable to bring himself down from the cross—as was pointed out by the mocking comments that were made by those transgressors being crucified next to him, as well as by several more judgmental and compassionless observers.

It has been a traditional belief of Christianity that Jesus died upon the cross and miraculously came back to life three days later. The fact that Jesus Christ was alive three days after being crucified is supported by the evidence that he was witnessed by many people in the flesh. Some have pointed out the fact that there is no proof that Jesus actually died upon the cross and proposed that it is possible he survived his crucifixion, judging from clues including that his legs were not broken and that he was taken down early, after just six hours on the cross. In truth, even if Jesus Christ did not die on the cross but rather survived his crucifixion to arise afterward, it would not make Christianity any less significant, because either way his crucifixion showed the extreme sacrifice that he was willing to make through his faith in God that his message would save many souls and change the world for the better.

The cross is now a symbol of monotheistic faith that is recognized worldwide as a testament to the fulfillment of prophesy, because when Jesus Christ was crucified it fulfilled prophesy from scriptures that were written centuries earlier and could only have been foreseen by God. One passage in particular noted to have been fulfilled by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was that of Psalm 22, which includes the words: “[T]hey have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.” The crucifixion of Jesus Christ showed that Psalm 22 must have been inspired in the Spirit of prophesy when it was written for David. There are many other ancient passages from the Hebrew Bible which can be noted to be fulfilled by Christ, including many verses from Isaiah, especially Isaiah 25, Isaiah 42, and Isaiah 53.

After hearing the story of Jesus and having received a vision from God, the apostle who became known as Paul became an advocate of Jesus as Christ and preached his message widely. The good tidings from Paul were that Gentiles could be forgiven and receive salvation through Jesus without having to practice all of the customs and traditions of Judaism. The story and message of Jesus Christ that was preached by Paul was even attractive to previous Pagans. Thus, Paul played a key role in creating a religion that was based in Judaism through Jesus that was accepting of non-Jews. This was done quite successfully, and after the adaptation of scripture, eventually resulted in the form of Christianity that became the state religion of the Roman Empire.

When Christianity was picked up as the state religion of Rome, as was officially announced by Theodosius in 380 CE, some of the Pagan festivals were simply switched to Christian ones. For example, Christmas, which is now celebrated throughout the world to commemorate the birth of Jesus, was previously a festival that celebrated the birth of the Roman sun god, *Sol Invictus*. It has been kept quite quiet that the birth of Jesus was simply transposed into this festival, which is held in December, though most scholars place the actual birth of Jesus to have occurred around the time of late September. (Still, Christmas can rightly be continued on the date of its traditional celebration in remembrance and appreciation for the life of a man that played a crucial part in helping individuals and the world improve for the better by becoming the Christ through his incarnation with God and his self-sacrifice.)
The Christian holiday of Easter has traditionally celebrated Jesus Christ being arisen after his crucifixion. In some traditions of Christianity, Easter is preceded by six weeks of Lent in which certain types of fasting are practiced, including giving up one worldly luxury for the entire six week period. The six weeks of Lent end with Holy Week, which includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday which commemorate the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of the tradition of Lent could be linked to the Jewish practices that include fasting, as a type of continuation of some of the preceding customs included in that Abrahamic religion.

When early Christianity was indoctrinated as the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was important for there to be a standard set of scriptures to go along with it. Some scholars believe that the list of endorsed books to become considered the official canonized scripture of the New Testament was put together by Athanasius of Alexandria in 367 CE. It is certain that this list was chosen from the many possible texts which could have been included to convey a certain picture of Jesus Christ—particularly one in which he had magical powers similar to those of the deities of the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian pantheons. This New Testament was then coupled with a translation of the Hebrew Bible to form the Holy Bible, which fundamentalist Christians have considered to be the Word of God despite its multiple authors who were not incarnations of God.

It is interesting that the oldest book in the New Testament is thought to be Paul’s letter to the Theologians, but that book is placed towards the end of the New Testament. It is apparent that the teachings of Paul were influential on the gospel accounts, which scholars have evidence to show were written many years after Paul’s letters, which he began writing around 49 CE. While it is somewhat irregular that books written after Paul’s letters were placed before them in the Holy Bible, it can be seen that they are useful to give context to the life of Jesus, who Paul was talking about. The Book of Acts, which was put together much later, is particularly interesting in its placement and how it makes this connection between the gospels and the letters in the New Testament.

It is important to know that while the main gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John contain great wisdom in their quotations from Jesus, they were composed of collections of hear-say accounts that were gathered decades after the death of Jesus. The gospel called Mark was the first of the four gospels written, and it was not written until around 70 CE. Of course, it is a well-known effect that over time the fish in the story gets bigger and bigger. This may be one of many factors which could have led to some stories becoming exaggerated. Another reason some stories may have been embellished would have been to augment belief for the time being, especially among the Pagans of the Roman Empire whose previous religions contained deities who had supernatural powers, including tales of physical resurrection from death. Sadly, having included physical impossibilities has been a hindrance to honest rational belief for many, resulting in much skepticism throughout the ages and even backfiring in many cases to cause previous believers to lose faith altogether later in life.

There are tens of thousands of denominations of Christianity being practiced at the time of this writing. Most of the denominations at the time of this writing can be considered to fall under three categories: Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, and Protestant Christianity. Christianity has undergone a number of good reforms since the end of the Middle Ages and the collapse of the Roman
While many Catholics may wish to continue their tradition which includes the support of a centralized power hierarchy that was not included in the teachings of Christ, most of the denominations of Christianity today are more liberal. Because Christ never taught that religion required any centralized power structure between individual congregations and God, you can be confident that independent Christian churches which emphasize the importance of Christ’s teachings are at least equally correct to the practice of Catholicism which includes extra elaborate doctrines and rituals.

Instead of getting into the different practices upheld by the many different denominations of Christianity being practice today, or picking at the beliefs about questionable accounts portrayed of Jesus that would have required breaking the laws of physics—such as literally walking on water, turning water into wine, or physically raising the dead—it is better to focus on the teachings of Jesus. (With regard to the proclaimed miracle in which Jesus Christ was said to have raised Laz’arus from the dead, however, one recommendation will be given: If one carefully reads the words of John 11:4, John 11:11, John 11:15, and John 11:25, followed by John 20:31, they can discern the understanding that some misperception was used toward helping people have faith in Christ’s true promise of eternal life.)

Though considerable dogmatism was enacted when the Pagan Roman Empire adopted Roman Catholic Christianity as its powerful new state religion that became the basis for later versions of Christianity which branched off from it, the original message of Jesus Christ was not about practicing dogmatic religious rituals or having to believe that Jesus could perform miracles. Rather, Christ’s message was about loving God, caring about one another, and treating one another well in accordance with those principles. Though much changed religiously after the coming of Jesus Christ, there was truly only one new commandment declared by him (John 15:12):

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Because this was the one new commandment given by Jesus Christ, it might be considered the single most important commandment to all Christians. However, there was one other commandment that Jesus said was the greatest of the commandments: to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). In this, Jesus Christ taught that loving others as yourself is second only to loving God (Matthew 22:39). With an understanding of these teachings of Jesus Christ, it becomes clear that it is a total misinterpretation and an utter misuse of Christianity to preach hatred.

Perhaps the most underrated book in the New Testament regarding the teaching of Jesus is the Letter of James. While the final authors of the four gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John were not actually disciples of Jesus (though it appears parts of John were originally written by someone with personal experience with Jesus before being added to by others later), James is believed to have been someone who would have actually known Jesus and his message. Thus, the Letter of James should be considered to reflect the message that Jesus taught was really important to preach.

Included in the Letter of James were warnings against storing up one’s wealth “to rust” when it could be doing good to help others. Perhaps this message can inspire those with far more than they need to put some of their excess riches to use by investing in helping those in need. And by being
merciful to those who are in a position of need, mercy will surely be given to them. In the end, those who were in a position to help others and actually acted upon that opportunity can rest assured that they will eventually find it to have been well worth it.

One can notice that the message of the Letter of James is quite different from the other books of the New Testament, as it gives no focus to the heavily emphasized miracle accounts. One reason James has not been quoted as frequently is because it contains a somewhat more difficult message than the easy message that Paul promoted in his letters stating that people will be saved by faith alone. People like the message of faith alone because it requires no real effort. So, multitudes have chosen to cling to this partially empty promise without actually practicing the message that Jesus Christ promoted. This may explain part of why there remain to be so many people in poverty in the world today even though there are well over two billion claimed Christians. Jesus Christ did not go around simply saying that salvation laid in accepting him as the Savior, but rather he taught people to be good to one another. An example of that message which Jesus preached is portrayed in Luke 3:10-11:

And the multitudes asked him, “What then shall we do?”; And he answered them, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.”

Clearly, Jesus Christ expected people to share in their surpluses with those lacking what they need. Still, it was not as though he expected everyone to give everything they have away in his name. As you see, Jesus did not say that a man with two coats must give both away and leave himself coatless. So Christ’s expectations are truly within reason, as none are expected to give so much that they themselves become the poor in need of donation. If everyone with extra would practice the message of Christ, and give within their means to help others, life on Earth for many would actually become more like it is in Heaven, as was the wish of Christ. Thus, let every Christian who is in a position to do good actually do good, rather than merely believing in Christ for forgiveness, and be a true Christian! The message that faith without works is empty was perhaps most clearly conveyed in James 2:14-17:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

As one can see, the Letter of James was intended to remind Christians about what Jesus actually taught—beyond just having faith in God and wishing well. So, here the primary message contained in the Letter of James will be repeated for the reader one more time: If one has called themselves a follower of Christ, but has chosen to merely have faith for themselves while doing nothing to help people in need, they have had their heart in the right place but have been lacking in their works. Still, while it was made clear that Jesus expected more than for people to just have faith and not do wrong, but to actually go further and practice his recommendations to help one another, he also made condolence by saying (John 12:47):
If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

From this, it can be known that Christ was given out of God’s love to save those who are lost by being a light unto belief in God for them. Not only was he was sent out of courtesy by God so that all could rightly believe in God and to show all that they should truly repent for their misdeeds so they may receive eternal life in Heaven, but he was also sent to teach everyone to be good to one another—and so his mission was not only to save souls eternally but also to save the world of the living. This is why Christianity is truly not about being judgmental of others, but rather about loving God and one another and receiving forgiveness. For judgment is surely best left to God.

Regarding these things, there is also wisdom included in the letters of Paul, which preach many messages about salvation. Paul’s promise of hope in salvation by accepting Christ is not a lie, so long as one also practices what Christ preached and treat one another well. While Paul has received harsh criticism from both non-Christians and Christians for portraying a message which can be wrongly interpreted to mean that one can consciously do evil and still be forgiven under the excuse of having faith in Jesus as Christ, it should be considered that Christianity may never have reached so many and saved so many without Paul’s movement to share the message of Jesus as Christ. In his many letters, Paul made very strong points. For example, he implored the Romans to stop judging one another and to instead leave that to God, in saying (Romans 2:1-3):

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

But Paul also included many messages of hope in his letters along with messages of warning against evil. One line that can be quoted from Paul that conveys some of his more kind-hearted wisdom comes from his letter to the Galatians 5:22-23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

Here we see that Paul was continuing the message of Jesus that God’s true message for the world is not to be petty and judgmental regarding following religious laws and socially-reinforced cultural norms, but rather to love one another and to bear one another’s burdens (as Jesus symbolized by washing his disciple’s feet) while wholesomely enjoying life together. Truly, this is what living is about, and Paul became an apostle of Christ by recognizing this and spreading the message.
Some of the more profound principles of Christianity from the original teachings of Jesus include having love for even your enemies—which is truly Godly unconditional love—and forgiving others so you yourself may be forgiven. This seems to be a good place to quote the Lord’s Prayer, which Jesus Christ taught in his prominent sermon on the mount, and which has been recited billions of times over in various versions by Christians worldwide:

Our Father, who art in Heaven,  
Hallowed be thy Name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom,  
The power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever.  
Amen.

Now, let us move the discussion on to the concern over the fact that Jesus was said to have claimed he would return. While this Second Coming has been interpreted by some to mean that Jesus himself would return one day, with some even having been led to believe imaginative tales in which Jesus was imagined magically flying like Superman with superpowers to fix all the world’s problems, it must be realized that in reality it is more accurate to understand that the promise given through Jesus meant that the essence of Christ would return. In the Gospel of John, it is written that Jesus Christ said he must leave the world so that another like him would be sent by God in the Spirit of truth to remind all of what he taught and to teach the many things that he had yet to say, but that the world was not yet ready to bear (John 14:16-17, John 14:25-26; John 15:26; and John 16:7-15).

And so, ever since Christ left this world, there have been people waiting for Christ’s return. In generation after generation, people have believed that the return of Christ would happen while they were alive. Needless to say, generation after generation went without having this prophesy fulfilled. Now, after all this time, it seems that humanity is beginning to lose faith. However, let those who have believed this promise remember that all along it has been understood that the return of Christ would come when it was least expected.

This brings up the message of the last book in the Holy Bible: The Revelation to John. Near the outset of his writing, John of Patmos wrote (Revelation 1:7): “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so, Amen.” It is then described that this revelation was given by One who identified Himself as
“the Alpha and the Omega”—meaning the Almighty One that is in everything, the Creator of All. It is clear from the style of prophesy and the language used that the vision given to John of Patmos was given by the same Holy Spirit that prophesized through Isaiah many centuries earlier.

The revelation John of Patmos received and wrote was extremely cryptic and figurative, but describes most clearly that “the Lamb” is to come and deliver a “scroll” having “seven seals”. Included in the writing regarding the opening of the “seven seals” of this “scroll” is a depiction of events which many have interpreted to portray a worldly apocalypse. However, most of these events can be interpreted to have happened already over the course of history and to be highly metaphorical visions representing change. The description of the opening of the “seven seals” of the Lamb’s “scroll” can be interpreted in a modern sense to correspond to seven parts of a book, with certain metaphors referring to certain subject matter within the parts of that book, others having to do with the Lamb and the processes involved with that book coming about, and others symbolizing the great changes that would come to the world with the results of that book’s application.

It may have to be accepted that many of the meanings of the symbolism within the Revelation to John was meant primarily to influence the Lamb to manifest and fulfill his role to humanity, though other parts will surely be discovered to have had hidden meanings. An important key in the writing of the Revelation to John of Patmos comes towards its end where it says (Revelation 22:18): “I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book[.]” What this means is that the remaining plagues that are described within the Book of Revelation that have not happened yet are avoidable, so long as the writing of John of Patmos has not been adulterated. Since that book has been maintained and passed down through time, it seems this world can be spared of many of those plagues—especially those described with the “seven trumpets”—even exactly as it has been written.

With this understanding, though major catastrophes will surely happen, wise Christians should free themselves of any notion of a coming total destruction of the world in their lifetime. For the true meaning of “apocalypse” is that of a widespread uncovering of the truth, and this book can begin that here and now for all those who have truly understood the message of eternal salvation. So live in the revealed way of God that Christ taught, and no matter what may become of things, know that it is the true teaching of Christ to love others as yourself and not to try to make yourself the judge of them; but instead do your best to treat everyone as you would like to be treated if you were them. That is the single greatest teaching of Christianity.

Islam

“In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, I seek refuge in God from the evil Satan.” These words are often used in the beginning of serious religious discussions by Muslims, many of whom take their particular religious form of devotion to God with the utmost seriousness. Hopefully beginning this discussion of Islam with these words will help buffer from the strong backlash that can result from critiquing this religion.
While Islam is considered to be one particular religion today, the term “Islam” can rightly be viewed to cover all religions which recognize and worship God—as will be covered in this section. The religious tradition recognized as Islam today is more specifically the Muhammadan tradition of Islam. This version of Islam can be considered to have been started by Muhammad in the year 610 CE when he began prophesizing what would become canonized as the Qur’an in around 650 CE.

It should be noted immediately, in the hopes of not aggravating any Muslims, that by Islamic tradition it is encouraged to write “peace be upon him” after any time one mentions the Prophet Muhammad’s name. Out of the same respect, Muslims are also encouraged to add the same phrase behind any mention of Jesus. Like Jesus, Muhammad preached monotheistic belief in God with reference to the scriptures which include mention of Abraham.

However, where Jesus promoted the ideal of pacifism, Muhammad endorsed violence against any attackers who threaten harm. This was originally in the spirit of righteousness, which permitted violence only when necessary for protection of innocent people from attackers. However, some of the interpretations of Islam have since then led Muslims to be attackers on innocent people. Sadly, this has also been the case for Christians, as both religions have been manipulated to bring violence despite their original messages of peace. Despite the small fraction of Muslims who plot violence such as suicide bombers, most practitioners of Islam are peaceful people who do not wish harm on others—which is a statement that should generally be true for most anyone who is in an undisturbed state and not suffering any kind of injustice.

As already noted, Muhammad is believed by Muslims as a prophet of Allah (with “Allah” simply being the Arabic pronunciation of the English word pronounced “God”). Muslims also revere Jesus as a prophet of God, but do not believe him to have been an incarnation of the Spirit of God as is the true understanding of many traditional Christians. But while Muslims and Christians have different beliefs about Jesus and Muhammad, this does not mean that Christians and Muslims cannot respect one another. For that matter, let it be that Jews and Christians and Muslims all respect each other’s religion; that is, if they want their own religion to be respected. It should be that the followers of this one family of Abrahamic faiths can get along, and that they can also get along with people of other faiths.

It is interesting to consider what the Qur’an itself says of Abraham’s faith. (Quotes from the Qur’an herein are derived from translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc.) Regarding the faith of Abraham, Muhammad said (Surah 3:67-68):

Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to God’s, (which is Islam), and he did not join gods with God. Without doubt, among men, the nearest of kin to Abraham are those who follow him; as are also this Messenger and those who believe: and God is the Protector of those who have faith.

By the traditional message promoted by the Prophet Muhammad, Islam is the one true religion of God, and everyone should follow Islam. But when Muhammad said “Islam”, he meant “Submission to
God”, as he could not have been referring to the Muhammadan tradition of Islam that is the Muslim religion of Islam today prior to its existence. Regarding this, Muhammad said (Surah 5:69):

Those who believe (in the Qur’an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians, and the Christians – any who believe in God, and the Last Day and work righteousness – on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Thus, Muhammad prophesized that people of faiths other than the Muhammadan tradition of Islam can be in the ways of God, and thus he endorsed righteous non-Muslims, that they should not be afraid so long as they do that which is right and acknowledge God. This may come as a surprise to those who have wrongly believed Islam to condemn all non-Muslims, but it is a message that comes straight out of the Qur’an itself.

Furthermore, the Qur’an recognizes that Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were all prophets of God (Surah 3:84). Thus, though Muslims take great pride in their particular tradition of worship, they admit that there have been other prophets of God. In the Qur’an, Surah 3:84 even explicitly states that Muslims are to make no distinction among the prophets—meaning there is actually no real justification for Muhammad to be taken as the ultimate prophet over the others, as that is actually Muhammadanism—but rather to bow their will to God. Again, in truth, the most accurate interpretation of the Qur’an explains that “Islam” means “Submission to God”. Therefore, any religious tradition which recognizes the existence of God can be considered a form of Islam, not just the Muhammadan tradition of Islam.

The most important messages of the Qur’an—the importance of which is notable from their emphasis through heavy repetition—are that one should never doubt that there is a hereafter, and that God determines that afterlife. In accordance with this, one can find many verses which declare warnings of condemnation to unbelievers. One solid passage from the Qur’an of particular interest in Islam’s true regard for other religions can be found in Surah 5:46-48:

And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God.

Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel.

To you We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to you. To each among you have we prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so
strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute.

Just after this passage, in Surah 5:51, there is a message given that says that Muslims should not accept Jews and Christians as their allies. However, it has been the case in parts of the world such as the United States of America that the practice of Muhammadan Islam has been protected by Christians and Jews, and Christians and Jews have been friends of Muslims in many parts of the world. For this reason, it should be known that Jews and Christians truly can be allies of Muslims, and thus that Muslims truly can be allies of Jews and Christians.

So, just as not every word of the Holy Bible can be taken as the unquestionable Word of God, in truth it must also be accepted that not every word of the Qur’an can be taken as the unquestionable Word of God. Moreover, the Qur’an was certainly not the last revelation from God, as this text you are now reading is a revelation from God. It must be understood that while Muhammad was a prophet, some of the messages of the Qur’an—particularly those promoting violence—are a misguidance of the true will of God, as God’s will is that all be able to live in peace free from war. Still, it is possible for the Qur’an, the Hebrew Bible, the Holy Bible, and other religious books to be reconciled. This truth is even recognized in the Qur’an itself in Surah 29:46, where Muslims are instructed to say:

“We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).”

What these passages truly mean is that God has revealed teachings through many messengers and that all traditions practicing virtue can rightly be continued, so long as all practice being good to one another and avoid idolatry by recognizing that only God should be worshipped, though others can be appreciated. In many places within the Qur’an there is recognition given to the fact that there have been many different messengers to different peoples. Learning from this, let everyone try to be less stern and more impartial regarding each other’s religious scriptures and their own so that religion can be shared willingly and openly in the various religious traditions.

As recorded in the Qur’an, Muhammad explained his view that Jesus truly was a messenger of God, but that he was not God Himself. As can be found in the Holy Bible, Jesus prayed to God on many occasions, which would indicate that he was not God, per se; but in truth the Holy Spirit acted directly through Christ, making him more than a prophet. Still, there does not need to be contention regarding this, because such details are impossible to prove in this life. It will always surely be better to find things to agree upon than to amplify disagreements. The message that Christians and Muslims at least agree upon the major things echoes some words Prophet Muhammad said (Surah 3:114-115):

They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten in good works; they are in the ranks of the righteous. Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for God knows well those that do right.
From this, at the minimum level, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others should all be able to agree with one another that there is one true God—and that God is the Creator of the universe, loving to all who practice goodness and charity, especially with recognition given unto God. That people accept God into their hearts and show it in some way is truly the most important part of the message. Even those of the karmic Eastern religions (which are to be discussed in the next chapter) can agree with some of what Prophet Muhammad said, such as Surah 45:15:

*If any one does a righteous deed, it goes to the benefit of his own soul; if he does evil it works against (his own soul). In the end will you (all) be brought back to your Lord.*

This is one example of the many good messages preached in the writings of the Qur’an. It is true that inspiring words of patience, kindness, and forgiveness can be found within the pages of the Qur’an among the many stern messages meant to warn against questioning certain faith in God. It must be hoped that Muslims who value continuing the faith and tradition of Muhammadan Islam will seek out the messages in the Qur’an which promote peace and understanding and not the ones that promote hatred, so that they may not make themselves as sores in the eyes of God. It is surely true that God hears and sees all things and will give to each as they deserve, as is continually repeated in the Qur’an. Knowing this is good encouragement not to practice cruelty and to leave judgment to God.

In addition to the Qur’an, the tradition of Muhammadan Islam also has other scriptures. The Hadith is a collection of Islamic traditions and laws, as well as more sayings of Prophet Muhammad and his followers, which has traditionally been considered second only to the Qur’an. However, the Hadith was not reviewed by Muhammad for his approval as the words of the Qur’an are said to have been, and thus the Hadith is not considered the verbatim Word of God, as fundamentalist Muslims have traditionally believed the Qur’an to be.

In the mainstream tradition of Muhammadan Islam, there are “Five Pillars” which are expected of all Muslims. First, the Shahadah, or the testimony, is a declaration of faith that all Muslims must recite. This testimony translates to say: “There is none worthy of worship except God, and Muhammad is a messenger of God.” This first pillar declaration is obviously of high importance to Muhammadan Islam in the recognition of Prophet Muhammad, but the part of conceding that none is worthy of worship except God could be considered a shared component for all monotheistic faiths.

Second in the five pillars is Salah, or prayer. All practicing Muslims have been obligated to pray five times each day ritualistically—the first before sunrise, the next at midday, and three more. In saying these prayers, able Muslims practice a ritual process in which they focus their mind on the Creator of the universe and go to their knees and bow in tribute, praise, and worship of that one and only God. Going to one’s knees daily to carry out prayers is a humbling practice, and it is good for its intended purpose of keeping one continually mindful of the existence and presence of God, the solitary Sovereign Judge over the souls of all who have ever lived and all who ever will live.
The third pillar is Zakah, which is similar to tithing and almsgiving. In Zakah, Muslims practice donation to the needy or humanitarian organizations. By traditional Zakah, all Muslims with any extra to give are required to donate a certain percentage of their wealth to those in need. Besides this obligatory percentage donation, Muslims with more to give after Zakah are encouraged to give more to charity voluntarily with the intentions of purifying themselves from succumbing to greed. (It could be noted that paying taxes can be compared to the minimum Zakah, with giving additional donations to charity then being considered as a voluntary practice of purifying good will that will be recognized by God.)

Fourth in the pillars of Islam is Sawm, or fasting. In particular, all practicing Muslims have been encouraged to abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations during the daylight hours in the month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar. As with the prayer times of Salah, if it is not practical for certain Muslims to practice this fasting between sunrise and sunset during the days of Ramadan, which is practiced as a month of spiritual reflection in Muhammadan Islam, this fasting can be made up for in other times. Sawm is intended for self-purification, and the practice of it also develops self-restraint and reminds one that this physical life is only a temporary part of the spirit’s existence. Such fasting, which is practiced in many spiritual traditions, has the effect of increasing one’s appreciation for life’s pleasures once they again partake afterward.

Lastly in the Five Pillars of Islam is the Hajj, or pilgrimage. All Muslims who are able to are expected to make at least one pilgrimage to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which is noted to be the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and considered to be the holiest city in Muhammadan Islam. Millions of Muslims travel to Mecca each year, especially during the annual days of the Hajj. In Mecca, Muslims pray towards a building called the Kabba and walk around it seven times. Many touch the Black Stone there, among other traditional rituals which are considered to be a religious duty. During the Hajj, all participants wear nearly identical garments, which represents unity of Muslims, and makes for no distinction of class or culture between them in an expression of the fact that all are equals under God.

There are many religious laws practiced in Muhammadan Islam which are too numerous to mention here and vary among tradition. As with Judaism, all Muslims strictly abstain from eating pork. Aside from such traditional practices, religious laws of Muhammadan Islam are often implemented into the state law of historically Muslim nations in which there is a vast majority of practicing Muslims. While some of these laws could be considered wise, many are restricting of the freedom of individuals, and especially of women. These concepts were improved by the creation of Bahá’í faith, the origins of which began with a reformation of Islam from within a culture practicing Muhammadan Islam and which also recognizes Prophet Muhammad to have been a messenger of God.

Over time, the larger religion of Muhammadan Islam fragmented into two major separate denominations: Sunni Islam and Shi’a Islam. The split grew from disagreement on such matters as who should be considered the rightful successors of Muhammad. Sunni Muslims believe that the first four caliphs were the rightful successors of Muhammad, and that because no successors were declared that the caliphs should be elected by the community. Shi’a, on the other hand, believe in the religious leadership of the Imams. In another rendition of Islam, which has been deemed Sufism, followers
uphold Sufi texts as sacred scriptures. Among other improvements, Sufis understand a more direct and personal experience of God. The vast majority of Muslims are currently classified as Sunni.

One of the major traditional differences in Islam from Judaism and Christianity is in the subject of marriage. Where Jews and Christians traditionally uphold monogamy, Islam allows men to have more than one wife, which is not necessarily wrong so long as marriage is consensual. The subject of how some Muslim men treat their wives has been of major concern to some non-Muslims, because there have been examples in the news of Muslim men abusing their wives in horrible ways such as throwing acid in their faces for disobeying them. Still, it must be considered that men of all walks of life have been guilty of mistreating their wives. While some Islamic traditions have wrongly condoned the abuse of women by their husbands, Islamic scripture recorded Prophet Muhammad to have said: “The most perfect in faith, amongst believers, is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife.” Clearly, this means that by true Islam, men should never subject their wives to any kind of abuse. Moreover, wives should never be considered the property of their husbands, but rather equals.

There has also been great worry about the approach that Islam takes to war. Moreover, the fact that there have been many Islamic suicide bombers has led many to believe Islam to be a violent and dangerous religion. It is true that there are some notorious “sword verses” in the Qur’an which have been used to wrongly endorse violence against anyone who could be considered a party to a previous attack, but there are better words in the Qur’an which could be focused on to promote peace, for example (Surah 8:61):

If they seek peace, then you seek peace. And trust in God for He is the One that hears and knows all things.

Some will surely feel that this is being too tolerant for not accentuating the violence that has occurred in the name of Islam, but one simply must give the benefit of the doubt that individuals will be reasonable despite the endorsement of violence in their religious scriptures. After all, one cannot deny that there is also much violence endorsed in the scriptures of Judaism and the Holy Bible. In the spirit of being reasonable, one must hope that Muslims will wisely choose not to try to force everyone else in the world to practice Muhammadan Islam. That would be an improper take on Islam, after all, because Muhammad himself endorsed Judaism, Christianity, and Sabianism as noted above in the quote from the Qur’an Surah 5:69.

When considering the violence that has happened in the name of Muhammadan Islam throughout history and the violence perpetrated by those of many religions other than Muhammadan Islam, one must realize they cannot condemn all of the people of an entire religion simply because some individuals have carried out violence in its name. Would a Christian expect that all Christians should be hated for the violence perpetrated by a few who called themselves Christians? No, they would not. And as such, no Muslim would want all Muslims to be hated for the violence perpetrated by a few who called themselves Muslims.
Much hatred has been stirred up between the Abrahamic religions, and both sides have been
demonized by the other. One question should be asked by all of those of the different Abrahamic faiths:
What need is there for there to be fighting between Jews, Christians, and Muslims when they are all
already truly practicing different forms of Islam anyway? There is no practical use in fighting and making
violence over minor differences in religious tradition, such as the particular rituals associated with
prayer and worship—so long as all prayer and worship is directed to the one God that created the
universe. That is what is truly important about the message of Islam.

Now, the world is fully ready for all religious violence—especially among these groups that all
claim to be of the same larger Abrahamic family of religions in the first place—to be dissolved. Perhaps
the next religion to be discussed, which is a more recently developed tradition in the line of the
Abrahamic religions, could be helpful in bringing resolution to the areas where Muslims, Christians,
Jews, and others have had differing opinions on particular details.

Latter Day Saints

The Latter Day Saints movement, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and
Mormonism, has been considered to have been started by Joseph Smith in the late 1820’s. Though,
because the accounts written by Joseph Smith were recorded by others from much earlier times and
“hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time”, Smith cannot truly be considered the founder of the
religion. Rather, the religion is truly of the Abrahamic religions, as parts of it have been traced back to
the lineage from the Hebrew Bible. This purpose is stated towards the beginning of the first book in the
Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 6:4): “For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto
the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.”

Joseph Smith explained that he was told the location of an ancient book comprised of inscribed
golden plates by what he described to be an angel. Smith found the plates hidden in a hill near his home
in western New York, precisely where he was instructed to look for them. Upon properly following the
directions of the angel that made sure Smith did not have any intentions of using the plates for profit
and that he would protect them from being destroyed, Smith was able to retrieve them to know that
they were real.

Smith went through great stress over keeping the plates from being stolen, but showed them to
several people to witness them to validate their physical existence. Eleven sworn witnesses signed their
names to having seen these plates, three of whom were also visited by what they described as an angel
that “came down from heaven” and showed them the plates, and eight of whom handled the plates
physically themselves. Through a type of visionary guidance, Smith was dictated the content matter of
the plates in English. Once it was verified to Smith that the scribing of the content of the plates was
complete until a later time, Smith returned the plates to their guardians.

The writings produced from the translation of the golden plates by Smith became what is now
called the Book of Mormon. Though the process by which the Book of Mormon was written and its
contents have been highly questioned, the book is accepted as scripture by members of the Latter Day Saint movement, including primarily the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—which includes some 14 million members. Despite how many details of the Book of Mormon have been scrutinized as hard to believe, it is highly improbable that Smith went through the pains of the process that he did in order to fabricate it. Furthermore, it would have been extremely difficult to make up such details. So, it must be true that the accounts depicted in Book of Mormon originated in some genuine history holding spiritual significance.

The Book of Mormon—which is subtitled Another Testament of Jesus Christ—is composed of the accounts of several authors that were originally compiled in engravings on metal plates that include the descriptions of revelations of the future as well as histories of several different genealogies of peoples, including particular groups referred to as the Nephites, the Lamanites, and the people of Jared. Within the larger Book of Mormon, there are fifteen smaller books. However, it is known that there were originally sixteen, but that the translation of the Book of Lehi was lost while in the possession of an associate of Smith’s and not retranslated—by reason described by Smith to be that God told him not to so that its content would not fall into the wrong hands. There was also a portion of the plates that was not translated due to being sealed. The content of the sealed portion has been expected by Mormons and other Latter-day Saints to come forth at a later date.

Included in the Book of Mormon are accounts in which the Lord inspired many faithful Gentiles to have faith in Jesus Christ, to repent for their sins sincerely, and to receive knowledgeable baptism. In the book, there are directions given by the Lord in response to prayer very similar to those accounts given in the Hebrew Bible—except, of course, that these were given to persons aside from Jews and the early Christian movement that was absorbed by the Roman Empire. As proclaimed from the information contained in their scripture, the Latter Day Saints have maintained a connection with the remnant of the house of Israel, and have upheld the belief that Jesus is the Christ of the Eternal God who will one day return to manifest again as the Lamb of God for all the nations of the world to see.

The oldest plates that Smith translated originated from long before the time of Jesus, yet some included prophecy foretelling his coming. Following through to the last book in the Book of Mormon, the author named Moroni describes that he lived in a time when Christians were being persecuted and put to death. It was written by Smith that the plates he received and translated were “sealed up” for keeping by this Moroni, the son of the Nephite man named Mormon who had possessed the collections of plates and abridged them before passing them down to Moroni.

The lineages that had possessed the plates through time knew that they contained prophecy which was fulfilled and therefore knew that they were sacred. And Smith, through the process of being told where to find the plates and the successful translation of them, was assuredly won over regarding the importance of the plates and making their knowledge known as a service to God. This is part of why many of the Latter-day Saints, particularly the Mormons, have often been very avid believers who have been advocates of gaining converts to their faith.
The first two books in the Book of Mormon were written by one named Nephi, the son of Lehi. Again, the book of Lehi would have been the first in the Book of Mormon but the original translation was lost and not retranslated. This is curious considering that it sounds as though Lehi had received some of the most detailed visions regarding important future events. Perhaps the details contained in the plates of Lehi were too detailed that they might prevent the Second Coming of Christ from occurring as God intended had they been shared to the world. For context, Lehi lived in the early reign of king Zedekiah of Judah, who is mentioned in the First Book of Kings and Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible for his dreadful loss of Jerusalem to king Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon in 586 BC. In the first book of Nephi, he describes that his father, Lehi, was given an abstract vision (1 Nephi 1:9-10):

And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

This, of course, has been interpreted to have been a revelation of the coming of Jesus Christ and his Twelve Disciples. In his vision, Lehi read from a book given to him by the first who was originally followed by twelve others, and the reading filled him with the Spirit of the Lord (1 Nephi 1:11-12).

Nephi describes further that his father was foretold by the Holy Spirit that the great city of Jerusalem would be destroyed and that many of its inhabitants would be carried away captive to Babylon (1 Nephi 1:13). Lehi tried to warn the Jews according to this prophecy, so that they might leave Jerusalem to save themselves, but they did not believe him and instead mocked him (1 Nephi 1:19). Because the Jews became angry with his prophesying and threatened his life (1 Nephi 1:20), Lehi took his family and left the city under the direction of the Lord (1 Nephi 2:1-2). After leaving the city and going into the wilderness, the family including Nephi would eventually travel across the great waters to the bountiful land of promise.

Though Nephi admits that he did not care to give a clear description of all of the particular details of his father’s visions, he does give an abbreviated account of them to substitute the more detailed version that was given in Lehi’s own plates, the translation of which did not make it into the Book of Mormon. In part 10 of the First Book of Nephi, there is a second-hand description given of Lehi’s visions regarding the coming Messiah. Due to vagueness in Nephi’s shortened version, it seems that Lehi may have originally spoken of two separate figures.

It is clear from 1 Nephi 10:4 that Lehi referred to Jesus as the Jewish Messiah to come out of Jerusalem. But in 1 Nephi 10:10, Lehi also spoke of a “Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world.” It seems that Nephi mixed up his father’s reference to two closely linked individuals: one being Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, and one being the Lamb of God, to come later as the Redeemer of the world. It would make sense that the two were confused with one another or even understood to be the same individual if they shared the same essence bestowed upon them by the Spirit of God.

The terminology of this coming “Lamb of God” most obviously corresponds to “the Lamb” who was written about after the crucifixion of Jesus by John of Patmos in the Book of Revelation. It is of great
interest that according to the Book of Mormon Nephi was actually told beforehand that an apostle named John would write in more detail later about the Lamb (1 Nephi 14:24-27):

And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see. But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them. And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel. And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

This particular detail connects the Book of Mormon to the Book of Revelation of the Holy Bible. And, though the Book of Mormon was written by John Smith long after the Holy Bible was written, the plates of Lehi and Nephi were originally recorded before the first destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, the above prophesy that is portrayed in the Book of Mormon was actually fulfilled by the recording of the Revelation to John, which ended up being the last book in the Holy Bible.

In fact, interpretation of 1 Nephi 13:23-24 most obviously refers to the Holy Bible. It provides that the words of Jesus were whole and true. However, 1 Nephi 13:26-29 gives the understanding that the New Testament of the Holy Bible that went out into the world was adulterated by the early Roman Catholic Church, having falsities included and many important words of Jesus intentionally left out. This cast a great stumbling block before many in the world and gave Satan great power over many Gentiles in the confusion created by its ignorance. (This has to do with some impossibilities like water into wine being included in the New Testament to be blindly accepted by faith, which would actually prevent many from having faith, and the promise of unconditional forgiveness being included to lead some to be fooled by the temptation of the excuse that evil was permissible so long as one had faith in Christ.)

Nevertheless, in 1 Nephi 13:33-34, Nephi described he was also shown that, as part of a response to the corruption of the teachings of Jesus, the Lamb of God would come and mercifully give a new Gospel of his own to the world directly. This Gospel is the same Gospel that was cryptically referred to by John of Patmos as the Lamb’s book of seven seals; indeed, it is the very seven-part book that you are now reading. Concerning this, Nephi wrote (1 Nephi 14:1-2):

And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever; they shall be no more brought down into captivity; and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded.
So, it was promised and became scripture that if you choose to accept the truth of the words that have manifested in this book you are now reading, your stumbling blocks will be removed and you will no longer be confounded. (Let that sentence sink in.) Now, this does not mean that the Latter Day Saints are of the one true religion, but rather that their tradition holds a significant piece to the puzzle of religions that has been put before the world. Rather than only one religion being correct, all of the religions of the world can be grafted into the same tree. Though this may seem hard to believe, it will be true so long as each religion can adapt itself to be inclusive of the larger truth—the most important parts of which are treating others as you like to be treated, recognizing God for the creation of the universe, and intending worship to exalt none other than that God.

If this is taken into practice, with everyone recognizing that all blessings flow from God and that worship should be intended only for God, the separate religions will no longer be held in contempt and it can finally be understood that we all live under the same God who offers eternal life in Heaven. Thus, the one true teaching is that God should be known and accepted in our hearts, though the teachings of other traditions can be practiced. God wills that we respect and accept one another and one another’s cultures. It is by respecting God and one another’s religions and cultures that the stumbling blocks that were set before the world may be taken away.

In analyzing the message given by the Book of Mormon and the traditions of the Latter Day Saints, one finds that it uniquely endorses some of the apparently contradictory beliefs held between traditional Christianity and traditional Islam. From the passages of the Book of Mormon, it is reinforced that Jesus was the Messiah, but that the holy book about him would be corrupted. This agrees with the view that Muslims have taken regarding the Holy Bible. Now, perhaps by God’s grace, this message can be brought to form a common reconciliation between these argumentative points between the ideologies of Christians and Muslims, both of which include parts that are right.

While much is written in the Book of Mormon regarding repentance and receiving baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, which is a respected faithful tradition in Christianity that is practiced in representation of faith and forgiveness, it is also clearly written that contention over the requirement of such things is not the way of Christ (3 Nephi 11:30):

> Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

There is also commonality shared between Christianity and Muhammadan Islam in that Islamic tradition has also maintained that the Christ would return to clarify what can be considered proper religion. A further traditional link between Muhammadan Islam and the part of the Latter Day Saints movement can be found in that some Mormons have allowed men to have multiple wives, which is also accepted with the Muslim tradition. As already noted, marriage does not have to be between one man and one woman for it to be in the way of God, but the more important part is that it is in shared love and mutual agreement.
Thus, in many ways, it seems that the more recent addition to the Abrahamic religious of the Latter Day Saints movement holds an important place as a theological bridge between the Abrahamic religions that have previously been regarded to be in opposition of one another. Regarding this, a final quote can be taken from the last book in the Book of Mormon which says (Moroni 10:8):

And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God[.]

While there are other teachings from the Book of Mormon and the practice of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that could be mentioned and commented on here, it is up to the reader if they would like to look into that particular religious tradition any further. As noted earlier, it seems to be the tendency for people to focus on which rituals, rites, and customary laws must be practiced when considering the differences between religions. But such things truly should not be the primary focus of spirituality. Rather, it is recognition of God and the mindset that one takes toward life and others that is important. As can be learned from the sovereign teachings of the authority of Christ himself, it is better that one’s mindset be open and accepting than narrow and condemning.

In the Book of Revelation (which was given reference to early in the Book of Mormon as to be written by John, the apostle of the Lamb of God) it does not say there are any particular rituals which one absolutely must practice in order to receive admittance to Heaven. Furthermore, though the Revelation to John seems to be a major shared factor involved in the Abrahamic religions regarding the Day of Judgment, nowhere within it does it make the stipulation that one must have practiced in an organized Abrahamic faith to get to Heaven; rather, it makes the point that each individual will be judged by the Spirit of God according to their works unto one another. And I tell you now, it is of evil to believe that all who do not practice your particular religious tradition must go to Hell. Still, it is true that past misdeeds can be forgiven by faith, repentance, and correcting one’s ways.

With that, this discussion of the Abrahamic religions will be concluded. Admittedly, this is cutting short the explanation of the many denominational variations within these major faiths. Though many of the more precise details of the beliefs and traditions of the specific denominations have been left out, the descriptions given here for the Abrahamic religions should be inclusive enough of the important details needed to be clarified for the purpose of this book.

Now, to move on so that more of the major world religions can be discussed, the next chapter covers religions that originated in the geographical region of India.
Chapter 9
Religions Originating in India
(Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism)

This chapter is intended to cover the major religions in the world today which originated in the lands of the Indian subcontinent—which includes the land that is now India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Tibet. Much of the spiritual essence that went into the religions that have emerged in this region can be traced back to very ancient times. Indeed, some of it has been traced back to an advanced early civilization in Indus River valley that existed prior to 3000 BC. The Indus River Valley Civilization is the largest known ancient civilization on Earth, surpassing both the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt. This once flourishing civilization went through a stage of collapse and dispersion around 2000 BC, but afterward strongly reemerged.

The roots of the ancient polytheistic Vedic religion and early Jainism extend into the Indus River Valley Civilization. The reformed pieces of the Vedic traditions resulted in the current world religion called Hinduism. Later in time, the current religious practices of Jainism, Buddhism, and eventually Sikhism would emerge in the geographical region of the Indian subcontinent.

Like the Abrahamic religions, religions that originated in the lands of the Indian subcontinent have now spread throughout the world. At the time of the writing of this book, there are estimated to be around 1 billion practicing Hindus, at least 500 million Buddhists, some 30 million practicing Sikhs, and around 6 million Jains living on Earth.

Hinduism

Hinduism can be considered to have formed from a reformation of the Vedic traditions, which date back to times long before the Torah was revealed to Moses. However, much of the Vedic traditions included worship and tribute to various “gods”, which the message of monotheism delivered to Moses was significantly inspired to clear up. Still, it is worth noting that many commentaries written on the older Vedic texts renounce the rituals dedicated to the various deities and embrace notations which are much closer to the idea of monotheism. Interestingly, many such commentaries were written around roughly the same time the prophets were recording the commentaries that became the books of the Hebrew Bible. Still, it should be noted that some of the oldest scriptures of Hinduism already held a somewhat monotheistic view from early times, as will be discussed. The older Vedic religion morphed into various types of Hinduism as the diverse culture developed within the early civilization in India.
There are many Hindu texts, some of the most primary and commonly recognized as sacred include the three Vedas of: the Rig-Veda, or “Veda of Hymns”; the Sama-Veda, or “Veda of Chants”; and the Yajur-Veda, or “Veda of Sacrifice”. A fourth titled the Artharva-Veda, or the “Veda of Artharvan”, emerged after the first three. Additionally there are numerous Upanishads which were written in association to the Vedas including commentary on them, a scripture titled the Bhagavad Gita, as well as many other texts. Several of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, in particular, hold much writing which endorses more monotheistic belief than that portrayed in the Vedas—though there is a slight amount of content in part 10 of the Rig-Veda which acknowledges the fact that there is or at least may be an All-Maker above the gods and part 11 of the Artharva-Veda pays homage to the unborn and eternal One that is the unseen Source of the Breath of Life upon which all things are based and the Ruler of all births Whom the very gods themselves must revere.

As with the other religions discussed so far, the current practice of Hinduism varies widely between subdivisions; but the variance with Hinduism is more extensive than perhaps any other religion. The various beliefs in Hinduism stems from the fact that Hindus are generally considered to have total freedom of belief and worship, as well as a lack of one significant foundational figure or centrally recognized creed. This lack of any centralized doctrine, as well as a widely varied amount of cultural practices makes Hinduism difficult to classify as one unified religion.

Nonetheless, Hinduism does have its own themes and beliefs which are generally expected to be shared by most adherents. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include: Dharma, which is a type of acceptance of the fact that we have ethical duties in life to rightly uphold; Samsāra, which is basically belief in reincarnation, or in other words a continuing cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth in this worldly life; Karma, which is considered a balancing of actions and subsequent reactions in which a person basically cannot avoid the repercussions of their actions, either good or bad, coming back on them—whether in this life or the next; and Moksha, which is the final release from the cycle of reincarnation in samsāra which is possible through proper development of the self. Hinduism also includes various Yogas, or disciplines which are considered different paths or practices of Hinduism which lead to attainment of Moksha. While these beliefs can be expected to be held by most Hindus, it is a general belief in Hinduism that no one must adhere to any specific creed as to not be limited by it in their understanding. Many Hindus consider the whole world as a single family which includes many parts of the total truth—with no particular claim being considered by Hindus to be blasphemy.

The Hindu religion includes many forms of polytheism in which many deities revered for their different qualities. There are two major trinities in Hindu theology: the masculine Trimurti and the feminine Tridevi. The three deities that make up the Trimurti are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Generally speaking, Brahma is considered to be the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. The three that make up the Tridevi are the goddesses that are the spouses of the Trimurti gods. It is said that as creator, Brahma needs the goddess of knowledge and science named Saraswati. To be preserver, Vishnu needs the goddess of all types of wealth and prosperity named Lakshmi. And it said that Shiva, as destroyer and re-creator, needs goddess Parvati, the gentle aspect of the Great Goddess Mahadevi for power. By their very conception in Hinduism, neither the masculine Trimurti gods nor the feminine Trimurti goddesses are complete without their counterpart in the other.
In some Hindu traditions, the qualities and characteristics of the deities have been richly depicted. Many of the divinities are believed to have had different incarnations or manifestations in life, and have stories to go with what happened to them during their incarnations. For example, Parvati is generally believed to be a benevolent goddess but she is also said to have had many wrathful incarnations. Because the details of these incarnations and their interactions are very complicated and oftentimes confusing, their detailed descriptions will not be delved into here.

The practices of Hinduism in which separate deities are worshipped can be considered polytheistic religion. Still, the well-developed concept of Brahma in Hinduism can be compared to the one true God of the Abrahamic faiths. Many Hindus consider Brahma to be the one Ultimate Universal Spirit from which all things flow, as is ultimately the truest understanding regarding this matter. Unlike the Abrahamic faiths, which generally refer to God as masculine, most Hindus view Brahma as being neither masculine nor feminine, but either gender-neutral or having attributes of both. For those that view Brahma as above all other deities, parts of Hinduism can be considered to bear likeness to monotheism.

Others have considered Hinduism to be a type of panentheism, in which God is considered to be part of all of the created universe as well as a divine being that exists separate from the universe. Yet others consider Hinduism to be a form of pantheism, in which God and the universe are considered as basically the same thing, with God being an aspect of the universe that does not go beyond it. Indeed, individual practice and non-practicing Hindus have held all of these differing types of theologies and more. To investigate how Hinduism can be regarded as these theologies further, some selections of Hindu scriptures can be referenced.

In one of the oldest Upanishads, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Book 4: Chapter 4: Verses 8-21), there are the following verses: (Quotes from Hindu scriptures sited in this text are from translations produced by R. C. Zaehner and published by Everyman’s Library.)

The ancient narrow far-flung path  
Has touched me: I have found it!  
Knowers of Brahma, wise, proceed along it  
[From this world] freed and raised on high,  
Along to Paradise.

On it, they say, are white and blue,  
Yellow and green and red:  
This is the path that Brahma found:  
Knowers of Brahma proceed along it,  
Workers of good—irradiant.

Blind darkness enter they  
Who reverence unwisdom:  
Into darkness blinder yet  
[Go they] who delight in wisdom.
Some world there are called “void of bliss”,
   Within blind darkness swathed:
To these at death such folk pass on
As know not wisdom—unawake.

Should a man [truly] understand the Self,
Knowing this that: “I am He,”
What could he wish for,—what desire
That he should to this body cleave?

Whoso has found the Self and wakened It
Deep buried in this abyss of ambiguity:
All-maker he—for everything he makes and does:
His is the world: the world itself is he!

While yet on earth we may come to know It.
If thou hast here not known [It], great is the destruction!
Whoso knows This becomes immortal,
The rest must suffer misery indeed.

Should a man descry Him suddenly,
   This Self, this God,
Lord of what was and what is yet to be,
   How should he shrink from Him?

   Before whose face the year
   Revolves with [all] its days,—
   To Him the gods pay homage,—
Life, light of lights, and immortality

   On who the peoples five
   And space [itself] are founded,—
Myself immortal, wise, I know Him
   The Self—Immortal—Brahman!

Breath of breath, eye of eye,
Ear of ear, and mind of mind:
Who knows him thus, has understood
Primeval Brahman who from the beginning is.

Descry This with your mind:
Herein there’s no diversity at all.
Death beyond death is all the lot
Of him who sees in This what seems to be diverse.

Descry It in its Oneness,
Immeasurable, firm,
Transcending space, immaculate,
Unborn, abiding, great,—
This is the Self!

Let a wise Brāhmaṇ, knowing Him,
Bend his mind towards Him:
Let him not meditate on many words;
These can but tire the voice.

This translation from the original Sanskrit credits Brahman as being from the beginning and notes Brahman to transcends space. Thus, at least in this passage, Hinduism seems to represent fully panentheistic belief, and can even be interpreted to include a conception of God similar to that held by the Abrahamic faiths. For example, the phrase “Let a wise Brāhmaṇ, knowing Him, bend his mind towards Him” is remarkably close to the definition Muhammad prophesized of the faith of Abraham in which Abraham “bowed his will to God’s” as a form of Islam. This particular passage even interprets Brahman to be masculine like the Abrahamic religions do. In the commentary directly after this passage, it is indicated that a wise Brāhmaṇ (which can be interpreted in this case to mean a wise Hindu) strives to know God, the Lord of Spirits.

So, this particular message from Hinduism can be viewed to converge and align with some views of the Abrahamic religions. One can further consider the interpretations of a few more words in the passage quoted above. If one replaces “Brahman” in the above verses with “God”, the first verse would be read: “Knowers of God, wise, proceed along it, [from this world] freed and raised on high, along to Paradise.” Again, this is like the view of Islam in which Heaven is Paradise. Continuing this idea, the part of the second verse would read: “Knowers of God proceed along it, workers of good[.]” Thus, it is professed that knowing the true will of God leads one to do good works. So here it has been shown that the interpretation of ancient Hindu scripture includes a more proper definition of monotheism than most have realized.

In many places, the Hindu scriptures refer to persons basically becoming Brahman. This is confusing if one equates Brahman to God precisely, because it must be understood that persons who have come about through the universe which God created will always be below the level of God even if they receive eternal life in Heaven. But some Hindus maintain that there is an infinite hidden self, or Atman, in everyone which can in some ways achieve becoming Brahman-like or unite with Brahman. In some ways these passages may be interpreted to mean that persons must find God (capitalized “It”, “Oneness”, or “Brahman”) in the above passage through belief in order to eventually attain Moksha and receive eternal life in Heaven after the death of the body. Otherwise, it is believed the soul will remain in the cycle of reincarnation into a different body in this limited existence of samsara in which there is certainty of suffering, and in which some lives could be interpreted to be like a form of what other religions have conceived of as Hell.

In later Upanishads, such changes need not even be inferred to make this comparison. In the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (Part 4:17), it says:
He is God, All-maker, of exalted Self, forever dwelling in the hearts of men, by heart and thought and mind to be conceived of: Whoso knows this becomes immortal.

From this one can clearly see that Hinduism speaks of the Creator, with this translation even calling Him God. Shortly after the above excerpt, the passage goes on to say in verse 20: “His form cannot be glimpsed, none may see Him with the eye: Whoso should know Him with heart and mind as dwelling in the heart, becomes immortal!” Here, more similarity can be noted, for it also says in parts of the Holy Bible that none can look upon God, while Muhammadan Islam makes that absolutely clear. It is common to find in the rest of the Hindu scriptures of the Upanishads that Brahman is God placed above all other gods—though the various “gods” have continued to be worshiped in idolatry. In many other parts of scripture, Brahman, or the Spirit of God, is referred to as All-Highest, the supreme Great Lord, omniscient and all-knowing, the architect of time, endless and beginningless, the One Encompasser of all, and the God who pervades all regions.

More general commonalities between other faiths and Hinduism are easy to find if one looks. For example, in the Chandogya Upanishad (Book 1: Chapter 9), the following story can be found:

Śilaka Śalavatya asked, “What is the goal of this world?” To this, Pravāhana replied: “Space, for all these contingent beings originate from space, and to space do they return. For space is greater and more ancient than they: Space is the final goal. This is the supremely desirable manifestation of the syllable Oṃ: It is infinite. Whoso thus knows and reveres this supremely desirable manifestation of the syllable Oṃ, wins what is supremely desirable and conquers supremely desirable states of being.”

Then Atidhanvan Śaunaka, after expounding this manifestation of the syllable Oṃ to Udaraśāndilya, said: “To the extent that this supremely desirable [manifestation of] the syllable Oṃ shall be known among your offspring, to that extent will they enjoy a supremely desirable life in this world and an exalted state in the next.”

Here we see that in Hinduism the syllable Oṃ—which can also be considered a sacred symbol representing Brahman in Hinduism—is to be kept sacred and passed down from generation to generation. It is hard not to draw a comparison here between keeping Oṃ for the Hindus and keeping the Covenant of the Lord for Jews. Both are maintaining what has been declared as sacred to their ancestors through religious tradition in the hopes of helping them have good lives. This is one of the major commonalities shared between most religions, which mostly hold the same social functions no matter how diverse they may seem on their surface. Like most religions, the teaching of compassion and caring about the welfare and prosperity of all can be found in Hinduism, which has been carried on from generation to generation in the hopes of maintaining sacredness and thus prosperity.

Lastly, the scripture of the Bhagavad Gita will be referred to for some more remarkable wording regarding the concept of God. The Bhagavad Gita is an ancient and highly-regarded Hindu text that many regard as a sacred scripture. In this ancient text, war is spoken of in a way similar to how it is in the Hebrew Bible. Whereas Lord Yahweh used to speak to righteous prophets in preparation for war, in
the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna speaks to Arjuna prior to entering war to console him regarding his duties to fight to bring harmony. Krishna, who is referred to speaking as the Blessed Lord, consoles Arjuna by telling him that he is wise in questioning war but that he should not be faint of heart in the hour of battle.

In response to Arjuna questioning whether he should kill other men in this battle that is about to unfold, it is said that Krishna ensured Arjuna that the men he may slay are not truly slain when their body is slain, but rather that souls are eternal and indestructible—referring to reincarnation with the words (Bhagavad Gita 2:22):

_As a man casts off his worn-out clothes_
_And takes on other new ones [in their place],_
_So does the embodied soul cast off his worn-out bodies_
_And enters others new._

But beyond just speaking of the war at hand, Krishna also dispelled much valuable wisdom into the Bhagavad Gita. For instance, Krishna tells Arjuna the essence of the soul is will, that clinging to power is foolish, and that one’s work itself can be one’s drive for work rather than the reward gained from it. Krishna also offers explanation of the way of yogic renunciation, in which one can relinquish the emotional struggles of self if they make that their spiritual ascent. He further explains to Arjuna that one must eventually let go of worldly desire to attain release from the cycle of rebirth and be allowed to enter the eternal hereafter. It is interesting that Jesus Christ was also said to have referred to the body as clothes (Matthew 6:25) and spoke of being born anew into Heaven (John 3:1-14), though Christianity usually has not proclaimed belief in reincarnation.

In many ways, the message given to Arjuna by Krishna described in the previous paragraph resonates with parts of the letter of James that was quoted in the previous chapter. Both say one should hold higher meaning as more important than amassing worldly wealth. In relation to this, Jesus is quoted to have said (Matthew 6:19): “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Other parts of the message of James are resonated in the Bhagavad Gita 3:3-6, as Krishna explains to Arjuna that having wisdom without works is not perfect. So it can be seen here that some of the teachings of Jesus are the same as the teachings that were given by Krishna. In effect, this shows that Jesus Christ and Lord Krishna both served as messengers of the One True God at different times.

There is other wisdom dispensed in the Bhagavad Gita that would seem to show that Krishna received his information from God, or perhaps that God spoke through Krishna to Arjuna—or through the inspiration of the pen of the one who wrote the Bhagavad Gita, the Source dispensing vast wisdom. In the Bhagavad Gita 7:7 the Blessed Lord is written to have said:

_Higher than I_
_There’s nothing whatsoever:_

In the Bhagavad Gita 7:7 the Blessed Lord is written to have said:
On Me the universe is strung
Like clustered pearls upon a thread.

If the universe is cyclic, with many Big Bangs followed by Big Collapses, and if this were to be viewed from outside the universe, it would appear to be like a pearl necklace, with each pearl being one cycle of the universe, and each leading directly into the other. If the universe is truly cyclic in such a fashion, which would make the most sense, it would give credence to the description in the verse above being Divinely revealed.

After giving this description, with Krishna speaking as the Blessed Lord, apparently inspired by Brahman the Almighty, going on to say this ever-wise passage (Bhagavad Gita 7:14-30):

For [all] this is my creative power,
Divine, hard to transcend.
Whoso shall put his trust in Me alone,
Shall pass beyond this [my] uncanny power.

Doers of evil, deluded, base,
Put not their trust in Me;
Their minds seduced by this uncanny power,
They cleave to a devilish form of life.

Fourfold are the doers of good
Who love and worship Me,—
The afflicted, the man who seeks for wisdom,
The man who strives for gain and the man who wisdom knows.

Of these the man of wisdom, ever integrated,
Who loves and worships One alone, excels:
To such a man I am exceedingly dear,
And he is dear to Me.

All these are noble and exalted,
But the man of wisdom is my vey self, so must I hold.
His self [already] integrated, he puts his trust in Me,
The [one] All-Highest Way.

At the end of many a birth
The man of wisdom resigns himself to Me,
[Knowing that Krishna,] Vasudeva’s son, is All:
A man so great of soul is exceedingly hard to find.

[All] wisdom swept away by manifold desires,
Men put their trust in other gods,
Relying on diverse rules and precepts:
For their own nature forces them thereto.
Whatever form, [whatever god,] a devotee
     With faith desires to honor,
That very faith do I confirm in him,
Making it unswerving and secure.

Firm established in that faith,
He seeks to reverence that [god],
And thence he gains all he desires,
Though it is I who am the true dispenser.

But finite is the reward
     Of such men of little wit:
Whoso worships the gods, to the gods will [surely] go,
[But] whoso loves and worships Me,
     To Me will come indeed.

Fools think I am the Unmanifest
In manifest form displayed:
They know nothing of my higher state,
     The Unchangeable, All-Highest.

Because my creative power (māyā) conceals Me,
     I am not revealed to all:
This world, deluded, knows Me not,—
     [Me,] the Unborn and Changeless.

All beings past and present,
     And yet to come
     I know:
But none there is that knoweth Me.

By dualities are men confused, and these arise
     From desire and hate;
Thereby are all contingent beings
Bewildered the moment they are born.

But some there are for whom [all] ill is ended,—
     Doers of what is good and pure:
Released [at last] from the confusion of duality,
Steadfast in their vows, they love and worship Me.

Whoso shall strive to win release from age and death,
     Putting his trust in Me,
Will come to know That Brahman in Its wholeness,
What appertains to self and the whole [mystery] of works.

Whoso shall know Me and all that appertains
To contingent being, to the divine and to the sacrifice,
Will come to know Me at the time of passing on,
For integrated their thought will be.

In this message is it is professed that all those who have worshipped “gods” have not known God, but that all blessings truly come from God nonetheless, and those who have faith in God and worship God will be rewarded eternally. Many Hindus view this eternal reward as a union with the Supreme Brahman, as opposed to the continuance of the individual in their own personal idealized Heaven (though it is ultimately more correct that, for it to be the ultimate reward, one must have the option of either). Furthermore, it is explained that it has only been by bewilderment that many have not known God. This should clear up the atheistic and polytheistic views of many. It would be wise that such verses as those quoted above were paid more attention in Hinduism. If the polytheistic idolatry were to be rightly stopped and Hindus focused more on Brahman, Hinduism would become a more proper practice of religion before God.

As with the scriptures of the other religions, there is more good writing that could be quoted here, but I believe this should suffice. The multitude of practices that have been upheld in Hinduism—including many rituals, pilgrimages, and festival celebrations—are simply too numerous to describe here. One particular tradition of Hinduism that many westerners find odd is that cows are respected as sacred animals in Hindu cultures. Contrary to some misconceptions, however, cows are not worshipped and eating meat is not considered a sin to Hindus. Rather than it being considered a sin to eat meat, it is merely said that abstaining from or eating less meat is beneficial.

To continue this discussion of the religions, this text will now move on to cover the teachings of Buddhism, which also emerged in the lands of India.

**Buddhism**

Buddhism is an Eastern religion that grew from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in the land that is now India around the time of 500 BC. After Siddhartha Gautama’s enlightenment, he became called Gautama Buddha, and has since become known as the Buddha. His teachings regarding truth, love, compassion, nirvana, meditation, and freeness from ego are revered in the many existing traditions of Buddhism today. In general, Buddhist practitioners have faith in the Buddha’s enlightened insights—believing that suffering can be ended peacefully by ending ignorance and selfish desire.

Some denominations of Buddhism believe the Buddha to have been an incarnation of the Divine, or the Eternal Buddha, though the teachings of Gautama Buddha took an agnostic stance regarding God in saying it was beyond knowing whether or not there was a Creator. Gautama Buddha was a sage, as opposed to a prophet, and did not claim to have heard what was to be preached from any Lord. Rather, Gautama Buddha looked into himself to try to understand the reasons behind suffering and how a person should act in this life as to reduce suffering. His insights have now been recognized by hundreds of millions, with many regarding him as the Supreme Buddha.
According to one tradition of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama grew up as a prince in the palace estates of his father, king Śuddhodana. It is said that Siddhartha’s father guarded him from the outside world while he was growing up, and thus Siddhartha was not exposed to the knowledge of human suffering or any religious teachings until later in life. After growing to the age of 29, Siddhartha Gautama decided to leave his estate to go on a quest to find truth. Upon seeing some of the suffering in the world he was confounded. Then, after meeting some ascetics of that region of India, he decided to give up his worldly wealth and follow in an ascetic life of learning and training in discipline. In this, he is said to have mentored from two teachers who both eventually conceded that he had surpassed them. As part of his ascetic life, having renounced worldly passions and possessions, Siddhartha begged alms from people for sustenance and fasted extremely.

At one point Siddhartha is said to have fainted as a result of practicing extreme ascetic fasting and fell into water. After that incident, in which he could have drowned, Gautama is traditionally believed to have decided to sit beneath a tree until he attained enlightenment through meditation. It has been said that he sat under a Bodhi tree meditating for 49 days. It is generally understood that Siddhartha Gautama became the first “Buddha”, which means “Awakened One” or “Enlightened One”, upon attaining awakening under that tree at the age of 35 years old. After that point Gautama Buddha went on a walking ministry and taught the wisdom teachings that include the many wise practices of Buddhism. Buddha’s first formal discourse has been titled Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma.

In his enlightenment, Gautama Buddha discovered the concept of dependent co-arising, explained the Middle Way, derived the Four Immeasurables, and taught the Four Noble Truths, which includes the Noble Eightfold Path. The concept of dependent co-arising that Buddha saw was that all things are interconnected, that we are all contingent on everything else, and there is not really a clear distinction between self and everything else; rather, we are all parts of a larger whole of universal oneness in which we are all influenced by one another as we grow. From this insight, the conclusion can be drawn that much of what shapes us and our actions is dependent upon the culture in which we live and the individuals we come in contact with through our individual experiences in life.

The most basic of the teachings of Buddhism is the Middle Way, which includes finding a reasonable path between the extremes of torturous self-neglecting discipline and overindulgence. After experiencing the unneeded sacrifice of total ascetic fasting and renunciation of all the pleasures of life, the Middle Way became a central part of the Buddha’s first teachings after his awakening. (This Middle Way can easily and wisely be taken up by those of all faiths or even those who lack faith to uphold balance in life and prevent things like addiction.) The Four Immeasurables include points of meditation cultivating a loving attitude toward all sentient beings. In the Four Noble Truths, Buddha explained the causes of suffering and provided recommendations of how to become free from it. Finally, the Noble Eightfold Path that Buddha preached consists of eight virtuous contemplations which are recommended to be practiced in a wholesome life toward non-suffering.

It is believed by Buddhists that Buddha-like enlightenment can be attained by practicing in the ways of Buddhism. For example, by keeping one’s thoughts away from the delusions that can be caused by becoming entangled in any worldly extreme, one can keep themselves away from ignorance. It is
considered beneficial toward being enlightened to practice the Middle Way and the Noble Eightfold Path. While the Middle Way is a more general attempt to stay free from individual pride and to resist being caught up too much in the current of one’s desires, the Noble Eightfold Path gives more absolute direction in its eight parts. It could be summarized that following the Middle Way is intended to keep one free of the miseries of life and that the Eightfold Noble Path is intended as a teaching of Dharma, which can be described as the responsibility to do what is right as to influence the betterment of all. The symbol for Buddhism has become the Wheel of Dharma, or the Dharmachakra, which is a wheel having spokes which represent parts from the teachings of Buddhism.

The Dharmachakra is commonly viewed with eight spokes representing the parts of the Noble Eightfold Path, but it can also be viewed to hold more spokes with more symbolism. Some version with further interpretation include: 12 spokes for the Twelve Laws of Dependent Origination, 12 spokes for the Twelve Laws of Dependent Termination, and 31 spokes representing the 31 realms of existence. Within the center circle that forms the hub of the Dharmachakra, there is sometimes a depiction of three components forming a Gankyil. The Gankyil is also called the “Wheel of Joy” and can be interpreted to represent many components of different Eastern teachings. When it is included in the Wheel of Dharma as the symbol for Buddhism, the three components of the Gankyil could be said to symbolize the Three Marks of Existence of Buddhism.

A fundamental understand of the concepts of the Three Marks of Existence is central to the theology of Buddhism, which is intended to cover the three characteristics found in all sentient beings. The Three Marks of Existence are: impermanence, dissatisfaction or unease, and non-self. It is said that the Buddha achieved an enlightened state of peace called Nirvana through fully understanding these three notions and their true implications in life.

To start the discussion of the teachings of Buddhism, the Four Immeasurables can be considered representative of the positive emotions of Buddhism—the emphasis of which are sometimes overlooked due to the focus that is placed on suffering in a more basic representation of Buddhism. So, before getting into more of the disciplined direction to be free of suffering that was taught by Buddha, it may be conducive to first bring to light the positive focus of the Four Immeasurables. In the face of negative emotion, Buddhists are encouraged to meditate on these four things: (1) Loving-kindness, which is benevolence towards all sentient beings without exception; (2) Compassion, to hope for suffering to be alleviated or diminished for all; (3) Empathetic Joy, which is celebrating joy and the accomplishment of happiness along with all who experience it; and (4) Equanimity, which can be viewed as an equal and selfless view of tranquility that is free from the idea that for the self to win others must lose. (These four things could actually be considered attributes of God, though God may also become angered at the opposites of these four mindsets and, even more, actions to the opposite of them.)

When meditating on the positive stance of these Four Immeasurables, the practitioner recognizes the peacefulness brought to themselves by these beautiful mental states and then radiates them out in all directions to all beings in the world, as well as further out into the entire universe. In a way, this is like a focused and expansive meditative prayer wishing good will and equality to all sentient
beings. Furthermore, through reminding oneself to practice the implications of these Four Immeasurables in life, their reception can help one develop a positive light at all times.

Beyond only holding the Four Immeasurables in their hearts and sharing it through this type of meditative prayer, Buddhists are further encouraged to practice the eight parts of the Noble Eightfold Path, which are: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. It is believed that if all practiced these things, much of human suffering would be alleviated, thus practicing them is going beyond merely wishing good for all, but actually taking action to physically be a part of bringing it about.

Some have even come to the idea that if enough people practiced the Noble Eightfold Path it could lead to an end of all suffering. Thus, practicing these eight rights has been called the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering. It is probably more accurate that this path can lead individuals toward the cessation of suffering. Nonetheless, as Buddha taught in the Four Noble Truths, there will always be suffering in the world. This is called the Truth of Suffering, and it is, of course, a fact of life. But while some suffering is an unavoidable part of life, such as the inevitable ending of relationships (at least in this physical life), other suffering could be easily avoidable, such as the suffering caused by people fighting unnecessary fights.

Before getting into further discussion about the Noble Eightfold Path, one must first discuss the Four Noble Truths, which some have considered to contain the essence of the Buddha’s teachings. The Four Noble Truths can be extrapolated to consist of the following truths:

1. Life includes suffering.
2. Craving for things that one considers to be included in happiness causes suffering.
3. Letting go of craving for eventual happiness and embracing happiness now relieves the suffering such craving causes.
4. Following the path of enlightenment leads to liberation from such suffering.

In teaching the basis of these Four Noble Truths after his self-awakening, Buddha is said to have set into motion the Wheel of the Dharma, the karma of which would move others to live in a way that will help relieve suffering and to continue the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma by teaching others how to help relieve the suffering in the world. (In the transliteration from the writings of Buddha’s followers, the English “suffering” has been the common translation of the word “dukkha”, though dukkha might more accurately mean unease, non-relaxation, or dissatisfaction.) The Noble Eightfold Path stems from the fourth truth, and the Middle Way can also be viewed to be part of the enlightened path mentioned in the fourth truth.

The Noble Eightfold Path includes eight “rights”, but could also be translated to mean “proper” or “correct”. The parts of the Eightfold Noble Path can be broken down into three categories: Wisdom, which concerns the enlightenment that purifies the mind, allowing one to attain spiritual insight into the true nature of all things; Ethical Conduct, which concerns moral action, or refraining from unwholesome
deeds; and Concentration, which concerns the mental discipline required to develop mastery over one's own mind.

The Wisdom category includes Right View and Right Intention. Right View is a multifaceted concept, but can be summarized as concerning taking a perspective of truth. This consists of giving effort toward viewing reality as it actually exists, apart from the beliefs of other individuals who are limited to what reality appears to be on its surface, and inclusive of the ability to awaken the spiritual self beyond physicality. Right Intention concerns proper fortitude and the will to change, in which the practitioner aspires to rid themselves of any qualities that they know to be wrong or immoral, making themselves free from things like overly selfish desires and malevolence or ill will to cause harm to other beings.

The Ethical Conduct category includes Right Speech, Right Behavior, and Right Livelihood. Right Speech concerns using one's own ability to speak in a proper and respectful way, speaking only the truth and not saying things which could be hurtful to others. In choosing how to best use their speech, a Buddhist practitioner avoids speaking untruths, abusive words, and idle chatter, but rather speaks only things that create concord. Right Behavior pertains to upholding proper conduct in one's physical actions. This means taking only actions towards others that are helpful and thus avoiding any type of misconduct that causes harm. Right Livelihood concerns making proper choices regarding the way that one makes their living. In following right livelihood, Buddhist practitioners have traditionally chosen not to base their living in occupations that potentiate harm.

Finally, the Concentration category of the Noble Eightfold Path includes Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Right Effort involves abandoning all wrong and harmful thoughts and endeavoring to keep one's effort focused on what is good and useful, never letting their effort go toward evil. This pertains to consciously choosing to generate and exert effort towards the skillful development of prosperity. In practicing proper effort, the Buddhist practitioner remembers to prevent and let go of unwholesomeness while bringing up and maintaining wholesomeness. Right Mindfulness pertains to keeping one's thoughts attentive to and aware of clear positivity. In practicing right mindfulness, one chooses to remain ardently focused on the goodness of the aware and present mind, free of craving and aversion. And Right Concentration has been thought to primarily involve reaching full concentration through meditation, which has traditionally been a tranquility technique mastered by many Buddhists. Still, the Buddha is said to have taught that proper concentration not only regards meditation, but in its fullness is also dependent upon clear comprehension of the other seven parts of the Nobel Eightfold Path.

While this Eightfold Noble Path can be considered the main body of the teachings of the Buddha, there are also several other concepts that are centrally held by many Buddhists. Some of these other concepts include: karma, rebirth, samsāra, and yoga. While karma and the cycle of reincarnation in samsāra were already mentioned in the discussion of Hindu concepts, their conception is slightly different in Buddhism. Where the goal in the cycle of rebirth in Hinduism can be roughly summarized to be acceptance of dharma and to focus on God (or, less properly, “gods”), the goal in Buddhism is to achieve release from samsāra by partial renouncement of craving of worldly pleasures. Moreover, where many Hindus believe the concept of karma to be distributed by Brahman, most Buddhists have
viewed karma as more of a self-reinforcing function in which a person develops their own karma by influencing their own view and the views of others through the effects of dependent co-arising.

There are diverse degrees of focus regarding the practice of meditation in the different denominations of Buddhism today, some of which focus on keeping thought absent from the mind and others using directed meditation—both of which can be variably practiced by any individual for different chosen purposes. Some Buddhists believe that meditative self-awakening is the ultimate key to finding one’s own insight, and hence focus less on the teachings of Gautama Buddha and other recognized Buddhas, but rather on their own developments through meditation. (It should go without mention that non-Buddhists can practice meditation, but it might be useful to mention it here. Likewise, while Buddhism has not traditionally taught belief in God, Buddhists could practice acceptance of God.)

The early Buddhism prior to around 250 BC did not recognize distinguished schools, but there are greatly various traditions of Buddhism today, most of which fall into three main branches: Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism. Of the three branches mentioned, Theravada is the oldest and probably the closest to the early non-sectarian Buddhism, with Mahayana traditions emerging later in the development of Buddhism, followed by the emergence of the Vajrayana schools. Tibetan Buddhism is a major part of the Vajrayana branch, along with Nepalese Newar Buddhism, Chinese Esoteric Buddhism, and the Shingon, Tendai, and Shugendō traditions of Japan. Pure Land, Chán, Tiantai, Nichiren, and Zen Buddhism fall under the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. There have been many noted Buddhist teachers who have worked to spread enlightenment. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche was one particular Buddhist teacher who worked to spread the enlightening teachings that came to him to the widest possible audience, including many works and even founding a Buddhist-inspired university—though enlightenment remained largely unknown to much of the world.

There are various differences in the beliefs upheld by the many schools of Buddhism. Some of these differences involve modifications in the interpretations of complex concepts like enlightenment and nirvana, as well as different views regarding Gautama Buddha, the Supreme Buddha, or other Buddhas such as the “Five Wisdom Buddhas”. Among the Buddhist schools, there is a broad spectrum of the degree of strictness upheld in following the traditional rules of Buddhism. Like the other religions discussed thus far, there are different texts considered as scriptures and varying ritual practices maintained by the different denominational traditions of Buddhism. While some Buddhists choose to become monks entirely devoted to lives of religious learning and practices, many Buddhists practice amid lives including more of the cultural norms of the societies in which they live.

Aspects of Buddhism can also be practiced in coordination with other traditional religious beliefs. Many other traditions even officially recognize they practice renditions of Buddhism. Considering this, there are likely hundreds of millions more practicing Buddhist views beyond the roughly 500 million declared to practice only or primarily Buddhism. Furthermore, Christians can surely practice meditation and recognize many of the teachings of Buddhism as wise. With that noted, I will move on from this overview of Buddhism to discuss the religion of Jainism, which shares many things in common with Buddhism and may actually have been a partial predecessor to Buddhism if the ascetics Siddhartha Gautama practiced with before becoming the “Awakened One” were influenced by Jainism.
Jainism

Jainism is known to have emerged in India sometime before 600 BC, but Jain doctrine teaches that Jainism has always existed and will always exist. Jains are known to adhere strictly to non-violence toward all living beings and practice doing the absolute least harm possible to all other living things. As such, Jains are devout advocates of peace through pacifism.

Jains attempt to attain perfect being through moving the soul to conquer all of its own inner enemies. If a Jain is able to accomplish this total purification of self, they attain a state of consciousness which is considered to be liberated. When a Jain is able to free themselves from attachment, they are become considered victors of life, afterward being considered as a Jina. The ultimate goal in Jain practice is to transcend ego and attain a spiritual status called siddha, which is considered a supreme mastery of consciousness which Jains consider the perfection of the soul. This siddha is similar in ideation to achieving nirvana in Buddhism, except that Jains consider this ultimate state only to be fully reachable in death, after the perfectly enlightened soul passes away from this worldly existence and attains the total freedom of pure moksha.

The moksha called siddha in Jainism for those entirely purified is quite like the view of the salvation of Heaven in the Abrahamic religions, except without any continuation of the body. Some Jain traditions describe there to be many ascending levels of Heaven, with siddha at the top, with each soul’s stay in all but siddha temporally limited in time rather than everlasting, so that when one’s positive karmic effects wear off they will eventually be reincarnated again. Some Jain interpretations also include the concept of Hell for negative karmic actions, which includes seven levels of increasing severity of suffering for the severity of wrongdoing. Though the Jain explanation of Hell, called Naraka, is not everlasting, time spent there is very long, again with the length of time depending on amount of misdeeds until eventually resulting in reincarnation after penance for negative karmic actions is paid.

Many modern day Jains basically use the term dharma instead of religion, and claim that true dharma does not go along with any organized dogma. Thus, Jain dharma seems to try to make a claim that it is not necessarily a religion—though it obviously is in comparison to other religions. But in the Jain understanding, dharma is nothing but the true nature of something. So Jains view their religion to represent the true nature of self in the universe. Therefore, in practicing Jainism, a Jain seeks to practice the self-realization of the soul in unison with seeking full realization of the true nature of the universe.

Jains seek to be free of all of the negative aspects of self, such as: selfishness, arrogance, greed, anger, and all other less favorable mindsets and emotions. In practicing freedom from these negative passions it is said that persons of any creed can partake in the Jain teaching of the living dharma, especially through processes such as meditation on the soul and karma. In this view, Jains can be considered to exist everywhere and in all different religions. With that being said, it is true that Jains do have creeds and Jainism really can be considered a type of organized religion with particular beliefs. In fact, there are several different sects of Jainism which uphold various teachings and scriptures, though the most central ideas of Jainism are shared among Jains in a type of mutual respect among them as a
larger complete teaching in which it is for the most part understood that absolute knowing is in some ways indescribable.

In Jainism, time is considered to move in a boundless flow having many phases in arrangement. Jains believe time to have two main phases which fade in and out between each other continually for both individuals and larger cultures and societies. These two phases are named Utsarpini, the phase of evolution, and Avasarpini, the phase of decline. These phases are part of the beliefs of the Jain Order. During the Utsarpini phase, things progress and develop. During the Avasarpini phase, things decline. In the Jain view, when the Utsarpini phase reaches its highest limit the Avasarpini phase commences, and when the Avasarpini phase reaches its lowest limit the Utsarpini commences, with the cycle continually occurring in time. To Jains, there is no end whatsoever to the revolution of this cyclic wheel, which they have named the wheel of time.

In the Jain tradition, it is believed that there are 24 individual Jains called Tirthankaras born in each era who become absolutely enlightened and completely devoid of attachments. These Tirthankaras go beyond the rest of the enlightened Jains, or Arihants, by becoming role-models and leaders for those seeking spiritual guidance. The Tirthankaras teach and expound their philosophy for the spiritual welfare of all of the sentient beings in the universe. Many of the Tirthankaras have been depicted as having no aversions to reality and so indifferent to their bodily nature as to walk the earth naked, as has been depicted by some sculptures and statues of them, though it is today proper custom most everywhere to be clothed in public.

The Tirthankaras preached what has been called the living dharma in the hope to increase happiness and reduce sorrow in their respective periods of time—as to teach all to do the least harm possible and the most good possible with their lives. Through following the teachings of the Tirthankaras, the simplest of which being non-violence and honesty, Jains attempt to accomplish becoming their own means for the attainment of salvation. Thus, the work of the Tirthankaras is believed to go toward helping many souls bring themselves to enlightenment and moksha.

An Indian sage known as Vardhamāna who eventually took the name Mahavira is considered to have been the most recent Tirthankara in this cycle assumed by Jainism. It can be roughly considered that Mahavira holds a position in Jainism similar to that of Gautama Buddha in Buddhism. However, as mentioned, Jainism is believed to have existed long before Mahavira. Modern Jains currently follow the central tenants and multidimensional path—including the Five Great Vows discussed below—for the attainment of self-purification that was taught by Mahavira around 558 BC. Like Siddhartha Gautama, Vardhamāna Mahavira renounced his worldly life and went on a spiritual endeavor. After twelve and a half years of seeking awakening, of which many embellished stories have been told, Mahavira is said to have attained absolute enlightenment. This enlightened Mahavira has now been referred to many times as “Lord Mahavir”.

Jinas such as Mahavira have taught a great deal of preaching that has been mostly derived from meditation. First and foremost of the teachings of Jainism is complete non-violence toward all living beings, but along with non-violence Jains are expected to practice a great deal of personal mastery. This
attempt at mastery is taught to be totally removed from egocentrism though simultaneously aspiring toward many ideals. Such aspiring toward perfection while maintaining humility is truly a daunting task to be embarked upon and carried out.

In Jainism there are basically two observed paths: that of Total Renunciation and that of Partial Renunciation. In Total Renunciation, the Jain practitioner abstains from anything that has been deemed to be possibly sinful. Both of the Jain paths of Partial Renunciation and Total Renunciation are far stricter than the Middle Way of Buddhism and go far beyond simply refraining from such things as intoxicants or overindulging in unhealthy activities. The content of the Five Great Vows of those who choose to follow the Total Renunciation path of Jainism can be abbreviated into the following:

1. _Ahimsa_ (Non-violence) – attempting to cause minimal harm to all living beings.
2. _Satya_ (Truthfulness) – speaking only truth intended to cause no harm.
3. _Asteya_ (Non-stealing) – not taking anything that has not been willingly given.
4. _Brahmacharya_ (Chastity) – abstaining from all sensual indulgences.
5. _Aparigraha_ (Non-possession/Non-attachment) – exercising no attachment to anything material.

Basically, the implications of these Five Great Vows mean total detachment from all but the simplest pleasures that come with the sustenance of life. These Jains attempt at all times not to cause any harm or violence to any living being and live according to the pledge that they will not lie or steal under any circumstances. They will not have intimate partners, observing their vow of celibacy with absolute adherence. The Jain monks practicing the absolute ascetic lifestyle of Total Renunciation own little to no possessions, spend much time reading scripture and practicing yogic meditation, and have been known to sleep on the floor with no blankets in an act of disregard for their physical body. This path of Total Renunciation can include extreme fasting, and some Jains have even eventually gone so far as to take a final vow called _Santhara_ or _Sallekhana_ which results in death from abandoning all food, water, and medicine.

Even for those Jains who practice Partial Renunciation and allow themselves such worldly things as possession of their own home and purchased food, there are many rules that are customary to be followed extremely carefully. All Jains follow a strict dietary regimen which is basically total veganism with even more stringency. Following the rules of Jainism strictly has led some Jains to even wear breathing masks to prevent the inhalation of microscopic organisms, simply so that those they don’t have to die in their lungs.

While such pure intentions to do no harm are commendable, it should be known that God would not want us to worry so much about harming miniscule creatures. Furthermore, sometimes the right thing to do involves what might be considered harmful. Beyond that, God would not expect us to entirely deprive ourselves in such an extreme way from enjoying the pleasures of life, unless perhaps one had done great wrongs in life and chose to serve their own repentance. On the other hand, it should
be understood that refraining from indulging in all the luxuries and sensual pleasures that can be indulged in during life certainly does not mean one is not enjoying life’s fullest potential.

Jains feel it is important to believe that all sentient beings have souls and that all souls are potentially divine, which guides how they treat all other sentient beings with common dignity. One of the most positive of the many teachings of Jainism is the purity of thoughts Jains practice having. Such practice is a positive way to purify oneself and perhaps change into a better person than before, or merely to lighten how one feels about themselves and improve their interaction with others and the world as a whole. Regarding this, Jains are encouraged to meditate and reflect on the thoughts of the following four virtuous value categories:

1. Peace, love and friendship to all.
2. Appreciation, respect and delight for the achievements of others.
3. Compassion to souls who are suffering.
4. Equanimity and tolerance in dealing with other’s thoughts, words and actions.

Among the many teachings of Jainism, perhaps the most central are the Triple Gems of: Right View, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct. Devout Jains believe that following the detailed implications of the Five Great Vows, the Triple Gems, and the specifics of the many Jain scriptures is the one straight and proper enlightened path for attaining release from the cycle of reincarnation. The essence of this, as the reader can gather, is quite similar to the views of Buddhism except that a more stringent deemed path from a different set of teachings is practiced.

Though some Jains may have believed that Jainism is superior to Buddhism and other religions because it is stricter, things such as more rigorous fasting, meditation, and yoga do not necessarily make a religion superior to others—especially if the individuals practicing the religion do not do anything to help others. Although there are benefits to fasting, or more simply abstaining from overindulging, such as preventing or curing obesity it should be noted that one does not have to put themself through unnecessary suffering and totally renounce all pleasures to be divinely rewarded.

While Jain dharma is commendable for many reasons, especially including the high degree of compassion it promotes, it has been lacking in one of the most important areas of religion—particularly in that, like traditional Buddhism, it gives no credit to God the Creator. Rather, the notion that the universe and its laws simply always existed has been promoted. Thus, acknowledgment and respect for God has been lacking in this otherwise highly positive system of beliefs. It would be wiser to give the well-deserved appreciation to God for providing us all the opportunity to exist through the wondrous creation of the universe. Moreover, there has been misguidance in some Jains have taken to worshipping certain other Jains and icons of them as types of deities, which is also a misguidance in some practices of Buddhism. While respect and appreciation can rightly be given to individuals who have attained wisdom and shared it, true worship should be directed only to God.
The commonality of the views of karma and the cycle of reincarnation and the goal of release from it are the central beliefs that Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism share. Hinduism, of course, includes a more prominent conception of Brahman, or God, and thus it is ultimately more enlightened regarding this factor. Consider the fact that since God Almighty created the universe and can see and hear it all, it might be quite annoying to have some within creation going about in total denial of God’s existence—especially if they were simultaneously trying to claim to be fully enlightened beings.

This viewpoint that the existence of God must be observed in any complete religion is centrally shared in Sikhism, which is the last religion that will be discussed in this chapter regarding religions from India. As the reader will see, Sikhism takes a very contrasting stance to both Jainism and Buddhism on several other subjects of interest regarding the practice of religion. It may be because Sikhism emerged much more recently than the religions from ancient India that it varies so much from them.

**Sikhism**

The religion of Sikhism was officially founded in the Punjab region by a man named Nanak Dev, who was born into a Hindu family in 1469. Thus, Sikhism emerged very recently compared to the other religions discussed in this chapter, though it does have significant history compared to new religions. Nanak, who would become the first of ten celebrated Gurus (which means divinely enlightened teacher leaders) in Sikhism, is said to have been fascinated by God and religion as a young boy, but did not conform to any particular religion. Instead of seeking wisdom from religious figures, he is said to have meditated on the subjects of God and religion to himself.

Nanak is said to have had his intellect and divine qualities recognized at a young age, and to have been encouraged to travel and study. And so Nanak went on missionary journeys searching for the truth, as did the founders of many religions. Around the age of thirty, Nanak returned from one such journey and is said to have announced: “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.” From that point, which could be considered Nanak’s enlightenment, he preached his own new philosophy of Sikhism.

It has been said that the essence of Guru Nanak’s teachings can be summarized in his saying: “Realization of Truth is higher than all else. Higher still is truthful living.” Through his preaching, Guru Nanak taught what would become the foundational principles of Sikhism—the most important of these including the emphasis of the principle of equality of all humans and the rejection of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, or social status. The principal beliefs of Sikhism are justice and faith under one God. Sikhs call God by the name of Wāhegurū, which translates to “Wonderful Teacher” in English. Wāhegurū is viewed as the Supreme Being having no form, no preferred country, and no preferred religion.

The beginning of the first composition of Sikh scripture is the figure “1”—signifying the universality of the one God. This Sikh composition states that God is omnipresent and infinite with power over everything. Sikhs believe that before creation, all that existed was God and God’s will. Then,
when God willed, the entire cosmos was created. Sikhs believe that from these beginnings, God nurtured "enticement and attachment" to māyā, or the living perception of reality.

Guru Nanak described that while a full understanding of God is beyond any sentient being, God is not wholly unknowable. By the understanding of Sikhs, God is always present in all of creation and visible everywhere to the spiritually awakened. God is further described in Sikhism as shapeless, timeless, and sightless though all-knowing. As its primary message, Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through personal meditation on the name and message of God. This is part of Guru Nanak’s teaching that salvation can be reached only through rigorous and disciplined devotion to God. As part of his teaching, Guru Nanak distinctly emphasized that outward religious observations such as dogmatic rituals, fasting, and pilgrimages are irrelevant to achieving salvation.

Guru Nanak taught that all worship to God should be selfless and that all Sikhs should be free from egotism. Other Sikh principles encourage living life as a family householder and avoiding the dangerous “Five Evils” of: ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust. Today, Sikhs are expected to embody the qualities of a Sant-Sipahie, which translates to “Saint-Soldier”. As part of this, Sikhs are sworn to have the courage to defend the rights of all who are wrongfully oppressed or persecuted.

As already mentioned, Guru Nanak was followed by nine other enlightened Guru leaders that continued his tradition and further developed his philosophy. Today, the followers of Sikhism follow the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus and the holy scripture of the Gurū Granth Sāhib Ji, which scripture includes the writings of six of the ten Sikh Gurus and selected works of many devotees from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds. The text was decreed as the official scripture of Sikhism by the tenth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in 1678.

In 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, created the Sikh Khalsa. Part of this Khalsa translates to “Army of God”. The function of this Army of God was to be the protection and safeguarding of all the peoples of God regardless of their race, religion, or creed. The Sikh Khalsa was fortified during a time of growing militancy against Muslim rule in India during the 17th century. The Sikh believe that the situation called for liberators and emancipators from the oppression of forced submission to any one tradition. From this grew the Sikh Khalsa Empire, which protected the Punjab region of India from Muslim domination and is even known for being one of very few successful deterrents of invasion by British Conquest in history.

This ideology is obviously much different from the absolute non-violence practiced by Buddhists and Jains. While the principles of the Buddhist and Jain traditions are highly respectable, the Sikh mentality that all should be free from unwilling oppression is also respectable. And sometimes non-peaceful defensive action is vital. Surely, it would be nice if everyone in the world were non-violent; but because there are perpetrators of violence in the world, there is need for defenders of the innocent. Thus, for there to be protection for the innocent there is a purpose for the righteous to stop those who are surely responsible for perpetrating violence against innocents and intending to commit more violence. Nevertheless, to really solve the problem it would be better to work towards balancing the
problems of inequality that contribute to most violence and for all to practice nonviolence except when needed to stop violence, and therefore help to prevent violence in the first place.

Regarding the subject of the use of violence, there is a wise saying: “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” What this means is that if there were always a violent retribution to punish those who have committed violence, one act of violence would eventually spring forth to have everyone in the world committing violence in a chain of retribution for it. Thus, this saying promotes the idea that we should not commit violence in response to violence, but rather turn the other cheek. However, as the world had been polluted with evil, some had to fill the role of putting down the perpetrators of evil so that the innocent could be protected and free. By this understanding, the Sikh Khalsa could be looked at as a type of religious civil police for the time, trying to protect free and peaceful prosperity through using violence only when necessary to stop those who unjustly violate the rights of innocent others and would continue to do so as long as they were allowed. As it is true that such self-defense is justified—so long as it is actually those responsible for violence that are the ones who are stopped—it is sometimes possible for the use of violence to be righteous.

Sikhs are often recognizable by the turbans which they now traditionally wear despite Guru Nanak’s original preaching that religion does not have to portray any outward display. There are also festivals celebrated by the practitioners of Sikhism today, and it is a very colorful religious tradition—again, despite its original conception by Guru Nanak to not have any parts of outward religious characteristics. Among other traditions, practicing Sikhs are traditionally prohibited from: making ritualistic sacrifices, taking intoxicating substances, having obsession with material wealth, or making worthless talk of slander or gossip.

To move on with the discussion of the major religions in the world today, the next chapter includes discussion of the religions originating in the geographical region of China.
Chapter 10
Religions Originating in China
(Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Traditional Religion)

Many different schools of thought have emerged in the long-standing culture of the Chinese despite the fact that several different approaches have been implemented by the changing ruling groups through time in attempt to assimilate all the people of China into one shared cultural tradition.

One particular state-organized philosophy that was largely secular was *Legalism*, which did not address the larger questions regarding the divine purpose of life, but rather simply upheld principles which were meant to keep the people submissive to authority and following the legal rules set forth by the authoritarian leaders. Such philosophies as Legalism were not at all enlightening since treating the law as religion lacks any sense of spirituality.

Despite the attempts by various Chinese diplomatic factions to prohibit open practice of religiosity, several religious traditions have been maintained by the Chinese people through time. Chinese Traditional Religion, which supports many beliefs of the traditional Chinese folk religions as well as parts of other cultural practices and thought systems that are often otherwise considered to be separate religions, has been the general outcome of this.

Along with the more ancient spiritual practices of the Chinese, there have been several prominent Chinese teachers who gained respect and following by the people: Of these teachers, Confucius and Laozi (or Lao Tzu) have been two of the most prominent. Confucius, of course, was the founder of Confucianism and Laozi is considered the founder of Daoism (which is pronounced “Dowism” but has been more commonly written as “Taoism”). Both of the figures of Confucius and Laozi lived around the time of 500 BC, though there is some debate of when Laozi actually lived.

Confucianism had its historical rise to prominence in China slightly earlier than Daoism, so it will be discussed first. It should be noted, however, that many scholars do not feel that Confucianism should not actually be considered a religion because it does not have much to say about God or spiritual insistence, but rather focuses on what ethical principles should be upheld to have a well-functioning society. Still, Confucianism can be considered as a type of religion, and it will be discussed here as such.

According to recent estimates to the time of this writing, there are around 6 million people who consider themselves to be Confucians and at least 20 million who classify themselves to be Daoists. However, these numbers do not represent the whole of the people observing these philosophies because both Confucian and Daoist ideologies are included in the practice of Chinese Traditional Religion, the recent estimates of which were around 450 million people.
Confucianism

Confucius is considered to have preached an ethical and philosophical belief system more than he is considered to have preached a religion. Yet, the sociopolitical teachings of Confucius eventually had some metaphysical and cosmological elements added to them, making Confucianism more like what one would expect from a religious tradition including spirituality. (While Confucianism does not focus on the concept of God, the practices promoted by it include good principles shared by other religions that already have.) Confucianism became the official state ideology of the nation of China in 206 BC after the abandonment of the briefly mentioned practice of Legalism and remained the main state ideology of China until 1912, though Confucian philosophy still remained a central part of Chinese culture.

Confucius was a strong believer in tradition and taught principles that he hoped would be worth keeping in generation after generation. In this, Confucius humbly admitted that he taught principles higher than even he himself was able to uphold at all times. But by setting his ideals higher than even he could attain, we knew that he would be teaching something worth being taught and strived toward by himself and others. Confucius is said to have treated his students as peers. At the heart of Confucian teachings are respect for human dignity and the will for an ordered and civilized society. This includes moral values and social norms which, if upheld by all, will keep society peaceful and dignified.

To facilitate this, Confucius taught that a good government of a people should absolutely reflect the same values and ethical principles that a good family or individual would. Thus, Confucius taught ways that good citizens can be produced through good government with just laws. Unlike in Legalism, where the citizen was simply expected to be obedient of the law for the sake of order, Confucianism focuses on civil enlightenment and learning on the part of the individual, so that they would have their own ethical guidance and be able to tell if the legal rules set forth by the government are truly proper. In a Confucian state, officials are expected to critically analyze their rulers and refuse to serve corruption.

The main principles of humanistic caring and moral excellence that Confucius taught include: basic ideals of social interaction, in which all individuals treat one another respectfully; family interaction, in which family members treat each other with love and consideration; and state ideals, in which rulers are expected to be good to their people by looking after their basic needs. In the teachings of Confucianism, we are reminded that the old familiar ideals of friendship, parenthood, and good manners are far from trivial motions, but rather actually crucial factors in an ideal society. The following thought can be considered to represent Confucian transcendence: If we all wholeheartedly and consistently practice our potential to be good social agents—friends, parents, sons, daughters, spouses, associates, employees, co-workers, bosses, business owners, government officials, etc.—through these smaller relationships we would be co-creators of a larger society that would be closer to utopian.

Some of the details of Confucianism include the content of deliberate tradition that focuses on the self-cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. Confucian ethics is encompassed by the Five Constants, which are: Ren, or humaneness; Yi, or righteousness; Li, or proper etiquette; Zhi, or knowledge; and Xin, or integrity. These Five Constants are accompanied by the Four Classical Virtues of
Sizi, which are: Zhong, or loyalty; Xiao, or familial devotion; Jie, or self-restraint; and again Yi, or righteousness. Beyond these, the many other revered characteristics or qualities in Confucianism include: honesty, kind heartedness, honest clearness, the sense of right and wrong, bravery, kind gentleness, kind forgivingness, respectfulness, non-wastefulness, and modesty. Surely, most would agree that these idealized qualities are characteristics worth striving for.

Among all of the elements of Confucianism, the first three mentioned—Ren, Yi, and Li—are usually maintained to be the most fundamental, so let us analyze these in further detail. The aspect of Ren includes an obligation of altruistic caring for other individuals within a community. Included in this is the teaching of a variation of the Golden Rule: “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” This so-called “Silver Rule” is similar to the well-known Golden Rule taught later by teachers such as Jesus saying: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” But Confucius’s Silver Rule is much simpler to follow—for it is very easy for one to tell how they would not want to be treated. (In Islam, Muhammad is said to have once combined the two, saying: “As you would have people do to you, do to them; and what you dislike to be done to you, don’t do to them.”) The aspect of Yi can be simply put to include the continuous upholding of just action and the moral disposition to do good. And the content of Li includes a system of standards of proper etiquette and politeness that are meant to always be considered when determining how one should act within a community.

Practicing Confucians uphold Li as an integral part of their official code of conduct and maintain that one should dedicate or even give up their own life, if necessary, for the sake of upholding the cardinal moral values of Ren and Yi for the common good. Generally speaking, one must first begin small by practicing these virtues in their direct interactions with family and local community, but ultimately these same virtues should be practiced regarding the entire global community. As such, adapting at least some parts of the social responsibility promoted by Confucian philosophy into our daily lives could be widely conducive to the many possible positive changes that could happen in the currently emerging time of globalization toward more global harmony as the total civilization on our planet evolves.

The main basis of Confucius’s teachings can be said to focus on seeking to find and practice wisdom through contentious study in order to become a better person. In this, Confucians train themselves through practice to approach improvements in social interaction which could theoretically result in perfecting one’s characteristics of social interaction. The many teachings of Confucius regarding cultivating one’s character toward the perfect gentleman are a prime example of this philosophy. Many of these teachings can be found in the Confucian texts called the Analects.

Because of the emphasis Confucius placed on being a gentleman, some have criticized him as being a type of sexist for focusing on the gender roles of men, and in the process somewhat disregarding women. However, Confucius’s focus on male gender roles can be understood when considering the fact that the culture of China when Confucius developed his principles and teaching was largely patriarchal, with males controlling most aspects of society. Generally speaking, women have benefitted equally as men from the teachings of Confucius and the more civilized societies produced by them. Furthermore, women can equally practice the same characteristics toward becoming well-mannered ladies.
As I’m sure the reader has already gathered, Confucianism has been like Buddhism and Jainism in that it has placed its focus on proper behavior rather than belief in God. But Confucian teachings can be applied to many other religious traditions that do recognize the existence of God. Regarding the subject of spirituality, Confucius is recorded as saying to one of his students: “You are not yet able to serve men, how can you serve spirits?” Just as Jesus’s Golden Rule echoed Confucius’s Silver Rule, it is interesting to note that those words of Confucius were echoed by Jesus when he said (John 3:12): “If I have told you earthly things and you did not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Both statements make a good point. But, though Jesus was more inclusive of truthful knowledge—which Confucians are supposed to seek—by including God and the afterlife in his teachings. Still, it would only take a minor addition to Confucianism to gain the understanding that when we serve each other well, we also serve God well.

Next to be discussed is Daoism, which has also been integrated within Chinese culture. Rather than being focused on character toward a proper society as in Buddhism and Confucianism, Daoism has been a practice mostly intended as a way individuals may attain contentment.

**Daoism**

Daoism is commonly thought to have been founded by Laozi, though Laozi said that the Dao came into being on its own. It is traditionally believed that Laozi wrote the *Dao De Jing* (also commonly written as *Tao Te Ching*), which is the primary text of Daoism, in three days after being asked to leave behind a record of his beliefs sometime in the 6th century BC. However, some scholars have contended that Laozi, which translates to mean “Honored Old Teacher”, or Lao Tzu which basically translates to “Master Old Teacher”, is actually a mythological combination of several figures and that the *Dao De Jing* has multiple authors, or at least that there were secondary authors who added to the original writings of Laozi. Though the historical authorship of the *Dao De Jing* has been proven debatable, it is generally attributed to constitute the beliefs and philosophy of Laozi.

In Daoism, *Dao* (again, commonly written with as *Tao*) can be translated to mean “Way”, “Path”, or “Principle”. One can see that Daoism is yet another path of religion like the paths of Buddhism and Jainism, but one which has been largely devoid of spirituality. The three Chinese symbols for the *Dao De Jing* (道德經) are: 道 or Dao, meaning "Way"; 德 or Dé, meaning "Virtue"; and 經 or Jing, meaning "Power". Drawing from this, the title of the *Dao De Jing* could be translated into English to mean the “Way of Virtue and its Power”.

Many words of the *Dao De Jing* have been quoted extensively. A few of the wiser quotations from the *Dao De Jing* worth contemplating include:

Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.
If you realize that you have enough, you are truly rich.
Simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and thoughts, you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate toward yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world.

Love
Embracing Dao, you become embraced.
Supple, breathing gently, you become reborn.
Clearing your vision, you become clear.
Nurturing your beloved, you become impartial.
Opening your heart, you become accepted.
Accepting the World, you embrace Dao.
Bearing and nurturing,
Creating but not owning,
Giving without demanding,
Controlling without authority,
This is love.

The Master’s power is like this.
He lets all things come and go effortlessly, without desire.
He never expects results; thus he is never disappointed.
He is never disappointed; thus his spirit never grows old.

There is no greater misfortune
than not knowing what is enough.
There is no greater flaw
than wanting more and more.
Whoever knows contentment
is blissful at all times.

If powerful men and women
could remain centered in the Dao,
all things would be in harmony.
The world would become a paradise.
All people would be at peace,
and the law would be written in their hearts.

Dao is great.
Heaven is great.
Earth is great.
Humanity is great.

By being a part of Nature, we are one with Dao.
Dao is eternal, and we survive physical death.

These are just a few parts of the Dao De Jing’s most widely recognized verses. You can see some poetic similarity in the verses to that of Hinduism, as well as sharing some of the principle ideas of the other religions that have been discussed. While these teachings are wise toward seeking contentment and avoiding lusts such as greed, they are lacking in promoting good works. As such, the teachings of Laozi have indifference to doing good or preventing evil, but rather simply being content. Some verses even encouraging inaction, which could be interpreted to promote sitting idly by while evil is being carried out or not helping others who are in need of help. The reason this is lacking is because sentient beings should not be indifferent to the suffering of others by merely focusing on contentment for only themselves. Rather, they should help to alleviate the suffering of others.

Besides lacking the promotion of righteousness, the teachings of the Dao De Jing are also entirely lacking of positive regard for God. Still, while Laozi did not pay tribute to God directly, one could interpret the Dao De Jing to pay some tribute to the Holy Spirit indirectly through the Dao, and at least life after death is recognized, which was something lacking discussion in Confucianism.

As was mentioned for the quotes of Hindu scripture, there is also an interestingly useful result if one looks to the above verses and replaces all occurrences of “Dao” with “God”. At least in the case of this translation of the above verses, there is a huge improvement which actually makes sense despite changing the meaning entirely (which would actually be recommended for those who wish to continue practicing Daoism and no other religion). Still, as with other religions, one could implement some of the parts of Daoist practice into a more properly developed faith which includes recognition and appreciation of God for creating this wonderful creation—which Daoists admittedly enjoy.

It cannot be denied that the Dao De Jing does contain simplistic beauty, including wise passages that promote non-obsession with material objects, respect for nature, non-rivalry, and many warnings against making war. These are certainly very good messages that it would be nice if other religious books included. However, some messages of the Dao De Jing say that the Dao is not done out of benevolence, but that the Dao is carried out by weakening the wills of people and keeping them ignorant in order to govern them, which is a horrible messages. Moreover, some less regarded messages of the Dao De Jing have been interpreted to endorse methods which are intended to keep the poor and impoverished in their state of poverty, which is inequitable and unjust.

But in Daoism, there are other religious texts besides only the Dao De Jing. In addition, the books of Zhuangzi, Liezi, and the Daozang can be considered to comprise the totality of the Daoist philosophy. Of all of the Daoist writings, the Dao De Jing and the Zhuangzi have been considered to be the two essential scriptures of Daoism. The book of Zhuangzi is attributed to have been written by an influential Chinese philosopher by the name of Zhuangzi who lived around the 4th century BC, during
the Warring States Period of Chinese history in which there were many bloody wars before China was united under the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC. Zhuangzi is considered to be the second master of Daoism to Loazi. The book of the Zhuangzi has been now been re-entitled as the "True Classic of Cultural Florencence". The Liezi, which was believed to have been written by a third Daoist master, was re-entitled as the "True Classic of Simplicity and Emptiness". The Daozang is an additional expansive collection of other Daoist philosophy that was compiled in 400 CE.

While the philosophy of Daoism itself stresses individuality and non-institutionalization of religion, Daoism has been institutionalized over the course of history. Daoist rules and ethics vary depending on the particular school, but there is a core body of beliefs that are generally held throughout the religion. As one of their most central beliefs, Daoists revere Laozi as one of the “Three Pure Ones”. Some traditions believe a messianic figure called Li Hang will come at the end of this world age to set right heaven and Earth. Most Daoists emphasize the aspects of: chi (qi), which is the life-force energy that flows through all living things; wujì, or boundlessness; and taijì, or ultimateness. Most Daoists also generally embrace simplicity, spontaneity, and harmony between the individual and the cosmos. The main principles of the teachings of Daoism are the profoundly sensible virtues of the Three Treasures, which are: 1) Kindness, 2) Simplicity, and 3) Modesty.

The widely recognizable symbol of Daoism is the yin-yang symbol, which is more properly called the Taijitu. In the yin-yang symbol, yín is usually represented by black and yáng (which is actually properly pronounced “yau-ning”) is represented by white. The symbol shows that what would be considered to be opposite parts of reality are always touching and intertwined, with a small part of the opposite always existing within the other. This shows that no quality is independent of its opposite, nor so pure that it does not contain its opposite at least in a diminished form. As such, the yin-yang reflects the inescapably intertwined duality of all things in nature. It should be noted that while the yin-yang symbol is considered the symbol for Daoism, it is also used by many other institutions and can be viewed to represent many different symbolic meanings.

As a general synopsis Daoism has many good qualities, especially in its teachings of kindness, moderation, humility, the recognition of chi, not becoming obsessed with materialistic wealth and the understanding of the yin-yang. Still, the importance of recognizing God for any individual cannot be overstated. Moving on, Chinese Traditional Religion, which is a blend of many spiritual and religious beliefs and cultural practices, will be that last religion from China to be discussed here.

**Chinese Traditional Religion**

Over the centuries, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism have been intertwined with Chinese folk religion to create what is now called Chinese Traditional Religion. Thus, Chinese Traditional Religion incorporates Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist thought systems with many of the traditional practices and beliefs of the ancient Chinese folk religion. Parts of Chinese Traditional Religion that come from Chinese folk religion include Chinese mythology and what has been called Shenism.
Chinese mythology includes a collection of cultural history, folk-tales, and religious practices that have been passed down in oral or written tradition. It includes creation myths and legends, such as myths concerning the founding of Chinese culture and the Chinese state. Historians have estimated that Chinese mythology dates back to the 12th century BC. Legends were passed down in oral form for thousands of years before being written down in books such as *Shan Hai Jing*, which means "Classic of the Mountains and Seas".

Shenism is comprised of ancient Chinese religious beliefs including the worship of *shens*, which can generally be described as deified spirits. Shens can be nature deities, clan deities, city deities, national deities, cultural heroes, demi-gods, dragons, and revered ancestors. Shens are central icons in Chinese Traditional Religion that vary in importance depending on the particular tradition. Chinese Traditional Religion also retains traces of some of its ancestral Chinese folk religion belief systems, including the worship of and communication with the Sun, Moon, Earth, the heavens and various stars, as well as communication with animals.

Some of the shens that are exalted as presiding deities in Chinese folk religion including (in their most basic description): *Shangdi*, or *Shang Ti*, who is the high God who works through the other gods and that the other gods can be considered to work for; *Tian*, which can translate to “Heaven”; *Huangtian Shangdi*, which is a combination of Shangdi and Tian, or basically God on His throne in Heaven; *Yu Huang* or *Yu Di*, who is considered the ruler of the moral realm and all realms of existence below, also known as the “Jade Emperor” in some interpretations; *Huangdi*, who is considered the founder of China and referred to as the “Yellow Emperor”; *Nüwa*, the mother goddess; *Fuxi* or *Paoxi*, a patriarch reputed to have taught to humanity writing, fishing, and hunting; *Shennong* or *Yandi*, a patriarch said to have taught the ancient Chinese the practices of agriculture; and *Pangu*, who is the a separate Creator God in certain renditions.

In Chinese folk religion, the One God may or may not be recognized according the individual practitioner, and the different shens are considered to have different qualities. Some practices have been like Hinduism with separate “gods” revered for things such as wealth, happiness, prosperity, longevity, and fertility. In this old tradition of polytheism, different shens are also looked to for different things. For example, believers in this tradition trying to have children look to the fertility goddess *Songzi Niangniang* or *Zhusheng Nangniang*. Oftentimes this goddess has been asked to give Chinese couples a boy, because Chinese culture has been largely patriarchal and male offspring have wrongly been valued more than females. (This became a problem when the government of China limited couples to having only one child. That legislation resulted in many female fetuses being aborted, and now there is a higher percentage of males in the population of China.)

The Shenist temples of Chinese folk religion can be distinguished into two types: *miao*, or "joss houses", where the differing deities are worshipped; and *ci*, or ancestral halls, where human spirits are revered. Shenist temples are usually very colorful and decorated with traditional figures on their roofs such as dragons and the various other shens. These are the primary temples for those practicing only Chinese folk religion, but those that practice Chinese Traditional Religion can also visit Daoist temples and Buddhist temples. Some figures—such as the Yellow Emperor and the Jade emperor—are idolized in
both Shenism and Daoism. In contrast to Shenist temples, Daoist temples are traditionally black and white in color, and Buddhist temples are usually characterized by the colors of yellow and red.

Also incorporated into Chinese Traditional Religion have been many other fields of thought and action from the Chinese culture, including: Neidan spiritual alchemy, Chinese astrology, traditional Chinese medicine, feng shui, and many styles of tai chi and qigong. Some of the parts of Chinese folk religion that converge with Daoists beliefs include shared tribute to several similar variations of cultural heroes and mythical rulers, practices believed to help in achieving ecstasy and longevity of life, and a variety of divination and exorcism rituals. In both Daoism and Chinese folk religion, spirits of deceased ancestors are often viewed as immortals. There are different immortals revered in different traditions. Because the customs and practices found in Chinese folk religion often become blurred in distinction with those of Daoism, the daoshi clerics of institutionalized Daoism have taken care to keep the distinctions that make Daoism a clearly separate religion.

While many westerners may be leery to ideas like exorcism rituals and concepts of immortals, it could be pointed out that some relations of these concepts could be related to Christian teachings. After all, Jesus is said to have become famous for casting demons out of people. And as far as comparing the traditional beliefs, Jesus Christ could be said to be an immortal of the Christian tradition, not too unlike the immortals of Chinese folk religion and Daoism.

Still, it can be difficult to understand that different deities are still idolized and worshipped today after most of the world has converted to monotheism. But this goes to show that traditional heritage is a very strong pervasive force that tends to resist change. Some of those who practice Chinese Traditional Religion have, despite the obvious existence of idols in the religion, claimed that Shangdi can be interpreted as the same singular God worshipped in other religions. If this is the case, and those of Chinese Traditional Religion recognize that there is ultimately one Creator from whom all blessings flow, and under Whom all other deities fall, perhaps it could be possible that the adherents could continue to venerate their recognized deities without disrespecting God—though it would be recommended that sacrifices to and the worship of idols should probably be phased out of practice and that prayer should only go to God. The same could be said for other religions with multiple figures in order to preserve cultural heritage and to not strip away such things as remembering ancestors and honoring significant historical figures for their contributions—again, given the understanding that the people take on the understanding in their hearts that there is one God over all.

Though there are many rich cultural traditions and celebrations which could be mentioned in the discussion of Chinese religions, I will stop there. The next chapter covers the major religions in the world today that had their foundations in China’s neighboring islands of Japan.
Chapter 11
Religions Originating in Japan
(Shinto, Tenrikyo, and the Church of World Messianity)

While many of the Japanese practice religions from other regions, there are several religions unique in origin to Japan. Shinto has its historical roots in Japan and is one of the largest religious influences in Japan today. Millions of the Japanese have Shinto beliefs. The majority of religious Japanese people today practice a mixture of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs. One particular which officially combines Shinto and Buddhism is called Shinbutsu-shūgō. But the larger part of the population of Japan does not affiliate with any single religion and there is a very high rate of atheism. (This may relate to the fact that Japan is the one country in history to have had cities bombed with nuclear weapons.)

In addition to Shinto that was originally established in Japan and the larger world traditions being practiced, there are numerous newer religions that have emerged within Japan. Ōka Gakkai is one of the largest newer tradition practiced in Japan, but it will not be discussed individually because it can be considered to fall under a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, though there are notable differences in its practice. Other newer religions to emerge in Japan include Shinreikyo, Zenrinkyo, Sukyo Mahikari, Tenrikyo, and several more. Tenrikyo has been chosen for discussion because it is one of the largest of these smaller religions and also for the intrinsic beauty of its teachings.

The Church of World Messianity is another newer religion to emerge in Japan. Though the Church of World Messianity can be considered an offshoot of Christianity, it will be discussed here separately because it contains a number of distinctly different beliefs. One of the religion’s key concepts is Johrei, which is claimed to be a method of channeling divine light into the body of another for the purposes of healing. There is a practice of similar ideation in Sukyo Mahikari, which will be discussed in the same section regarding the Church of World Messianity along with an extended discussion regarding some of the principles set forth by these two organizations.

Shinto

Shinto consists of the native spirituality belief system of Japan, which is not traditionally thought of as a religion. Shintoism is the name given to Shinto when it is considered as a religion. Shinto was originally not a unified religion, but a conglomeration of spiritual beliefs and practices. Shintoism contains much of the cultural history, folklore, and mythology of Japan, and even contains a creation story for the islands of Japan.
A primary focus in Shinto is that of *kami*, which is a Japanese word meaning “spirits”, “natural forces”, or “essence”, and also basically refers to the metaphysical spiritual aspect of all things. Beyond the spiritual force within people, natural forces such as the elements can be considered to have *kami*, as well as natural formations such as mountains, forests, and rivers. The spirits of these *kami* are not necessarily considered separate from the spirits within persons, but rather our spirits are considered to interact with the spiritual dimension or the spiritual aspect of all things; for example, the essence of animals or even vegetation can be considered to have *kami* spirits.

Shinto has also been referred to as *Kami no Michi*, which basically means the “Way of the Spirits”. Collectively, the spirits of Shinto have been referred to as *yaoyorozu no kami*, which is an expression generally meaning the myriad of spirits which are thought to be more numerous than blades of grass. Shinto today is still not necessarily a unified religion or faith, but rather a shared collection of general spiritual beliefs and practices. Shinto also contains an aspect which has been called ancestor worship in which the spirits of persons who have passed away into the spirit realm remain here in a way similar to the conception of ghosts, though without the negative connotation.

Those practicing Shintoism recognize it to be an understanding of the spiritual essence of all things, though non-believers skeptically reduce Shinto to be nothing more than the collection of shrines and false mystical beliefs. The latter skeptical view is simply lacking in recognition and acceptance of the spiritual side of things—which can be due to personal problems of disbelief or cultural influences from other skeptical or atheistic people. If anyone has ever felt admiration and respect for the spirit of nature, they have felt the *kami* to which Shinto refers. Shintoism as a religion, however, also contains its own creation story for Japan and many unique customary practices.

There are at least five different major schools of thought identified within Shintoism: *Shrine Shinto*, which is the historical tradition of Shinto and the most prevalent of the Shinto types; *Imperial Household Shinto*, which includes the religious rites performed exclusively by the Imperial Family at the three shrines on the Japanese Imperial grounds; *Folk Shinto*, which includes many folk beliefs in deities and spirits, with practices including divination, spirit possession, and shamanic healing; *Sect Shinto*, which includes many different individual sects which focus on individual *kami* spirits; and *Koshintō*, which literally means "Old Shinto", is the result of an attempt to reconstruct the original "Shinto from before the time of Buddhism". These main types of Shinto, as well as other subtypes, have given rise to numerous and varied traditions of Shintoism.

Shintoism as a religion includes veneration of *kami* in religiously in public shrines, as well as less formally in private homes and nature. Sacred locations in nature are called *mori*. Visiting shrines for purification is an important part of Shintoism, with many practicing this on a daily basis. There is a specific routine of customs that one is expected to carry out when entering a Shinto shrine. This includes bowing in respect and washing hands at the *Temizu* water basin as a ritual of cleansing. It is customary for shoes not to be worn inside any building that is considered a Shinto shrine. Like with all sacred places of worship, it is expected that the attendee be quiet and respectful inside the shrine. There are a great number of Shinto shrines throughout Japan and elsewhere where this is practiced.
At the Shinto shrines, there are sometimes offerings of food and Sakiki tree branches, which are customary for spiritual purposes. Oftentimes these offerings are intended for the spirits of passed loved ones. Other times, offerings are given in intention of Harae, or purification rituals. Some Shinto beliefs include the idea that certain deeds create a kind of ritual impurity that one should cleanse for peace of mind. Wrong deeds are called “impurity”, as opposed to "purity". Purification can be carried out individually or by being blessed by Shinto priests, who are called kannushi.

Another focal part of Shinto is the music, dance, and song of kagura, which comes in several different distinct forms of tradition. The practice of kagura is believed to pacify the spirits of the departed. Many of these practices and their associated stories are described in both of the ancient Japanese collections of the Kojiki and the Nihongi (or Nihon Shoki), which are composed of elaborate and detailed collection of Japanese chronicles. These could be considered to be the two base scriptures of Shinto, though they were both not collected until the early 8th century CE, which was obviously long after the origins of Shinto, which are thought to have come from the understanding of cohesion with nature and spirits that was held by the indigenous Jomon peoples who lived in the islands of Japan over 16,000 years ago.

Tenrikyo

Tenrikyo is a monotheistic religion that was founded in 1838 by a Japanese woman named Nakayama Miki. During a time when most all of Japan was practicing the primarily Godless ideation of Shintoism (which may explain why the spirits of many passed Shintos have been felt to remain in the spiritual realm here instead of attaining Moksha or Heaven), Nakayama Miki promoted belief in God—the singular Creator of the entire universe, who is called “Tenri-Ō-no-Mikoto” in Tenrikyo.

Nakayama Miki is believed by the followers of Tenrikyo to have been incarnated by the spirit of God, whom they call “God the Parent”—who is viewed as having no gender but rather considerable to have attributes of both the Father and the Mother. It is said that God spoke through Miki, saying:

I am God of Origin, God in Truth. There is causality in this Residence. At this time I have descended here to save all humankind. I wish to receive Miki as the Shrine of God.

After the event in which those words were spoken, Miki began teaching what would become the religion of Tenrikyo, which included writing the poetic Ofudesaki as a mouthpiece of God. In recognition of her workings of the Spirit after her temporary incarnation, Nakayama Miki is now called Oyasama by her followers, who continue to revere her as one of God’s chosen Messengers.

Besides the great gift of bringing a new form of monotheistic worship of God to the Japanese people at that time, Oyasama declared that part of the mission of Tenrikyo is to quicken the coming of a divine kingdom on Earth, in which the members of humankind will enjoy more joyous lives. The coming of that kingdom can begin here and now if everyone chooses to will it—though it is accepted in Tenrikyo
that everything must go “step by step”. In Tenrikyo, Kagura Tsutome, or the Dance of Creation, is performed with the intension of bringing about a more divine existence on Earth.

The ideology of practicing the joyous life promoted by Tenrikyo takes a stance of joyous acceptance that even views troubles such as illness constructively, teaching that merely being alive is something to be celebrated. Practitioners of Tenrikyo are also taught the blissful wisdom of being free from greed, selfishness, hatred, anger, and arrogance. In Tenrikyo negative thoughts are not known as sins, but rather as “dust” which can be viewed to be swept away from the mind as easily as dust is swept off a shelf. In this view, if one finds themselves having thoughts which could be considered sinful, they can just clear their mind of those thoughts and move on instead dwelling on them.

The adherents of Tenrikyo understand our bodies to be a blessing from God, and they consider the body to be "a thing lent, a thing borrowed" from God by divine grace. Like with most other Eastern religions, reincarnation is a belief held in Tenrikyo, which views death usually as “passing away for rebirth” rather than a final loss of life. In the practice of hinokishin, followers practice acts of charity, in which adherents are taught to perform selfless actions in gratitude for the daily blessings of life, which can be considered both as a positive karma and an action of simple gratitude to God.

Tenrikyo is now a widely recognized religious movements in the world with over a million followers—which is a good example of the fact that both men and women are divinely blessed with spiritual potential and can be successful religious leaders. Some practices of Tenrikyo include a spiritual practice intended to reduce the pain of childbirth, as well as some aspects similar to the belief in assisted healing practiced in the next religious movements to be discussed.

Church of World Messianity

Thanks to Japan’s policy of freedom of religion, Christianity is also practiced there, along with the other major world religions. The Church of World Messianity (COWM) is an offshoot of Christianity that was founded in 1935 by Mokichi Okada. The COWM practices the belief that people can channel God’s energy for the purpose of healing. Members believe that Mokichi Okada received a divine revelation in 1926 and was empowered to channel God’s healing light in a practice called Johrei to remove illness and strife from the world and inaugurate a new Messianic Age. Mokichi Okada's teaching are represented by the scripture titled Johrei, which has been edited and translated by the Society of Johrei, a newer branch of the COWM. Another branch of the COWM is Shinji Shumeikai, or Shumei for short, which also follows the teachings of Mokichi Okada.

In a written document titled The Church of World Messianity (Sekai Kyūsei-kyō) by Masakazu Fujieda, the beliefs of the COWM are described, including the following:

The Church of World Messianity worships the God of Creation, the Almighty God who rules the paradise of our earth. The slogan of the Church of World Messianity is the construction of a paradise on earth filled with "Truth, Virtue, and Beauty".
It is not through logic but through emotion and the evidence of doctors that the teachers of the Church of World Messianity try to inculcate its doctrine among the believers. The object of worship is "Sōzō Sushin" that is, the God of Creation who wills that paradise be built on this earth so that mankind can follow the will of God. The method that God provides is the elimination of the three evils: sickness, poverty, and strife; but paradise can not be brought about by material civilization alone. A religious civilization must be developed before paradise can be attained. So the present task of the leaders of the Church of World Messianity is the creation of such a religious civilization and its propagation among all the people.

The Universe: Now one may ask how the leaders of the Church of World Messianity look upon the universe and the world of reality. The basis of their belief is that paradise should be built here. The leaders believe it is the will of God that this be done and consider that everything that has happened since the establishment of the Church and is happening in this world is proof that there is a course for the realization of this divine will. The leaders regard the past as "night." The present time is a moment of transition. Since man was created on this earth, millions of years have elapsed and now we are going to welcome the dawn of paradise on this earth. Up to now only material civilization has been dominant. Should religious civilization be added to this, then a genuine paradise will come into existence. This is what we are striving for.

Man: As for human beings, man is regarded as the "lord of creation," but his soul and mind must be purified and become better. Everything depends on the quality of the soul and mind. Man, being inherently a child of God, possesses in part the divine spirit, which is generally known as conscience. At the same time, man has a side which is bestial, egotistic and shameful. So man is considered to have a dual nature: one side good, the other bestial. One and the same person can be good at one moment and very bad at another moment. Even the most evil human being has in himself the divine nature, so there is always a possibility of salvation, and of doing what is right. Superior effort can always be exerted.

Despite the impossibility of a true paradise for everyone living on Earth, this message is a positive one for the world to hear because it points out that spiritual acceptance beyond mere materialism is needed to attain a society which is more like paradise for everyone. Nonetheless, there are many religions in society already paying tribute to God, and the COWM does not necessarily need to replace them. Of course, the COWM is what it is, one additional religion within the larger society, which truly could use some re-orientation with God.

The message following the excerpt quoted above has more to do with the positivity that comes with belief and some of the practices of healing in the COWM, as Masakazu Fujieda continues:
Happiness: As for happiness and unhappiness. If man follows the path shown by God, he is bound to become happy. When he deviates from the divine law given by God, then naturally he becomes unhappy. This unhappiness can manifest itself in various ways but it is always to be regarded as a reprimand from God. In the Church of World Messianity the leaders speak of "spirit first, body second" (reishu taijū), that is, the spirit must always be the master and the body must always be subservient to the spirit. All the teachers of World Messianity are trying to do their best to educate the thousands of their believers in this direction: spirit dominant; body subservient. There are clouds in our souls which exist in the same manner as our physical bodies. When the physical body dies, the spirit goes to the other world. All sickness or so-called unhappiness is derived from the clouding of this spiritual body. When the clouds of the spirit are removed, then the spirit becomes healthy and the body naturally follows the spirit. The body becomes healthy when the spirit is purified. It ought to become as clear as crystal. One possessing a crystal clear spirit should be able to always enjoy health. Such a being can be called a "heavenly being" or a being of the spirit.

How to Gain Happiness: Next comes the problem of how to get rid of the clouds or shadows of the spirit. There are two ways to do this. One way is by channeling the divine light, which is given from above to purify the soul. Another way is through human effort, through doing good or virtuous things for other people or for the sake of society. The teachers of the Church of World Messianity are rendering good service, conveying this light from God to believers. Countless cases of illness have been healed. Countless cases of unhappiness have been overcome.

It would not be surprising if many readers objected to a few claims made in that passage while reading, which could rightly be expected because some parts of it are not always true. First of all, it is most obvious that one can have bodily illnesses despite holding true faith and a clear spirit. Moreover, there is no probable means by which one can be instantly cured of any truly physical disease of bodily origin by faith and spiritual development alone. But despite these things, there is also much truth in the above message considering the fact that spiritual belief is highly conducive to happiness. Furthermore, spiritual wholeness has been shown to alleviate distressed mental states, and though it has not been proven to cure physical illness, it may speed the healing processes of the body. Thus, in those ways, it is true that one's suffering can be diminished with a positive spiritual attitude.

As alluded to in the previous section of this chapter, there is a similar message of healing preached in Tenrikyo; except in Tenrikyo the healing is brought about through a spiritual process accompanied by a prayer called Sazuke, rather than through channeling divine light through Johrei. In both of the healing practices of Johrei in the COWM and Sazuke of Tenrikyo, God's blessings must be requested by the practitioner to help with the recovery. But where the healing practice of Sazuke in Tenrikyo is understood to only give benefit if there is sincere belief in God and faith from both the practitioner and the recipient, the COWM believes the assisted healing of channeled Johrei can occur even if the recipient is a non-believer.
Further, as was briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, another organization called Sukyo Mahikari practices a similar belief to Johrei of channeling divine light energy. In Sukyo Mahikari, the use of healing spiritual energy is called True Light instead of Johrei. Sukyo Mahikari, which technically classifies itself as a nonprofit spiritual and community service organization rather than a religion, focuses some of its teachings on “the ability in people to develop a world of true peace by understanding and practicing light energy and the universal principles in all aspects of life.”

In both the COWM and Sukyo Mahikari, it is believed channeled light can be radiated out through the hands, but where the COWM’s practice of channeling divine light through Johrei is believed to have physical healing powers, the channeling of light energy in Sukyo Mahikari is believed to be conducive to spiritual healing rather than physical healing. (Again, Tenrikyo places its focus on prayer, as is traditionally done in other religions such as Christianity, rather than focusing on channeling divine light through the body.) For various reasons, both Sukyo Mahikari and the COWM have been warned against publicly and have sometimes been termed cults. While this is probably undeserved in some cases, both Sukyo Mahikari and the COWM have included some very far-fetched claims, and in some practices the COWM has endorsed refusal of medical treatment under the ideation that suffering is purifying, which is potentially dangerous and unnecessary.

Nonetheless, many free and willing participants of these faiths believe wholeheartedly they truly are practicing the healing work of God and both practices have been shown to have positive results. Of course, these practices should always be used in coordination with medical science. After all, everyone can agree that it is very sad to hear the stories of children dying of easily treatable illnesses because the parents decided just to pray instead of getting medical treatment.

The obvious consideration that must be made concerning the cases in which positive results have been indicated from treatments in Tenrikyo, the COWM, and Sukyo Mahikari is that they may simply be harnessing the power of the placebo effect. It has been shown that there are true functional effects which relieve suffering by means of the placebo effect. Just as a sugar pill can result in pain relief in many cases, so can a caring touch or even a mere wave of a hand that someone truly believes will help. It has been proven again and again that if someone has a positive emotion involved with their healing, they are more likely to have a better recovery than if someone has negative emotions regarding their healing process. In the same way, if the person who is receiving the healing light truly believes that it will help them heal, their bodies can actually heal faster.

Of course, it is also possible that there is more going on with prayer, Johrei, and True Light energy than the proven physical effects of positive thinking. It is certain that positive belief in God is beneficial to health, and it may be possible that the metaphysical energy of a person’s chi energy field—the physical existence of which exist in the electromagnetic field of the human body and is indicated by the real medicinal effects that can result from acupuncture—can be focused and directed through belief to temporarily supplement the chi energy field of another. But even in the case that spiritual energy does aid in healing, it would be an error to think all of the world’s trained medical doctors should be replaced with spiritual healers who only do their work by channeling light energy. It is an obvious fact of this reality that we need trained medical doctors to diagnose physical medical conditions and surgeons
for operations. Nevertheless, adding positive belief in God and spiritual thought to physiological medicine surely would be an improvement.

It is interesting to note that Sukyo Mahikari was founded by a previous follower of the COWM who decided to separate from that particular church and created the original organization of Sukyo Mahikari, which kept some similar ideology but has now become less of a religion and more of a center of spiritual teaching. Nonetheless, the founder of Sukyo Mahikari, who founded the original organization under the name L.H. Yokoshi Tomo no Kai, also claimed to have been given a foundational revelation from God. Regarding the status of Sukyo Mahikari, the following statements were previously made:

[The] intention [in creating Sukyo Mahikari] was to help people throughout the world create a more peaceful and harmonious civilization based on the tenet that, "The origin of the world is one, the origin of all human beings is one, and the origin of all religions is one." The one is Creator God, whatever He may be called in various religions and elevated philosophies of the world.

Sukyo Mahikari is not the only path to God nor is it the only way to come closer to God. It is one of many paths leading to the same Universal Truth.

Those two statements contain a good and true message. However, many details of the religious writings of L.H. Yokoshi Tomo no Kai are extremely improbable and some of its practices have been questionable. But despite the highly questionable claims that were included in those original writings, there were some parts which were very insightful. For example, there was a message included which described that almost all of the religions of the world contain some distortion, and that these separate distortions—which may include partial untruths or a lack of acceptance of the whole truth—should be removed in an effort to keep the spiritual truth while getting rid of the distortions (such as the idea that all of the followers of other religions beside one’s own religion will go to Hell). Then, instead of people being followers of religions held in contempt of one another, all humankind will be able to take part in attunement with the same One True God, by whatever name God is referred to in different languages and traditions.

As one can tell, that particular ideation has already been proposed several times in this book, which endorses different religious traditions to become more inclusive of the many truths that are included in other religions, such as inviting recognition and acceptance of God for the creation of the universe and the work that has been carried out by many prophets and messengers in different cultures. The world may truly be on the verge of this momentous time that has been prophetically declared by many of the spiritual and religious traditions all around the world. It seems most likely that all of those ideations must refer to the same awakening that has been expected with the dawning of the new era.

As all of the world religions continue to develop, more people will come to accept the truth of the Spirit and become believers in God without the need for all people to practice the same particular religious tradition—though all could become forms of New Christianity through acceptance of Christ and implementing the recognition of God as ultimate in all the traditions. After all, one does not necessarily
have to join or conform to any particular institutionalized religion to become a believer in God and be saved (though it surely can be helpful). Thus, people of all religious traditions can become more accepting and inclusive of one another, which will help everyone work together with faith to make this Earth more heavenly, less materialistically superficial, and no longer lost to either Godlessness or fighting in the name of God.

With that, this chapter will be concluded. The next chapter covers some of the major aspects of religious traditions that have come from the spiritual belief systems of indigenous populations in other regions of the world.
Chapter 12

Indigenous Religions

(Other Traditional Belief Systems)

There are many spiritual systems of belief that originated in indigenous populations around the world that have not become popularly recognized as major world religions today, but do merit discussion. This chapter will give attention to a few of those other traditional belief systems. The chapter’s discussion will follow in three sections which are titled: Religions Originating in Africa, Mesoamerican Religions, and Native American Religion.

Yoruba religion is one of the most predominate of the religious traditions originating Africa, and it will be the primary focus of that section. In addition, the native spiritual belief system that has been called Animism will be briefly summarized. From Mesoamerica, some of the history and teachings of the Olmec, Toltec, Maya, and Aztec people will be briefly touched on. Most of the basic spiritual beliefs to be discussed for Native American religion center on the thought of the Great Plains American Indians.

These belief systems will provide some representation for the unique spiritual beliefs from populations around the rest of the major world regions that have not yet been given attention. There is much to be learned from some particular implications of these spiritual traditions before moving on to the next chapter, which covers some of the world’s major newer religions.

Religions Originating in Africa

While most people in Africa today practice the major world religions such as Islam and Christianity, some continue to practice the spiritual beliefs of the indigenous tribes of the region. As stated, Yoruba religion is one the largest remaining example of such indigenous belief systems. Yoruba religion originated with the loosely related city-states and kingdoms of the Yoruba people in the geographical region of West Africa, but has now spread to various places around the world especially including Cuba and Brazil, particularly because of the transport of Africans of this faith elsewhere in the world as slaves.

Yoruba religion upholds many beliefs which could be compared to that of Hinduism on the theological level, including the concept of reincarnation. In Yoruba religion, the essence of reincarnation is slightly different than in Hinduism in that it is not necessarily a cycle of reincarnations in which one’s karma from past lives is played out, but rather in each incarnation in life the soul has a purpose which they must attempt to find. Like in Hinduism, there is one Supreme God with many lesser gods, making it another form of polytheism which can also be viewed as monotheism. In the varying accounts of
Yoruba, which were all originally passed down by oral tradition, God has been referred by both the names of Olòrùn and Olódùmarè, depending on the context.

Like Brahman in Hinduism, Olòrùn is the Supreme Being and Source of Creation; self-existing prior to the creation of the universe and describable as either male or female depending on the person’s view, but is more properly understood as gender neutral. Olòrùn, like Brahman, can be equated to the formless Holy Spirit or God Almighty in Christianity, the First and the Last and the Ultimate Judge of all the souls that come about through creation. Yoruba religion is quite confusing because of its dualistic nature. In some older versions of Yoruba mythology, Olódùmarè was thought of as the male high god who was considered to be the “owner of the heavens” or the ruler of the sky gods.

Some more ancient mythological creation stories of Yoruba have some similarities to the ancient Sumerian accounts in which the sky gods (referred to under the blanket term “Lord God” in the Genesis account) created humans by advancing archaic Homo sapiens into modern Homo sapiens sapiens, as was discussed in the section on Judaism. From those stories, Olódùmarè might be credited as the captain who God worked through to arrange the preparation of the Earth’s ancient civilizations by delegating the various sky gods to seed civilizations through things like teaching writing, agriculture, and celestial observation at various locations around the Earth. (This has also involved the different enigmatic ancient monuments around the world, including the pyramids, which have stood from prehistoric times into modern times as a testament to the involvement of advanced technology in the Earth’s ancient history.) The highly respected captain high god Olódùmarè could refer to the one called God the Father, the one who decided to have Noah warned before the Great Flood, and who surely had oversight to the great Lord Yahweh coming down in an enactment of the Holy Spirit to deliver to Moses the Ten Commandments and the Genesis account through that crucial Exodus event which founded the Abrahamic religions that have instilled clearer monotheistic understanding.

In traditional Yoruba religion, there are a number of deities that are venerated, forming a type of polytheism—though, as said, there has now been a formless Supreme God recognized by the faith by the name of Olòrùn. In the more ancient versions of Yoruba, the understanding may have been that some of these deities were physical messengers between people on Earth and the sky gods of the heavens, with others intermediaries between this physical worldly realm and the metaphysical underworld. The spiritual tradition of Yoruba has recognized characteristics of the spiritual realm and given them separate names to form a pantheon of many supernatural spirit beings known as orishas. Two of the primary orishas have been called Eshu and Orunmila. Both of these orishas have been considered types of messengers between the realms. Eshu is the character representing interaction between the crossroads of the physical realm and the underworld, and has been deemed to be Satan, the one who snatches up selfish prayers and takes them to the lower realm of the underworld. In this, Eshu represents evil temptation and the learning of character “the hard way”. Orunmila, on the other hand, has been considered to be able to see into the future.

In this, there has been some confusion in Yoruba religion by thinking different qualities of the Spirit of God are actually of different characters in a polytheistic pantheon. It should be understood that it is a type of failure to try and call on separate deities for separate things within creation rather than
recognizing only the One True God that is the Creator of all the universe, physical and metaphysical. That Almighty God sees all intentions and can Judge morality from overly selfish desires which lack benevolent wishes for others. God has allowed some to try to call upon different deities for different things and teaches hard lessons through failures, losses, and temporary confusions.

Some renditions from the vast Yoruba scriptures, called *Odù*, place Orunmila as a Yoruba priest who walked on Earth as an embodied prophet of wisdom around 5,000 years ago. Orunmila has also been described as second in command to Olódùmarè. Though Olódùmarè has been said by some to be the dispenser of fates, the dispensing of fates is more truly understood to be decided by Olórún (i.e., God, Allah, Brahman, the Holy Spirit, the Creator, and Wonderful Teacher). There have been many Yoruba priests to Orunmila, as some have believed that one can be helped in learning their purpose or destiny through him. The Yoruba priests and priestesses have carried out divination rituals and prayers which they have accompanied with offerings to the sought orisha. Though many prayers and offerings have traditionally been dedicated to the various orishas, it should be clarified that all spiritual efforts must ultimately recognize God, as God is the One Source and Upholder of all existence, and should wisely be attributed as such. In that way, Yoruba religion could be considered monotheistic despite having many polytheistic qualities.

There are many concepts that are central tenants to the practitioners of the Yoruba religion. The primary doctrine of Yoruba religion is called *Ija*. Included in the main concepts of this religion is the spiritual energy called *ashe* which flows through all things and by which all spiritual phenomena occur. This *ashe* is like a mixture of the Easter concept of *chi* and the essence of the kami of Shinto. Meditative prayer has also been a traditional practice of the Yoruba peoples, and it can be considered to be the simplest form of communication between the individual (*ori*), the divine self (*ori-Orùn*), and the all-knowing (*Olu-Orùn*). In this practice, it is believed that not only do our actions have influence on the world, but our thoughts also have influence through the combined essence of all things. This is possible as Yoruba religion explains that each individual acts in this physical realm while also having a spiritual aspect which interacts with the spiritual dimension.

The body and the spirit, which are understood as two distinctly separate things, are united by the individual *ori*, which can be considered the conscious pilot or commander of one’s thoughts, choices, and actions. Thus, while a spirit may be reincarnated in multiple lives, and each life may actually have more than one spirit, each acting individual will develop one new *ori*, which is identifiable by the given or chosen name of the individual in that lifetime. In each life, the refinement of one’s character (*iwa*) and one’s behavior through learning is the central goal. In the historic practice of Yoruba religion, there have been many types of divination rituals practiced that have been thought to aid in this process, though such rituals are not necessary.

As noted, it is believed by those practicing Yoruba religion that each person has a particular purpose in life, which was known and perhaps even chosen before being born into the world. The idea is that the spirit knew their purpose before incarnating, but that purpose is forgotten upon being born, as each baby is a blank slate with no prior knowledge. Then, in life, the individual must rediscover their forgotten purpose over the course of their lifetime. One of the primary roles of Yoruba priests—known
as Babalawos if men and Iyalawos if women, or simply Awo in plural—is to help individuals find their purpose in life. This is much like the help sought from counselors and spiritual leaders in all religions.

It has been estimated at this time that there are at least 25 million people continuing the practice of Yoruba religion in its birthplace in West Africa, and perhaps 75 million or more continuing it globally, making it one of the largest religions in the world today. There are also many other traditions which practice belief systems which are partly related to Yoruba religion. For instance, the practice of Santeria grew from a meld of influence from Yoruba religion and Christianity.

Aside from Yoruba religion, there are many other spiritual belief systems which have their origins in the indigenous people of Africa. Some of the Akan religion, which has been passed down from ancient times, is similar to the more ancient accounts of Yoruba as it includes a story in which a deity came down to Earth from above and used to interact with humans but then retreated back up into the sky. Another African religion called Odinani recognizes several deities but rightly gives faith to the fact that one Great Spirit was before all things and will forever be over all smaller deities.

Many spiritual belief systems practiced by people currently living in Africa fall under the title Animism. The term Animism, which has its origin in the Latin term anima (meaning soul or life), is the name that has been given to spiritual belief systems which basically maintain that the spiritual realm exists throughout the natural physical world. Thus, the definition of Animism is far different from the connotation given by the sound of the name. Much to the opposite of thinking we are all merely animals with no spirits, it is believed that spirits exist throughout nature—including not only humans and other intelligent creatures, but also vegetation and geological formations such as waterfalls. Many have been known to be able to feel such spirits, which are also recognized components in the previously discussed spiritual belief of kami in Shinto.

In fact, most of the oldest spiritual belief systems held by the wisdom teachings of the indigenous people from pre-history fall into the category of Animism. Native American religion, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is a largely animistic faith—especially as much of Native American spirituality has been related by the actions of animals in their natural environment, as well as through visions of them. Additionally, the indigenous religions of the Aborigines of Australia and the Inuit of the Arctic regions (commonly called Eskimos) can be considered to be animistic in their worldview. Because the belief of a spirit in all things is shared by many different groups, it is difficult to draw a total number of people who hold animistic worldviews, but in all it would be a tremendous number, surely in the hundreds of millions.

**Mesoamerican Religions**

There were many different systems of belief practiced by the native peoples in the geographical region that today composes the countries of Mexico and Central America. Of these, there were native people called the Olmec, Toltec, Maya, and Aztec. The Inca, who lived in the western region of South America, are often discussed in relation to these others but are not of the Mesoamerican region. The
interesting characteristics of the Inca—including their shaped stonework architecture, interesting religion in which the god-ruler was said to have descended from the Sun, and the preserved skeletons from the carefully buried nobles having skulls which appear to be of a species other than *Homo sapiens sapiens*—will be left to the reader’s investigation.

The Olmec were one of the earliest civilizations in the Gulf region of Mexico. They have been respected as the earliest contributors to the cultural heritage of the natives of Mesoamerica. The birth of the Olmec civilization from the previous farming cultures, which were in the region as early as 5000 BC, is marked by a sudden increase in artwork and monument building. Olmec monuments, such as stone “colossal heads” that weigh tens of tons and were transported long distances from their quarries by unknown methods, are some of the oldest in the region, dating back to around 1500 BC. The facial characteristics of these colossal heads look more like Africans in appearance than Native Americans, which is quite difficult to explain with the current paleo-anthropological theory that all of the inhabitants of the Americas prior to Columbus shared a common ancestry with the cold-adapted hunters who came across the Beringia land bridge from Eurasia during the last ice age.

The Olmec, who were the first in the Americas to have developed writing, are considered to have laid some of the foundations for the later civilizations that came to flourish in Mesoamerica. This included the cultural use of obsidian and jade, which have since been used especially for decorative objects such as masks and jewelry. There is evidence that the Olmec were the first influential civilization to have played what has been plainly called the *Mesoamerican ballgame*. The evidence of this includes around a dozen rubber balls dating to roughly 1500 BC, which interestingly would have been earlier than the building of the first permanent ball courts in the region. There currently is not a good understanding of the religious views of the Olmec aside from some details such as there being evidence that they practiced ritual bloodletting, but it is believed that their thinking may have influenced parts of the religions of the later civilizations in the region.

The religions of the later civilizations from the Mesoamerican region are more well-known. For instance, the Toltec civilization held vast spiritual teachings which could constitute a religion. Some of this cultural wisdom has been preserved by Toltec teachers called *naguals*. Though there were times of considerable oppression that came with some religious intolerance previously practiced by Spanish colonizers who originally strictly enforced Catholic Christianity, today the preserved teachings of the Toltec are openly promoted by several avid teachers.

One prolific writer and teacher in the modern era of the theology of the Toltecs is don Miguel Ruiz. In his books, such as *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz has shared some of the best wisdom held in the Toltec way of thinking, which is impressively liberating from the stressful mindset that has come over industrialized civilization today. A summary of some of the most essential wisdom teachings of the Toltec emphasized by Ruiz includes: being honest and truthful in speech and sticking to your word, not making assumptions about people, doing your best not to be a cruel judge of yourself and others, attempting not to take things personally, and breaking free from negative old thought patterns. In his positive message to the world, don Miguel Ruiz has hoped to help us free ourselves from any and all
internal emotional “poisons” which may cause us to suffer. Regarding this, he has written an appreciative prayer to God, who he understands to be a part of the love in everything:

    Thank you, Creator of the Universe, for the gift of life you have given me. Thank you for giving me everything that I have ever truly needed. Thank you for the opportunity to experience this beautiful body and this wonderful mind. Thank you for living inside me with all your love, with your pure and boundless spirit, with your warm and radiant light.

    Thank you for using my words, for using my eyes, for using my heart to share your love wherever I go. I love you just the way you are, and because I am your creation, I love myself just the way I am. Help me to keep the love and the peace in my heart and to make that love a new way of life, that I may live in love the rest of my life. Amen.

This prayer of Ruiz’s is a wonderful representation of the worldview that can be developed from the wisdom teachings of the Toltec when melded with a more modern monotheistic understanding. The older teachings of the original Toltec religion, however, focus more on the concept of the ideal warrior, who is viewed to have excellence in both thinking and in action. As with the teachings of Buddhism, the Toltec view is that if we have the proper mindsets, we can be free from suffering—though the Toltec could hold positions including some violence such as being athletes or protective soldiers.

Writings by Dr. Sheri Rosenthal have described much of the Toltec thinking which promotes a quiet mind, open heart, and “impeccability” in: communication, action, livelihood, emotions, mind, and love. These concepts are quite similar to the wise teachings of Buddhism without the absolute of total non-violence regardless of the circumstances. Further shared concepts of Toltec spirituality which are included in other major religions such as Christianity and Islam include that of kindness and generosity. Furthermore, similarity between the Toltec religion and Confucianism can be found in the promotion of performing a response role to the larger community.

The Toltec mindset also includes breaking the habits of: our addiction to drama, getting over the impossible idea of perfection, and becoming masters of awareness and intent. Intent is taught to be a crucial part of everything we do. It is taught that if we have good intentions which are not centered on self-importance we can know that we are acting in the right way and overcome any fear. Some of the greatest advice of the Toltec includes remembering to use our speech with the intention of helping and never with the intention of hurting, which is a misuse of the ability to speak. In all of the wisdom of the Toltec there is one particular view that I must say I do not agree with, and that is the promotion of the idea that we are living in a dream. Surely, this life is reality, and not merely a dream—because in dreams our actions do not affect others, but in this reality they do.

Besides their advanced spiritual development, the Toltec were master artisans of craftwork. The greatly impressive ancient city of Teotihuacán in the Basin of Mexico near Mexico City was previously attributed to have been built by the Toltecs, though archeologists now admit that the true builders of Teotihuacán currently remain a mystery. Teotihuacán’s planning includes numerous large pyramids in a strategically organized layout, the most enormous ones being: the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of
the Moon, and the temple of Quetzalcoatl. It is believed that the city supported a population of up to 250,000 before it was abruptly abandoned and burned around 750 CE, with some indications that it may have been intended to remove evidence of the elite class. This mysterious ancient city has now become a popularly visited archeological site which has inspired wonder in most every visitor. The city of Teotihuacán has been noted to be “the place where man becomes god”.

There are many other great ancient cities including numerous large pyramids in the region of Mesoamerica, though none are as extensive as the planning at Teotihuacán. The largest of these other pyramids includes Chichen Itza, which appears to have had both Toltec and Maya influences. Many of the cities in the region built by the Maya civilization include pyramids but not the ballcourts for the notoriously violent Mesoamerican ballgame apparently pioneered by the Olmec. Though the now-famous Long Count calendar and the mathematical concept of zero may have first been pioneered in this region by the earlier Olmec, the Maya are known to have been masters of them and developed them for further use. The Maya also had the first fully developed written language in the Americas and may have been the first there to teach astronomical study of the stars.

Though the Maya lived in basically the same land region as the earlier Olmec, the depictions of the Maya elites show their facial characteristics to be distinctly different in appearance of the Olmec depicted by the colossal heads. These variances, as well as others, have led many to believe the Olmec and the Maya were influenced by races from different star systems. Furthermore, in the imagery of ancient Mayan ruins such as the capital city of Palenque, the Mayan “gods” are portrayed in depictions on columns which represent events in which the elites handed things down to the native culture.

In what has been deemed mythology, the Mayan maize god graciously gave maize to the native Mesoamericans. Evidence that this might be more historical than mythological comes from an extremely interesting Mayan manuscript that recently emerged, titled The Testimony of the Ancient One, Chac-Le. Within this curious text, it describes that corn seeds were brought on a ship from another planet, the travel time from which took several generations to complete. This is particularly thought-provoking because modern experts have had great difficulty in coming up with a sound explanation for how maize could have been domesticated on Earth, due to there being no evidence of any previous crop strain that would have had nutritional value from which maize would have been domesticated. Beyond giving an explanation for maize, the above mentioned manuscript also seems to hold answers to many of the enigmatic questions regarding the origins of some of the civilizations of Mesoamerica—especially those which refer to their original home in a distant Tollan.

José Argüelles, who became a prolific author and advocate for world peace, was said to have had a visionary experience on top of the Pyramid of the Sun of Teotihuacán at age 14. He later dedicated himself to deciphering Mayan history and teleology. He was one of the first to have transcribed the Mayan calendar’s current Long Count period to end on or around December 21st, 2012—which has also been found to align with calculations related to other sites around the world. While some have worried that the ending of this cycle has meant the end of the world, it is more accurately interpreted as the end of the current cycle and the beginning of a New Age. This is actually probably very good news,
considering the massive amounts of disharmony that have been associated with this Great Cycle, which had its start in what would have been 3113 BC.

After the mysterious emergences and successively abrupt declines of the Olmec, Toltec, and Classic Maya civilizations, parts of the cultures taught by these civilizations were learned by the Aztecs and absorbed into their civilization, which came to live in many of the abandoned structures that were built by those previous civilizations. Some Aztecs in Mesoamerica are said to have noted the Toltecs as their predecessors, though there surely was interplay between the tribes of all these civilizations. The Aztecs also incorporated parts of the Mayan culture, such as derivations from the Mayan calendar, stories of the Hero Twins, and focus on the Underworld. Today, there are some isolated groups from these differing tribes which have preserved their independent cultures, but the culture throughout the larger part of Mesoamerica is largely mixed and there are many interpretations of the complicated cultural history in the region. Mesoamerican culture can be found to share some common themes throughout it.

One of the main deities throughout Mesoamerica is that of the Feathered Serpent, which in many cases has been represented as a snake-like reptile often shown to be eating humans and related to live human sacrifices. In other cases, the Feathered Serpent has been referred to by both the names of Quetzalcoatl and Kukulkan. It is best understood, however, that the terms Kukulkan and Quetzalcoatl refer to subjects entirely different from that intended to be represented by the serpent imagery. Rather, the Feathered Serpent is more correctly viewed symbolically. At this time of the end of the cycle, the symbolism of the serpent eating its own tail is particularly notable.

There have been many interpretations of the Mayan term Kukulkan, some of which have rightly explained it to represent the same basic ideology of the Holy Spirit or Brahman as the Source and Maintaining Spirit of all existence. But the term Quetzalcoatl was used by the Toltecs in many contexts to refer to a legendary human being and heroic leader considered by many interpretations to have been incarnated with the Spirit of God. While Quetzalcoatl is rightly associated with God and messengers of God, it was a confusion of the Aztec interpretation of Quetzalcoatl afterward that the name became attributed to different natural phenomena in a type of polytheistic ideology.

One version of the story of Quetzalcoatl from the Mesoamerican culture can be attributed to a Toltec warrior-priest named Cē Ācatl Topiltzin, who became called Topiltzin Cē Ācatl Quetzalcoatl once he was recognized as a king of the Toltecs and their major city Tōllan around 950 CE. This Quetzalcoatl is remembered as a hero who abolished the horrific practice of human sacrifice, becoming beloved by his people and revered as a god among men. According to tradition, some of the priesthood who wished to continue human sacrifice planned to get rid of him by plotting to shame him. Topiltzin was given an intoxicating drink and then allegedly broke his vow of celibacy, or was at least tricked into thinking he had. After that event he is said to have left in self-imposed exile, though vowing to return. Some interpretations said that Topiltzin himself would return, while others insisted that he would send another representative.
Some, particularly including Mormons and other members of the Latter-day Saints, believe that other versions of Quetzalcoatl may refer to the same figure as Jesus Christ. Reasons for this include the fact that Quetzalcoatl was said to have been a white man with a beard who came from the sky in some versions of the story, and that he prophesied his own return. Though this connection seems quite outlandish, it is possible that such a link exists. It is a reasonable interpretation that Quetzalcoatl is a recurrent figure spanning time and incarnating in different persons at crucial points throughout history as a Savior of civilizations, of which Jesus Christ was one of several instances.

In more historically accepted accounts, the prophesized return of Quetzalcoatl was influential in the event in which Hernán Cortés, a commander in the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, was peacefully let in to the great city of Tenochtitlan by the Aztec emperor Moctezuma II in 1519. This misinterpretation of the prophesized return led to the downfall of this once great empire. As recorded in the Florentine Codex, which is a collection of Mesoamerican historic accounts that was written after a great deal of research by Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún in the years following the Spanish conquest, Moctezuma II gave a speech to Cortés that had been intended for the return of Quetzalcoatl. An excerpt from this anticipated speech, which was prepared and recited in the Nahuatl language, has been translated to say: "You have graciously come on earth, you have graciously approached your water, your high place of Mexico, you have come down to your mat, your throne, which I have briefly kept for you, I who used to keep it for you...You have graciously arrived, you have known pain, you have known weariness, now come on earth, take your rest, enter into your palace, rest your limbs; may our lords come on earth." It seems that the true meaning of this speech remains to be seen.

The historical and mythological become blurred when it comes to the figure of Quetzalcoatl, which can be considered as a re-emerging theme character in the development of civilization. José Argüelles is one individual in particular who pointed out a connection between Quetzalcoatl and the ruler named Pacal the Great who had a massive sarcophagus lid elaborately carved and hidden within the Temple of Inscriptions of the ancient city of Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico. But more than only Argüelles have found the ideology of Quetzalcoatl to span over many cultures across different places and times. Many have pointed out the similarities between Quetzalcoatl, Jesus Christ, and Itzamná Kauil.

There was an incredible degree of synchronistic convergence that occurred when Christianity was incorporated into the various Mesoamerican spiritual traditions, which already had crosses in some of their monuments such as the foliated cross in Palenque. Like most of the other religions that have been discussed, the Maya also recognize One True God, who they call Hunab-ku. This overlay is found in some versions of the Maya creation story which understood the Holy Spirit as the continuation of the original Creator God who has been said to be One in essence and seven in manifestation—something enigmatically compatible to how John of Patmos described the Lamb (Revelation 5:6).

An example of how Mayan prophecy interrelates with Christianity can be found in the Chilam Balam books, which are collections of preserved history and oracles from the continued practice of the religion of the Yucatec Mayas. While the various Mayan Chilam Balam books (which are named after a prophet named Chilam Balam along with the name of the Yucatec towns around which they were collected) function to preserve the history of Maya wisdom from the past, they have also included
prodigious prophesy for the future. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, by Ralph L. Roys, is the particularly thorough version from which the following quotes were taken. You can note the prophesies of Napuctun, Ah Kuil Chel, Natzin Yabun Chan, and Chilam Balam are of particular importance here.

These prophesies have been said to refer to a coming time when “A new wisdom shall dawn upon the world universally.” The prophecy of Napuctun revealed: “[T]here shall be a circle in the sky.” (Something particularly worth noting here is that the author of this book you are now reading witnessed a circle of lights in the night sky above the Temple of Inscriptions in Palenque over Spring Equinox in 2012, prior to ever receiving and reading this prophesy of Napuctun.) In the prophecy of Ah Kuil Chel, it was foretold that “the prophet who will declare truly the word of the book” would come from the north and the west of the four quarters, which most plainly refers to North America.

The prophesy of Natzin Yabun Chan states: “Give your understanding to his word, to his admonition. Fortunate are you who truly receive it.” And finally, in the original prophecy of Chilam Balam it is declared: “There is the sign of Hunab-ku on high. The raised wooden standard shall come. It shall be displayed to the world, that the world may be enlightened,” as, “[He is] the guardian of their souls. He who receives him, who has truly believed, he will go to heaven with him,” and happily, “They will correct their ways who receive him in their hearts.” As these prophesies come true, it will show proof of the synchronicity of God that spans all cultures and pervades all time—a synchronicity which the Maya long ago connected with in the creation of the Long Count calendar.

One must consider the fact that the Creator of the universe—that is, the Holy Spirit which is the One True God—must have involvement throughout the entire universe, which was designed with the physical laws and created through the Big Bang. Clearly, this would mean that God ultimately must be included in most all of the world’s religions, as to encompass them all. God’s proof is shown through all of the religious prophesies that have come true throughout the various organized religions. Their eventual manifestation shows that they must have originated from the same Holy Spirit which sees all from outside of time. This theme, that the same Great Spirit pervades everything, can be further considered in the examples of the spiritual thinking of the indigenous peoples of North America.

Just as this description of Mesoamerican religion has been limited in scope and lacking in inclusion of the finer details, the rendition of Native American religion will also be only one rendition of the many spiritual concepts and practices.

Native American Religion

Similar to the tribes of Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest and colonization, the natives of North America had a rich cultural diversity of many tribes who established trade networks with one another over the centuries. While industrialized civilization was developing in Europe and elsewhere, the Native Americans continued to make their living primarily out of efficiently utilizing what was provided to them directly by nature. For example, the natives in the Great Plains used flint for tools such as arrowheads and utilized almost every part of harvested game such as the buffalo which used to freely
roam the grasslands in enormous herds. The Native Americans were said to have originally given a warm welcome to the Europeans and helped them in many ways—as is partially remembered in the American tradition of Thanksgiving. While the cultures slowly continued to interact, however, the generosity of the Native Americans was generally abused and violence grew between the cultures.

Armed violence between the settlers and natives was generally not good for the natives, especially considering they only had bows and arrows versus the settler’s rifles and bullets. So the natives usually kept their distance; however, there were some major battles before the eventual surrender to control by the government of the colonizers. Despite the fact that the natives were outgunned and usually lost in organized armed battle against the United States armies, there were some groups that vowed not to surrender. One battle that occurred in which an allied coalition of Native Americans actually defeated a United States Army battalion was the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Many leaders of the North American natives—who had come to be called Indians—took up a mentality of resistance regarding the struggle against those who threatened the natives’ territories and way of life. These included: Geronimo, Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, and Crazy Horse.

Crazy Horse, or Tȟašúŋke Witkó in the Lakota language, is said to have received his name from a vision in which he interacted directly with the spirit realm. He said that he understood the spirit world to exist behind the physical world in which the spirits are unseen. In his vision, he received several messages about how he would be a protector of his people, and because his horse acted with a wild spirit in his vision, he took the name Crazy Horse. Crazy Horse said that he would remember the spirit realm and take to it in battle, which was how he managed to have never suffered a wound from an enemy in battle despite being involved with many. People have thought that he truly must have been protected by the Holy Spirit for the number of times he was fired upon and never hit by a bullet. However, Crazy Horse did eventually decide to formally surrender in the name of peace. But after his peaceful surrender, his replies to questioning were mistranslated and he subsequently suffered wounds in a scuffle with the guards that resulted in his death in 1877.

Over time, the spiritual traditions of the Native Americans were continually marginalized, and there was pressure to get them to give up their spiritual belief systems. The poor decision to try to strip the Native American people of their freedom to practice their own spiritual ceremonies could be viewed as a policy to intentionally destroy their unique heritage, which only added to the great number of tribulations that the Native American people have faced. Long after the diseases that came with the Europeans wiped out many of the natives, they were forced to give up their lifestyles and live on Reservations, after which alcoholism continued to destroy many lives. On the Reservations, the lack of the sense of accomplishment that comes with playing a productive role in society became a conscious toll created by the welfare system which was set up for the ancestors of the natives with the intention of being compensation for their past displacement.

Some of what Native American welfare has been intended to make up for includes things like the Trail of Tears, which is a name given to the to the forced relocations of basically all Native American tribes to Indian Reservations that came after the United States Indian Removal Act was declared in 1830. This official decision came after a course of decades of cases of battle between homesteaders and
the natives, and was an action taken that would hopefully result in peace; but, as proven by the Indian Wars that broke out in response to it, that legislation did not bring peace for some time. In one case of the Trail of Tears, government officials forced the Cherokee people to walk a thousand miles, which included the winter months between 1838 and 1839. It has been reported that in this particular part of the Trail of Tears, some 4,000 of the 15,000 Cherokee died during their forced relocation. Many of the Native Americans suffered from not only exposure to the elements and illness, but also thirst and starvation in route to their destinations. In many cases, if the people refused to cooperate and keep walking, they were shot. This type of treatment makes it more understanding why many tribes had refused to surrender.

Despite the suffering of the Native Americans, and the possible attempt to strip them from their heritage, many Native American groups have heroically persevered and maintained their spiritual belief systems. And while the practice of Native American spirituality truly was marginalized previously, many United States officials have officially re-allowed the practice of their spiritual ceremonies. This can be noted by the beautiful practice of pow-wow dancing celebrations today. Though some had once portrayed Native Americans as savages that were incapable of understanding the view of God, one Native American elder and holy man of the Oglala Sioux tribe by the name of Black Elk described some of his religious beliefs in the words of a prayer, saying:

[T]his is my prayer: That peace may come to those peoples who can understand; an understanding which must be of the heart and not of the head alone. Then they will realize that we Indians know the One true God, and that we pray to Him continually.

Black Elk, or Heȟáka Sápa in the Lakota language, was growing very old in the late 1940’s when he conveyed this message to Joseph Epes Brown. Black Elk spoke of a vision he was given at a very young age in which he was shown a “great flowering tree” of life that represented the sacred religion of the Plains Indians—and, indeed, the same shared World Tree that represents the connected spirituality of the whole world that has been forgotten only through temporary confusion. It was his hope that he might play a part in preserving the heritage of that tree. In preserving and conveying some of the teachings of the wisdom of his religion to writers like Joseph Epes Brown and John Neihardt, he succeeded in transmitting some explanation of one spiritual legacy of the Native Americans. This explanation especially included discussion of the symbolism of the circle inscribed with a cross—which you can see on the cover of this book. (The symbol has also been a sign for Gnosticism and the astrological symbol for Earth.)

The circle inscribed with a cross can be viewed to hold much of the meaning of the spiritual understanding of the Great Plains Native Americans. Just as the cross always finds itself centered in the circle, each person always finds themself at the center of their universe, and also at the crossroads between spirit and nature. The spirit is tethered in the body while we are here, and the body is tethered in nature, which the Native Americans have traditionally held great respect for as a central part of their spiritual understanding. The circle has been a symbol shared by many of the Native American tribes. The sacred circle, or hoop, was described by Black Elk in saying:
In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished.

This is a description of the peaceful trade of goods between the tribes which resulted in everyone having everything that was needed. Black Elk described that the “great flowering tree” of his vision was “the living center of the hoop”, which can be viewed to be symbolic of the fact that their prolific society was centered on a shared basic understanding of spirituality. The Native Americans recognized the circle in all of nature, as can be seen from such things as the natural cycle of the seasons. Even the teepees in which the Native Americans lived were formed in the shape of a circle.

When the circle is inscribed with a cross it makes four quadrants that can be viewed to represent many unique and insightful explanations. This symbol is usually displayed simply as showing four directions on one plane, but it can also be expanded three-dimensionally—as Joseph Epes Brown expands further regarding his learning about this symbol:

To realize this symbol in its fullness we must conceive of three horizontal circles inscribed with crosses, all three pierced by the vertical axis of man himself. For the Indians understand that man is intermediate between sky and earth, linking the two, with his feet on the ground and his head, or intellect, at the center of the firmament. The middle disc, like the vertical axis, also represents man himself, for in joining sky and earth, he is neither pure spirit nor gross matter, but a synthesis of both.

This multi-dimensional view describes the understanding that Native Americans have regarding their relationship to the universe. This symbolism also represents the fact that the thinking of each individual is at the center of their being and is thus the center of their own existence. It can be said that one’s mental state is ultimately not the result of one’s external conditions, but rather of the internal choices of how we react to events and conditions. Part of understanding this symbolism is to realize that each individual’s own experience of reality is centered on their very thoughts and perceptions. One can choose to be negative about everything, focusing on the bad and taking a thought pattern of defeat, or they can make the choice to be positive about everything and form a thought pattern which focuses on the joy of finding harmony where one is or making it through adverse situations in order to do so.

The Native American view of the relationship between human beings and nature is further symbolized by the sacred peace pipe. The Native Americans traditionally used blessed smoking pipes in sacred ceremonies such as inter-tribal peace meetings which were intended to bring about or re-affirm peace between previously warring tribes. Joseph Epes Brown described this with the following words after properly learning the tradition from Black Elk:

As the pipe is filled with the sacred tobacco, prayers are offered for all the powers of the universe, and for the myriad forms of creation, each of which is represented by a grain
of tobacco. The filled pipe is thus “Totality,” so that when the fire of the Great Spirit is added a divine sacrifice is enacted in which the universe and man are reabsorbed with the Principle, and become what in reality they are. In mingling his life-breath with the tobacco and fire through the straight stem of concentration, the man who smokes assists at the sacrifice of his own self, or ego, and is thus aided in realizing the Divine presence at his own center. Indeed, in the liberation of the smoke man is further helped in realizing that not only is God’s presence within him, but that he and the world are mysteriously plunged in God. The smoke that rises to the heavens is also, as it were, “visible prayer,” at the sight and fragrance of which the entire creation rejoices. The mysteries of the peace pipe are so profound that it is not too much to say that the rite of smoking for the Indian is something very near to the Holy Communion for Christians. It is therefore not without reason that it is commonly called a “Peace Pipe,” and was always used in establishing a relationship, or peace, between friends and also enemies. For in smoking the pipe together each man is aided in remembering his own center, which is now understood to be the same center of every man, and of the Universe itself.

In their spiritual ritual of smoking the sacred pipe in coordination with prayer, Native Americans also enact a process which represents the temporary aspect of this experience of life. The burnt tobacco sacrificed in the smoking of the sacred pipe can be viewed to be symbolic of the fact that our physical bodies are merely temporary physical vessels for the spirit. Just as the tobacco turns to ash as the smoke is released, when we die our spirits are released from the body like smoke from the ashes. Brown also wrote of the spiritual understanding of the Native Americans that:

The Indian believes that such knowledge can not be realized unless there is perfect humility, unless man humbles himself before the entire creation, before each smallest ant, realizing his own nothingness. Only in being nothing may man become everything, and only then does he realize his essential brotherhood with all forms of life. His center, or his Life, is the same center or Life of all that is.

Because of the true man’s totality and centrality he has the almost divine function of guardianship over the world of nature. Once this role is ignored or misused he is in danger of being shown ultimately by nature who in reality is the conqueror and who the conquered. It could also be said, under another perspective, that in the past man had to protect himself from the forces of nature, whereas today it is nature which must be protected from man.

As Brown pointed out, while people have acted at times as the conquerors of small parts of nature, in the larger picture nature is far more powerful than us. Therefore, it is wise to hold respect for nature and the environment in all of our actions. Applying this means that the environment should also be taken into consideration that the act of smoking which was just discussed should not be abused—especially because we now understand that it causes air pollution. In the context of Native American spiritual tradition, smoking tobacco was intended to be carried out as part of a sacred act. It was not to be done thoughtlessly and thus was not intended to be done so frequently as to cause addiction.
Regarding this, it could be suggested that if the sacred act of smoking tobacco were done no more frequently than once a week—similar to how Christians have traditionally reserved the practice of Holy Communion to once a week—that would be infrequent enough to be done without causing addiction. Still, it should be understood that neither smoking nor taking communion are truly required to be in harmony among body, soul, and spirit. Rather, any respectful spiritual practice can accomplish this, including the free independent practice of personal prayer or meditation.

It is with their simple and humble understanding that we are temporarily a part of nature itself, but that the soul continues on after the death of the body, that the Native Americans realized their spirituality. With their view, it could be said that we are not really our bodies any more than the smoke is the tobacco that turns to ash, for both are only temporary and the portion that is material will eventually go back into the cycle of nature when the spirit’s course of life is through. Regarding death, Native Americans view the soul as passing from this physical world into the purely spiritual realm while those living in this physical world continue on. With this profound understanding realized, it is easier to understand why the concept of owning land was not well comprehended by the Native Americans when it was first introduced to them by settlers.

As with other religions, the practice of Native American religion also upholds respect and the virtues—such as honor, courage, loyalty, honesty, kindness, and generosity—in addition to their profound respect for harmony with nature and serenity. Again, while some may have portrayed the Indian way of life as uncivilized, a true appreciator of culture can recognize the beauty and dignity of their many cultural forms of art and dance. The original Native Americans were a people who integrally lived their religion. This is particularly why it was so detrimental to try to strip away their spiritual practices and to force them to conform to a different way of life instead of allowing them to keep their spiritual roots.

Now, while it is important that all people be allowed to practice their traditional religious heritage with pride and dignity, the reverse argument could be made: People must also be allowed the liberty of converting religions and practicing new forms of religion. This newer emphasis will be the topic switched to in the next chapter, which covers some of the newer religious thinking and new religions that have developed more recently on this Earth.
Chapter 13
Newer Religions
(New Approaches to Religiosity)

There has recently been a revival in new thinking about spirituality and religion. The world is currently in a period of renovation of religious thinking that could be compared to what the Renaissance was to art. Like in the Renaissance, we are currently seeing a great flowering of ideas, which is being assisted along by new innovations in communication. Where during the Renaissance the improvement of printing methods increased public access to books such as the Holy Bible, the internet has now made access to great amounts of information more readily available. The reading you have completed regarding the different world religions in this particular document is an example of the results of this. Along with the prolific sharing of ideas, there must also be renovation of previously held ideas to be more inclusive of the wealth of knowledge from other regions.

In what has been called New Age thinking—which refers generally to the currently dawning astrological Age of Aquarius—people have been enjoying growing interest in expanding their knowledge base regarding the interaction of mind, body, and spirit. For instance, New Age thinkers in the West have been incorporating Eastern concepts, such as those from traditional Chinese medicine, to their worldviews. What this has meant for some has been seriously considering the metaphysics behind concepts such as chi and the neuroscience involved in meditation.

In terms of spirituality, what this more expansive type of thinking has amounted to in many cases have been new forms of religion. In some of these newer forms of religion, people have been melding different components of spiritual thought from previously separated religious traditions to create a more holistic type of spirituality without dogmatism. For many, this has meant a more open type of respect for the various wisdom traditions from around the world, as opposed to the older view in which it is assumed that a person must focus solely on one tradition.

This chapter will outline the basic understandings of some of the newer major religions or religious philosophies that have emerged on Earth. In most cases these new religions are not meant to oust previous traditions, but to augment them or combine their beliefs into more syncretized traditions. Oppositely, there have also been new religious movements or sects which have regressed backward to fundamentalism and ultra-conservative stances in which the theology of one religious tradition is promoted as the one and only true religious teaching. But while some of those preferring the older traditions may reflexively feel threatened by the newer type of thinking which is more accepting of other cultures, such opening-up is not something to be feared; rather, it is something to be embraced as a part of cultural evolution. This more open embrace for religiosity will be positive so long as faith in God and goodness are shared.
Those who prefer to remain practicing their older existing religious traditions should not have any reason to feel threatened considering this newer approach to religiosity and the new religions to be discussed here, because they are respectful of the other traditions and pose no threat to the continued practice of older established religions. And contrary to the fear that one’s faith will be threatened by more encompassing forms of worship, it could rightly be viewed that some of the newer religions—especially those of Bahá’í Faith and Unitarian Universalism—may serve as useful complimentary mediators between the world’s differing major religious traditions.

While the list of new religious movements is very long and includes many independent groups within larger religions as well as ones loosely affiliated with them, only a few specific ones will be mentioned here for purpose of directed discussion. Before getting to the mentioned syncretic religions of Bahá’í Faith and Unitarian Universalism, the viewpoints of Spiritism will be discussed, particularly because of the useful points made by its content.

### Spiritism

Spiritism is a religion based on the principles of the five books of the *Spiritist Codification* that was written by a French educator named Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, who was a devoted Christian, under the pen name of Allan Kardec. This religious movement can be said to have begun in the 1860’s and progressed through many other contributors. One of Spiritism’s primary components is the belief that passed human spirits can interact in the physical world. Of course, this requires the understanding that spirits can exist apart from physical bodies and that the spirit survives death, which is one of the oldest and most central views of nearly all religions.

What is different here is that it is a newer perspective which was developed in an era in which the scientific mindset had already emerged and by thinkers with scientific understanding. Because this religion began after we had developed nearly modern science, it includes in its primary components some more advanced concepts in addition to the ancient recognition of the fact that spirits can exist in a dimension that overlays with ours but is invisible to us. As in the ancient religions where spiritual leaders would communicate with passed spirits, mediums in Spiritism attempt to do the same in Spiritist sessions. But while Spiritism has involved Spiritist sessions, it also has other major components which do not focus on those more difficult to confirm practices.

The five original books that were written by Kardec which can be considered the primary scriptures of Spiritism are: *The Spirits’ Book*, which defines the basic beliefs of the religion; *The Mediums’ Book*, which outlines principles to be practiced by mediums and theory on paranormal phenomena; *The Gospel According to Spiritism*, which outlines Kardec’s interpretations of particular verses from the Gospels of the Holy Bible and a message that Christ’s teachings should be focused on rather than particular details from accounts that were written regarding him; *Heaven and Hell*, which gives an idea of the varying experience of the afterlife with depictions from contacted spirits; and *The Genesis According to Spiritism*, which includes a discussion about the origins of phenomena, commentaries on how the Genesis account does not agree with science and how the miracles reported
in the Gospels can be explained, and a prediction of the future for the time at hand in which there will be a reconciliation of religion with science that will eventually result in a drastic change in the world over time—after which the era in which this book you are now reading was written will be looked back upon on as a type of dark age that was largely lost to dogmatism and blind materialism.

Spiritists believe in reincarnation as well as the afterlife, but also that there are times when a soul does not go on to be reincarnated or into the afterlife but remains disembodied here in the spirit realm such as ghosts such as poltergeist, which many have known to exist. Spiritists view the progressive line of incarnations as opportunities to continuously develop ethical character and to correct past ignorances. Spiritists follow many of the teachings of Jesus Christ, except without the practice of the more dogmatic rituals, though they may practice them elsewhere as most Spiritist groups allow members to freely participate in other religious faiths if they choose. There are a few formalized practices of Spiritism, as it is mostly composed of shared teachings. Thus, Spiritism can be viewed more as a philosophy than as a religion in many cases.

There are over 10 million declared Spiritists practicing in many countries around the world, with the largest number of them today living in the country of Brazil. The following in Brazil grew especially after Francisco “Chico” Xavier became a prolific practice and writer on the subject there. Chico Xavier’s work included writing thousands of letters to living family members of the deceased through a process called psychography, which would have been very difficult to fake, for no monetary profit.

Among the most central tenants of Spiritism, Jesus Christ is viewed as the greatest example of morality to humankind. Spiritists maintain that Jesus incarnated to show people spiritual idealism through his example and is often viewed as an example of perfecting their view of spiritual evolution, in which it is believed that the spirit is eternal and evolves through a series of incarnations in the material world toward perfection. They believe that Christ’s preaching included hints that were intended to break the traditional mindset of the human race, preparing the foundation for the evolution of the planet to a higher state. Spiritual life is viewed as everlasting while the material world is viewed as merely a short-term stage in which the spirit is intended to progress toward perfection, and thus death does not truly exist because no soul can ever be destroyed.

One of the more groundbreaking components of Spiritism is the view that there are many inhabited planets in this universe. While this idea has come up many times already in the discussion of this book, this is one of the first religions to state it outright in certainty. In the writings of Spiritism, this viewpoint is made clear and there are some references drawn to it in the Holy Bible. Regarding this belief, Spiritists admit that there must be planets out there with more advances societies than ours and that a goal of spiritual evolution should be taken on by entire planetary civilizations, in addition to the goal for individuals within it.

Humanity should soon come to the realization that many truthful parts from the message of Spiritism are important to accept and be embraced by the general public of our world. It seems especially important for this message to get further attention at this time, because while our efforts to
make progress on this planet may be largely material in effort, they should always have spiritual foundation to be the most truly meaningful and in accordance with God.

Bahá’í Faith

Bahá’í Faith is probably the largest new independent religion to emerge in the world. It includes a very promising worldview which is optimistic about improving the world to become more peaceful, just, and sustainable for everyone. Bahá’ís happily view all of humanity as one diverse family, and therefore maintain that all types of racial and ethnic prejudices should be overcome. This religion is estimated to currently hold over 7 million participants and is demographically widespread, including establishment in over 218 countries throughout the world. Thus, Bahá’í Faith forms a global community of people looking past differences and toward unity.

Bahá’ís recognize there is one God from whom all blessings flow, and that there have been numerous special messengers of God throughout human history. Included in the recognized messengers of God among Bahá’í Faith are: Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad from the Abrahamic faiths; as well as messengers such as Zoroaster, Krishna, and Buddha from non-Abrahamic faiths. Because Bahá’í Faith officially recognizes Muhammad as a prophet, it may be able to form a peaceful common ground between Muhammadan Islam and other faiths. In Bahá’í Faith, these more recognized messengers have been added to by two more recent messengers who took the names of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, as well as a religious leader who became called `Abdu'l-Bahá.

Bahá’í Faith had a significant part of its original foundation in a young man named Siyyid ʿAlí-Muhammad Shirázi, who in 1844 took the title “Báb”—which means “Gate”—after he recognized himself as a Qáʾím of Islam and a prophet to the hidden Mahdí. The Mahdí has been prophesied to be the rightly guided Redeemer of proper monotheistic religion that is to rid the world of injustice and tyranny by re-establishing morality and harmony. In making this precious declaration of being the gate to the Mahdí or hidden Imam, the Báb recognized himself as an important messenger regarding the eventual redemption of religion throughout the world.

The Báb lived in Iran and, at the time, the Islamic authorities there saw the Báb’s teachings as a threat to their particular religious tradition of Muhammadan Islam. For those reasons, the Báb and thousands of his followers were thoroughly persecuted. The Báb was imprisoned, allegedly tortured, and eventually executed in 1850 at the young age of 30. Along with writing prolifically and emphatically regarding the singular Almighty God—who he recognized as the Creator of the entire universe and thus the Lord over all of it—the Báb proclaimed there would be a Savior coming to the world. The Báb called this person “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest”. It has been said that the Báb noted this Savior would properly interpret a crucial line from the Qur’an’s chapter on Joseph, which is Surah 12:41.

The coming figure that the Báb anticipated can be interpreted to be not only the coming Mahdí or Qāʾem to redeem Islam but also the singular embodiment of all the promised redeemers, including: the Second Coming of Christ and the Lamb of God proclaimed by Christianity, the Future Maitreya
Buddha some Buddhist traditions have taught will continue the turning of the Wheel of Dharma, the return of Quetzalcoatl as maintained by the Mesoamerican legends, and most likely many more figures expected by other spiritual traditions. From the state of things at the time of writing this book, it has been clear that the world awaits the recognition of this promised all-encompassing Redeemer.

Bahá'u'lláh, who was originally named Mírzá Husayn ‘Alí Núrí, publicly claimed to be the Báb’s Promised One in 1866, after being released from imprisonment and a series of banishments for his involvement with the Bábí religious movement. Despite the fact that the leader that was appointed by the Báb, named Subh-i-Azel, did not recognize the validity of this claim in Bábism, Bahá'u'lláh gained recognition of most of the Bábís as a religious leader through his prolific writings and efforts, though some Bábís have remained waiting for the one whom they expected.

The religion that Bahá'u'lláh established is now Bahá'í Faith. Upon dying, Bahá'u'lláh willed the religious leadership to his eldest son, ‘Abbás Effendi—who then took the name `Abdu'l-Bahá and filled the role of preaching and expanding the principles of Bahá’í Faith. After the death of `Abdu'l-Bahá, his eldest grandson, named Shoghi Effendi, was appointed as the first Guardian of Bahá’í Faith. It was Shoghi Effendi who then developed the administrative structure of the religion and launched the plans for the expansion of the Bahá’í global community. This is the process that began the spread of Bahá’í Faith to become the widespread world religion that it is today.

The writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh became the primary revealed scriptures of Bahá’í Faith, with additional scripture coming from interpretations by `Abdu'l-Bahá. In addition to those recognized scriptures, more writings came from Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá’í Universal House of Justice. This has made for a large amount of religious literature for Bahá’ís, who are well-known for their academic literacy. It is agreed among Bahá’ís that while Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have added useful contributions to the literature of the faith, the texts written by them do not have any authority over the congregations of Bahá’ís themselves in interpretation of the meanings of the already thorough writings of the three Central Figures of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and `Abdu'l-Bahá. Within the many writings and speeches given by these three Central Figures, there are amply wonderful teachings regarding ways to bring unity and harmony to humanity.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh are usually considered the primary scriptures of focus in Bahá’í Faith today. Bahá'u'lláh paid special attention to the fact that the human race is one large family and there should be mutual understanding between all differing nations, cultures, and peoples. His teachings also include the belief that men and women are viewed with equality under God the Creator, with neither male nor female being superior to the other. It was his clear understanding that men and women are mutually essential to progress and should have equal partnership in both families and society.

Bahá’ís believe there to be no real division between spirituality and science, and thus there is no reason that religion and science cannot be in harmony. In reality, there is no scientific truth that negates spirituality or religiosity, and no spiritual or religious truth that negates science. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh taught oneness of God in the belief that all major religions ultimately come from God and must share belief in the Same God. Thus, in the views of Bahá’í Faith, there is oneness in religion. Bahá'u'lláh taught
that much of the problems seen in the world to the contrary are due to people blindly and uncritically following the views and opinion of others who claim otherwise. The solution to this, as taught by Bahá’u’lláh, is to think for yourself instead of letting others think for you regarding what is the truth, which is good advice.

Bahá’í Faith is a major proponent of freedoms, equal rights, and harmony. As part of the central teachings of Bahá’í, the path toward global harmony starts in communities and families, which are the most basic units of society. From families and communities to the larger scale of society, Bahá’ís have made their goal to create a unifying vision of the purpose of life and the future of humanity. This unified vision is supported by a diverse membership representing nearly every ethnic group in the world. Let the world take the example of the global community of Bahá’í Faith, which views itself as a single community made up of diverse components, to find hope that the larger world civilization may also be able to view itself as one community.

As with Spiritism, Bahá’ís have faith that humanity is on the verge of an evolutionary leap. In their view of future development, Bahá’ís see growing religious respect, cooperation, and eventually world peace in our continuing advancement. After the current stage of evolution, the spiritual and physical wellbeing of every individual will be respected equally—no matter their skin color or cultural heritage. This, of course, requires seeing the inherent spiritual value in everybody, and working in the spirit of service to others as well as self. This vision reflects not only an appreciation for humanity's historic longing for peace and collective well-being, but also our understanding that humanity as a whole is now reaching a new level of maturity.

Though Bahá’í Faith grew out of a movement that has been viciously oppressed by tyrannical factions of the Muhammadan tradition of Islam, it is indeed a type of Islam by definition—because it recognizes the messengers of God, promotes faith in God, and includes worship of God. (Again, by its true meaning, Islam includes all religions which recognize the Creator of the universe as the One True God and worship that God alone.) Bahá’í Faith is a type of Islam that has matured past total narrow-mindedness, and does not include the type of ignorances that have plagued the previous interpretations of Islam to believe that their form of religion is ultimate while all other forms of religion can only result in eternal damnation to Hell. As such, Bahá’í Faith is a good result of religious evolution, and hopefully it will continue to gain respect and support as the people of the world awaken themselves beyond their past ignorances and previous viewpoints of division.

A slightly similar religious movement to that of Bahá’í Faith is that of Unitarian Universalism, which will be the last religion to be discussed in this part of the book. But where Bahá’í Faith has a creed and statute of laws and wise, well-intended restrictions which are expected to be followed, Unitarian Universalism is more open to other viewpoints and lifestyles.

Unitarian Universalism
Unitarian Universalism is a liberal organized religion that accepts members of basically all worldviews and requires no rigorous creed of participating members. The basis of the religion is constituted by the desire to practice organized group participation toward understanding the true meaning and purpose of life and to keep in touch with that understanding along with other members of the community. This has most often been based in the general format of a Christian church while being far less dogmatic and far more accepting of other spiritual beliefs and traditions.

Some of the roots of Unitarian Universalism have been traced back to Unitarian Christianity, which returned from the ideation of the Christian Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) to a more unified understanding of God through Christ. From those more historic roots of Unitarianism which continued to hold continued focus on the scriptures of the Holy Bible, more liberal theology was enacted to eventually form the new and separate religion titled Unitarian Universalism. The currently practicing groups of Unitarian Universalism do not claim to hold to such roots, but rather have formed from the roots of many spiritual heritages and free-thinking individuals.

Generally, Unitarian Universalists believe in organized religion and continuing religious heritage, but without the focus on maintaining any single declared doctrine from the older world religions. The practice of Unitarian Universalism formally accepts current and previous atheists, agnostics, deists, and polytheists. In other words, Unitarian Universalism is an organization similar to the Christian church, except that it more openly allows everyone to participate without having to guard either their beliefs or their uncertainty about their beliefs regarding spirituality and God.

This makes Unitarian Universalism a new religion where basically everyone can feel welcomed and free from any concerns about being judged regarding either skepticism or diversity of beliefs. Still, while this religion is very open and accepting, it is not thoughtless concerning morality. Rather, it teaches there to be certain things that everyone should be able to agree upon, without having to declare themselves to one creed or another. In place of declaring alignment to one particular religious tradition, Unitarian Universalists base their beliefs from the results of simply thinking about benevolent principles and acceptance of themselves, others, and common truths.

Aside from general perspectives shared in common between most Unitarian Universalists and among the many independent beliefs of its members, there are some declared parts or foundational principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations promote. The parts which are officially affirmed by the Unitarian Universalist Association at this time include: the inherent worth and dignity of every person, equity and compassion in human relations, acceptance of one another in the encouragement of spiritual growth in their congregations, the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within their congregations and in society at large, the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all, and respect for the interdependent web of existence in which we are a part.

In general, Unitarian Universalists recognize the transcending mystery and wonder affirmed in all cultures, as well as that which moves people to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life. Generally, these things should be attributed to the existence of God, but Unitarian Universalists have not put pressure on the members of their congregations to see it that way,
and those not accepting the existence of God the Creator separate from the universe usually at least acknowledging pantheistic views acknowledging teleology. Many members of Unitarian Universalism embrace the challenge to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.

In addition to the important and easy to agree upon principles and purposes declared by the Unitarian Universalist Association, there are a number of recognized beliefs from other sources that form the backbone of the Unitarian Universalist religious community. These sources often include teachings collected from the religious preaching of many inspirational individuals from throughout the history of the world—for example, the Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by treating our neighbors as we ourselves like to be treated, as well as other teachings from messengers such as those recognized in Bahá'í Faith. But while Unitarian Universalists draw inspiration from a variety of other faith traditions, most tend to lean towards beliefs that are based more on individual thought—such as the focus on values taken by the study of humanism, which remembers to give credit to the guidance of reason and the results of science.

Because Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition—meaning its traditions are not locked in, but still developing and changing over time—its principles and purposes of are continually modified to reflect changes in the spiritual beliefs among its membership. This is productive because faith does not really consist of conforming to any institutionalized doctrine, but rather is continually evolving. One of the recent additions to the affirmed beliefs recognized by Unitarian Universalist congregations was: “spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.” This was added with the intention of including representation of and respect for the wise teachings of indigenous spiritual traditions.

What this means is that Unitarian Universalism embodies, or at least embraces, respect for most all of the positive beliefs that have been discussed throughout this entire part of the book covering the world’s major religions. There are estimated to be around a million currently practicing Unitarian Universalism, but participation in it has been steadily growing. Unitarian Universalists try to integrate the best parts from all of the previously existing religious traditions, because they generally accept that influences of the divine can be found in the teachings of all faiths. In that respect, the emphasis in Unitarian Universalism is on the individual search for solace and meaning through whichever resources they choose and participating in the process of that journey along with them.

Regarding what they believe in theologically, there are various views upheld among those who participate in Unitarian Universalist congregations. Some Unitarian Universalists believe in karma and reincarnation in this life of reality in samsara as a process toward eventually ridding ourselves of greed and attaining enlightenment, while others believe in salvation by faith in God through Christ. Still, wise others recognize and understand that the ultimate truth may include some combination of both. Others still remain uncertain about the existence of God and the afterlife, but at least maintain belief in the bare minimum that we should be good to ourselves and one another.
While Unitarian Universalists have maintained that no single existing religious scripture should be considered to be the ultimate source of truth, they encourage members to respect the scriptures of other religions at least as historically significant literary works that should be viewed with an open mind. Members of Unitarian Universalism believe that all religions can coexist if viewed with the concept that one should love their neighbor as they love themself. In this, Unitarian Universalists uphold compassion and universal love in supporting free choice on subjects such as abortion and gay rights. It is the correct belief of Unitarian Universalism that by accepting others for who they are, treating others as you like to be treated, and not being judgmental except for the purpose of stopping injustice and malevolence, that individuals from all the varying lifestyles and religions can live together in true peace.

The gatherings of Unitarian Universalism vary in practice depending upon the particular congregation and can develop their own routines. Most Unitarian Universalist services are similar to Christian church services with a sermon by a preacher, but vary from the Christian church in that they can include what would be considered as alternative worship to traditional churches, such as guided meditation, quiet time given for meditation, guided discussion, and time for free discussion among others. Regarding the extreme diversity of many Unitarian Universalist communities, it is a belief that the diverse membership and practices of their congregations is conducive to the advanced spiritual evolution of each participating individual, and through that the community is bound to develop.

The combination of practices of many religious traditions or simply discussion of them and their beliefs could arguably be viewed as more productive than simply gathering together into groups which already think the same to reinforce the same beliefs again and again without development. Still, newer alternative practices such as that of Unitarian Universalism don’t take away from the beauty that can also be recognized in continuing centuries-old styles of spirituality and religious styles of worshipping God. Moreover, with insightful consideration of the laws of science and properly thorough study of the various religions, one cannot help but eventually understand the final truth of God.

Surely, God appreciates it when any individual willingly chooses to try to better themselves. This means seeking new information sometimes, as opposed to only seeking information that will reinforce one’s previously formed conclusions. If this view of continual self-improvement were to be taken up in every spiritual gathering, real progress would be made. After all, keeping the exact same type of thinking and expecting things to get better is one rendition of the definition of insanity. Still, this is not intended to suggest that anyone should feel pressured to make changes to their religious traditions to be more like others. Most everyone should be able to agree that variety is the spice of life, and things would be very boring if everyone became exactly the same.

As in other religions, many Unitarian Universalists go beyond working on developing their own understanding of spirituality, but also participating in improving the world. This is part of the growing collective understanding that if one already has everything they need, it is good for them to put some effort towards helping improve the living conditions of others who do not, rather than only doing things to benefit themselves. This means not only having faith in goodness, but showing it through one’s thoughts and actions. Anyone doing such is carrying out the teachings of Christ, whether or not others consider them to be proper Christians.
Over all, Unitarian Universalism is one of the most promising new approaches to religion that has been developed. It is a religious organization that actively works to find things to agree upon instead of continually reinforcing things that are not agreed upon—and yet, it happily does not even say that everyone has to agree. As such, those who practice Unitarian Universalism freely enjoy a simple yet profound respect for diversity. This new viewpoint regarding spirituality could be adapted into the worldviews of individuals everywhere—even while they can choose to sustain the practice of their traditional religious ceremonies to continue the world’s unique heritages.

With that, this part of the book regarding religious traditions will be concluded. Hopefully, the reader has a better understanding of what the differing views of the major world religions have been throughout history, and has used this opportunity to further develop their own understanding of spirituality today.
Part Four

Our Reckoning:

Using Logical Thinking to Make Progress
Each individual has had a unique experience of life which has shaped them. To a certain degree, we are all the result of our experiences, and this heavily includes the cultures in which we developed and began to form opinions.

Naturally, we tend to accept what is taught to us by our cultures as correct, if only for the means of functioning well with others in our society. Often, the views which one has developed within their culture are reflectively reinforced by others in the same culture. The individual then gains more certainty that their opinions are right and may even become upset at the idea that others think differently or do not feel the same way. But, in reality, it is not always true that what we have been taught by our cultures is correct.

As a function of the subconscious mechanisms in our minds which work to maintain one’s ego continually through time, the initial reaction is most always to continually defend the idea that one is right, in a reaction to protect from the sometimes discomforting feeling they may have been wrong. As an extension of this, a person often even feels a need to protect and preserve previous beliefs, as to support the idea that they have always been right in the past. This mentality is often taken up as if clinging to previous opinions somehow helps a person by fending off temporarily the thought that they may have been wrong.

But the truth is that such emotions are a reflexive fear of admitting they may have been wrong, and in the end it will only add to the amount of total reflexive emotional investments to continue to defend their past judgments. This fighting of the ego is a means of continuing the false idea that it is somehow a failure of their past selves to accept new truths and to grow. And not only does it prevent growth, but it is also a needless distress to be so defensive. It can be greatly relieving to relax the tendency to cling to past beliefs and allow oneself to move into the future with an open outlook, as opposed to trying to maintain a narrow-minded viewpoint day in and day out which can cause one to become frustrated with perceived threats to their mentality and feeling the need to fight them off.

This is such a strong tendency that some will go so far as to continue to protect previous stances they have taken in arguments even after they have already accepted inside that they may have been wrong. This often comes into effect when one feels the need to uphold their past declared opinions as a means of continuing the past self that was portrayed to others. Obviously, such past publicly declared beliefs regarding the all-important subject of religion are one of the strongest areas that one really feels bound to. However, despite the fact that one may feel the need to protect every single detail of what they professed as earnest belief in the past, it is actually very easy for one’s current stance to evolve
forward without the need to feel any attachment to past actions or declarations. Really, what matters is how one views things in the present, and it truly makes for a more enjoyable life in the present if one lets go of defending previously condemning narrow-minded views.

Many previously formed opinions that may be involved in this include judgments a person may have previously made about others based on race, nationality, religion, or other belief. Sometimes a person will feel an internal discomfort or frustration when asked to think about letting go of such judgmental opinions. In truth, the discomfort or frustration that one might feel when trying to cling to such biases is an emergence of the truth they already knew deep down inside. This is because they know that they themselves do not like to be judged or discriminated against.

In knowing this about oneself, the person truly understands already that it is partly wrong to judge or hate others—and so it is temporarily distressing to them to come to terms with the fact that they themselves were reflexively doing the same thing they feel it is wrong for others to do. As a reflex to defend oneself from this distress, they will often defend their opinions by making arguments regarding how their viewpoint is somewhat correct or pointing out individual cases in which their opinions were right. This is like a kicking and thrashing of the ego not wanting to let go.

The ego reflexively does this to protect itself, even when the better thing is to let go of biases. In letting go of ego, one relaxes the useless defensive frustration which comes with feeling the need to protect their previous beliefs. And in relaxing this idea that they must be on the defensive or offensive regarding some view, a person can more freely enjoy their existence. Furthermore, when one fully realizes the truth, they can see that they are no less today even if they were wrong in the past. Or even if their opinions were or are right, it is easier not to hate others who think differently. One must understand simply from the very fact that hating is discomforting that it is best left out of one’s mind. This overcoming of the ego is a liberating step on the path toward more freely enjoying life.

Further down the path, if one realizes that they do not have to take offense to other persons’ thoughts of them, they achieve a level of being which allows increased freedom from discomfort. So by freeing oneself from the unnecessary need of building up the ego just to then have to protect it, one becomes liberated from that feeling of being defensive. This can free up a lot of time spent on negative thought regarding reinforcing judgments like hate or the reflexive anxiety of caring what others think about them. Thus, in liberating oneself from the ego, they are far less confined than if they have a big ego which continually requires both offensive and defensive reinforcement continually. As one can then see, the person without an ego is actually stronger than the person with one.

Putting this into action, we can realize that we need take no offense if someone else does not agree with what we think. Without an ego to defend, there is no need to worry about any opinions anyone else holds about you. Think about it. Where you have seen others double up on their ego when it is threatened, you have seen them make larger fools of themselves. On the other hand, you have seen people gain respect for admitting they were wrong in the past. So you know from experience that what I have said here about being stronger without an ego is true. It is actually much easier on a person not to
try to build up an ego to defend, because then they only feel more in debt to defending it. So, while it may feel bolstering to build up one’s ego, letting go of the ego is actually the best way to advance.

One can actually feel relieved almost immediately when they shed this inhibitory shell of feeling they must always have been right. And this feeling of reduced stress will continue so long as one remembers to let go of thinking they must always be right into the future. With this view, one attains an open and clear mind for advancement—without the extra weight of opinionating where it is really unnecessary to have to place judgment. Not only does this help a person feel better and avoid unneeded arguments in daily life, but it makes one more ready to broaden their worldview.

Through such personal expansion as gaining the insightful view of seeing how one’s own viewpoints have been a result of the influences they were exposed to in their own life, one makes great progress toward being more accepting of others through understanding the fact that others have also been the result of the influences they have been exposed to in their lives. Thus, one can realize that it is usually the differences in an individual’s conditions which drive them to have different opinions and to act differently (though there is also some contribution on the part of the individual). Once one moves beyond the confinement of blind hatred for things they don’t understand and becomes accepting of the fact that all have become what they have become as a result of the experiences from that which was before them, one can become relieved from being upset with others today as if it were their fault.

Now, the good reciprocal side of the fact that everyone is to some degree the result of what they have been exposed to in life is the fact that, through our own influence, we can help others to change toward getting along better into the future. Thus, through one’s own conscious choice to be less negatively opinionated and instead more positively open, those who we come into contact with may also become more positive. And in such a fashion, through individuals using their interactions as sources of positive influences which shape other’s experience of life and in turn how they interact, the whole world progresses toward becoming less stubborn and blind and more open and seeing.

Though we tend to feel as if we are continually on trial to prove that our opinions and actions are correct, it does not have to be this way. And while it may sometimes be discomforting to doubt one’s previous beliefs, such questioning does not necessarily mean that one will have to let go of those ideas—that is, unless they find those ideas to have been misguided, in which case it is better to let go of them anyway. In this way, it can never be wrong to reconsider previously held beliefs and broaden one’s horizon. Besides, one does not have to give up their own opinions or culture to be accepting of the fact that others have different views and practices within their culture.

Everyone can keep their cultures while respecting others. All this requires is that the individual lets go of the false idea that their culture must be the best of all cultures. In reality, there really is no single ultimate culture. The only ultimate truth regarding culture is that there will always be different cultures within different societies and different ways for different individuals. Thus, cultures will always vary, and this is no problem so long as individuals can change themselves within their own cultures or move toward a different culture they might prefer.
The reader was already introduced to this understanding in the previous part of the book regarding religion, as it was repeatedly noted that there is not necessarily any one single ultimate denomination of religion. Rather, different religions work for different people; and in fact, this is why different religions have emerged within differing cultures: They were the religions those cultures were ready to accept and able to put into practice.

Just as many religious denominations have claimed to be the one true correct practice of religion, many cultures have claimed to be the best culture. However, it has been seen in many places that several different religions or religious denominations can be practiced in one area and many different cultures can also be practiced in the same region. Moreover, different religions and different cultures vary in practice from one place to another and even within themselves—as each individual inevitably establishes their own understanding of religion and their own personal style of culture.

When considering both religion and culture, arrogance is the greatest vice. In the past, people have fought viciously over the idea that their culture is right and that all others are wrong. Now, it is not wrong to defend one’s culture, but it is wrong to try to enforce one’s culture on others. This is an understanding that needs to be reconciled for each culture in the world, so that no particular style of culture is enforced on others—even under the guise that doing such will be good for them. People and their own cultures must be able to decide for themselves how they would like their culture to function and to freely evolve through time.

We must embrace most all of the different ways of both religion and culture. Regarding this, it is absolutely crucial that all of the world must grow past the old Crusades type of mentality. Because we are all connected parts of a larger whole, it can never really be “Us” versus “Them”—such as has been the mentality at times with the perceived conflict of Christianity vs. Islam, capitalism versus socialism, and otherwise. In the larger picture, all fighting is truly us versus ourselves. If everyone could recognize this profoundly simple concept, there would be total unity and peace.

Regarding the current lack of unity in religion, there was a recent book written titled “God is Not One” in which the author, Stephen Prothero, points out that the major world religions can often seem to have different beliefs about God and what God wants of religion. In Prothero’s description of eight religions, he describes each major religion to be a different Way, identifying: Christianity as the “Way of Salvation”, Islam as the “Way of Submission”, Confucianism as the “Way of Propriety”, Hinduism as the “Way of Devotion”, Buddhism as the “Way of Awakening”, Yoruba Religion as the “Way of Connection”, Judaism as the “Way of Exile and Return”, and Daoism as the “Way of Flourishing”.

But in this description, Prothero has not actually proven that “God is not One”, as stated by the title of his book, but rather he has merely proven there to be different ways of religion. If we realize that God is One, and that all of the religions are different routes of devotion under God, then we can make it so that God is not only One in ultimate truth, but also One in all of our hearts and minds. By doing this, we can take the monotheistic parts from all the religions as part of our description of God and part of the more comprehensive worldview that should be added to the religious views lacking God. When I say there is good to be taken from all religions, it should not be taken personally that your individual faith
was not already right; but rather I am saying that you have been right, in part, but there is more to the whole global situation than merely any one religion at this time.

If one takes the good parts out of all of the religions that were discussed in the previous chapter, their new religious worldview would be something far more advanced than any currently existing organized religion. Drawing partially from the various descriptions of the different Ways, this new combination of Ways would be more like: “The Integrated Way of Salvation through: faith in Christ’s teachings, submission to God’s will by worshipping only God, upholding proper action, devotion in life, awakening from selfishness, connecting with our purpose, and a return to flourishing.” And that particular sentence is just a combination of the few religions that were discussed in Prothero’s book. Many more positive beliefs can be found from among the different religions that were discussed in the previous part of this book.

A combined understanding derived from the best beliefs from the world’s many religions would be more encompassing than knowing only one religion (though this is not saying that a person cannot be satisfied with practicing one traditional religion). Through true acceptance of Christ, everyone can see there are other acceptable ways without requiring strict adherence to any one absolutist dogmatized religion. For example, Christians could see there is enlightenment in the teachings of Buddhism that can help for relief of the suffering that can be caused by worldly desires. And Buddhists could see it really is ascertainable that God exists via the proof of the fulfillment of prophesy. Moreover, through accepting the ancient connective wisdom of the indigenous religions, skeptics can grow to understand that spirits exist and there is a spiritual side of things which often goes unseen. Perhaps even Muslims can figure out there is a difference between a prophet and one who fulfills prophesy through the very Spirit of God. One could continue on further to embrace the diversity of stories and beliefs such as those of Hinduism while maintaining the true understanding that there is but one Supreme Being from which all of life’s enjoyments were given. And so on.

While it is not true that everything portrayed by all religions is true, it is useful to open-mindedly see there are truths to be found beyond only one source. Through this, a person can find that the self is never really all-knowing as God is; rather, there is always more to be learned—either from the simple experience of life or through seeking out continued learning beyond the contentment that can be found through the sources that have come to them. In all of this, it is interesting to note that if one’s ego is let to trick them into thinking they know everything, they are actually reduced to being less wise than they are when recognizing there is much beyond comprehension.

Where the ego makes itself weaker by building up walls and guarding its old views at a loss to opportunity to grow, it is truly being superior when we have humility and admit that our previous opinions may not have been ultimately correct. Indeed, the wise are the ones who have grown to know themselves to have been fools. We must get over the idea of being right or wrong and instead think of improvement. The wise better themselves by changing their opinions when presented with new evidence. And true masters don’t take it personally when their viewpoint is questioned as perhaps having been partly clouded. Instead, they embrace any time they may have previously been incorrect as an opportunity to improve and advance forward.
There might be an initial fearful response with considering the idea that no single religion has been the one true religion, but let this reflex of the ego relax and be at peace. There is no need to fear punishment from thinking that your religion was ultimate, and there is no sense in fearing punishment for thinking your religion was not ultimate, for each religion has simply been one of the separate Ways. Furthermore, there is absolutely nothing to fear in considering the whole of reality, for this is our larger purpose and learning can only be gained from. Even after learning and accepting new ideas, one can continue to uphold diversity through maintaining separate heritages as they wish.

Finally, there cannot be anything wrong with thinking that God is One, as opposed to any trinity or pantheon, for knowing God is One is accepting the truth. And it is simple to understand that God, being One, surely knows all that goes on within creation. Moreover, all individuals within creation can expand their mind to see creation as one, despite the superficial divisions which have come and gone within it. And as all is one, all of those practicing any religious appreciation of God have been sending their appreciation to that same One Original Source and same One Ultimate Receiver, even if they have been directing their worship at different symbols with different names. The different names God has been referred to by are truly trivial, for they are merely different words from different languages. Of course, it is the most proper religious practice when one purposely intends worship to God—that is, the All-Making Spirit and the Great Foundational Essence behind all existence.

So when people worship separate deities that have come about within God’s universe, there is a certain lacking in respect to God. Thus, it is best to consciously direct worship to only God; though thanks and appreciation can be given to those individuals who have helped you in recognition for their efforts and works. (In this, the importance is in the difference between thanking and worshipping. While others can and should be thanked to show appreciation and gratitude for their efforts, only God should be truly worshipped.) Still, when showing thanks or appreciation to any group or individual for their works, it is an act which can be considered to glorify God.

To reiterate, it is good to give praise where praise is due; but it is only right to truly worship the Holy Spirit that is God, and that God is ultimately formless. Still, because God is purely all-knowing, it is known to that Supreme Being if people are being idolaters or properly intending worship to the One it is due. It is not necessarily being an idolater to do one’s worship of God before an object unless worship is actually intended for something other than the One True God. As such, idols truly should never be worshipped. But it is truly for God to decide if it is okay for others to call God by different names or identify God with different symbols. For example, worship of God before a cross is surely not idolatry. So let us give the benefit of the doubt to those practicing different ways and leave it up to God to be the Judge of who is ultimately right.

The reason for putting so much emphasis on the fact that God is the only Supreme Being in this chapter regarding pride and culture is to highlight the importance of recognizing God as superior to all. By recognizing this plain truth that all of the living are equals under God, it is simple to see that no particular culture should rule over others. Still, in knowing that God is Unified, we do not have to unify all religions and nations. Rather, we can continue to appreciate the rich diversity of the existing cultural traditions in the universe all under the God that created and maintains it all and will ultimately serve
justice to each and all. As such, every religious house of worship—whether it is called a mosque, church, temple, shrine, or any other name—can be considered to be a house of God. And each of these houses can be considered to be one room of the larger estate of God, which in truth comprises the whole cosmos. In other words, everything is God’s.

So let us all have humility and freedom from the ego and offer up our cultures and religions and share in the good parts from all of them, because this surely would be the most fruitful. Of course, all organized religious gatherings facilitate community interaction and continuing social relationships, so it is not as though any existing religious institution must be ended. Rather, it is possible for there to be evolution within existing religions. We simply must be able to get along while respecting differences. There is nothing to be gained with the viewpoint of saying that it is impossible for different cultures to mix; and the idea that only one viewpoint can ultimately be true will always lead to conflict.

The two most important parts of religion are: (1) ultimate recognition of God the Source as Judge and thus the true Almighty, and (2) recognition of goodness and ethical considerations. While some religions have mastered the concept of God, other religions have mastered the ideal of goodness and not mistreating others. Sadly, some who have been doing a great job of respectful worship of God have been lacking in respectful treatment of others—which includes accepting all others as equals, working and sharing with generosity, and acting with kind consideration. Likewise, some who have been doing a fantastic job of practicing goodness to all have been lacking in recognition of God.

God created the universe out of generosity, that we could exist and enjoy reality together with one another. So, God has given all to us generously, and it has only been individuals—in not seeing how we are all truly equal parts of existence—that have made the mistakes of being arrogant, greedy, and contemptuous. Because we are all equal parts of God’s creation, we should be generous as God has been and be satisfied with sharing the goods of existence with one another rather than trying to hoard all we can to ourselves away from others. Still, we can rightly have our own portions, within reasonable means, and should be given equal and informed say in important decisions.

We can learn from among all of the religions by looking past their differences in ceremonial customs and focusing instead on discovering and honoring their wise understandings and ideals which should be taken into consideration regarding moral actions. In seeking to find what is good, one has already begun on the right path to God. Metaphorically, it should be possible to make a type of juice concentrate from the berries of all of the religions, as has been accomplished by Bahá’í Faith and is being developed in a more minimalist version through Unitarian Universalism.

We simply must be able to compromise. By practicing the good and simple ethics shared by all the great religions, and giving thanks and respect to the Great Spirit behind all creation, a person can know they are practicing the supreme religion. This religion could be called New Christianity, but would not even have to be given a title for all who practice it to know they were of the right religion. In fact, by giving a religion a name, it only creates superficial division between it and religions with other names; and viewing ourselves as divided from one another is the first error in the path towards all wrongs. Fundamentalists who cling to the thought that there is only one ultimate Book of Truth and only one
true religion are in error, and far too much unnecessary hatred and unease has been caused by that closed-mindedness. After all, it is not the title of the religion that one practices that truly matters, but how we treat one another and God.

While separate religious traditions have been a strong source of bringing internal cohesion and harmony within individual religious groups, their conflicting views have caused dissonance when they have come into contact with one another. Thus, as it has occurred, religions have been useful in bringing people together, but they now also seem to divide us. Contrary to the wrong ideation that one religious tradition must dominate the rest while the others must be abolished, all that those individuals practicing the differing religious traditions need to do at this time is expand their worldviews to encompass everyone and become accepting of other ways of developing our eternal spirits under the same God. Through that mentality, all can attune to harmony with one another.

This opening-up in the personal worldview of each person, which is truly liberating in itself, is literally all it will take to allow the global continuity of each religious tradition and the culture that goes along with it as we move toward a more balanced and harmonious future. For any who might resist this proposal, and reflexively want to maintain the false idea their culture is supreme to all others, and thus that all should rightly practice their culture, I implore you to consider the fact that you would not want others to uphold that same type of thinking. Certainly, you would not appreciate the feeling of being subjected to forced conversion to someone else’s culture. In knowing this, you can thus see that no one else wants to be subjected to forced conversion to your culture. Understanding this plain reality is the basis of maintaining the concept of “live and let live” while still progressing toward unity.

When each person decides to allow themselves to feel in harmony with all others, and chooses to act in harmony with everyone else, then there truly will be harmony. But before thinking in harmony together, we must first be able to let ourselves notice harmony in the world when we see it and thereby find harmony in our own individual thinking. If one looks for harmony in the world, they will be able to recognize it everywhere as if being highlighted to stand out where it did not before. This can be like transforming the world through simply altering one’s view.

The next chapter develops the concept of such individual reckoning further, in part by giving some deserved attention to those free thinkers who have opposed organized religion altogether. Even for those who have developed faith already, there is something to be gained in discussing the thought processes of non-theists, because they address the same questions which many believers have also struggled with.

Then, after getting down to the fact that each individual must ultimately come to their own conclusions regarding God and spirituality, the following chapter on thinking together will move the reader toward the type of mindset that is needed when approaching the concluding chapter of this fourth part of the book, which will discuss key concepts that must be kept in mind regarding our currently globalizing planetary civilization.
Chapter 15
Independent Thinking
(Individual Reckoning)

Ultimately, each individual has to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions about what is true. This chapter is about embracing the freedom to use your own intelligence to lead to your own true reckoning—because, in the end, we are each responsible for ourselves. So now, after giving much discussion to the various spiritual philosophies of the billions of believers in the major religions, the freethinkers and non-theists will have their way of thinking paid some attention. The reader should come out of the discussion with a more evolved and resolute understanding of their own views—which might be needed to quell the sense of confusion that can grow from studying the widespread and various views of the differing world religions.

While the vast majority of the world’s population is religious, it is true that there is also a huge number of people who do not practice in any form of religion. In general, those who do not practice any form of religion can be called non-theists. But the beliefs of non-theists are varied. For example, a non-theist may believe in God but not practice in any particular organized religion. They may be agnostic, meaning they are uncertain about whether or not God exists, but remain open to the idea. Or they may be under the belief that God does not exist, in which case they are called atheists. The total population of irreligious people in the world at the time of writing this book has been estimated to be over 1 billion, or roughly 15% of the global population.

Many non-theists have made a good point regarding their explanation for not supporting any organized religion in pointing out the fact that organized religion has been the cause of much violence and hatred in the world. That reason for choosing not to participate in any organized religion is understandable, but it must also be pointed out that there has also been much good brought about by organized religion—including both individual salvation and worldly progress through such things as religious charities. Furthermore, it is obvious that violence would exist without religions as well, as many violent acts have been perpetrated by people who do not believe in anything. So it could also be said that irreligion has been to blame for some of the violence and disharmony in the world.

Yet, it is also true that people can be moral and virtuous without any belief in God or the afterlife. There is good argument behind the point that a person does not have to participate in any religious tradition to be a good person. The common argument that has been made by many non-theists is that people can get ethical principles and morals from sources other than religion. And surely it is true that parents can raise moral children without instilling any dogmatic religious beliefs but rather by simply teaching things such as the common truth of the Golden Rule that it is good to treat others with kindness and bad to hurt others or treat them disrespectfully.
Still, after giving respect to the fact that one does not have to believe in God or practice any religious faith to be a good person, I must say that there is something lacking in the worldviews of those who do not believe in God. Because I know that I have seen sufficient evidence of the fact that God exists outside of time and can see far into the future through prophesy fulfilled, I must promote the truth of God and teach that believing otherwise is to be in denial of the larger reality.

To give some respect to the non-theists who have questioned religion, I must say that it is actually Godlike to analyze the different religions for the problems that they have caused. Thus, it must be true that when a person decides not to endorse religion because of the violence that has been caused in the name of religion, it does not mean that they are necessary being Godless and amoral. However, to state more boldly what I have already stated many times in this text, to actively believe there is no God, and to deny the truth of the Spirit, is to be in disillusion.

That being said, because I have discussed the religions so much, I will also address the reasons that atheists don’t believe. They see the horrible things that happen in the world, such as violent crimes and natural disasters, and in consideration of the idea that God has been said to be all-powerful, think to themselves: “If there were such a God that was all-powerful, and He could prevent innocent people from such suffering, He would prevent all these horrible things from happening. But because I see that horrible things do happen to people who don’t deserve it, that God must not exist.” While such a line of thinking does make some sense and holds a lesson to be learned, in such a line of thinking atheists have left out the fact that a Supreme Creator and Lord of Spirits can exist who is not all-powerful over nature and individuals.

Other atheists may point out the fact that evolution has occurred, but that the Holy Bible does not account for evolution, and use this as some kind of misguided proof that God does not exist. Again, just because the God described by some to allegedly be able to break the laws of physics may not exist does not mean there was no Source of creation or that there is no Judge. As such, facts such as bad things happening to good people or the truth of evolution cannot be taken as proof against the true existence of God. In many cases, individuals who become atheists have actually done so in some subconscious or backwards conscious effort to spite God because something bad has happened to them in their life. Obviously, such self-contradictory ideation would be entirely illogical.

Here, I must again point out that the mere fact that the laws of our universe have allowed for life to evolve and flourish is basically proof that an Intelligent Creator must have ordained the laws of the universe from the start to hold true throughout the duration of the universe, so that real life could exist within it. My evidence to this is the reasoning that there could have otherwise been an infinite number of different possible combinations of laws of physics that would not have allowed for life and it is extremely improbable that they just occurred this way randomly out of luck—as was carefully pointed out earlier in the text. And surely, the universe could not choose its laws for itself; because its laws are what compose it and it could not have possibly thought to pick out its own laws before it existed.

So, to any of those who have been so daring to declare that God does not exist, and to think that all of this wonderful creation that is the universe could have come about on its own without a Creator, I
implore you to use that brain to be so daring as to believe in God. The very intelligence that some people have misused to try to rationalize against God’s existence is in itself a quality given by God. If one really wants to get scientific, the quantum enigma of quantum physics shows that there could be no history of reality if there were no Observer of the universe, because otherwise everything would only exist in probabilities in quantum entanglement without a conscious observer. Thus, for there to have been a history leading up to the very first life in the universe, there must have been a Consciousness existent before that. That Original Consciousness is the One True God who transcends all and gives us eternal meaning.

It is wise for every conscious being capable of it to realize that God exists, because after the death of the physical body, God has sovereign power over what the eternal soul experiences next. God could choose your soul’s next incarnation into any person who might experience a better life or a more difficult one; or God could decide that for your faith and just action you are worthy to receive eternal bliss in Heaven; lastly, of course, if you choose to be evil and disrespectful, God could decide that you must be sent into torment in Hell to serve the full punishment deserved for all your wrongdoings. It is for the sake of your own soul that I tell you this. If you have done wrong, all you can do is pray to God for forgiveness and move forward wishing no more evil. While life truly is a test, it can be enjoyed while being a good person! Knowing this should be a blessing to you in this life and the next.

Thus, while there have been some great thinkers who have been non-theists (such as Bertrand Russell and other writers who have done a great job of critiquing many of the problems that have been caused by older forms of Christianity, including practices like the irrational prohibition of contraceptives that was instructed by the Catholic Church), I tell you it is not wise to be in prideful and ignorant denial of God’s existence. It should simply be known that it is foolish to deny the existence of God. For, as noted, God will have ultimate power over your soul when you die. Let this be known with certainty from here forward by anyone who wishes to consider themself to be a smart individual.

It could even be viewed that an individual who denies belief in anything greater than themself is no more enlightened than a blade of grass—even if they uphold perfect manners toward one another, understand all of the laws of physics, and are informed of all of the secrets of history. It is truly and plainly disheartening to know there are so many intelligent beings living their lives un-awakened, while all of Creation has been designed for them in the hopes that they might be able to grasp, understand, and appreciate the concept of creation being given by the Divine.

It is frustrating that some atheists have been so backwardly confused that they have gone so far as to belittle others for believing in God and eternal life. When some even bask in or brag about their ignorance to God, it is actually worrisome, for their part. We intelligent beings would be wisest to use our intelligence not to try to disprove God’s existence—but rather to realize that we are each part of the very purpose of God’s universe, that we may enjoy life and be good shepherds to help each other enjoy life, and thus glorify God through God’s grace.

While many previous non-theists have certainly just been insulted, let me now pay them a respectful compliment: It is wise and commendable to understand that God has no one chosen race or
religion considered best over others. Rather, God simply prefers that all do good unto one another. If we instead recognize the concept that we are all connected and not really distinctly separate, but rather all parts of the greater experience of life in which we have merely had different influences as well as exerting our own influence, it will be useful in our working together. Still, while the main concern is that individuals treat each other well, it is better yet to do good in acknowledgement and appreciation of God. We are all in this spiritual journey together and should view each other as equals under God—no matter what religious beliefs, or lack thereof, anyone may have.

To reassert what I have already admitted, it is possible to be a good person—and thus to act in the way that God would want of us—even if you have been uncertain as to whether or not God existed, and even if you had somehow been convinced that God did not exist. For instance, while I have been critical of Buddhists, Jains, Confucians, Daoists, and others for their lack of belief in God, I have also appreciated their ways of caring goodness and non-violence. And for solace, I must share that all can be reassured that their good deeds will not go unnoticed by God just because the individual was uncertain of God’s existence. For others, there may be consolation in knowing that those who have carried out unjust abuse will not be left unaccountable for it simply because they believed in God.

Atheists were right about one thing, and that is if we want conditions to improve, we have to do more than merely pray for it, but actually work with one another to make the changes that we know would be improvements. While God wishes for us a perfect world filled with love, cooperation, peace, and compassion, everyone must understand that we have to work to make it so through the laws of physics that God ordained from the start. It has been made painfully clear that God cannot magically fix everything for us. Whether we attempt to fix things through religious pursuit or by rational employment of moral philosophy and ethics (such as those messages promoted in John Rawl’s highly reasoned A Theory of Justice and the rational approach taken by Sam Harris in his recent book titled The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values), both stances actually require some degree of faith, because for things to get better we must first have faith in believing it is possible they can.

If you make it part of your life’s aspiration to help make the world better for others, beyond merely working to get what you want in this life for yourself, then after death you will be given an everlasting Paradise more perfect than you could ever have imagined for yourself while alive. This life in the imperfection of this physical reality is merely part of the test that God has made to be sure that everyone in Heaven truly deserves to be there. Moreover, it is a fact that we could not appreciate the Paradise of Heaven for what it is if we had not experienced the discomforts of reality first.

Thankfully though, by God’s grace, this test of physical life can be quite fulfilling and rewarding in itself. And, for that reason, it is not wrong to be attached to it. It is okay to have desires in life, but peacefully know that even if your desires are not fulfilled in life they may be fulfilled in your afterlife, so long as you work in this life to help others. While this life is surely a test, it is not intended to be torturous. Rather, in knowing that it is right to wish for life to be joyous for others, you may know that it is also okay to wish for life to be joyous for yourself as well.
A key to enjoying this test of life is choosing to take an optimistic worldview. The optimistic viewpoint—which is essential if one wants to enjoy life—includes our current conditions just as much as it includes having hope for improvement in everyone’s conditions continuing into the future. If one willingly chooses to think positively instead of negatively, they can literally make their life more joyous just by choosing to view it as such. This means trying not to think about things we are lacking, but instead to appreciate what we already have right now—like the free will to relax and be happy with ourselves as we are and to not think badly of ourselves or others today.

It is not just talk to say that the very viewpoints we choose to take have influence over whether or not we feel satisfied with life. Much to the opposite, it is wholly true that one can be happy or unhappy with the very same conditions depending on their viewpoint. Still, there is obvious truth to the fact that poor conditions can make it much harder to enjoy life. Understanding the fact that it can be hard to be joyous when in poor conditions is good stimulus to realize that one should give a little help to improve the conditions of others. This is simply an extension of the intrinsic truth that one should treat others well so that they may be more happy, just as you like to be. Furthermore, there is no good reason to be jealous of others being joyous, but rather it is better to appreciate their joy as your own.

Now, while atheists may have been lacking in their understanding of the fact that the spirit continues after the death of the body, many have still accomplished great things for others. It is actually very inspiring to see that many atheists have found such purpose in life without having to do so out of encouragement from any particular religious doctrine and without expecting return for their good karma after life. Those non-religious people who have decided to try to help others enjoy life and to bring about a more perfect world without participating in any organized religion have proven that it is possible to be a good person and realize the true purpose in life, as intended by God, without having to have been forced to believe in any single formalized religious doctrine.

For example, there are many non-religious charitable organizations that have been benevolent and worked to help alleviate the suffering of people in poor conditions around the world. That having been said, it cannot be ignored that there has been vastly more goodwill volunteering and donations given by religiously-affiliated charities, especially from the world’s many Christian organizations. It is truly commendable to help others simply for the sake of being a good person, but while it seems like it may actually be more honorable to do good without the self-interest of reward from God, it is just fine to admit that doing good does glorify God, and knowing that God will reward one's good deeds should bring even greater inner peace that doing good just to do good for the sake of others.

Both religious and irreligious people have been able to successfully see through the lies that life is only about being successful and what others think of you. Rather, life is about enjoying life and helping others to enjoy life and what others think of you will ultimately be of no concern. One must be able to see that it is great for anyone to achieve this altruistic understanding, whether or not they have done it through the vector of spirituality, organized religion, or through following their own rationality. Thus, neither religious people nor non-religious people should judge each other for why they do good, but simply appreciate that they do. Furthermore, everyone must also get over the insinuated idea that life is a competition about who is more holy, for this assumption can lead to frustration on both sides.
After all, it is usually not the place of one person to tell another if they are glorifying God in the proper way or not: That is obviously best left for God to decipher. With the idea that there is one best way to live, people tend to fear other cultures reflexively as though they are a competitive threat to their own way as ultimate. But when we leave it to God to be the Judge of this, we can get over such reflexive fear of difference and instead embrace differences.

Considering this, it would be a step in the right direction to view the diversity of life and culture as God’s art. This way, every individual way to do good can be appreciated for its individual uniqueness, with differences considered as art to be appreciated. Perhaps most importantly for each culture involved, in adopting this viewpoint and respecting other cultures as art not to be destroyed, you ensure that your own culture will also be respected as art not to be destroyed. Surely, God loves all who truly mean well, and so long as individuals appreciate God, they can do it in many ways.

This is what Jesus Christ taught about when he spoke of bringing in the kingdom of God. It was not about making one kingdom to rule all the others, but more about having all of the kingdoms accept one another and God alike. In Jesus’s individual reckoning, he taught a message that contained the intention that we all need to make a fundamental change of spirit from a self-centered and possessive basis to a more benevolent basis of sharing.

Christ’s true message gathered from his own individual reckoning involved allowing religion to move away from merely performing rituals and dogmatic rites and toward practicing the dharma of goodness toward others with respect for God continually. For, truly it is not by the practice of ritual rites that one will be permitted to enter Heaven, but by humbling oneself before God, treating others with kindness, and doing what is right. This Christ-like way of thinking and acting has the power to lead to an improved society by encouraging individuals to focus altruistically on improving all of our common lot.

In spreading this message, Jesus Christ became the world’s most influential teacher. So here I will cite what was probably Jesus’s single greatest saying: “[Just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.” If this teaching—which was given to the world graciously nearly 2,000 years ago and has now reached literally billions of people—were honestly considered and truthfully followed by all it reached, life on Earth would have been much more like Heaven for some time now already. But surely, it is much better than it would have been had he not preached his message and made it heard.

In reality, the kingdom of God has been waiting within each and every individual to be awakened all along from the start. And for many it has been awakened individually. But too many people have become distracted by a materialistic society that has been willingly bolstering egos and embracing utter selfishness as though it were good and proper. This, along with the promotion of war by warmongers, has delayed heaven on Earth long enough, with individuals and society as a whole choosing to listen to the wrong messages from the wrong teachers and ignoring, or sometimes even belittling, the right messages from the right teachers.

Thankfully, while God has been waiting for the larger society to awaken to all of this, there have been many individuals who have been able to unlock this key to the kingdom of God within themselves through their own pursuit of truth. By their grace, many of these individuals have been willing to help by
sharing some heavenly caring among those with whom they have interacted. Still, many others who have heard the message of Jesus have neglected to heed it, choosing to treat others as they would not like to be treated anyway, and countless innocent people have suffered because of it. But Jesus Christ has not been the only teacher who has tried to help all, as there have been many others throughout history who have taught teachings that remain wise to heed and follow.

As was noted already in this text, Confucius is said to have taught even earlier than Jesus the similar and starker truth of: “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” Likewise, the Buddha earlier taught: “Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” Several centuries after Jesus, Muhammad would be quoted to say: “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” Much more recently in time, Mohandas Gandhi said: “Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different road, so long as we reach the same goal. Wherein is the cause for quarreling?” And Martin Luther King Jr., who was an even more recent advocate for peace and equality, said: “Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

Everyone can take on the wisdom held in quotes such as those into their own independent thinking and truly evolve their own individual reckoning forward toward the light of acceptance, as opposed to being stuck back in the darkness of ignorance. Of course, the real test is putting such wisdom into practice. It is not our intended goal to judge one another, but rather to be good to one another. It is long overdue for everyone to give up their judgmental egos and begin on their personal journeys toward true advancement of the eternal soul by accepting oneself and others as equals. After being enlightened as such by freeing oneself from obstructing assumptions and thus awakening, helping others to do the same is the way to bring about a more awakened society.

So it is now time for everyone to cast out your own demons and not allow yourselves to be fooled any longer into judging and mistreating one another, because doing so truly gets you nowhere but to a hampering state of mind. In larger society, it is time that we no longer allow ourselves to be manipulated by fear to hate one another. Truly, most all of the citizens in the world want harmony. It is usually only when people are influenced by their societies to view others as enemies that they are then able to be manipulated to turn against one another in violence.

In truth, it is possible for us to go beyond finding the strength within ourselves to decide to no longer be tricked into thinking against one another, but to actually make the decision to instead try to bring ourselves toward thinking together. By choosing to bring unity into one’s own mindset, the unity in the world increases just a little, and as more begin to bring unity into their thoughts and actions, harmony will expand into larger frames. Eventually, once enough gain this consciousness and all of the harmonious frames merge, there will be a greater harmony that encompasses the whole world.
To no longer be a house divided, we must simply decide to stop dividing ourselves from one another; and thus become a part of the solution instead of being part of the problem. This can really be drawn down to a difference in thinking. While people will always be spread out around the globe and separated geographically, we do not need to divide ourselves in thought. To find a happy and peaceful shared mentality, individuals must be willing to reconcile previous opinions in the spirit of progress. It is through groups and individuals putting aside past closed-mindedness to open-mindedly work together that we will really begin to see the world change. What this often entails on the individual level is working within oneself to grow beyond past ignorances.

In fact, it should be acknowledged that many people are already open-minded and free of stereotypical thinking. Still, it must be understood that patience will be required to give time for everyone to become in tune with this. It is quite possible that many readers have not yet even embraced for themselves the main points that have been repeated in this book just yet. Reluctance to change is natural, but it is merely the last part of clinging to old mindsets, and after that stage is over is when enlightenment truly sets in. When we decide to let ourselves get over our fettering assumptions of the past, we can truly begin to see that on the simplest levels we really are all the same. And, from there, we can see that it must then really be possible for us to think together and find harmony.

When working toward thinking together, the first thing to consider is that most others are actually pretty much the same as you. Basically all sentient beings desire to have their bodily necessities met. And all higher-level sentient beings with emotions desire to be content. Generally, to become content we want to avoid unnecessary discomfort and to have fulfilling lives. And having fulfilling lives means not only having our daily physical requirements, but also to have our own desire to be happy recognized and respected by others. Obviously, this means that we would all naturally like to be treated kindly by others. It should be easy for us in this day and age to make it a reality that these basic things become fulfilled for all.

Further, beyond getting our physical needs met and having own natural want for contentment acknowledged, there is another aspiration. This aspiration, which is commonly underestimated for its importance in a satisfactory life, is to feel that we each have some kind of productive role in larger society. This is a natural aspiration that works well toward thinking together, as it is above the simple materialistic drives. The innate want to play a productive role as part of a well-functioning society is one of the best intrinsic drives we have, and it is often overlooked. Oftentimes people are treated as though they are lazy and will only work to help others if there is something in it for them. Treating people in this
way, as though they are incapable of thinking together toward collective wellbeing, can actually make such selfishness manifest. In other words, it has been an insult to our better qualities to guide society under the assumption that everyone only cares about themselves.

There is obviously some degree of selfishness in most everyone, but people also do wish to get along with one another. And it is understood that cooperating toward shared goals is a natural way for a group to get along well. From extending this simple observation, it should only be normal that we would all naturally like to work together toward a better world. Sadly, there has been considerable opposition to this true possibility in the past due to a mentality of conquest for rule over the lands of the world. But now that most all of the land on the Earth has well-established territories and trade networks, most all that is left in the way of a world that thinks together are the remnants of negativity that remain from past wrongdoings and some undermining corruption based in greed.

Surely, there are many problems that remain in the world (some of which will be addressed in the next part of the book), but for the most part everyone throughout the world has the same goals. We all want peaceful prosperity in which everyone has opportunity to live a comfortable and happy life. From this it should be known that there is little reason for hatred of one another except that which is infused through manipulative regimes. Aside from such manipulations to stir up dispute, which will be addressed later, there is little need for taking up the mentality that other groups are enemies.

Beyond petty resentments, which individuals should be ready to get over rather quickly once their minds are opened up from the ignorances of the past, the world is ready to move towards seeing all as allies toward the same goals, rather than competition. It is a happy realization that if we share the same goals of peaceful relations, we truly can all be winners. And simply by coming to see this plain realization, which has wrongly been hidden away and taught the opposite of, the people of the world are already beginning to use their minds properly to think together.

In knowing that we all basically think alike in these ways, it should help us be able to not fear one another or to fight against one another. Why would you want to fight against someone else when you know they have essentially the same goals you do? So long as there is enough to go around for everyone’s basic needs to be filled (and there truly is plenty at this time on the global level), there should be no real need to make enemies. Surely, in these times of abundance it is fully backwards to be making war; indeed, it would still be backwards to make war even if there was scarcity. In agreeing that we all have the same goals, as described in the above paragraphs, we should all be able to realize that we are all already on the same team.

Again, though it is true that we are divided physically, we do not need to divide ourselves in thinking. While in reality there are things that we could pick out to try to show as reasons for why we are different, there will always be more things that can be found to show as reasons for why we are the same. It is just a matter of truly realizing this to see that trying to argue about how we are different can really boil down to a simple matter of opinion. And, as I have just pointed out, because what we wish for ourselves are basically the same things that others wish for themselves, all we have to do is wish for others the same basic things we wish for ourselves and we will all be thinking together.
If we were all able to realize that different cultures are all merely different collaborations of societies made up of people trying to work together to be happy, we would be able to see that the people in all different cultures are really intrinsically the same. Knowing that basically all people have good will towards their own family and friends, it must be possible for everyone to extend the same good will to the larger global family. And if we could commit to doing that, we would be able to let go of the misplaced fear or ill will toward different cultures and instead embrace the different avenues towards happiness.

Thus, there is no need for fear of other cultures, so long as we can decide to agree upon the already explained point that no one culture should try to rule over others. Rather, we can see now that all of the different traditions have just been smaller sovereign parts of the larger sum containing the whole truth. And, though we have previously held on to particular opinions that were contradictory, if we can let go of the small details that used to divide us and embrace the big points that can now unite us, we can truly begin to move toward unity in both thought and action.

Now, it is important to know that thinking together does not require that everyone has to think the same. It is like the concept of agreeing to disagree: People can think together while holding different opinions and living differently by simply accepting the fact that it is fine for people to live differently. But while the small details can be appreciated as the spice of life, it would be good to find compromise in the larger points that we can agree upon. Just as the points made above that we all like to have our needs filled, to be contented and happy, and to not be judged by others are obvious, it should also be obvious that we all enjoy peace and freedom. After realizing these things are the larger points that we can all agree upon, the only thing left to do is work to have our actions truly reflect these shared truths.

Even if people cannot commit to having good will for those of other cultures, for whatever personal reasons they might have, they should at least be able to choose to tolerate different cultures out of respect. As stated by John F. Kennedy, “Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one’s own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others.” What this means is that, out of the spirit of tolerance, one should work to protect the freedom of beliefs of others—even if they believe strongly that their own particular beliefs are the best. So even if one cannot bring themself to see there is no ultimate culture and that we are all basically the same, they ought to at least be able to agree that they themself want freedom of belief and would not want that to be oppressed or persecuted.

People do not naturally hate one another without reason, though being brought to is obviously within our nature. For the most part, it is usually only when we have hatred stirred up in us against one another that we forget that we all do naturally care about one another. There are many forces that try to get us to fight against one another by fooling us into thinking we are each other’s enemies. But if we can allow ourselves to be unfazed by these outside influences that seem to want to work to turn us on one another, and instead uphold our good will towards one another, we will be able to make much more peaceful progress. If more people would adapt such an outlook on life, it would make life much more enjoyable for everyone.
It is good for our own mental well-being to help others out of the simple fact that we know it is just as important for others to enjoy life as it is for us to. Optimally, when we all work together and cooperate, we can take turns between helping others and being helped ourselves. This is how true harmony is achieved. In knowing that we all are involved in a larger system that supports everyone, each individual can be willing to give service to the greater good independently as to uphold the same system which supports them. By this, we guide our independent thinking into thinking together and form a whole that is much greater than the mere sum of its parts.

In furthering this line of thought, we can enjoy the beauty of choosing to cooperate with one another for the greater good out of free will. It is truly a great privilege that we have the opportunity to help one another have comfortable and enjoyable lives. We can see that it is much more fulfilling to understand our work to be for the greater good of a happy and thriving system than to merely look at what we get out of the deal. Even when serving others, we can optimistically know ourselves to be free agents working out of our free will to help one another enjoy life as we do. And even when work doesn’t involve a lot of enjoying getting along pleasantly or interacting with friendliness, it is important to at least get it done. Sometimes work is about certain goals like working towards getting something done on time, but even then it can be seen to be out of thinking together because we also like to have our schedules maintained so that planning can flow smoothly.

There are many plain examples which simply illustrate how thinking together is often greatly advantageous to individuals only going about on their own. Though there is nothing wrong with working independently, larger purpose shows up in the collaborations of individuals. This can include anything from school, family, or work projects to international relations. Working toward common goals through organization and teamwork is obviously much better than competing against one another to try to prove who is most right or to try to decide who should rule over others. Surely, there are sometimes benefits to being able to make freely independent choices, but in the cases involving many there needs to be communication and cooperation between everyone involved so that everyone can be heard as to contribute towards making real progress.

On the international level, this is why peace and trade agreements have been beneficial above the simple correspondence between nations. Just as individuals from differing countries communicate and get along all the time, national leaders obviously should as well for improvements in planning and thinking together as a planetary family. We can all remain independent while also cooperating freely and openly to make things easier for everyone involved through the spirit of cooperation. This applies from the largest to the smallest scale and in coordination everywhere between.

We are most always working in some kind of coordination with others, and upholding the values of things like inner peace, love, sympathy, friendship, forgiveness, and tolerance in our interactions will bring about more happiness for all. When individuals think together through such uniting concepts it leads to sharing, and that is nearly always a good thing. Interestingly, giving to others can actually be more rewarding than receiving something. Thus, acting virtuously or morally toward others can be rewarding in and of itself, let alone that it helps to build a strong community that will support the individual in return (which is a natural effect of what can be called karma). This effect of personal
reward gives people a stronger stimulus to do good than plainly cooperating and working toward shared goals out social duty and spiritual responsibility—though those too can be factors one can fall back on at times when not feeling so altruistic.

When we think together and communicate, we synchronize with one another; and when we are more synchronous, teamwork is more efficient through harmony. Oppositely, it is when individuals are not thinking together that they carry out acts from minor abuses such as petty littering to large abuses such as violent attacks. Or worse, the idea of thinking together can be manipulated as to be seen as one team versus other teams to perceive false division which leads to strife—such as the organized crime that has been seen in wars throughout history, with both sides always thinking they are the good guys. Many industries and companies have taken to “making a killing” off of such mental coercion. We must be able to coalesce towards the true realization that we really are already on the same team. Those who have been led to think and act otherwise have only been confused against better judgment.

(With regard to those “elites” in particular who have been the ones conspiring and influencing others to fight unneeded wars, and so causing suffering to many others for some plans of personal gain of your own, I tell you this: Know that God sees with every eye and hears with every ear, so even in plotting in secret from the world your plans are known by God. Knowing that is true, it is best you not do anything you wouldn’t want others to find out about anyway, for there is no keeping secrets from the God who owns everything and who sees each at all times in their life. Thus, it is ultimately best for you to come to thinking together for the common good anyway.)

To prevent such atrocities as the world has been plagued with in the past, both governments and private sector organizations should be held accountable by the communities they serve and the larger world to uphold virtuous actions, just as is expected of individuals within larger society. If all corporate, governmental, and religious factions would think together with the rest of the world rather than as individuals looking out only for their own deemed interests, that change of mentality would truly bring hope that harmony would surely be coming soon to all of humanity.

When we see that we must overcome selfishness to find harmony, we become aware of a critical fact that many have been in denial of for a long time. Though it has been taught in many of the most dominant cultures that the best way toward success is to be selfish, that mentality is bad for everyone. It is as though many have been trained like horses in a horse race to wear blinders, blocking out their field of view of everything except for their own finish. But we are more than horses in horse races, and it is better to take off the blinders to see what is going on around us, so that we might not ignore others in need while in pursuit of some goal of individual achievement and success which cares nothing for the well-being of others.

What is the point of “being successful” if people are hurting themselves and others in the process? Besides such selfishness obviously being bad in the long run for one’s soul, it is also bad in the short term in physical life as well. There have been many sad stories where people have lost focus on meaningful relationships in their lives through being blinded by overemphasis on the pursuit of money and achievement of false status. Of the many that have been led to become miserably obsessed with
wealth rather than enjoying more moderately, some eventually wake up to the realization that they would have been happier hurting fewer and helping more along the way. This has led a few to decide later in life to make a point to share a message with others not to make the same mistakes that they did by focusing too much on making a fortune and too little on God and their relationships with others.

This is one of many reasons why both spiritual and non-spiritual groups have been organized to help others learn through shared learning—rather than having to learn the hard way through life. Such sharing has been the basis behind most every spiritual tradition, and indeed any case in which advice has been given by those who have already gained wisdom through experience and wish to pass it on to help others. By learning from shared teachings, individuals can advance their own thinking without having to make their own mistakes through absorbing the pre-molded learning of others.

Learning can be done through both listening to teachers and through independent study. As promoted already, wise teachings can be found in many sources of reading and also through personal processes such as meditation (which will be expanded on a little later in the chapter on personal development). We should all keep our minds open to learning so as to absorb revelations when their appointed times come about in life. By moving beyond conflicts and taking the opportunity to learn from one another and developing toward shared understanding, the world’s various contributions of wisdom can be combined toward vast global progress.

It is at this time in which our advancements in technology are facilitating greater communication and coordination than ever before between individuals and cultures around the planet that our thinking could be vastly harmonized. We should be able to meld our different areas of expertise to contribute toward a global civilization that is both highly functioning and also more inclusive of larger realities. This means that individuals all over the world today can become better educated in both the physical sciences and the wisdom teachings than most any individual from any one local civilization on Earth ever has been in the past.

Through contributing all of the different types of advancements, being both technological and spiritual, the individuals living in the dawning globalized society will each be more understanding and enlightened regarding higher truths. This may sound simply like fluffy talk, but respect must be given to its true reality. Through individuals awakening to the underlying unity and interdependence of all creation, the whole world’s total awareness and connection increases bit by bit toward a more peaceful and harmonious existence.

There are definitely still some difficulties to overcome towards really thinking together and truly finding unity, but the processes of global evolution can be looked upon as an adventure. Still, the time for this global advancement is no longer some far-off time in the hazy future; rather, it is dawning here and now. We should keep a number of things in mind through the process from the start so that the eventual results can be a success. Some such things to surely keep in mind are humanitarianism and our universally unified spiritual nature. Though it is hard to foresee from within one mind exactly what will be the best path to take, there are some ideas which should be helpful to the process.
Chapter 17

Globalization

(Connecting Worldwide)

Globalization has been occurring in the world for some time now already. Connections going as far back as the first major trade routes connected major civilizations which had previously been isolated from one another. Ships connected lands separated by seas and even continents separated by oceans. Today, aircraft are continually flying people from one location to another, with international flights moving people from continent to continent within a day.

Beyond travel, people can communicate by phone or internet basically instantaneously from most anywhere in the world. Even common people can handle live video chat for simple conversation with friends and family across the globe. International news is delivered instantaneously to people in their homes, businesses, or even on the go. And social network updates have grown to frenzy. Basically, we are now living in the manifested future that seemed to be a far off dream that was hardly believable when predicted in science fiction just a few decades ago.

Along with the increasing global interconnectedness socially, there have been large progressions in things such as multinational corporations which have connected nations through free trade, as well as bureaucratic organizations linking national governments. Along with such developments, there has been fantastic progress in increasing the standard of living around the world. Today, in industrialized nations, people in the middle class can enjoy luxuries rivaling that of royalty in the past. Many people in well-established nations have come to expect their luxuries, such as a wide variety of food and clothing choices from around the world, and hardly notice or appreciate the comfort of their lives. Still, many do appreciate such comforts such as being able to partake in sharing cultural diversity from around the world in categories such as food, art, spirituality, and medicine.

Yet, while many international corporations have been reaping huge revenues and profits, there are many places in the world which are lagging behind in progress. And there has been a large degree of environmental destruction that has come with the progression of industrialization. Though some degree of loss of natural habitat is expected with modernizations, the effects of pollution can be curtailed and already have been in many places. All this requires is responsibility in things such as the disposal of hazardous waste and garbage being managed properly along with efforts like recycling increasing in efficiency. Such things were mentioned briefly in the preface of the book and will be expanded on a little more in the next part.

The new things to consider when looking into the current status of globalization include such issues as reducing the amount of corruption that has infiltrated both corporations and governments, and improving development programs to make them more efficient so that funding and efforts really go
toward productivity in the intended projects. Increases in the quality of life are gaining in previously poor areas through both governmental work through tax revenues and free will donation. While free trade has been greatly effective in spreading developments, many have noted the dangers of rampant and unregulated capitalistic expansion including abuses of shabby labor laws and lagging legislation regarding environmental protection in underdeveloped countries. But awareness is spreading and acts are being cleaned up in places everywhere.

For some time already, more advanced nations have provided aid to developing ones, and banks have loaned money to developing nations in order for them to build infrastructure toward maturing economies which can then pay back those investments. In some cases, however, interest rates have been raised on such loans without reason. And in other cases, debt has been cancelled anyway. In the future, development aid should be able to be provided without it having to “profit” any particular source monetarily over others aside from the profit of all helped through good, clean development.

But besides such major planning, which should be able to be worked out socially as it becomes more feasible over time, individual parties have already begun to be able to pitch in toward global advancements. Through realization that we are all in this together—both physically through the shared global economy and planetary environment, as well as mentally and spiritually as discussed in the previous chapter—there are good ideas being spread in leaps and bounds around the world.

As more and more people get to meet others from different cultures and ancestral backgrounds, stereotypical judgments are decreasing more than ever before. People are really beginning to realize that we are all basically the same and that we all share most of the same common experiences and aspirations. Further, as was noted in the section regarding new religions, there has been a spiritual re-awakening happening in the New Age movement. Processes such as meditation, energy work, and simply positively interacting are being practiced by more and more individuals to subtly influence the global attitude. Such things are getting us more connected back to our roots of the spiritual essences that we really are—as opposed to the mere materialistic consumers that some interests would apparently like us to be reduced to.

While it is true that we must all still pay attention to realist principles, such as the fact that work must be done and that it is wise to make reasonable monetary decisions to keep one’s finances manageable, more and more people are starting to use their extra free time and finances more productively for their own advancement and the advancement of others by becoming involved in rewarding activities and organizations. This progress is being made despite the influence of some cultures which have emphasized total materialistic over-consumption through media and its products. Though there is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying the experience of life, over-pursuit of goods and experiences has driven some individuals toward many negative physical and psychological health effects; which have, in turn, taken their toll on the societies in which they live.

Though many have made the fair defensive argument that there is no benefit of trying to guilt people for overindulging while others are living in conditions of famine, there is real use in moving some of those who are able to share a little while also enjoying life. Moreover, rather than becoming upset in
response to such a suggestion, one might actually come to find that it is personally rewarding to help out altruistically if they might choose to give it a try. Individuals can help to make the world a little better by reducing their own consumption to moderation—which is generally good for people anyway—and perhaps choosing to give within their means to one or more of the world’s organizations working on development (a number of which will be mentioned in the next part of the book). People can also help out without really sacrificing anything by simply using a little discretion with their purchasing power, such as choosing to support companies with involvement in things like 1% for the Planet.

But beyond making a few conscientious choices with one’s own consumption or contributing small or large efforts to non-profit organizations whose ideology they support while simply letting the major financial institutions of governments determine where funding will go, citizens everywhere can also choose to participate in the political processes that influence social planning in modern society. As noted by Jay Weinstein in his book Social Change, “If the people en masse do not use the system to protect their collective interests, it will be used by oligarchs to benefit themselves.” This, of course, applies more to making sure that governments are effectively monitoring things for the public within their own countries than it does to their processes which help to influence development projects elsewhere, but participation by the citizenry for effective democracy is equally important in both.

Most countries have worked to continually improve the conditions of their citizens over time while also putting significant funding toward development to help people elsewhere in the world. In developed countries where most people have freedom and access to things like clean water and public education or libraries, a certain percentage of tax revenue goes toward developmental aid to those still undergoing such developments. Such aid is meant to go toward resolving some of the inequality on the global scale, much of which has its roots in the colonial history of the world.

Most of the well-developed countries today were the core countries of past imperialistic empires that the other colonies were primarily used to support. The supporting periphery colonies (which were originally used for slavery and the production of goods desired by the core countries), as well as the areas which were largely ignored by the imperialistic empires, have remained the underdeveloped countries. This, as one can see from the current state of affairs in the world, continues today with a high degree of economic inequality globally. However, all areas of the world should eventually reap the benefits of the easier and more enjoyable lifestyles that come with modernization as the unequal mountains and low places that have metaphorically formed in the distribution of the world’s wealth become more leveled out.

In the long run, or at least so long as everyone who can chips in a little to help out, the difference between today’s First World and Third World countries will end up reducing to the mere order in which they were developed. Any with a rightly unbiased view should see there is no true difference in the inherent worth of people depending upon where they live or their ancestry. Such ideology of assigning supremacy to certain bloodlines and not to others is rubbish and should be done away with, as the true merit of an individual is found in the goodness of their works unto others, not in their genetics. Perhaps there can be some useful advantage to those who have been waiting so long for their iniquities to be resolved in that their developments, now that they are receiving them, are more
efficient since they have already been advanced and mastered by those gifted with the education and the resources which have allowed them to accomplish technological advancement during the time that others have mastered good old methods of labor.

Now, while increased cooperation is good, there is also something to be said for nations continuing their sovereignty. There have recently been some worries about forces trying to move toward one world government. If such ideas were actually being proposed, it would be legitimate to be opposed to them, because it is most clear the world is not ready for one global government at this time. First of all, it would probably not be a good idea to base the world government on the most dominant country in the world today, the United States of America, because there has even been some financial instability in that country, along with inane fighting between its political parties over its social systems while corruption has crept into its systems more than most would like to believe.

Moreover, even if there were a good model for one global government, it might be a poor idea to force the whole world under one government; because, once that occurred, there would be nowhere for whistleblowers on that global government to run. Moreover, by having sovereign governments, it allows people to be able to move to places which they feel represent their beliefs—though, of course, that is only an option for those with the resources to move. Because of the fact that many people do not have the resources or availability to move, it is important that improvements are shared throughout the world and that the various countries are monitored to make sure human rights are respected within nations under their own developing constitutions and bills of rights.

This is why there is good use for a strengthened United Nations. It is good to have a benevolent world council which can level-headedly oversee world affairs. This is especially so at this time when, if such a council were absent, it would primarily be the multinational corporations and independent militaries that would rule the world. Such a state of affairs would not be a good thing for the sake of the world since both corporations and militaries can be blinded to consideration for human wellbeing if being run only for the pursuit of profit.

So, it is good that we have a multifaceted United Nations to serve several purposes, including: facilitating cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights, and achievement of world peace. It is important that the United Nations, as the world’s main forum for international cooperation and global organizing, continues to uphold and truly pursues those defined purposes. This will be helpful in countering special interests which might be detrimental to the people through supporting republics and the democratic process through the people’s governments and continuing progress through the missions of its subsidiary organizations for the wellbeing of all the world’s people.

Now, it is interesting to note that among the countries involved in the United Nations, there is over a thousand times more funding put into continuing the war machine at this time than is put towards peacekeeping efforts. And of the five major members of the United Nations Security Council—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China—all but China are the top weapons dealers in the world. While it is legitimate for people to be able to own small arms for recreation or self-
defense, it is another thing to be producing heavy artillery and assault weapons in mass and selling them to places torn by war.

Weapons dealing beyond that intended for individual use and a country’s own police or military operations only makes excuse for more heavy equipment to be built for the larger militaries, and then that makes excuse for spending toward nuclear weaponry—all of which ends up sucking up a huge amount of resources that could be going towards resolving problems like poverty and hunger. There should be a push for significant decreases in military spending across the board, especially reductions in spending to create more nuclear weapons. There are already far too many nuclear weapons in existence for anyone’s good and we should be disarming many of those already made rather than making more.

Moreover regarding globalization and the involvement of individuals and groups in international crime, the International Criminal Court created by the United Nations should be ratified by all United Nations members so that all international criminals can be tried and held to world justice. It is important to have the International Criminal Court as the unanimously recognized World Court for such measures so that people can be held accountable since plutocracy and oligarchy within individual nations can often impede true justice. When justice is not properly upheld by the courts of one nation, it is called for that a World Court hold trial, especially regarding international affairs. Such a court is necessary, as it would not be the place of another separate and sovereign nation to hold trials regarding international affairs or to oversee that internal justice is held in other nations.

With that, the next part of the book regarding the challenges that the currently globalizing world currently faces will be introduced. The next chapter will briefly discuss a few critical points regarding some of the remaining conflicts in the world. After addressing such violence, which should be the first thing to resolve in the advancement of the world, some critical points regarding the many social problems that plague the world in a quieter fashion will be covered. Though some considerations regarding government will be mentioned in that chapter, the topic of government will not be focused on individually until after a chapter discussing environmental concerns. And the last chapter in the next part of the book will close on the topic of sustainability before moving on to the final part of the book.
Part Five

Our Challenges:

Facing Our Current Obstacles to Overcome
Chapter 18
Conflict
(War, Terrorism, and Other Violence)

Especially as the world has globalized, there has been an increase in the scale of violence and war. This has involved an extensive history of war throughout time, with the two world wars in our history actually having sped along globalization. Despite all of our intermittent violence, much of the world is currently in a peaceful state. Thankfully, for most of the world, acts of war are a thing of the past, and most of the world’s primary borders peacefully established. However, there continues to be old territorial fighting over borders in some places, as well as fighting within many less developed and a few developed nations, plus a few instances of continued international war.

Although there has been real progress in the means of continued decreases in prejudice within most countries, there remain to be some cases of international resentments, as well as some continued prejudices within nations. All such minor resentments—national, religious, political, and so on—should be done away with in order to move forward to a future where we are working together as one large family rather than against one another. In every case of conflict, progress can be facilitated by hope and passionate belief in the fact that good fairness and communication can always overcome injustice.

A few of the many particular areas where considerable violence is occurring at the time of this writing include disputes and skirmishes between Israel and Palestine, an ongoing conflict in Afghanistan being carried out by the United States and NATO forces, and an uprising in Syria which has approached civil war. The current uprisings in Syria and Yemen are two examples of the remaining cases of larger uprisings in that largely generalized area of the world where several other revolts have occurred and been mostly resolved more recently, including the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

Aside from many smaller cases of internal warfare within nations, one of the few international wars currently ongoing is the War in Afghanistan. The War in Afghanistan has been declared to be an organized fight to remove from power the Taliban regime and to dismantle the terroristic group called al-Qaeda that it has harbored. One of the primary goals of the international intervention in Afghanistan has been to establish an effective democratic government there, which has already been achieved—complete with democratic elections and a democratically elected president. However, there has been much continued fighting dealing with the remaining Taliban insurgency in the more remote regions of Afghanistan and across the border into Pakistan.

There have been some legitimate causes for military intervention in Afghanistan, including the fact that the Taliban and al-Qaeda have killed civilians and used the poppy production in the region as a source of extortion to fund the purchase of weapons that have been used for violent insurgency. And there has reportedly been some desire by the people of Afghanistan to receive international military aid
to help in quelling such violence, which has included attacks on schools. Such a request for help should be the first indication that it is legitimate to militarily occupy a region, because consent is required to work with a people to remove their unwanted discordance. However, there are many things to take into consideration regarding such intervention.

First of all, as was previously pointed out, the use of violence in retribution to violence is always questionable because such a mentality can lead to a continued cascade of violence. From the effects we have seen, fighting in response to civilian casualties has caused far more civilian casualties, which makes the matters worse. Of course, there are cases when stopping those responsible for murdering civilians will eventually result in fewer cases of innocent casualties and eventual peace. This was the original ideation of going into Afghanistan, as it was supposed to stop terroristic organizations from plotting to kill civilians. However, the ideation of killing terrorists in vengeance has now changed somewhat to an ideation of liberating the people of Afghanistan.

In cases such as the rule by the Taliban including violence in an oppressive, non-democratic regime with apparently little respect for protecting individual human rights, there are many reasonable arguments to be made for the decision to intervene. That is why, despite much peaceful protest against the war in Afghanistan, there have been some humanitarian reasons in support of the use of military force to liberate the peaceful people there from a repressive and destructive presence. As such, the War in Afghanistan has at least been made out to be a case in which there is call for armed occupation and conflict despite the general truth that it is almost always best to use non-violent means as the first order action in trying to resolve injustice.

But even when peaceful resolution is proven ineffective, and it is decided that violence is truly called for in order to stop dangerous individuals or groups and protect those in need of protection, it is best to keep such violence to an absolute minimum. That is why it has been good news to hear that international forces are being withdrawn from Afghanistan now that the democratic government there has been set up and allowed to organize its own protective forces to sustain civilized laws and to keep a peaceful and refined society upheld there for its citizenry.

Now, it may seem quite late after all this warfare has already been carried out, first in Iraq and then Afghanistan, to go back to reanalyze the terroristic events which were originally used to justify those invasions—especially since, as just discussed, there have been some legitimate humanitarian arguments for armed military intervention. Nevertheless, the truth regarding the instances of September 11th, 2001 must be analyzed so that there may be true reconciliation brought and a much needed exploration of the groups really pulling strings behind the scenes in world affairs so that warmongers who use war as a means of profit will no longer plague the world into the future.

As brought up in the preface, there is much evidence that the events of 9/11 were staged “false flag” attacks to instill fear and gain public support for increased spending on security measures and the military expenditures of the “War on Terror”. If a person looks into false flag attacks, they will find that the United States has been involved in several in the past, which would give reason to believe that it could happen again. For example, in Operation Northwoods, U.S. officials proposed several possible
staged incidents to justify military occupation of Cuba. The proposed plans included framing the hijacking of a civilian plane, replacing it with another to intentionally crash, and then fabricating supporting evidence. Many believe an elaborate form of that plan was carried out on 9/11.

Some of the most obvious evidence of foul play regarding the terroristic attacks of 9/11 include the absolutely logic-defying fact that an intact passport visa for Satam M-A R al-Suqami, who was one of the supposed hijackers of American Airlines Flight 11, was given to a police officer on a street near the World Trade Center by an anonymous passerby—despite the fact that there is no legitimate explanation for it to have possibly come out of a jet that crashed into the tower to end up there on the street. This passport visa, which was used as evidence in the United States 9/11 Commission, is most obviously planted evidence to try to prove that the jet which crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center was actually American Airlines Flight 11. But, in reality, it is actually proof that those doing the planting of evidence knew ahead of time who would be framed and where.

Since there were no flight-recording black boxes recovered from the Ground Zero site, there is no solid proof that it was actually an American Airlines commercial jet that hit the North Tower, aside from the mentioned planted passport and other evidence which also could have been falsified. Many have proposed the jets that flew into the World Trade Center Towers were actually militarily rigged jets, due to there being photographic evidence that shows there to have been pods on the fuselages under the jets which should not be found on commercial airliners. There were also flashes recorded just before the planes impacted the buildings, indicating incendiary devices being deployed from those pods to cause the huge fireballs that blasted through the buildings.

Furthermore, experts have agreed that even if it really were commercial jets that crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, those steel-framed buildings would not have fallen as they did without structural damages below the impact sites. Evidence for this structural weakening was found in the form of liquid molten steel that poured out of the damaged World Trade Center buildings and piled in heaps after their collapse. Such liquid molten steel is impossible to be produced from the temperatures reached by the burning of jet fuel, but would be producible from the use of thermite, which burns to the extremely high temperatures that would be needed to liquify steel. Nano-thermite is an advanced military development that would have had no plausible reason to be found around the Ground Zero site except if militarily developments were involved, and it just so happened that nano-thermite was found around Ground Zero after the collapse of the buildings. This is part of the evidence that the buildings were internally rigged beforehand so that they would fall and produce a dramatic effect involving many casualties as to be more influential on public opinion.

Beyond those points, which some may have a hard time accepting, there is entirely irrefutable evidence of demolition-style rigging involved in the 9/11 events in the case of World Trade Center Building 7. Building 7 totally collapsed in classic demolition style even though it had not been hit by any jet and had only minimal fire damage. The way in which Building 7 fell indicates that basically all of the major structural supports for the building were strategically taken out. This shows that it had to have been an intentional demolition, which would have required significant rigging long in advance. Yet government officials falsely reported it collapsed from fire. The real testament to the widespread, pre-
planned organization of these events can be found in the unmistakable fact that reporters from both
CNN and BBC reported that Building 7 had already collapsed prior to its collapse, when there had only
been some fires and no structural damage at the time to that building. This indicates leaks into the mass
media immediately regarding these events, let alone afterward for their portrayal.

Finally, the official report by the 9/11 Commission for what struck the Pentagon does not
physically add up, as has been shown by Pilots for 9/11 Truth. The fact that numerous surveillance
videos from around the area of the Pentagon that could have captured footage of a jumbo jet flying into
the Pentagon were confiscated by government officials is highly questionable. Those videos could have
been shown to the public as proof of it being a hijacked jumbo airliner, as was officially reported by the
9/11 Commission, but instead they were kept out of sight from the public. Such indications point to
there having been a large cover-up orchestrated with insiders in the United States government
regarding what really happened on 9/11. Examination into what the officials who were killed in the
offices in that particular part of the Pentagon that day were investigating is a clue that could help in
figuring out who was really behind the terroristic inside-job that was 9/11.

But there is more that has to be considered when finding out what happened behind the scenes
on 9/11/01. Regarding the Pennsylvania crash site attributed to United Airlines Flight 93, several people
remarked on the absence of large parts of a plane and no bodies or even blood at the site, with the local
coroner Wallace Miller saying: "It was as if the plane had stopped and let the passengers off before it
crashed." The lack of bodies, or even significant pieces of bodies, made it very difficult for Miller to
identify those on the flight. All of the torsos, heads, arms, and legs were somehow explained to Miller to
have “vaporized”. There was a similar lack of human remains or substantial parts that would constitute a
large aircraft from the American Airlines Flight 77 that was claimed to have been responsible for the
Pentagon attack. Where did the people from those flights go? Moreover, considering the evidence that
indicates the two planes that hit the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center to actually have been
military airliners rigged with incendiary devices, that would make a total of four missing flights of people
from 9/11/01 that may have gone elsewhere. That is a major mystery yet to be explained—and a quite
curious one at that.

As for the intended effect of the terrorizing events of 9/11, it only makes sense that they were
procured to startle the American public and spur the United States representatives to rush through the
legislation of the “USA PATRIOT Act”, while also inducing support for embarking on an otherwise
obviously unnecessary war titled the “War on Terror” and creating a need for vastly increased
government spending on “Homeland Security” measures. The USA PATRIOT Act, which apparently was
in the works for a long time prior to 9/11/01, intriguingly included a great deal of reinforcement for the
private bank that has misleadingly been called the “Federal Reserve” and really included very little to
actually prevent acts of terrorism. What is more concerning is that the USA PATRIOT Act shot holes in
the United States Constitution by making loopholes which have removed some of the precious
protective civil rights which a republic is supposed to stand for.

What is saddest about this is the resulting injuries and loss of life that has occurred in Iraq and
Afghanistan as a result of the War on Terror. Obviously, the vast majority of the citizens of Iraq and
Afghanistan have had no involvement with terrorism. In fact, hardly any of them had any connection whatsoever to 9/11. Finding out whom exactly was truly involved inside the warmonger-organized and greed-driven plotting of 9/11 would be a huge step towards a future of Earth that is freer from the evils of corrupt manipulation. The American public should demand a reinvestigation regarding what really happened going into 9/11 as well as what happened with who was involved with some cover-up in its investigation, including destruction of evidence afterward.

This information regards the public, the soldiers that have gone into the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, and everyone in the world to has been led to believe that Islam was the root of that terrorism. Though some Muslims have become involved in violent attacks and acts of mistreatment, Islam has been framed in the case of 9/11. Of course some Muslims will come out to fight if invaders go into their country armed to kill. But in reality, most of the world’s large Muslim population consists of individuals who are good peace-loving, God-fearing people.

It is true that some Islamic scripture can be read to endorse violence, but so can some of the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. It says in the Holy Bible that homosexuals and adulterers should be stoned to death, but that does not mean that all Christians intend to carry out such cruel and biased violence. Just as most all Christians know better than to violently kill peaceful others, the vast majority of Muslims know better than to kill peaceful others. Because Muslims believe in a book that has some lines that endorse violence on their attackers does not mean that they are bad people without their own morals. People must move into the future deciding not to be so opinionated and realize that humanity can continue to develop socially to advance past the negligence of the past.

Moreover, though they have been portrayed as having a culture that cannot peacefully exist with the rest of the world, Muslim countries clearly can exist and interact peacefully with the rest of the world if they are respectfully not antagonized instead of continually confronted. Many predominately Muslim countries have interacted peacefully with the rest of the world. For instance, while Iran has been depicted as a potential threat to the world quite recently, they have not provoked war on any country for over two hundred years aside from being involved in a war with Iraq, which Iraq instigated.

Iran should be allowed to culturally evolve with time by its own democratic means. The ideology of attacking nations to prevent them from attacking others does not make sense. As noted, Iran does not seem to seek expansion but rather simply its own right to independently exist. It is wise to try to prevent nuclear armament, but even if Iran did create a nuclear weapon, all it would be good for would be to say, “Don’t mess with us.” Many countries currently possess nuclear weapons, and all know it would be a horrible idea for both the world and their own country if they actually used them. Those in authority positions in governments should be wise enough to know better than to use a nuclear weapon, even if only in regard to their own self-interest regarding the retaliation.

Now, there are cases around the world in which there are armed conflicts going on which should be worked on resolving. As has been stated throughout this book, violence is most always bad and ought to be a last resort when trying to fix problems. One case of long standing violence that was already addressed earlier in the book was the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This is one case where Muslims have
been proven to be repeated attackers on peaceful Israelis. However, Israel has not been entirely innocent in this fighting either. Without spending any more time debating about whom has been guilty of violence between Israel and Palestine, it is time to look for some kind of peaceful resolve. There should be no more launching rockets over the borders, which is entirely juvenile.

The time for resorting to the scriptures to decide who was promised what land is over. God wills all of the Earth’s lands to be peacefully shared. Surely, the lands of Israel ought to be able to be shared peacefully by those of all the Abrahamic faiths, as well as others—just as they have been at many times in the past. Thus, citizenship in either Israel or Palestine cannot be based on religion or ethnicity. The United Nations recently voted to recognize Palestine as a state, which is progress since that is indeed needed for lasting peaceful resolution. It is now time for the negotiations between the two states of Israel and Palestine to be decided on so that respectful existence of both sides can be established.

For starters, to begin the proper atmosphere of peaceful acceptance, the Old City of Jerusalem should become internationally administered by Israel and Palestinian representatives to be an example of a truly holy city of peace shared by all. At least a small defined number of Palestinians should be allowed into and out of the Old City of Jerusalem per day as an enactment of peaceful concord. The people there in the holy Old City of Jerusalem should simply understandably be in respect of one another’s beliefs and one another’s right to freely practice their own religion as they wish. This would become an example of the ability of people of all faiths to be responsible and act peacefully toward one another, with respect for the common civil law (which would be based upon that of Israel) while practicing their own religious laws personally as they wish.

Along with the enactment of making the Old City of Jerusalem a freely shared city, there should be some actions of restitution between Israel and Palestine. This must include prisoners held on both sides being either rightly tried for their alleged crimes or released. There must be a peace and reconciliation committee formed in which the war crimes involved with all of these prisoners are acknowledged across borders and education instituted to show that no more such violence should occur. Peace talks must be held with representatives from both sides until it is resolved that the past will be put behind and that focus will be made on what has to be done for cooperation and peace. This must be arranged with meetings held on both sides of the borders. It must be decided that prejudice will become a thing of the past with diplomacy and respect the ideas to focus on into the future.

Israel must acknowledge Palestine’s right to exist and Palestine must acknowledge Israel’s right to exist, without either trying to disrupt the affairs of the other but rather peacefully trading with one another. For this to be done properly, the Hamas and Fatah factions of Gaza and the West Bank must settle to take joint action to, along with representation from the major Israeli establishments in the lands of the West Bank, form one unified government for Palestine. Gaza would need to be considered along with the West Bank to make a two state system between Israel and Palestine (unless Gaza wants to remain its own isolated state separate from both Israel and Palestine).

The currently established borders connecting the continuous territory of Israel should be decided on as the border to be recognized for the nation of Israel from this time into the future. The
isolated Israeli establishments throughout the West Bank lands not connected within the continuous land of Israel must be recognized as cities within the country of Palestine. Obviously, the law in the new nation of Palestine must be respectful of non-Muslims, just as the laws in the nation of Israel are respectful of non-Jews. The isolated establishments that have been considered Israeli would become cities of Palestine with the establishment of the nation of Palestine and considered as compensation for the past encroachments on Palestinian lands. The new nation of Palestine would have democratic elections for a president, as well as democratic elections of mayors for the major cities.

These things can be done by Israel under the mutual understanding that there will be no more terroristic attacks on Israel by Palestinians, which must be truthfully and clearly promised by the new Palestinian authorities, which should be aided by the representatives from the Israeli establishments within the country of Palestine included within the Palestinian government. Regarding this, the nation of Palestine would be best established with a board of mayors from the major cities which would be considered as representatives of the Palestinian Congress. It would be a good idea for representatives to also be elected into the Palestinian Congress from rural counties. The Congress of Palestine would then need to work to keep the nation of Palestine contingent among itself.

To maintain peace between the new nation of Palestine and the nation of Israel, representatives from both countries would need to remain in routine contact with one another, both to monitor progress and to settle any future quarrels as they occur. The United Nations would need to oversee the formation of this new nation called Palestine, hopefully consisting of both Gaza and the West Bank, as its membership worked out a constitution and governing framework, with such monitoring continuing afterward until it was stably established. This plan of action should be a viable route to finally peacefully resolving the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Now, to move on, there is a current war going on in many other places in the world which needs to be addressed. This includes fighting within nations and international attacks such as the drone strikes being carried out in Pakistan and in Yemen. Many such conflicts have lacked recognition compared to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the current media coverage of the Syrian conflict, in which opposition forces are fighting against the established regime, which has allegedly turned against civilians.

Despite the arguable war crimes going on in Syria, the United Nations has opted to stay out of the conflict rather than aiding the established or the opposition forces. This decision has been made to remain on the conservative side and stay out of Syria’s own conflict. Certainly, both the established Syrian government and the opposition would surely like to have the United Nations on their side, but it has been hard to ascertain which side to support. The best solution would surely be for the existing Syrian government to simply transparently recognize the changes the opposition wishes to be made—that is, if they have any legitimate changes in mind aside from having themselves be in power.

Despite the success of some of the more recent revolts against established governments, violent uprisings should generally be avoided. It is far more harmonious to work within a government for wanted reform than to try to topple the government altogether. This should serve as advice to the many smaller militias and anarchic groups in the various regions throughout the world fighting against their
nation’s regular police or army to stop it. Indeed, the list of such smaller skirmishes in current conflicts is too extensive to list here, despite there being peace is most of the world. One can find information online regarding the current unrest in the world through a wide variety of news resources including websites—like Vision of Humanity, which includes reports such as the Global Peace Index and the Global Terrorism Index showing some of the clearer realities of terrorism. Everyone must focus on peaceful resolution rather than fighting, and strong developed nations should focus more on helpful foreign policy while reducing dealing assault weapons to regions torn by conflict.

Groups can often get themselves caught up in the fighting spirit, especially when intentionally provoked by manipulation, but destructive efforts are usually not helpful but instead only harmful and wasteful. If there is a call to action, it should be to peacefully work for reform within the established state and national governments. Regarding this, established governments absolutely must do their part to recognize the voice of the people and work with them in order to avoid violent uprisings. This means never ignoring what is concerning the people, but rather honestly acknowledging them and truly taking steps toward reaching common ground. Even if the requests are not feasible, the government should at the very minimum explain why they cannot be done.

Regarding the other violence in the world, aside from petty crime, there is also significant unnecessary violence going on in the world regarding the implications of the “War on Drugs”, especially including the Mexican Drug War, which is actually one of the most deadly ongoing conflicts occurring in the world at this time. While it is true that drug abuse has many harmful effects, the armed violence that has occurred due to the criminalization of drug possession has resulted in far more bloody despair than results from the drugs themselves. The persecution of drug busts for popular drugs only drives up the profitability of that particular drug, which provokes others to fill in the market even more fiercely. This will continue so long as there is demand. Thus, the real place to invest to reduce the drug trade is in education that will reduce the public’s demand.

Furthermore, the effect of illegalizing safe plants such as marijuana (which is the main cash crop fueling the drug war in Mexico) is actually increasing their profitability and creating criminal activity where there wouldn’t have to be any. With the unregulated and untaxed profits, drug cartels have been able to purchase weapons which would not need to be involved if it were legal. Then, because the cartels are already practicing secret organized crime for less harmful things such as marijuana shipments, they have also taken up truly wrong activities such as human trafficking. While it is worth it to have good police risk their lives to stop human trafficking, it is quite questionable for them to be dying in bloody shootouts over plants that can be grown from the dirt. This is especially so when some states have recently decriminalized marijuana anyway, as voiced by Mexican officials.

Plainly, the way to stopping conflict is to stop conflict, not to increase it. That should not be such a difficult concept to grasp. More such plain logical thinking will be discussed in the next chapter of the book which discusses more of the global social problems that many people around the world continue to face more quietly compared to outright violent conflict.
Even for those in the world not dealing with direct conflict where they live, there are often struggles. Beside the difficulties and stresses that come along with life for those with happily stable lives, there are many trouble areas in human wellbeing throughout the world which can cause anything from minor stress to major turmoil. The type of problems I am talking about here largely include those issues in developing areas of the world such as mass hunger, poverty, and lack of clean water. A list of these types of issues which has already been created to work on already can be found in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals—the humanitarian progress of which will soon be coming time to assess and adjust for further goals into the future. Other related trouble areas include issues which have tainted more developed countries such as drug abuse and unemployment.

Of course, all of these issues can be found within cultures in both advanced countries and underdeveloped ones. In all cases, progress can be made through learning about the issues and taking action to solve them with compassion and faith in the steady evolvement of development. While there are whole books written on these subjects in attempt to cover the many facets of these problems in detail, this chapter simply provides some key points regarding them and offers some suggestions which should prove helpful. Though many things regarding these points are already well-known to many, others are still less understood and require clarification, which is the purpose here.

The chapter is divided into subsections which make brief discussion based around a few crucial points regarding the selected topics of: poverty and hunger, population growth, potable water, unemployment, gender inequality, human rights violations, crime and society, and drug abuse. Of all the social problems in the world that could be discussed, these topics include some important issues which can be helped simply through some refreshed thinking.

**Poverty & Hunger**

There are different standards for poverty in different regions of the world. It is interesting that a person in the United States earning $10,000 per year can be considered to be living in poverty, while more than a third of the world’s population lives on less than $2 per day. Obviously, there is a difference in how much a dollar buys in differing areas of the world, but there is a greater difference in what people consider to be poverty. In the United States, most considered to be in poverty are much better off than others in different countries who do not consider themselves to be impoverished. This has much to do with the consideration of *relative* deprivation and *absolute* deprivation. While a person in a
developed country may be considered to be in poverty in comparison to wealthy people there, they are very likely quite far from true poverty compared to others in absolute deprivation.

This points out the fact that there are better indicators for poverty than only income. Some better indicators for true poverty include one’s freedoms and opportunities. While impoverished people such as the homeless in the developed countries of the world may truly be experiencing absolute poverty and in legitimate need of help, they at least live in regions where there are developed freedoms and available opportunities. Most of the people in absolute poverty in the world live in areas lacking in freedoms or where opportunities are limited. Such areas are in need of development, usually beginning with education.

When one becomes educated, they become more knowledgeable about how to take care of themselves and more capable of supporting themselves. Sadly, in some regions, children are used as workers instead of having time for education. This is especially the case where development is lacking and adults cannot provide for themselves and their children. If investment were given into such areas to develop production of goods and other employment for adults, the children could spend time in school learning to read, which would make them more capable to participate in efficient systems, and thus able to further work on the development of infrastructure toward a more modern future with less poverty.

This is a suggestion which can help empower people so that they can become their own means of sustaining their own living. Many who do not support humanitarian aid to feed the hungry in less developed regions of the world have that opinion because they think it is just feeding the problem, thinking that if they give resources to feed the hungry today that just leads to having to feed them tomorrow. This is not the truth. Oftentimes people run into struggles and need some help to get on their own feet. Things such as education are a practical application of the old adage: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

An example of a case in which giving developmental aid is very important at critical times to help the poor is the situations where natural disasters strike in areas of poverty. The people who live in poverty are much more susceptible to damages because they do not have funds in bank accounts or insurance policies to replace their losses. For instance, if a tsunami destroys subsistence fishermen’s boats which they needed to sustain their own livelihood, they do not get it replaced by an insurance policy. They didn’t even have the option of an insurance policy. Likewise, people in regions of poverty struck by earthquakes which destroy their homes have little to no means to rebuild without aid from others—even if they were hard working people who had been making a living for themselves. In such cases, humanitarian aid helps those in poverty at critical times so that they can get back to a stable life with food, shelter, and their own economy to maintain it.

There are many disaster relief programs which have been set up by the fortunate to help the less fortunate in times of need. These include many non-profit Christian organizations—such as the Red Cross groups around the world in the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and many other smaller Christian groups—which help alleviate the suffering of others. Of course, there are also many religiously unaffiliated non-profit groups—such as Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans
Frontières and several others—dedicated to humanitarian disaster relief, as well as for-profit companies and individuals who donate some of their extra resources toward the very same kind of assistance out of the goodness of their hearts. Beyond the donation and volunteer-based groups, there are also national programs such as FEMA, international governmental programs such as USAID, and extensions of the United Nations which work to help provide transitory assistance to victims of natural disasters.

There are, of course, other cases in which there are people in chronic need who have no real opportunities to work to support themselves. These are the cases where chronically hungry children can get swollen stomachs filled with fluid due to imbalances in their blood from chronic malnutrition—cases which some parts of programs such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Christian Children’s Fund or ChildFund International, Save the Children, Bread for the World, and others work to alleviate and resolve. Such cases usually occur in areas which are overpopulated for the food production and where the people are currently unable to make income to pay for food to be imported. Such cases of overpopulation are worrisome and the natural tendency when faced with such chronic hunger is simply to look away. However, while out of sight might be out of mind, ignoring problems does not make them go away. What can make it better is to embrace the fact that the unease that comes with seeing others suffering is stimulus to figure out ways to help.

In response to such a suggestion, some people may blindly claim there is no way to help and that the real problem is that there are just too many people on the planet to feed. However, this is entirely untrue. It really is possible to reduce and alleviate world hunger. In fact, the Earth holds enough resources to feed everyone currently on the planet, and even more, if the resources were more efficiently managed. For example, there are many people in industrialized nations who routinely fertilize, water, and mow lawns on soil which could also be used to grow food. While I am not saying there is anything wrong with that practice, it is just interesting when the same people claim there to be no possible way to feed everyone on Earth. Of course, not everyone has to grow gardens instead of lawns, but more gardens would surely be a good practical idea with a wide variety of personal and world benefits. While it is true that the Earth can only produce a limited amount of food and that there is a limited carrying capacity of people, that capacity has not yet been reached.

Regarding the subject of world hunger, population growth should be talked about more directly, even though the fact is that most cases of hunger in the world are currently not due to unavailability of food, but rather due to the world’s food being unequally shared.

**Population Growth**

There are many places in the world in which there are more people living than can be supported by the local land area. This does not necessarily mean that the region is overpopulated as long as the people there produce other goods or services which can then be traded for food. Of course, this is how every major metropolitan area in the world sustains its population. Unlike those regions where there is chronic hunger, the people have been educated so that they can work to trade goods and services for food that is grown elsewhere.
This has been going on in the world ever since the first cities were formed tens of thousands of years ago, and it can surely continue on long into the future. However, there are some limits to how many people the world can sustain. The human population of the world has been going up nearly exponentially with modernization, as can be seen from any population chart by year. We have noticed this trend, however, and many have been making choices to reduce their number of children so that the population growth can be reduced and level off some time in the future. Such efforts could prevent eventual overpopulation. At this time, the planet is not actually overpopulated, as the total current population could be sustained healthily if the world’s food resources were shared more efficiently and better managed so that less good food went to waste.

Currently, there is only overpopulation in certain regions. Interestingly, it has been found that the best means to help prevent overpopulation is through education—particularly women’s education. It has been found that where girls and women are educated, birth rates go down. Of course, it is not only education that has this effect, but also the means of contraceptives and birth control. This is why extremely helpful organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) work both on reproductive education and providing reproductive healthcare such as contraceptives and birth control to men and women who live in regions where such things are otherwise unavailable. Such support is especially helpful in regions which are currently overpopulated, though similar programs supporting family planning are a good idea everywhere. For example, groups such as Planned Parenthood help people in making life decisions regarding reproduction in developed areas as well.

A general trend that has been identified in many places is that birth rates often decrease after the survival rate increases. This has to do with the fact that in many areas children are considered to be the livelihood of parents. In such cultures, parents often desire to have children who will live into adulthood so that they can support them when they grow old. So when it is the case that many of their children are dying due to disease, the parents may actually intentionally have more children under the idea that doing so will increase the chances of at least one of them surviving into adulthood. This thinking is obviously illogical in the cases where a lack of food and water is the problem, but it actually makes some sense in cases where there is enough food and water but disease is the problem. As such, medical advances which help children to survive and decrease the child mortality rate can actually have the effect of decreasing birth rates. As such, helping reduce the incidence of disease can counter-intuitively result in less population growth, especially when properly combined with education.

That is one reason why advancements in cures to diseases like HIV, malaria, and other diseases are a good thing for the world even with regard to population. Regarding a cure to HIV, there is one idea I have come up with that I would like to suggest as a treatment and possible cure to HIV infections. This suggestion has to do with the fact that there should be some cases in which some individuals are immune to HIV. If a person does have natural immunity to HIV, it would probably mean their white blood cells (primarily the CD4 T-h lymphocytes and perhaps others) are immune to the virus and identify it as a pathogen to be removed by the immune system. If it is found that a naturally HIV-immune person does have white blood cells which are immune to the HIV virus, those cells should be cloned. Then persons infected with HIV could be given transfusions of the live cloned HIV-immune white blood cells.
Such a treatment would boost the immune system of the person with HIV and possibly clear up the infection entirely as a cure.

Obviously, it is best for people to use condoms and abstain from intravenous illicit drug use to prevent getting HIV and spreading it in the first place, but not all cases of HIV are contracted by such means. And even when they are, it is easy to say such things after the fact. Regarding this topic, it is interesting to note that there have been some cases in which condoms and birth control have been refused by those who they were provided to. In most cases, this is probably due to lack of education which should be easy to clear up through better information. For example, some uneducated aid recipients have been lead to believe rumors that condoms make people fat, which is obviously untrue to anyone with scientific education. (One possible correlation to this rumor may be that people who have received condoms have also received food which had high-fructose corn syrup as an ingredient, which has actually been indicated to make people fat due to the way the liver processes fructose.)

With regard to population, many educators have been doing a great job of increasing awareness throughout the world. For example, Hans Rosling is a brilliant professor who has become widely known for his classic TED lecture presentations. Rosling, who is an expert in population statistics regarding socioeconomic development, believes avidly that it is possible for all countries to become healthy and wealthy. The way to do this is for those who are already healthy and wealthy to share their wisdom and advancements with others who are in need of help and could use improved conditions. Such wisdom and advancements includes, of course, such things as: medicine, education, democracy, infrastructure development, and more productive farming methods.

Still, some people are happy continuing their traditional cultures and do not wish to convert to more modern techniques. That is a fine and should be wholly up to them. While there are advantages of new agricultural techniques, such as vastly increased yields, there are also some benefits of older established styles of agriculture. For instance, the ancient practice of using domestic blends including hearty strains has been a tried and true way to prevent the total losses that can sometimes result from monoculture genetically-modified strains, though not all genetically-modified strains are bad. Everything considered, we should offer options and information and allow the public to make their own choices about things involving them, especially with regard to matters involving health, food, and water.

**Potable Water**

Perhaps one of the greatest developments that can be given to a community in need of it is a clean source of drinking water. There are many communities throughout the poorer regions of the world which continue to only have dirty sources for drinking water. Some even have to walk miles to retrieved dirty water which has to be filtered several times before use—and even then people can still sometimes get sick from it. Such is an example of the difference between those who are in relative poverty in modern nations and those in absolute poverty.
There are some non-profit organizations that have been working on developing clean drinking sources for impoverished communities for some time—such as Water Wells for Africa, which has been going for 16 years strong in the hard to reach areas in Africa. Water Wells for Africa has stood by the fact that water is one of the first priorities in helping peoples’ quality of living and developing communities out of poverty. There are also newer non-profit organizations that have made some more recent breakthroughs in progress—including Charity Water, which is a multi-continent water development group placing water wells in impoverished communities that has placed focus on the modern ability to show the proof of their work online. Such programs are helping us on the way to universal water for all, which is obviously one of the very first things each individual would wish for themselves.

In some of the most remote regions where it would be too difficult or impossible to deliver equipment to put in a well, other methods such as simple filtration are needed. Regarding this, there has also been a simple solar water disinfection method identified to make water safe for drinking. This method, called the SODIS water purification method, uses the ultraviolet radiation in natural sunlight to kill many viruses, bacteria, and parasites in water. For the SODIS method to work, the water must first be clear, which can be accomplished by filtering the water through materials such as paper or cloth. If clear water is placed in a clean, clear PET plastic bottle and placed in direct sunlight for at least 6 hours, the ultraviolet radiation in the sunlight will kill many of the microbes that can often make people sick. This is a very economical method to use when purifying water by other means such as boiling, using iodine, or advanced filtering is more difficult or not available.

On the topic of drinking water, there is a questionable practice which has been going on for some time in several countries. While developing countries are trying to filter their water to get contaminants out, some industrialized nations have been intentionally adding contaminants to their water. The particular contaminants being referred to here are fluoridation compounds. Fluoride has been suggested to be added to drinking water to decrease the incidence of dental cavities. However, some studies have shown drinking fluoridated water to be detrimental to health and have indicated the benefit to tooth health of water fluoridation to be less than previously portrayed. Too much fluoride is actually known to be detrimental to teeth, as shown by the condition of dental fluorosis, and the positive dental effects from fluoride are known to be from its topical action on the surface of teeth, which means there is no need to ingest fluoride supplementation systemically.

Much to the contrary, there is actually good reason to remove chemical fluoride compounds from drinking water, because they are industrial waste byproducts that are detrimental to basically all living organisms. Unnatural fluoridation compounds are absolutely not essential nutrients and are toxic when ingested. That fact is part of why all toothpastes containing chemical fluoride compounds have a warning label on them to call poison control if more than a small amount of it is swallowed. Even fluoridation advocates recognize that the function of fluoride compounds to prevent or slow dental cavities works through the surface of teeth, and that ingestion should be avoided as not to go into the rest of one’s body systems where it is detrimental.

For a long time, many intelligent and informed medical scientists, such as Dr. Russell L. Blaylock, have warned about the many neurological damages and slight behavioral changes caused by ingesting
fluoride compounds that were kept concealed from the public. Some have indicated that ingesting chemical fluoridation compounds can cause restlessness, increase the risk of cancer, contribute to bone diseases, disrupt thyroid function, and detrimentally accumulate in the brain to cause other problems. While others have thought all of the worries about water fluoridation are unwarranted, numerous recent studies have made it into the public media informing that water fluoridation has been linked to decreased intelligence quotients in children. There are now many citizens, such as those of the Fluoride Action Network, working to spread awareness and stop involuntary water fluoridation.

Regarding the numerous detriments to natural health that are be caused by ingesting toxic unnatural fluoridation chemicals, it is concerning that adding them to water has become state law in many places. While the fact that there were many ignored cautions regarding the true damages of fluoridation compounds is concerning and its original proponents may be worth investigating, the most useful thing for people to do now is to have fluoridation of their drinking water sources discontinued. Wise citizens of democracy in states where the fluoridation of their water has been mandated should form a petition for their state legislature to vote to stop the mandatory addition of fluoride compounds to their drinking water at the next election and then have fluoridation ceased.

In the meantime while public water is still being fluoridated, the slight amount of fluoridation chemical in the water does not need to be feared. At the current lowest legal levels (which all places carrying out water fluoridation should reduce their levels to), there are only slight amounts of fluoride chemical in the water which will make it only mildly detrimental to body tissues. Staying hydrated is one of the most important things for one’s health, so a person should be sure to drink enough water to stay hydrated even if that requires fluoridated sources. Most of the negative effects of fluoridation chemicals in the short term are relatively minor and it is the long term effects of buildup in the body over time on many individuals which brings more detriment. So, while buying non-fluoridated bottled water or filtering drinking water can be good ideas, such things aren’t absolutely essential so long as it will only be a couple years until public water fluoridation is ceased through legislature changes.

It is quite a loose association, but the problem of unemployment in some modern countries may be related to polluting their drinking water supplies with fluoridation chemicals. The loose connection between the two would be the effect of ingesting fluoridation chemicals being linked to reduced intelligence quotients, as well as some of its other negative effects. However, the correlation refers more to the illogical ways of thinking that have been taken on in some modern areas, mentalities that are in need of major reconsideration.

**Unemployment**

The issue of unemployment has been something that many civilizations have faced and found creative ways to overcome. When all of the jobs in a civilization are filled, it is actually a sign that the civilization is highly functioning. Still, it is a problem when people are out of work and cannot find means to earn income for themselves.
The issue is more complicated when there are many unemployed and yet there are still jobs remaining unfilled. Obviously, in the cases in which entry-level jobs remain unfilled, the average jobless person needs to put more effort into finding a job, or skilled people simply need to take a job that requires less skill than they have in order to perform some role. And in the case that skilled positions remain empty, it is obvious that more people need to become educated in those skilled professions to fill the jobs that require more training. This can be done by providing the opportunity for people to become educated through things like college loans.

In the cases in which all of the foundational jobs in a civilization truly are filled and there are people left without work, there are several things which can be done. For instance, other jobs can be created as enrichment after the most crucial core jobs involved with maintaining the necessities of a healthy society—growing food, teaching, building materials, maintaining health and safety, providing necessary living items, etc.—are fulfilled. After those important roles and the other positions available in well-functioning civilizations are filled, entrepreneurial work which is not necessarily required for a functioning society but has cultural value can be branched into additionally.

Such extra work includes creating or selling art. It is a nice thing when societies have all of the required work for sustenance being performed so that skilled artists can produce forms of art such as literature, decoration, music, comedy, and other entertainment. Other additional positions which are nice to have in a society include interpersonal services such as talk therapy, massage therapy, or jobs related to enjoyable recreation. Obviously, jobs in these areas have already been ongoing in many of the societies which are now experiencing joblessness, but they could still be increased. Beyond such a nice suggestion, which could improve the quality and enjoyment of many lives while increasing employment, other ideas exist including restructuring for the future.

In the past and present, public work projects have been funded by the government to provide jobs for the people. Such projects include investing in infrastructure maintenance or construction or research and development for scientific advancement for the future. In addition, military service has been a frequent option for work service provided by governments. It is sometimes difficult to understand why military service, beyond providing defense, will go to means such as instigating war in other countries but not developing other countries peacefully. It seems that if funding is going towards sending people to other countries for war, it could just as well go toward developing them.

For instance, if all the work is being done in one nation, but there is work to do in another, it seems that a logical option might be to finance doing work in other areas. This is a suggestion that is hard to fathom with the current mindset in the world, and will surely be considered impractical by many, but such thinking could perhaps be better developed into the future as the world becomes further interrelated. Indeed, such things are already being carried out by non-profit groups as well as major organizations such as the United Nations Development Program. But if more of the current funding going toward the war machines of the world was redirected towards true development efforts—both internationally and within nations—it would surely lead to a much improved world from the current state of affairs.
Of course, there is always the current thinking of increasing manufacturing, which seems to be one of the only ways considered to create jobs in the current market mindset. However, that current market mindset of continually making more stuff to sell has been one that has led to depletion of resources and other quite unsustainable practices. Surely, more jobs can be created toward more efficient technologies, especially new energy and more efficient urban design. Those things are what will be needed to create a wiser and cleaner civilization that surpasses the current dependency on fossil fuel resources. However, more creativity than that will be needed regarding unemployment as our civilization becomes more and more efficient.

One newer suggestion that I have regarding the issue of unemployment is to share the existing workload. It is a simple understanding that if all the work is being done and there are extra people left over, those remaining people not working could simply bear some of the burden for the working people. That would mean that less hours of work would need to be put in by everyone, including the currently working individuals. A way to actually put this into practice would be to reduce the standard full time hours. If jobs hours per worker were portioned down, it would make for more job positions and fewer individuals would be unemployed. It is hard to fathom too many people arguing with the idea of spending a little less time working. The one problem I foresee with this proposal is that some employers at this time actually prefer having fewer employees as to have fewer health plans and to increase profits. However, this mentality of maximal profits will need to be renovated into the future while more social humanism is embraced.

Something to consider regarding employment is that of gender inequality. In the past, there were more commonly held stereotypes in which gender roles were assumed. For various reasons, it was thought that girls and women were to stay home rather than be educated or in the workplace. With this mentality, women would not be considered in unemployment numbers, as the idea was that their job was to remain home and tend to things there such as raising children, cooking, cleaning, and so on. If one does do such work it might not be right to consider them jobless, as such duties certainly are work just as much working at jobs that are more commonly considered as employment.

However, there is much changing in the assumptions that certain jobs, including doing work in the home, are limited to gender role. Instead, more equality is being instilled across the board as more people realize that basically all work is not limited to one gender, but rather can apply to both genders equally.

Gender Inequality

One of the most important things to recognize in developmental efforts is that girls should be given equal opportunity to education as boys. Inequality in education is one of the oldest problems in the world and perhaps the easiest to solve. Beyond youth education, it was also an old stereotype that women should not be allowed to pursue higher education roles such as doctors or professors. These stereotypes have been greatly reduced in modern nations, and women are becoming more equally recognized in both education and workplaces throughout the world. In the most developed nations,
there is less and less sexism and unequal treatment remaining, aside from some continued instances of unequal pay for equal work and marginalized opportunity to advance. However, many areas in the world greatly lag behind in this progress.

It is very important that women be given equal rights to men, especially involving the right to vote and to be involved in leadership positions. Many problems in the world have resulted from the idea that men should make all the decisions. While it simply isn’t really right for women not to be given free choice and equal say in even minor issues, it is actually vastly detrimental for women not to have equal say in societies. There really needs to be more respect given to the importance of the more caring motherly feminine qualities for there to be balance.

Because males are oftentimes more materialistically driven, having a civilization led entirely or primarily by men can lead to a more destructive and less cooperative world. Still, despite there being some differences in probabilities for personality traits between men and women, such generalizations will always have many exceptions. For that reason, all individuals should simply be treated equally regardless of gender so that their personal talents can emerge without the limitations that can come with assumptions based on gender.

As the world advances, the increased recognition for the equal say of women should be very helpful in increasing connectedness and reducing division. As such, it would be recommended that there be more equal representation from women in leadership roles in all aspects of society. This can be done through local programs facilitating the education and empowerment of women, as well as simply renewed recognition for the fact that women and feminine qualities are not inferior to men and masculine qualities. Obviously, women and men can develop all of the same talents and faults. But because some variations in traits and abilities do exist between males and females, it is surely a good idea to have more equally respectable representation of both sexes in a balanced society.

Human Rights Violations

There are many trouble areas in human rights violations which continue to occur throughout the world at this time. Continuing from the previous section, there are many gender-based abuses which continue. Domestic violence against women is one of the most dishonorable occurrences, and perhaps the only way to reduce its incidence is to teach morality and virtue regarding how everyone should treat other human beings well. Regarding abusive relationships, it is also useful for people to be educated to leave any individual who is abusive towards them to find someone else.

It could be considered a human rights violation to not allow women the right to make decisions regarding their own bodies. One implication of this means that making abortion illegal can actually be considered a human rights violation. Likewise, the arranged child marriages that still happen in some areas can also be considered a violation of human rights. All individuals should be free to make their own important life decisions, especially such important ones as who to marry and whether or not they wish to have a child.
Along with the mistreatment of women, mistreating children is another obviously entirely dishonorable human rights violation. While child labor laws have helped to prevent the abuse of overworking children in most all of the developed nations, child labor continues to be exploited in some areas. Groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have been doing a good job of identifying cases where such abuses are happening and reporting them so that action can be taken to put an end to such practices.

A similar human rights violation in this category is that of hate crime. There is no excuse for acts of violence based on things such as ethnicity. Hate crimes can occur from bullying between misguided children who have been taught to be judgmental regarding religiosity or skin color, to adolescents who don’t understand differences in sexual orientation, to racist adults who should know better. In all of these cases, education is lacking. People should be taught not to make stereotypical judgments with the same realization that they do not wish to be stereotypically judged; and even if one cannot help make such judgments, it is critical they do not act on them violently even through derogatory speech.

Police and military personnel can sometimes become abusive in the heat of the moment, with some cases being somewhat understandable in situations calling for immediate action. But human rights violations even in times of crisis should not be tolerated. Even in war, non-combatants should not be abused, which is why there has been a term invented for war crimes, even though warfare itself consists of what in all other cases would be considered criminal. As reported by agencies such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, there are also cases remaining in the world in which people have been or are being legally mistreated by military personnel, police officials, and corrective officers such as prison guards. Such practices of torture should be abolished.

Treatment of even prisoners in inhumane ways is an act of violating human rights. Sadly, there have been reports of prisoners being abused even in recent times in the United States by means such as being detained in solitary confinement for years upon years. This practice of extended isolation has caused extreme psychological disturbances which often persist even once the person is released. It is understood that imprisonment is not intended for enjoyment, and that there needs to be some type of deterrent for misbehavior when one is already detained, but there should be reasonable limits on such practices for the sake of not being inhumane.

Extensive periods of solitary isolation, while not being direct torture, could easily be considered a type of torture. And torture should almost never be condoned. Even in the cases of imprisonment, the purpose should not be to punish, but rather to stop wrongdoing and to protect society from dangerous individuals. While we truly are responsible for stopping wrongdoing in this worldly realm, the role of punishing the guilty is something that is ultimately best left to God.

**Crime & Society**

In the line of speaking of human rights violations, there is a growing problem of massively increasing prison populations in some developed nations such as the United States. This has been
referred to as the “Caging of America” by some. Of course, it is necessary for there to be laws and for there to be deterrents from breaking the law in a civilization, but it is going too far to imprison people for long periods of time who are actually no danger to society.

The law and rule of law should be intended to protect individuals from others. As such, acts of abuse in which one violates the rights of another are obviously the first order things which should be considered criminal and punishable by law. Certainly, there is good reason to have laws which uphold a safe society by criminalizing acts of abuse. This is why police officers should be appreciated for serving the duty of upholding the law to maintain a safe and ordered society through fighting crime, just as firemen are appreciated for their protective service of fighting fires. But when things which are not wrong are made illegal, it causes dissent in the public against police officers.

Beyond the dissonance caused between police and the public when there are unjust laws, it is wasteful to enforce unnecessary laws. People speak of government using money wastefully in the form of social programs meant to help the needy, and yet a great deal of money is being spent to imprison people who are not a danger to society. Beyond this being wasteful, it actually is wrong to hold people in prison for things which were not wrong. While it makes sense to imprison people to for abusing others and to prevent them from abusing others into the future, it should not be the role of the law to protect individuals from abusing themselves. For this reason, it should obviously not be considered a crime to possess cannabis products.

It is plainly incorrect to detain people and remove their freedoms for merely possessing natural plant products. This is especially so in the case of cannabis, as it has been found to be safe and non-toxic. It is simply nonsense to have non-toxic, natural substances illegal while toxic, unnatural ones are available everywhere. It is also interesting to note that cannabis is full of antioxidants and other natural substances which make it healthy when eaten raw—as has been pointed out by many well informed medical doctors such as Dr. William Courtney. It is totally backwards to prevent a vastly healthy plant from being a legal option while it has been a nonconsensual requirement by law in some places to add toxic fluoridation chemicals to drinking water. It cannot go without questioning who it has profited for such laws to be enacted.

The healthcare industry has become overrun by the chemical industry and its idea that profit is the most important thing to consider, which is the absolute opposite of what the focus of medicine should be. The purpose of medicine should be to keep people healthy at low costs. This is why it is extremely frustrating to find that natural treatments for cancer, such as the groundbreaking work pioneered by Dr. Stanislaw Burzynski, have been suppressed by the pharmaceutical industry influence on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is sad that the FDA has allowed many dangerous and non-effective synthetic drugs to be rushed through in catering to pharmaceutical manufacturers, but has been obstructive regarding natural supplements and Dr. Burzynski’s cancer treatment. (This, sadly, probably has a lot to do with the fact that the pharmaceutical industry reaps huge profits from their current harsh primary cancer treatments.)
It is a crime against humanity to have safe cancer treatments like Dr. Burzynski’s blocked from the public while simultaneously allowing chemicals that have been indicated to cause cancer to be added to people’s food and drink. It is plausible that this has occurred in order to sell vastly expensive and vastly harmful chemical and radiation treatments for cancer instead, which just happen to also cause all kinds of suffering through their side effects. And all the while, the naturally anti-cancer plant called cannabis has been made illegal and ignored as a medicine just because some people use some forms of it for intoxication. This has been a crime against society which has prevented the alleviation of a huge amount of unnecessary suffering.

Furthermore, it is very concerning regarding the degree of unnecessary suffering in the world to consider that toxic chemicals have been put into water by law in some places while those same places have made it illegal by law to have physician assisted end-of-life autonomy for those suffering painfully slow deaths from incurable debilitating illnesses. In such cases where recovery from a seriously debilitating medical condition is not possible, free and informed choice of physician assisted end-of-life autonomy considering all involved should be a humane legal option in reasonable states and nations. (Reform concerning this issue has been called for and supported by many organizations and health care professionals worldwide for a long time and has rightly been legally allowed under reasonable conditions already in several places—Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Oregon, Washington—through legitimate legislation, though it remains cold-heartedly disallowed in most of the rest of the world at this time.) Many things have gone wrong in some societies which have ignored respect for human dignity and human wellbeing to instead preserve profits.

In the United States, there has been long-standing corruption within the FDA involving the chemical industry which that society should no longer allow to go quietly unaddressed. Moreover, education regarding the effects of unnatural and not-so-natural food additives (many of which have been making people sick without their knowing the cause for decades now) is needed to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in the modern world and the prevent a downfall in health in modernizing areas.

For instance, it has not been right for people to be ingesting chemically derived artificial sweeteners like aspartame and phenylalanine without being informed that they can cause headaches and migraines. Lack of being informed of such things has led people to suffer headache without knowing the cause and may have led some to think there was something wrong with them when it was really the unnatural additives in their products. While it has not necessarily been wrong for the chemical industry and pharmaceutical companies to profit in tandem from selling such artificial sweeteners alongside the treatments for the symptoms caused by them in the form of headache and migraine pills, it has been wrong that the public has not been informed of those additives contributing to such ailments to narrow down the many possible causes when people develop them.

Moreover, there has been a plethora of pharmaceutical pills sold to treat the vastly various health ailments caused by the addictive additive called Monosodium Glutamate (MSG). Beside the neurological damage that is known to be caused to babies by MSG and the startlingly vast number of bodily irritations that have been found to be affected directly and indirectly by MSG to people of all
ages, eating foods that have been contaminated with MSG can lead to over-eating because of its neurologically addictive properties. Perhaps the worst crime of MSG, aside from the many vague health ailments that occur to a variable degree depending on the individual, is that growing a tolerance for it indirectly causes healthy natural foods without it to become less satisfying—robbing enjoyment from healthy foods like fruits and vegetables and thus causing dysfunction in the dietary health of many people. Sadly, the use of MSG has become widespread in many restaurants, especially fast-food chains.

It should also be known that MSG can be a hidden ingredient in food products. The FDA has wrongfully authorized the food industry to chemically create hydrolyzed proteins which results in free glutamate as a “flavor enhancer”. Contrary to the half-truths, free glutamate is a neurotransmitter which does not naturally occur at high levels freely in foods and ingesting it can be harmful to health due to its effect of sometimes causing dysregulation in its natural production levels, and it has been found to accumulate in the insula of the brain. As such, ingesting MSG and free glutamate from hydrolyzed proteins in foods can contribute to many chronic health problems including the pain of fibromyalgia and the draining symptoms associated with chronic fatigue syndrome. These conditions do not result in all, but can occur in those who are more sensitive to their effects.

Another fact which may be hard for some to believe at first is that many physical, mental, and behavioral problems have been linked to some of the chemical dyes that have been used as artificial food coloring. It is silly to use artificial color dyes that have been found to have detrimental health effects when they serve little to no functional benefit whatsoever. (For these reasons, some wise European countries have already banned particular artificial colors from being used in food.) Moreover, some chemically-derived preservatives—like the butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) and butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) that have been added to many breakfast cereals and other foods—have been shown to not only harm the physical body but also to cause mental, emotional, and behavioral problems in children and adults.

The pharmaceutical companies have profited from the widespread mental and behavioral problems caused by such chemical food additives through the production of yet more chemicals for prescriptions to treat them. Sadly, this has involved treating both children and adults suffering the side-effects of mild toxins in their food as though they have psychological disorders or diseases. For instance, many cases of the physical hyperactivity and mental inattention defined to characterize the supposed mental health disorder of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) are oftentimes really responses of the brain to being polluted with chemicals, such as those listed above.

It has been a crime against society that people have not known about these effects of some preservatives and artificial color dyes being the root of many having difficulty sitting still and concentrating and some even being diagnosed as disordered or diseased and then told they need to take pills to cure what was wrong with them. How could adding more chemicals in the form of synthesized pharmaceutical prescriptions ever cure problems caused by taking in chemicals in the first place? Perhaps the most blatant example of this is prescribing pills to treat restless leg syndrome, when restless leg syndrome itself is usually caused by ingesting pills or other chemicals itself.
While many people have become wise to avoiding chemically fluoridated water and checking ingredients lists as to avoid consuming or feeding their children products with certain synthesized additives like those hyperactivity-causing artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives, it is due time that a serious call for action be made to require all additives to be clearly indicated in ingredients lists and for warning labels on products including unnatural ingredients that have been found to be detrimental. All water which has had fluoride compounds added to it must have it indicated on the packaging and ingredients with any percentage of MSG must indicate it. (Truly, the unnecessary addition of any and all fluoride compounds to drinking water should be ceased and adding MSG to into foods or hydrolyzing proteins should be banned outright so that people do not have to go out of their way to avoid their health detriments.) In the United States, this is what the FDA was supposed to have been formed to prevent, and what it should rightly be used for now to fix; otherwise, its officials or the institution altogether might as well be replaced by an agency that truly has public health as its priority.

Why is it that chemical, food, and pharmaceutical industries have been turning gross profits from the large scale production and distribution of harmful chemicals and unnaturally produced additives for human ingestion while people have been put in jail for possessing the natural and non-toxic substance that is cannabis? It is true that smoking marijuana or eating it after it has been cooked causes mental impairment, other negative side-effects, and can be detrimentally habit forming; but such uses to become intoxicated are actually a misuse of nature’s blessing that is cannabis. When eaten raw, the natural anti-oxidants in cannabis can prevent and fight cancer, as well as having many other positive health effects and uses. But even when marijuana is abused for intoxication rather than used as medicine, it is not as harmfully addictive as many pharmaceuticals when they are used as directed.

Under the direction of the pharmaceutical company manipulated market, physicians have been taught to prescribe the dangerously addictive benzodiazepines for anxiety without even suggesting removing emotional irritants such as certain chemical additives or pork products from their diet. They even prescribe addictive pills before recommending getting talk therapy where some truly effective coping mechanisms such as breathing techniques and meditation can be taught. Likewise, physicians have been taught to prescribe addictive pain killers before educating regarding dietary wisdom including noting the pain-affecting inflammation factor of foods or suggesting natural treatments such as a good stretching regimen, quality chiropractic care, certified acupuncture, or therapeutic massage.

Our doctors have been trained through manipulation by the invasive pharmaceutical industry to get people hooked on addictive drugs which are toxic to the body and our police have been trained to arrest and imprison people for possessing cannabis, which is actually good for the body when used properly. And the drug cartels funded largely by untaxed sales of marijuana, which has been made only more profitable due to its illegalization, have become involved with other illegal trafficking, such as the illegal weapons trade which has contributed to mafias and gang violence, while also being able to fund corruption in government officials. Such practices are true crimes against humanity.

There has been much concern about the national budget, the economy, and unemployment. It should be obvious that the growth and commerce of cannabis ought to be considered employment rather than criminal activity. Once legalized and taxed, cannabis (which also has plentiful uses aside
from ingestion) will support governmental revenue rather than being a drain on it due to needlessly fighting it as criminal to possess. Also regarding unemployment, if fewer pills were sold to conceal the symptoms of anxiety and pain, there could be many jobs effectively created in the arts of educated natural health care such as talk therapists, meditation coaches, yoga and qigong instructors, trained acupuncturists, massage therapists, and so on.

Western medicine has been quite foolish to deny the ancient wisdom of spiritual traditions in order to funnel more profits to the pharmaceutical industry. That inanely materialistic thinking not only totally neglects our spiritual wholeness, but it has also caused massive amounts of pain and suffering that otherwise could have been alleviated. What a crime! It is time that larger society became wiser.

**Drug Abuse**

One of the degradations of society caused by a lacking in spiritual wholeness is drug abuse and drug addiction. The lack of wholeness that people feel inside due to lack of true spiritual wisdom and being tantalized by media is often cheaply attempted to be filled with drugs. Of course, drug abuse has been around much longer than it has been accompanied by the pharmaceutical industry producing modern medications which are intoxicating and have addictive potentialities.

Alcohol is the most widely abused drug at this time, and it is legal for adults in most places in the world. While it is possible for some people to drink alcohol responsibly in moderation, others have difficulty stopping drinking once they have started and can develop alcoholism. Though once universally looked down upon, binge drinking in which one drinks with the intention of becoming intoxicated has become popularized in many areas of the world. This has been largely due to marketing in which getting drunk has been portrayed to be a cool social activity. Advertising has framed alcohol with other naturally enjoyable activities in order to place the idea in mind that it too is naturally enjoyable—despite its many negative effects. There has really been something robbed from people in promoting through advertising that a celebration requires consuming alcohol, especially when alcohol is detrimental in most every way, when otherwise people could more freely celebrate anytime without it.

Perhaps the most subliminal enticement of drinking alcohol for youth has been the way in which it has been portrayed as an “adult” activity. Because the idea that one has to wait for something creates a desire for it that would not necessarily be there otherwise, making it illegal to drink until a certain age has had the effect of increasing the desire of youth to drink. In the United States, extending the drinking age to 21 years old has extended this effect far longer than in most other countries where drinking alcohol becomes legal at 18 or 19 years of age. While this marketing ploy has actually increased the sales of alcohol for the distributors, it has taken a negative toll on the youth who have been drawn into the temptation of rebelling. By holding the drinking age to the oldest possible age that society would allow, it has made drinking seem courageous and more exciting to the youth into a later age—in effect, prolonging immaturity for them while it is still breaking the law for them to drink.
Once one turns the age to which drinking becomes legal, much of the glamour fades away and there can actually be a reduction in binge drinking. But because of the increased inclination for young adults to drink caused by extending the drinking age to 21 years old, many have already developed alcoholism or drinking habits by the time it is legal for them, which obviously can then continue legally later into life. Again, this is considered a gain to the alcohol industry, though it takes its toll on society in many ways. These tolls include negative effects in relationships which can happen due to individuals acting foolishly while drunk, failed work roles due to hangovers, and healthcare costs or even death tolls due to motor vehicle accidents involving drunk drivers.

In the same way that making alcohol illegal for youth can actually make it more enticing by giving it a false sense of courageousness, making other drugs illegal can also backfire by making using them seem exciting to people. For those looking for ways to feel courageous through rebellion, which has also been a marketed tendency, illegalizing drugs has made them more attractive. The juvenile temptation of foolish rebellion can get the best of good people who try to impress others or themselves with the idea that they aren’t afraid of breaking the law.

While using drugs recreationally is not necessarily wrong in itself, it is an unnecessary risk which can have negative results, especially if done irresponsibly. The intoxication caused by drugs can make people much more likely to do irrational things or act carelessly to take stupid risks. This can occur both when directly under the influence of drugs or even when experiencing their residual after-effects. Poor decisions made while under the influence of drugs can lead people to lose dignity in many ways, which is why it is generally advised against by knowledgeable and caring adults. Entire lives can be destroyed by the detrimental effects of drug use and drug addiction. Now, drug addiction is obviously avoidable entirely if one chooses not to use drugs, or to use them in moderation if they do.

While the most common attempt to try to reduce drug use has been to harshen penalties through stricter drug policies and enforcement, decriminalization efforts have also been successful in reducing drug use and drug related crime in some countries such as Portugal. The progress made by decriminalization efforts has probably been due to providing educational rehabilitation to users and addicts rather than penalizing them. Of course, even if minor drug offenses are decriminalized, it would obviously be a bad idea to make dangerous drugs openly legal for sale, and the black market production or trafficking of truly dangerous substances should rightly continue to be fought so their availability can hopefully be reduced or eradicated.

While I am certainly not an advocate for legalizing or even decriminalizing all drugs, it is certain that cannabis and marijuana should be legal. Considering the fact that tobacco and alcohol are already legal and widely available in most places, the ‘gateway drug’ excuse for having marijuana illegal in those same places really makes no sense at all. Despite the fact that abusing cannabis by smoking marijuana or eating it after it has been cooked causes intoxication and many negative types of impairments including anxiety and paranoia, it is basically impossible to overdose on cannabis, even when it is intentionally abused. But again, cannabis and marijuana are better not used with the intention of intoxication through smoking or cooking it.
Nonetheless, ingesting marijuana even in raw form is still a substance and could be mildly habit forming and intoxicating in large doses. But even if potent marijuana is eaten raw as a natural anxiolytic in large enough doses to be intoxicating and often enough to become habit forming, it is surely the least damaging anxiolytic that any could become addicted to considering its positive physiological effects rather than negative ones. The minor withdrawals from marijuana, which are more problematic if it is smoked, are nothing compared to the painful and potentially fatal results of withdrawal from benzodiazepine addiction.

In deciding which substances should be illegal, decriminalized, or legal for sale, the true effects of each should be considered. If prescription drugs with major addictive potentials like benzodiazepines are legal with a prescription, marijuana should at the very minimum be legal with a prescription, as it truly is an impressive natural medicine to be ignoring while instead selling harmful artificial ones. It is up to the individual if they use it for health or for intoxication. Of course, wise citizens must follow the law where they live in order to stay out of legal trouble. And regardless of the legality of substances, it is best not to become intoxicated before or during driving or other important tasks to avoid risk of injury.

Aside from the health risks that come with intermittent drug use, such as breathing difficulties and heart problems from smoking and increased risk of accidental injury from drinking, many more health problems occur if use becomes chronic with addition. Of all the struggles in life, drug addiction is something that people struggle with which they would not have to if they avoided such substances. So if one is struggling with problems, adding drug use to those problems is really a poor idea. Because of the fact that life becomes much harder if one becomes chemically dependent on drugs and then compulsively addicted to getting more of them, it is observably the best idea to avoid abusing drugs and thus to prevent dependency on them. While chronic tobacco use can cause cancer and chronic alcohol use can cause liver failure, the effects of addiction to the more dangerous drugs are much worse.

Since the criminalization of drug possession has done little to stop the demand for drugs, it can only be hoped that education such as that provided herein can be helpful. This must be hoped in the case of the drugs that are already legal such as alcohol and tobacco, and should be helpful in teaching that marijuana should not be used as a drug of abuse but rather respected for its medicinal properties as it is becomes decriminalized and legal for sale in more states. Because it often tends to make the draw for anything worse by making it forbidden, simply informing of why doing something is undesirable can leave it as naturally unappealing instead.

In the case that a person does become addicted to a drug to where cravings occur if use is not repeated, the only way to correct it is to reduce its use so that dependency is diminished. This will require some suffering through the cravings, but that is required to break the habit and such suffering will diminish once the addiction is broken. Especially with dangerously addictive drugs, this will require tapering down the amount and frequency of use so that dependency will gradually lessen.

Breaking an addiction includes discomfort which can be extreme in some cases, and withdrawals from narcotic or even alcohol dependency can potentially be fatal. For addicts who repeatedly become addicted again and again despite treatment and honest efforts, it is said that a supervised treatment
using the natural plant brew ayahuasca can be helpful, though often very discomforting. Medical treatment in safe environments with other psychedelic substances have also been indicated to be helpful for some therapies, though irresponsible use can be dangerous and even responsible use can cause discomforts. Again, such discomforts are avoidable entirely if a person chooses not to abuse drugs or avoids them altogether. It is as simple as that.

It must be known that it is wisest for any individual’s own wellbeing to follow the law where they live and thus safely avoid getting into the troubles that come from breaking the law. Still, reform toward more logical drug policies can be enacted through proposing legislature change and voting on it in free democratic systems of government, which have been found to be the most successful type of national political system. Some particular points regarding national political systems which determine the rules of action of a nation’s government and their intended roles are discussed in the chapter following the next.

But first, the subject of environmental problems will be analyzed. It is through both individual action and governmental action that such social problems as have been discussed in this chapter and the environmental issues to be discussed in the next chapter can be lessened or resolved.
Chapter 20
Environmental Issues
(Pollution & Global Warming)

Environmental issues are largely an extension of social problems, and environmental problems can ultimately return to take tolls on people and society. So it is important to address the environment while discussing the problems the world has come to face and the obstacles we need to work toward overcoming.

As a place to start the discussion from the last subject in the previous chapter, it is interesting that much of the pollution in the form of litter that is found in developed societies is composed of empty alcohol and tobacco containers. This can be found in the form of empty booze bottles and cigarette packaging, especially along roadways in many developed areas. It is not surprising that individuals who have been led to poison their own bodies would also feel indifferent to polluting their environment. But while it is usually mostly only the individual’s own body and life that is affected by drug use, polluting the environment affects everyone who shares it.

It is obviously hypocritical of anyone who has littered to speak against it. But hypocrisy is something that needs to be faced if anyone is going to improve, and it is never too late for one to choose to pollute less or even go the extra step to actively clean up the environment to diminish the negative impact they and others have had. The truth is that most all of us have had some kind of impact on the environment through living that can be considered less harmonic than would occur if nature were left to itself. But this can be reduced through a little effort from those who have grown the heart to take reasonable concern for the fact that we will need to take care in our actions if we plan to have a manageably clean and healthy environment as civilization continues on this planet.

Obviously, if each individual picked up a piece of litter for every time they had littered, there would be no more litter in the environment. But, as it is hard to convince others, perhaps any individual who decides to change might like to set a goal of picking up two pieces of litter for each time they have littered, or more. Some individuals may even decide to pick up after others who have been slovenly and have littered even if they have never been guilty of it themselves. Hopefully more people will become environmentally conscious over time as awareness increases and more spirits begin to wake up from repression by the ego and its false bolstering by the influences of egocentric culture. Some will need to volunteer to serve as good examples and clean up for the past as the progression occurs to where less littering occurs in the first place through personal choices.

Beyond litter, which should really be the easiest environmental problem to start with fixing, there are many other serious environmental issues to address as we become better shepherds over our environment. Some of these issues include watching over and maintaining the species which continue
the balance of nature. Nature has its own feedback systems which create naturally sustaining balances over time when unaltered. This occurs over long periods of time through evolution in which different species fill different niches in ecosystems. When some of those niches become unfilled due to changes, things can become off balance and lead to larger issues from smaller ones. That is why it is a good idea to protect species from extinction.

To keep things in a moderate perspective, it should be kept in mind that species have come and gone naturally through time long before humans began to really change the world through processes such as hunting, industrialization, and urbanization. Still, it is certain that it is worth paying attention to our impacts so that we do not throw nature too off balance—since we are obviously also dependent on nature, no matter how much we view ourselves as dominant over it. This is why preservation programs which leave areas for natural habitat are a wise idea to maintain. Even in altered environments it can be a good idea to leave some room for nature and try to allow ecosystems to naturally maintain themselves where possible.

While it is smart not to overlook the small alterations that can add up to larger issues, such as being more environmentally-friendly from the bottom-up, many have also focused on bigger global environmental issues from the top-down. The most well-known of these in recent times has obviously been that of global warming. Scientists have found that the average temperatures around the world have been increasing as a trend over the past few decades. The evidenced effects of this warming include shrinking polar ice caps and glaciers and the rising sea levels that go along with that. Of course, as has been pointed out by many knowledgeable scientists and laymen, this trend is to be expected, as the Earth would currently be in a warming trend, called an inter-glaciation, without any human activity anyway. Many have pointed out that the Earth has always gone through cycles of temperature change through time, and that the factors involved in that can include many things, such as fluctuations in: solar activity, the Earth’s magnetic field, ocean currents, and cloud cover.

Still, there is substantial evidence to show that human activity, particularly burning fossil fuels, has probably significantly accelerated the slow warming that would be occurring otherwise. And many scientists have forecasted that the continued burning of fossil fuels could continue the trend of warming past what it normally would have been, perhaps throwing the global environment off balance. Indeed, the increases in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere already will take some time to set in as the world warms. Many have worried the warming will influence natural climate change in a way that will be detrimental to our civilization. Some believe there has already been evidence of this in the form of more extreme weather. Of course, it is hard to say for sure to what degree human activity has influenced global warming, and also to what degree global warming has influenced extreme weather.

It is possible that there have been other influences on the weather through human-made weather modification, such as the facilities under the name of the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARPA) in Alaska and military projects testing the use of chemical spraying or “chem-trails” for weather modification. (Such weather modification, by the way, should be limited to minor local uses like disrupting inclement weather such as hailstorms and benevolently managing rain or snowfall for civil and agricultural uses. Tampering with major parts of the global environment like
HAARPA, widespread chem-trailing, or other geo-engineering are bad ideas that should be avoided because of the major disruptions in ecosystems that would occur due to them and the unforeseen damage they would cause to our civilization.) Still, even if some of the more recent weather disruptions have been due to secret governmental testing of potential weaponry such as HAARPA and chem-trailing, the reality is that global warming itself could also have some major detrimental effects.

But as the planet continues to warm and sea levels slowly rise, the extreme weather that occurs will surely have to do with many more factors than our burning of fossil fuels. So it is not really correct to blame extreme weather on the use of fossil fuels, which truly have helped our civilization advance. Nevertheless, it is still certainly wise that we heed the warnings of many climate scientists and attempt to lessen our pollution of the atmosphere by reducing excessive uses of fossil fuels. As such, I am promoting a moderate and reasonable stance regarding fossil fuel use which embraces living life and using fossil fuels for necessity, comfort, and recreation, but also recommends efforts to be more fuel efficient for the sake of maintaining the environment for those who will share it in the future.

It is a bonus that a person can also save money by reducing their use of fossil fuels. Of course, that is why people have been conservative with their fossil fuel use since long before it was recognized as being harmful to the environment through pollution. There are many things a person can do to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels, most of which are commonly known. The good old standard of saving electricity include the plain means of turning off electrical appliances when they are not being used. It is important to conserve electricity because most of it currently comes from coal power, which does cause some pollution as a side-effect of the extraordinary process of making the electricity which allows our lives to be much easier. But even where electricity comes from renewable energy sources, it is wise to conserve it by modern means such as more efficient appliances (though enjoying life can certainly sometimes surmount efficiency). Likewise, conserving the use of liquid fossil fuels is a good idea, which currently mostly involves transportation. Improvements in that category have come recently in the form of vehicles with better fuel efficiency.

Hybrid electric and fully electric vehicles have also become available, which is a sign that we may one day be able to switch toward primarily electric power and be far less dependent on the fossil fuels which modern civilization is highly dependent upon. While electric vehicles fueled by coal-powered electricity still involve some pollution, they can also be run on electricity generated from cleaner energy sources that cause little to no pollution. That is a great advancement. And when other means of energy production or alternative fuels for vehicles are developed, they must be researched and developed to be given a chance at implementation to larger scale production. It has got to be known that it is entirely unacceptable for new energy innovations to be corruptly suppressed from development.

The recent progress in clean, renewable electricity sources such as solar, wind, wave, and tide energy are very hopeful developments for a cleaner and more sustainable future. Advancements in the productivity and efficiency of these energy technologies, as well as other breakthrough new energy developments, should come with time to produce clean energy in the future. Of course, for now it is fossil fuel energy that primarily moves us toward the instilment of those more lasting means of energy production, and fossil fuel use will surely continue even once other means have been implemented, so
striving for fuel efficiency is still a good idea in the meantime. (More about environmental concerns regarding sustainability will be talked about in the chapter following the next.)

Many proponents of large scale change have promoted the involvement of government with environmental issues, which is a logical idea considering that the government is supposed to protect the people, and preserving the natural environment is a function of protecting the people. This is why reasonable laws regarding pollution regulations are a good idea. They help protect the global environment and, in turn, everyone dependent upon it. While individuals can freely manage their own environmental impacts within reason, and the actions of many individuals over time add up to big differences, the businesses and corporations that make more significant impacts daily need to be kept responsible for their effects on the environment through reasonable legislation.

It is also important that large governments invest in new energy research and development for the good of the people and the good of the planet. While the idea of money efficiency is important, it is not nearly as important as natural efficiency. Money today is literally generated by computers and printed, but the natural resources in the environment and the amount of pollution the environment can sustain are physically limited. It is obviously true that inflation occurs with more money being printed, but that merely shows that there is a difference between the value that money represents in trade and the value in goods themselves. That is why funding for developing things like recycling is a good use of resources while funding toward developing things like more weaponry is a poor use of resources.

No matter what one’s opinions are regarding the environment and the economy, the role of government should be to maintain a functioning civilization which represents the people. The latter is especially the focus of democracy, in which citizens utilize their right to vote regarding political officials and legislation. Democracy has been found to be the most effective system of government once a republic has been instituted to protect the rights of individuals. More regarding national administrative systems is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 21

Government

(National Administrative Systems)

There have been many models for government through time. In more primeval times, there were many monarchies in which kings and queens ruled their city-states or kingdoms based on “royal” authority, which was oftentimes assumed through birthright of certain bloodlines. This type of thinking has been surpassed throughout most all of the civilized world, as it has become known that governing is best done through a coordinated effort in which there is free political discussion and joint decisions wherever possible. Democratic systems work out much better in the long run than tyrannical regimes in which authority is taught to be assumed ultimate and never questioned. Such dictatorships tend to be too callous to civil rights and liberties of the common citizens, and it is truly the citizenry from which any government must receive its authority.

The best working model for a good government is one that is based first on protecting individual civil rights. Such a foundation for a government is called a republic. Perhaps the best existing example in the world for the basis of a republic is the Constitution of the United States of America. The United States Constitution recognizes that all are born equal and guaranties certain freedoms, at least until one is proven guilty of a crime. The purpose of the constitution of a republic is to protect free individuals from tyrannical oppression, which could otherwise be carried out by a government, with the intention of preventing individuals from being treated unfairly. (The USA PATRIOT Act and other “Homeland Security” acts sadly include some questionably unconstitutional legislation which must be removed if the United States wishes to be a true republic in which due process for all citizens is protected.)

After the important guarantee of freedom and protection from unjust treatment is established for a government, the next most important piece of a national administrative system is a functioning free election system in which representatives for various roles are voted into the governing body. This type of representative democracy is best done through a system in which candidates for office are free to enter elections and in which each candidate is given an equal amount of publicity so that the voters are informed about the opinions and stances of the candidates on relevant issues.

Giving candidates equal amount of publicity and citizens equal opportunity to vote is the only way for a free democratic election to be fair. Sadly, because of the influence of money in politics throughout the world at this time, certain campaigns are often unfairly given special attention due to monetary financing by influential special interests. When campaign finances make certain candidates more heard than others, the election process cannot really be considered fair.

It is very important for functioning democracies, and all administrative systems for that matter, to be free from corruption and open regarding their actions. This means that all governmental
administrations should be as transparent as possible. In other words, the government should let the public it serves know about all its actions. This means that the topics and discussions of governmental meetings, aside from personal information, must be open for the public to review and discuss. There should not be secrecy regarding political matters which involve the citizenry, and public officials should not be allowed to manipulate governmental actions to suit their own private interests.

In much of the world, the greatest challenge to overcome regarding government is corruption within its operations. To avoid corruption, government officials should be financially reimbursed well enough so that there is no need for them to try to manipulate government matters to serve themselves more financially. As such, it would be wise for government officials to be guaranteed generous pensions so long as they did not participate in any corrupt actions while in office.

The temptation of corruption with temporary terms was one drawback avoided by rulers having life-long kingships in the past, but today it is a measure of the honest character and morality of the individual to choose not to tamper with things in attempt to stack materialistic gains for themselves over others while temporarily in office. Good, responsible officials work to leave a stable system after they are done with their term, even though they will no longer be the representative. This is obviously why it is always a good idea to try to elect officials with good moral characteristics. But because of the risk of temptation, there must be legislation which bans all acts of governmental insider trading, just as corporate financial officers are banned from insider trading.

But beyond it being important that government officials do not use their positions to unjustly serve themselves, it is more critical yet for the government not to be influenced to serve the rich financial “elites” who use money to influence politics. When a government becomes ruled by the rich, it is called a plutocracy, and plutocracies function to serve the interests of the rich, rather than serving all the people—which is obviously a problem when the government should serve the public’s best interest. (But even the rich should logically understand that a government which serves all people equally will always serve them as well, but a government which serves only the rich would not protect them if they were to lose their riches. So it is ultimately in their best interests to support a government which supports both rich and poor, and all in between, well.)

Regarding corruption and the influences of plutocracy, true crimes should be penalized equally for all classes. It is entirely disgusting to see cases in which the rich and powerful temporarily get away with injustice. (I say temporarily, because there is no getting away from the one Sovereign God who sees all and who has a running list for every individual’s actions. It is nice to know that Sovereign God is not petty about trivial sins, but only a fool would think God cannot tell right from wrong regarding morality and how one treats others and the world.)

In a proper democracy, the people get to vote directly on less complicated public issues along with voting for their political representatives. It is when the voters of a nation or state with a proper democratic government get to vote on their own officials and laws that the government truly becomes a government by the people, for the people. Otherwise, even in a democracy, if the people do not involve
themselves in the government, it is too easily run by special interests which do not necessarily have the
good of the people in mind.

Still, even with the public’s active participation in a participatory democracy, the government
can become influenced by corrupt others if there is not transparency. This is why governmental actions
should never really be concealed. While it is a good quality for individuals to be able to respectfully
withhold secrets and information concerning others’ private business which does not involve anyone
else, much evil has occurred through the larger secret-keeping mentality regarding corruption in
governmental organizations and their significant affiliations.

Now, for elections to truly become fair, the campaigning process should not be dominated by
money. To make this change in some nations, there needs to be campaign reform. Ideally, candidates
should be allowed equal media coverage, all candidates should be required to post a list of their views
on certain topics for open public review, and money should be taken out of campaigning so that
politicians would no longer be influenced by campaign contributors and so that money would no longer
be able to effectively buy elections through advertising. Where these ideals are not met, there at least
needs to be practical regulation for campaigning to be fairer. Moreover, it is time to reduce slander-like
smear campaign tactics which negatively portray the competition, but rather have candidates uprightly
talk about how their own ideas are good and sound.

Politics in some areas have led citizens to view their own fellow citizens as enemies. This has
especially been the case in the United States where the largely two-party system has grown to now pit
“Republicans” and “Democrats” against one another, when they are all truly simply Americans. It is sad
that such a system has brought people to bitterly dispute one another as though whoever is not on the
side of their political party is the enemy, especially when all the people of a nation should obviously be
on the same team in the form of one nation.

I hope people everywhere can move past such dichotomies and false divisions and grow beyond
seeing people as either allies or enemies in such a way. Do not let yourselves be so easily pitted against
one another! Underneath it all, in areas where there is a lot of money involved, both parties are often
being influenced to give attention to the same intrinsic assumptions that the politicians’ handlers want
to keep the public focused on for their own purposes anyway. This often has to do with why you will see
both candidates continually talking about the same things—for instance, money and war—which
indicate what their handlers want people to be focused on.

That old nonsensical ideology needs to be moved away from and done away with. For the
United States, the idea of the “national debt” is mostly imaginary in the first place, because it is simply
money that the Federal Reserve has printed for the government, which really makes no sense to expect
to be paid back. And the focus on war has simply been to legitimate spending by the government toward
the military supply companies with some of the money that it got from the Federal Reserve, which it
made out of nothing. The politics just keeps the people arguing based upon the same old assumptions in
the hope that they won’t catch on to that reality going on in the background.
Now, the national administrative systems of government involve far more than political elections. National governments have ties to overseeing commerce and serve the people by facilitating trade and public services. Many governments today work by taxing the public sector to fund social programs, such as infrastructure including: public roads, public water, waste management, safety services, and public education. It is very beneficial to have a government which provides such public programs, as most anyone in a developed country must agree. In some more advanced countries, social services have also included socializing basic healthcare services and programs to assist those in poverty, as a humanitarian service as well as a means of helping them get themselves on their own feet.

Such social advancements have been crucial in developing nations into modern ones. It is interestingly contradictory that some in modern countries have been influenced to oppose socialism as some kind of enemy without realizing they are already reaping the rewards of socialism through the socialized functions within their own governments—such as those public infrastructures of roads, sanitation, public education, safety programs including emergency response, and so on.

It is really odd that people have been led to believe there must be a fight between free trade and socialized public functions. The idea that those things exclude each other is a type of fragmented thinking which is fundamentally confused and has been shown to be untrue. In fact, every major economy in the world at this time is an example of a reasonable merger of both the ideologies of free trade and socialized public functions. All modern nations, which are currently existing mergers of those two non-opposed but rather cooperative systems are examples of the different degrees of intermixing that can occur with them, and their different resulting satisfaction levels pay tribute to the successfulness of such mixing.

One flexible model for very successful national administrative systems can be found in the several governments which share the general ideology called the Nordic Model. The Nordic nations of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland are fine examples of the intelligent use of well-functioning free democratic administrative systems which nations can develop toward. The Nordic Model has been shown to be a highly stable model for government in educated and cooperative nations which facilitate a high degree of freedom and a high quality of living through focus on equal rights and honest participation of the citizens and the public officials. The success of the equality-based framework of the Nordic Model works by continued respect for private ownership while including many socialized functions which work to support the wellbeing of all current and future citizens.

Very unlike the ideology of totalitarian communism, which has historically been shown to be oppressive of individual freedoms and human rights as well as highly prone to corruption, democratic nations with socialized public functions have been shown to work well on all levels. In such systems, free trade is used in the market for efficiency and the right to free choice of businesses and individual property and wealth is respected along with state-facilitated cooperation. Of course, with advanced social structures to ensure better wellbeing for all, there is often a higher tax rate on those with the highest incomes as to develop more equitable financial distribution.
Such systems do not simply take from the rich and give a free lunch to the poor, but rather work to ensure that society functions well by facilitating able people to be educated and working, and only having increased taxes after individuals are fully covered for their own comfortable living as well as being able to earn plenty extra for leisure and retirement. As such, individuals are still freely allowed to earn more and own more than others and to be able to have luxurious things and experiences as they wish through their work. Such proven functioning systems show greater levels of satisfaction among all and prove there to be very good alternatives to a more just and equal world today than the old ideas of rigorous communism in which total equality was viewed as some type of ultimatum.

While the best model for government does not require absolute financial equality, it surely does include the promise of truly equal rights. And a good government should facilitate equality in access to universal clean water, universal primary education, and universal access to basic healthcare. Each person under a good government should have the opportunity to be healthy and educated and to earn a good living. Surely, there must be freeness of choice in profession, room for advancement, and also the option not to advance within one's profession. People should be able to earn a decent living or more and be allowed the option of sharing their extra. In this way, the world can become much more equitable and harmonious by choice without trying to force it to be equal.

Still, within a free system of trade based on the concepts of capitalism, there does need to be some governmental action to moderate through taxation. This certainly does not mean that no one can be wealthy, but simply that those with more finances do need to be taxed to share toward socialized public programs. For any of the rich who might think about griping about sharing wealth with the less fortunate, I might recommend imagining living a week in the life of a poor person in need of basic health care. That would probably quickly change one's mind toward the idea of more sharing. Considering the reality of the fact that many at this time can make more money in a day of work than others do in a month might even alter their attitude to actually being happy to share toward helping others in need. That is part of what has already been recognized by many and enacted into the taxation systems that currently exist and continue to flexibly change through the continual modifications made possible by modern democratic governments.

Moreover regarding government and finances, most realize there cannot be totally free rampant markets without any oversight or regulation, because that is far too risky and can have very损害ing results—as was shown in the recent United States banking and insurance market crisis of 2008 which required governmental bailout to repair for irresponsible corporate financial practices. That widespread crisis proved that markets cannot simply go unwatched under the idea that the market will govern itself. Furthermore, because nature’s economy is ultimately the most important economy, there does need to be continual regulations protecting the environment, and thus humanity, from the destructive path that rampant capitalism leads itself down when left unchecked.

Though it is fine to have things for enjoyment beyond mere necessity, it is quite foolish to idealize capitalistic gain to make things we don’t need in the idea of a “healthy economy” if it involves polluting the environment and human beings through things like unnecessary chemical production that could be avoided. A purely capitalistic mentality might actually think it is a good idea to produce
chemicals to feed people to damage their health and then sell more chemicals to treat those health problems. By that same mentality, other utterly wasteful practices such as planned obsolescence can actually make perfect sense when viewed capitalistically. But anyone who values human wellbeing and the wellbeing of other life on the planet must see that purely monetary incentive for action is a totally detrimental one that needs major rethinking.

It is the role of a wise public and its governing body not only to uphold public wellbeing in the current time, but also into the future. And that means governments should wisely watch pollution and sustainability. After all, politics and finances will not matter much if the environment becomes too destroyed to support humanity anyway. It is erroneous when matters such as national deficits to the banks that simply print the money in the first place have been made a big deal, as if the public would be expected to print money to refund the central banks in return. Making stress over such things is ludicrous compared to being wise shepherds over the environment. That is why it is important for participatory democracies to vote for leaders who value humanity, the environment, and sustainable practices which will be able to serve civilization long into the future.

For many reasons, the current mindset in many capitalistic countries of infinite economic growth through more and more needless production has got to be matured past—though globalized free trade should rightly continue to advance the world by bridging gaps through more equal trade and development. All around the world, governments need to become more coordinated in sustainable efforts which put less focus on artificial economies driven by short-sighted plans for profiteering and more focus on humanitarian effort within nature’s natural lasting economy.

Nations need to strengthen themselves through their own governments with progressive reform while improving their global collaboration. As was already suggested regarding global government, it is apparent that the world is not ready for one. If the world does one day advance to the stage where a switch to a type of global government might be feasible, it would be most feasible and peaceful to leave the current national borders as territory lines simply to designate independently chosen laws within those named historical and geographical regions as states of the world nation.

But again, what does need to be done on the level of global government now is to have an the International Criminal Court ratified and augmented to more seriously be able to try all international criminals not being held to justice within their own countries for things such as war crimes called for by government officials and humanitarian crimes overseen by officers of international companies. This would work to keep international players more honest and the world better balanced and just.

The topic of the next chapter, and the last chapter in this part of the book briefly addressing some points regarding our world’s current challenges is the topic of true sustainability, which will be the most pervasive issue continuing with the world as it evolves into the future.
Chapter 22
Sustainability
(Planning for the Future)

For any system to be sustainable, it must be balanced. Imbalanced systems can continue for a short time, but will eventually fail once their imbalance destabilizes that upon which the system itself was founded. This is why, if any system plans on continuing for any time into the future, it must be careful to maintain balance.

There are many examples of ways in which imbalanced systems can be prolonged, but in the end it will ultimately be best to keep any whole system balanced from the bottom in order to make it sustainable into the future. On the level of the world economy, this means trying to instill balance in trade and development. It is wise for individual countries to work toward self-sufficiency in goods where possible, but the whole world system has been able to balance local imbalances through interchanging goods and services. Free trade has guided this arrangement of global cooperation quite efficiently so far and should continue to into the future as interconnection increases and places lacking development continue to be helped out.

In the process, there are some concerns which cannot be ignored regarding sustainability. Perhaps the largest concern for many has been air pollution, which affects the global atmosphere and has been correlated to global warming. Of course, air pollution has been recognized as a problem and individuals have already begun reducing their unnecessary burning of materials within reason while continuing to live their lives. That is all that can really be expected along with the continued progress in increased efficiency and reduced emissions. Continued work regarding the development and implementation of new clean energies is an inspiring field which should be able to sustain the energy needs of the future. Such new energy should not only decrease pollution but also allow us to become less dependent on the limited fossil fuels on which much of the world is currently dependent.

More and more electricity should become generated from non-pollutive sources such as wind energy, solar energy, wave energy, tidal energy, and more. This should allow electric power for things like heating, cooling, and lighting to be produced as to improve lives with far less air pollution. In addition, architectural designs which wisely use geothermal energy can ease existing heating and cooling needs. These sources and others, including possible magnetic and gravitational techniques of electricity production, should provide clean electricity to power many of the grids that are now run primarily on coal.

In addition to the conventional clean energies, there should be new breakthrough energies possible. For instance, whatever device Edward Leedskalnin used to neutralize the weight of the stones for his Coral Castle could be used to lighten one side of a wheel upon an electricity producing axel, with
gravity on the other side causing the wheel to continually turn and produce unlimited electricity simply through gravity. But much more advanced means will surely become known eventually. (Some, including members of The Disclosure Project, believe that new energy technologies already exist but have not been shared publicly due to secrecy and control by larger industries wishing to preserve profit from older technologies.) With the coming advancement of electricity production, there will also be less demand on petroleum as more vehicles become partially or fully electric.

Of course, because many products are based on petroleum, there will continue to be plenty of use for it even after we are able to run civilization without so much burning. Because many of the products in modern civilizations at this time are based on our limited petroleum, we will need to start to reduce the use of petroleum products by converting to other products and recycling more of the products that do not require petroleum. With increased recycling of petroleum products such as plastics and reduced use of petroleum products altogether through reuse and alternative use, we should be able to decrease our pollution considerably and sustain our petroleum reserves into the future despite their limitations as non-renewable resources.

Still, less petro-chemicals and more environmentally-friendly products should be used. For example, many cleaning products could be replaced with less harmful substances such as plain vinegar, which works as a solvent for light cleaning. Moreover, all products and their packaging should be designed for less waste and more reuse. It is irritating when companies make incompatible product parts and even go so far as to intentionally plan to make their own products obsolete and require replacement instead of making products to last. Across the board, more planning considering the future will be a helpful activity by good companies, individuals, and communities.

One positive case where much more sustainable planning has already been implemented has been recycling projects. Many establishments have made recycling receptacles available to dispose of recyclable products. Cities with reasonable connections to recycling projects and the funding for it have smartly implemented pick-up for recyclables along with their waste disposal systems. Recycling things like metals is important for long-term sustainability because metal ores are limited, non-renewable resources. Moreover, making metals is a damaging process and recycling them after they have already been processed from ore is far more efficient. That is why metals, as well as glass, have often paid to recycle. One thing which it would be good for recycle projects to implement would also be more places for used batteries and other electronics to be dispensed or picked up, because such things should not be thrown into regular garbage due to the harmful effects their components cause on groundwater if sent to landfills. Now, it is surely no sin not to recycle, especially in cases where recycling is not readily available, but it is nice to participate in recycling where it feasible.

Even recycling renewable yet recyclable products including paper is useful as our civilization continues to grow. Trees are renewable resource, but it is still helpful to conserve them by reducing paper use or recycle paper products and using recycled paper where sensible for sustainability. While new trees can be regrown on tree farms, the old forests and jungles harbor ecosystems which hold the balance of nature and should be preserved where it is possible. It is not as though no tree should ever be cut down, but it is a good idea to keep them where they are not causing problems or preventing
progress. In other areas where there is a lack of trees, it is oftentimes a good idea to plant them so that they can do their natural work of absorbing CO$_2$ and producing O$_2$ to for us to breathe, like all vegetation does, as well as serving other functions. Trees can be used to help prevent soil erosion from both wind and water, and fruit trees can even be a source of food where the habitat is suitable.

Plant life is also good for urban settings, as shrubs and trees liven up cities. And small gardens are a great idea for their natural ability to produce food out of mere dirt, water, and sunlight in any place where the three are available. There are a vast variety of seeds to choose between today from which anybody can decide what food to grow. Many new urban developments are including garden projects to help reintroduce nature in the form of plant life to urban settings, to grow healthy food in this time when chemical additives are hard to avoid in many store-bought foods, and also to provide a good therapeutic social activity in tending to them. Gardens can be grown in a variety of places, even if the only available place is rooftops in the most packed cities. Such projects are an idea for a sustainable future that can be implemented in cities all over the world.

Improved urban planning has been an area of civil engineering for some time now, with more efficient buildings and city plans always being drawn up. Many renovations and economically-friendly redevelopment projects are happening to make existing cities more efficient, and new cities being built in this modern age are being more efficiently designed from the start. Some very innovative ideas for future city planning have been drawn up by brilliant groups such as The Venus Project. While some such total technological designs are far out, the same ideas can go into development in already existing cities. In addition to futuristic planning, there are also more minimalist ideas emphasizing more locality and simple traditional methods such as facilitating more natural mobility through adding bicycle lanes and biking roadways.

Public transportation in the means of buses and railways have been highly efficient means of transportation that has been around for a long time. These types of public transportation in which many people are transported together behind one engine are vastly more efficient than transportation in which a separate engine is used for each driver. High-speed railways often make transportation even faster and more efficient where they are developed and used. For those cases in which individual cars are more efficient but not always needed, there are car-share programs being developed in which members can use community vehicles for designated times. Many intelligent advancements such as these will continue to make our civilization logically sustainable into the future.

Amid the many advancements, there are also some concerns. Perhaps the most currently concerning limiting factor in sustainability has been the availability of drinking water. In many places, drinking water reserves are being depleted due to areas being overpopulated for their local water production. This problem has become worsened by warming temperatures and will continue to be due to increased temperatures into the future. The best thing that can be done regarding dwindling water supplies is for people to be more conservative with their use of water, which generally means reducing use of water on things other than drinking it. Though it is not an urgent issue in places where there are not current shortages or foreseeable shortages, water-conscious individuals may still wish to reduce water use wherever they are.
Probably the easiest way to conserve water is to simply turn down the flow of water when it is being used, such as during washing or bathing. Many showerheads reduce water consumption, or a conscious individual can usually simply turn down the water flow as they shower. More water efficient appliances and toilets are also becoming available, as well as ways to modify older ones to consume less water. Though many places with limited water reserves may not realize it, where it is a critical issue there are water restrictions enforced. In highly populated places drawing on limited fresh water reserves, it is smart for people to decrease their water waste even long before there is any sign of water there running out, for the sake of future generations.

While the fresh water reserves around the world are renewed through the continual water cycle, the rate with which they renew is limited. This means that the water use in a region needs to be balanced to the amount of natural water renewal there. Of course, this can be augmented by pumping in water from other sources, as is already being done in many places. But such practices are still limited as to where that fresh water comes from. One relatively new way to produce more fresh water for drinking is through the desalination of seawater. Because our Earth has so much seawater, the modern engineering of the desalination process is a very promising success which indicates that it is possible for the world’s population to be sustained long into the future.

Currently, the high electricity demand of desalination makes its use limited. This is especially so because most of our electricity is currently produced from fossil fuels. But as better electrical energy production is developed, seawater desalination will become a more feasible process. In the future, new energy production will be able to power water desalination as a part of the common routine along the shores of all continents. This may lead to more people moving toward the oceans, but water will also be able to be pumped inland. In such a way, the honest concern of the availability of fresh drinking water should be able to be overcome. However, limited water sources are still a serious current issue and will remain to be even after desalination becomes more common, so people should be mindful of in their use of water within reason.

Regarding limitations of life’s necessities and sustainability, population is always a factor. The best means of population control is simply for people to be educated about reproduction and careful to avoid unplanned pregnancies. If a couple does not wish to have a baby, this obviously means not having sex or using contraceptives or other birth control if they do. And if an unplanned pregnancy does occur, the option of aborting the pregnancy is something that the woman should have the free right to choose if she does not wish to carry a baby and become a mother at that time in her life.

On the other hand, if a couple does wish to have their own offspring, the number of children should not be legally limited. Many couples choose not to have more than two children as to not replace any more than themselves, but if a family can support more than two children and wishes to, it should be their option to do so. When China legally limited the number of children to one, it caused some troublesome results including many female fetuses being aborted so the one child could be male. (That was upsetting because neither male nor female children should be valued more, but it understandably occurred due to many factors such as women’s inequality in employment and pay rate in China at the time.) Of course, couples can freely choose to limit themselves to having one or two children, or choose
not to have offspring, by their own choices. And for those couples who do wish to raise children but do not want to increase the population, becoming foster parents or adopting from local orphanages or internationally are sensible and noble choices.

Continued education regarding all of the global issues in the world will be the best means of overcoming all of the challenges we collectively face. The vast expansion of education for all currently underway throughout the world is the greatest source for inspiration regarding the sustainability of civilization on this planet. Though our population is far larger than ever before, our ability to learn from one another and cooperate is now greater than ever. This increased education and access to information has come just in time for us to begin implementing it as we move into the future optimistically as individuals, families, groups, communities, states, nations, and as one global family.
Part Six

Our Future:

Moving Forward
Chapter 23

Personal Development
(Changing for the Better)

As each individual continually moves into the future one moment at a time, they develop through their experience of life. The continual experience of life causes all individuals to change slowly over time. Indeed, because all experience can be viewed as change, it is an unavoidable result of living that a person changes. The only thing one must do in this experience of life is try to guide their own changes to be developments for the better, as opposed to changing for the worse.

The best way for one to tell if they are changing for the better or changing for the worse is to note their own mind state. If they are becoming more aggravated and upset with life and others, it is a sign that they may be changing for the worse. On the other hand, if the changes one brings about within themself allows them to be happier, it is a sign that their development is improving. Of course, what one experiences in their external environment must be considered to have influences on their own mind state, but if one continually expands their horizons and becomes more understanding of others, such development should help in even negative conditions.

In the face of negativity, an individual can work within themselves to find clarity and understand that succumbing to hate is a loss of the struggle of life. Even if one has correctly identified things that may be deserving of hate—such as abuse, injustice, deliberate spreading of ignorance, manipulation, and corruption—it is not good to spend one’s thoughts thinking about that hate. Rather, it is better to think of what one can be thankful for and work toward overcoming obstacles. This process is helped if one can root out any insecurity within themself which might hold them back from truly developing within this world which often seems to try and invoke responses in us based on fear.

Life is best moved through motivated by open pursuit of understanding, rather than motivated by fear. But sadly, most people who have not been awakened to that intrinsic truth of life will simply go about life merely seeking pleasure and avoiding distress. The fact that many in life are simply being led around avoiding discomfort and seeking pleasure can be inhibiting to one’s own progress through the influence from those blinded individuals teaching that to be all there is to life. This is why it is important for each individual to wake themselves up from the blind materialistic view that can often be imposed by others. To be enlightened to the reality that life is truly a journey of the soul can be like awakening from a simple evolutionary autopilot. Waking from that state can be like opening one’s eyes for the first time to see, or it may be like a slow process in which one’s free conscious spirit progressively engages from where it had previously been inhibited from being actualized.

Today it seems that there is not only an effect of people happening not to awaken, but it as though secular culture has been actively suppressing this realization as if to try to make us soulless. In
truth, we are all free agents in life who have the ability to wake up and see the vitality in life—to realize this life in such a phenomenally capable body and mind is a great opportunity to advance the spirit that it houses. This awakened realization can make life a vastly more purposeful experience than just some day to day act of merely keeping oneself entertained.

It is unbelievable how so many have become blinded by the modern world to the fact that the very essence of living and learning is a sacred process. This is something that was understood by many totally basic people in ancient times, but that has seemingly been lost in the sands of time and replaced by some idea that life itself is not sacred but only certain places and things within it. What a total loss it has been to have life’s process of improving ones understanding of the sacred nature of reality emptily replaced with a blinding egocentric mindset focused on materialistic goods which one will never be able to take with them after this life is through.

In many modern societies that have become lost in materialism, people have been trained to simply continually bolster their own egos—tricked into thinking life is about trying to find reasons why they are better than others. They get into arguments over how they were right and others were wrong in some effort to protect their old viewpoints, as if that today has anything to do with them anymore. It is a sad trick that the ego plays on people to think life is some big fight to see who was the most right. How sad it is for people to become distracted in such a way from the fact that life is truly about enjoying the experience of life and developing oneself through the process!

It is one of the worst confusions for people to be led to think that what others think of them has anything to do with who they really are. What you think of yourself does not necessarily even reflect who you truly are, so how could what others think of you reflect what you truly are? Now, while an inflated ego that persists by trying to think of how one is better than others is a truly damaging thing, to both the carrier of that ego and others, there is nothing wrong with having healthy positive self-esteem. And one’s self-esteem should have nothing to do with what others think is important, but rather the understanding that one has made personal progress through life.

While one can cater to the expectations of others through means such as fitting in with the current fashion trends, there should be no need within oneself to impress others to have a positive self-image. In fact, trying to base one’s own worth from the opinionated views of others is a totally wasted effort. Oftentimes, people merely want you to think like them so that they can feel supported as right. Why even let oneself be bothered by others who try to enforce their own social judgments on others as a type of reinforcement for their own subconscious insecurities?

In contrast, one can tell from their own experience that it is enjoyable to interact with non-judgmental people. Non-judgmental people are able to feel good about themselves without trying to point out perceived faults of others to give themselves a false sense of superiority. It should be obvious from being more comfortable with non-judgmental people that it is better to be influenced by them rather than being influenced by judgmental ones. And if one truly gains insight from this observation, it should be recognized that others will enjoy your company more if you too develop yourself to be less critically judging and more relaxed with oneself and others.
It is simply natural to enjoy being around humble and friendly people. Having the insight to recognize this, one should realize that it is good to be humble and friendly. Oppositely, having more pessimistic views can make a person not enjoyable to be around. Indeed, having a negative outlook can even make one not enjoy being around themself! If one notices any of this in themself, it should be clear that the only true way to fix that is to develop themself through practice to be more humble and friendly so that they can more truly enjoy being around themself. One can develop their own mindset to be more optimistic by letting go of negative attachment and assumptions and working on new thinking. This can really improve one’s experience of life from the inside.

There are certain things a person can do to help facilitate their own progress toward true development of the self—even today in this world full of materialistic arguments and distractions which can leave one void of self-development if they do not slow down and sift through what truly matters in life. Aside from learning from good advice given by great teachers through reading and meeting people in life, a person can also learn from themselves through insightful practice. One practice which can be done to learn from oneself is the calming mental development technique known as meditation. Through meditation, an individual can develop their current self through available present times into a future self that is more favorable than the past self (or perhaps also to return some of the lost positive elements of one’s self from some time in the past back into their current self anew).

But even if one does not want to change their current self, but rather simply to be able to better enjoy life, developing the art of meditation can be helpful. One can use meditation—which comes down to a training and mastery of one’s own mind—for many purposes, such as developing thankfulness and radiating good will, as a stress relief technique, or as a creative process. For many with stressful lives in this sometimes hectic world, one of the greatest benefits of meditational practice and development is that it can improve one’s ability to remain a calm warrior through difficult situations between meditation sessions. Or, much to the opposite effect, meditation can also be used as an interesting journey into the mind’s eye that can surprisingly be an escape from boredom. In any type of use, meditation is a centering activity which aids in personal development through relaxed focus.

No matter how one chooses to use meditation, it is an extremely useful skill which can be utilized by the common person to develop their inner self, which is the only thing one can take with them when the body dies. Whether developing the self through calming the mind to a quiet emptiness which can quell anxiety and reduce stress, seeking harmony with the Divine to radiate thankful good will, or to bring forth vision or light from within the third eye, meditation can be carried out most anywhere at any time—whether over short periods or for minutes on end.

From a basic use of words, meditating includes freeing the mind from thinking. But when meditating, it is not that one is not thinking, per se, but rather that the person is not thinking in words. This can seem foreign at first to one who is used to always frantically thinking in words in lines strung continually one after another, but it can become a more natural state with practice. (It should be noted that fleeting thoughts in words while meditating are fine too; and one can even focus on a particular word while meditating if they wish—such as love, peace, forgiveness, etc. It is only in a more restricted view of classical meditation that the mind is trained to focus on nothing but emptiness.)
To help in making the breakthrough to being able to meditate by clearing the mind from thinking in words, one can close their eyes and use the mind’s eye to focus on visualizing something—such as envisioning the whole Earth turning in space, not having anything in particular about it in mind, but just seeing the whole thing from a calm distance. One’s own issues fade away when envisioning the world globally, and this view can also help one to see how we are all connected by the planet.

Another technique to clear one’s mind of thoughts in meditation is to imagine perception through the heart rather than the brain. Because the heart does not think, but instead has pure wholeness that accepts its own being without need of thought, bringing one’s center of focus to the heart rather than the mind can be helpful in quieting a restless mind for meditation. From focus on the heart, one can actually cease thinking with the mind and instead focus on feeling with the heart. This can be beneficial because the heart is often more solid in oneself than the reactive mind. Also, because the heart has the strongest magnetic field in the body, one can imagine radiating the magnetic energy around the heart into the space surrounding their body as a rainbow of light into the darkness of space, spreading the peace of the heart outward.

Or, in even more visually focused meditation, one can envision their energy field augmenting the intertwined magnetic fields around the whole Earth. Such a powerful visualization can almost remove the spiritual seat of consciousness from the thinking mind into the seeing mind which operates on a level of being that is not whatsoever constrained to the stresses of one’s life. As such, meditation can be a total escape from life’s stresses momentarily—which is a much more effective thing to do than to eat, take pills, smoke, drink, or do drugs, as some people have been tricked to do despite those things really being superficial activities that only reduce one’s ability to truly cope with stress on their own.

Working on sitting for quiet meditation can take a little time to practice, but it is time well invested as it is ultimately one of the most effective ways for one to calm a restless or distressed mind through patience. Some particularly nice things about meditation are that it is a totally free activity and that it requires aid from no source to depend on, so it can never run out or become unavailable. As such, meditation can be viewed as an endless divine gift of conscious intelligence from God, and can even be viewed as a form of worship if one recognizes God above their own developmental process as the One Source that granted it. Thus, meditation should be acknowledged as an intrinsically inborn gift of consciousness from God the Creator that many didn’t even have a clue they’d been given.

After one has learned how to meditate, the simple fact of knowing how to meditate can increase one’s mindful awareness of their own mental state, and having become accustomed to the peaceful state of meditation through practice lets one know that peace and calm is always available within yourself as a state that you can self-actualize in a moment’s time if need be. As such, meditation is a limitless calming and insightful activity which fosters self-sufficiency and independence rather than dependence on any kind of crutch like the mentioned substances. Becoming dependent on using substances as crutches to get through stress can only make things worse—for instance, chronic heavy drinking has been found to alter brain function in a way that causes the individual to become less able to properly handle stress.
One who has not yet learned how to meditate may be tricked into thinking they need to resort to substances for false anxiety relief, but learning how to meditate (and then remembering to actually practice meditation) truly works much better. Moreover, much to the opposite of using substances for anxiety, which can often leave a person more anxious when they wear off than they were to start out with, developing the mind through meditation over time brings a continued level of clear connectedness that remains with one between meditation sessions. But the greatest achievement of the awakened self that is made possible through meditation is that it can actually bring one’s own mind to be their ally instead of something to be at odds with.

If one has tried to sit and calm the mind through meditation and has been unable to successfully make progress despite practice, it could be due to having chemicals in your system. Artificial food coloring dyes and many unhealthy preservatives can cause restlessness that may impede meditation due to their pollutive effects on the brain and body. Many may react to this true information in disbelief, but it is true that such things can contribute to restlessness and agitation. So if you or others in your life suffer from restlessness or irritability, it could have some to do with ingesting unnatural chemicals. If so, trying changing to a diet more free from such chemical toxins can help one physically relax enough to calmly go about life, perhaps even including personal development techniques like meditation.

The body is very closely connected to the mind, so if one has many unnatural additives or other toxins in their diet it can pollute the mind and make spiritual progress more difficult. As such, not only is an unhealthy diet full of unnatural additives bad for one’s physical health, but it can actually impede personal development such as getting over mood swings. The difference one’s diet makes in this is significant, as one can find out for themselves if they give a natural diet a try. To do this, one can simply research a little to educate themselves about detrimental food additives and then read labels to avoid them. This can be especially helpful with children’s diets. While some may choose to go entirely organic, a person can simply change to having more natural food choices and fewer artificial ones to reduce their intake of the pollutants that are currently being added to many foods.

Removing chemicals from the diet and having more whole raw foods can also reduce chronic pain. If one has difficulty with pain, or simply if one wants to maintain good health, another thing they can do simply regarding the diet is look into resources about the inflammation factor ratings of different foods. Inflammation factor ratings indicate whether a food tends to increase or reduce the amount of inflammation in the body. In general, more processed foods with more unnatural ingredients will tend to cause more inflammation, and thus contribute to worse pain. Many natural foods reduce inflammation, though others can cause it, especially ones high in gluten. Making dietary changes according to the inflammation factor of foods can make a big difference in chronic pain and can be useful knowledge for anyone interested in maintaining general health. The inflammation factor of foods and the fact that some food additives worsen diffuse chronic pain is relatively new knowledge that should become known to all doctors, especially ones who specialize in pain.

Along with a good diet, many types of exercise can be helpful practices for physical problems like pain, as well as personal development. Strenuous aerobic exercise such as running has been recommended by doctors for health and can be used for weight loss and stress relief. Many find such
exercise to be rejuvenating and therapeutic for the mind while also keeping the body in good physical condition. For those less inclined for rigorous exercise, or as additional physical activity to aerobic exercise, there are also lighter activities such as simply walking, stretching, or the more advanced yoga and qigong. While yoga has become a popular exercise almost everywhere, the great ancient art of qigong (pronounced “chi-gung”) is little known to much of the world at the time of this writing.

Qigong and yoga are both guided forms of stretching which help keep the body balanced and fluidly flowing. Along with good stretching in proven poses, yoga and qigong incorporate mindful breathing techniques which help for relaxing the body and the mind. (These breathing techniques can also be used by themselves—as deep breaths and intentionally slowed breathing is relaxing for the body and soul.) Like meditation produces peace of mind to relieve stress and augment mental health, yoga and qigong can help produce peace of body and can be used for many chronic conditions. Peace of mind and body are important for spiritual development while alive because the spirit functions through the living body in this life, and peace is most suiting for spiritual development. These practices also train personal development through working on patience by consciously slowing down and relaxing.

People can also use yoga and qigong as parts of a holistic therapeutic regimen to manage chronic pain. Both work to relieve pain by keeping nerves from being pinched and producing healthy blood flow to muscles, ligaments, and joints. But even if one does not have difficulty with pain, yoga or qigong can be incorporated into one’s routine to reduce stress and keep the body and spirit in tune by stretching and exercising balancing muscles and producing and maintaining flexibility. One can learn yoga or qigong through a teacher or through other sources. Once a person learns yoga or qigong, they can be freely practiced and catered to one’s own needs with the most useful poses and motions for each individual being freely practiced independently as a healthy activity that works for therapeutic stress reduction. Many people can benefit from learning and practicing these healthy and enjoyable arts.

Due to the fact that many people in the modern world have not known about the true benefits of activities such as meditation, yoga, and qigong, they have been susceptible to becoming high-strung and stricken by bodily pain. Without having taken the time to learn centering techniques to bring one to calm focus, it is easy to become scatterbrained in these times of more and more distractions. This has not been helped by the unnatural additives that have been slipped into food and drink, making people also physically agitated without realizing why. Many, including myself for some time before my recent awakening, have been led through various influences to make it even more difficult for themselves to concentrate by doing things like smoking tobacco and drinking caffeinated beverages, both of which can increase alertness for a time but can also cause one’s thoughts to be more scattered or less clear and result in withdrawals from addiction.

The added distractions and chemicals, as well as a lost sense of meaning that has come to many people in the wake of the overly-materialistic and secular culture that has developed in modern times with complete ignorance of the spiritual existence of God, have contributed to the recent widespread rise in psychological upset. Sadly, the response of the medical community to this psychological upset was not to try to find the cause of such upset in truly healthy individuals, but rather to say there was something wrong with the individual and diagnosing them as having disorders or diseases and then
telling them they needed pills to treat what was wrong with them. (In the United States, this may have had to do with doctors assuming the FDA was effectively doing its job and keeping toxins out of foods rather than knowingly letting them in and reassuring everyone that they were not harmful.)

For instance, people with increased restlessness from ingesting all kinds of chemicals like artificial color dyes and unhealthy preservatives were diagnosed as having ADHD and treated as diseased—instead of being informed that removing some of those chemicals from their diet could help them. People suffering headaches from artificial sweeteners or other unnatural additives were diagnosed with migraines—rather than being told to stop ingesting the products with additives that could be causing the headaches. And instead of removing MSG and other not-so-naturally produced additives from foods, more were allowed to be added—while their unrecognized side-effects piled up to cause them a wide number of misunderstood health issues.

But the problem of processed food additives amounts to more than just the suffering of those individuals who eat them and then experience difficulty concentrating, difficulty falling to sleep, headaches, increased pain, and so on. These things have also taken tolls on larger societies. For instance, the costs of healthcare have been largely increased by obesity, which can have to do with the effects of MSG causing people to always feel hungry and the way in which the liver processes excess fructose from fructose corn syrup leading to more fat production. While becoming obese does also include personal factors including overeating and lack of exercise, the effects of excess fructose from a lot of fructose corn syrup in the diet causing metabolic dysfunctions which contribute to type-2 diabetes, insulin resistance syndrome, and many less recognized symptoms such as trembling of the hands with hunger (which can be a sign of disruption within the metabolic system that would normally naturally burn fat for energy instead) in many people is not dependent on any other lifestyle choices.

The lack of knowledge regarding these things has caused vast healthcare costs. In truth, MSG should be banned from foods and only allowed in distinctly labeled separate containers for voluntary use as to be the person’s own informed choice. While regular corn syrup causes fewer health disturbances if it is left in its natural state instead of using enzymes to unnaturally alter its original glucose into fructose, it can be up to the informed consumer which they choose. (The FDA did do a good job of preventing a proposed deceptive label change of high-fructose corn syrup to ‘corn sugar’—though adding sucrose sugar to regular corn syrup to mix sugar and corn syrup would actually be a good compromise.) If any of the issues that have been discussed herein involving unnatural food additives have been problems for you, removing some or all of the products with the related detrimental additives from the diet can be helpful in personal development.

Much in contrast to what the pharmaceutical industry has led people to believe, both physiological and psychological disorders are far more commonly due to the presence of chemicals in the human body and brain than due to a lack of the proper chemicals. This is really common sense if one thinks about the effect that drinking alcohol can have on people. In truth, it is our activities which have the most influence on our own mental health, so it is our activities which should be looked to when attempting to treat problems rather than to pills. As written by the great author Pitirim Sorokin:
The practice of kindness and love is one of the best therapies for many mental disorders; for the elimination of sorrow, loneliness and unhappiness; for the mitigation of hatred and other antisocial tendencies; and, above all, for the ennoblement of human personality, for release in man of his creative forces, and for the attainment of union with God and peace with oneself, others, and the universe.

As one can learn from such wisdom, many psychological problems are best helped by redirection in one’s mindset. It was only because pills can be used to treat physical problems that it was inferred that pills might be used to treat psychological issues as well. While chemical prescriptions can sometimes alleviate psychological symptoms, true medical science is used to fix the source of problems where possible rather than just masking symptoms. Doctors are originally trained to find the cause of ailments in patients and fix those causes, as to actually help patients become healthy; but the pharmaceutical industry has influenced doctors away from that true medical work of figuring out what is causing ailments to instead simply looking at symptoms and reflexively seeking a chemical drug from the pharmaceutical company arsenal they can prescribe.

While some medical conditions are rightly treated by prescription pills, and there are some natural health supplement pills that can be beneficial for health in the absence of a nutritious diet, the idea of taking pills to become healthy has become overused. It is sad that patients have also gone along with this idea, which has probably had to do with all of the various advertisements for pills which have become commonplace in some areas. The use of prescription drug commercials has influenced people to seek doctors for pills to treat things, such as difficulty falling to sleep—though inability to sleep is best handled naturally by taking healthy advice including the simple wisdom that good exercise during the day can help with sleep at night and that one should avoid things like smoking cigarettes or eating foods with chemicals additives in them before bed.

Again, there are some physical diseases which prescriptions are the only way to manage, and prescriptions can even be used for desired results intermittently without causing problems, but many psychiatric prescription drugs can have detrimental effects. It is sad that doctors have been led to prescribe drugs that cause dangerous chemical dependency for issues such as anxiety and pain without even having the knowledge base to inform their patients about the detrimental mood effects of some chemical food additives and the pain-affecting properties of the inflammation factor of foods. Doctors should improve their practice by doing more educating about relevant dietary effects and the benefits of exercise like meditation and the active release techniques mentioned herein—which truly are forms of medicine—as part of their job of improving health and wellbeing. Such education might help them be able to prescribe fewer detrimental habit-forming drugs. (It should be clear, however, that prescriptions to relieve pain and emotional distress can be legitimately called for in many cases and that it can be a blessing they exist when reasonably needed.)

It is total disinformation to deny there being anything wrong with ingesting all kinds of chemicals and unnaturally produced substances and instead telling people there is something wrong with them when they develop ailments from those substances. While lack of knowledge regarding these things is simply sad, the denial of their truth at the cost of the wellbeing of people can actually be truly
frustrating. But while some of this news I have presented can be upsetting to hear and to come to grips with as the truth, it needs to be addressed so that progress can be made. Any time one notices they are becoming upset, they can remember to take a deep breath.

Slow breathing can most always help one return to calmness from among agitation. If one finds themself too upset to meditate, exercise like doing push-ups or sit-ups until exhaustion is a healthy way for frustration to be vented. Becoming upset might be a natural response from learning some frustrating information, but rather than becoming involved in destructive activity, what people must do is believe in the constructive spread of knowledge and work toward future reform. (Some means of working toward social reform including legislative change will be discussed in the next chapter.)

Now, it is not necessarily needed for everyone to avoid all chemicals, but because they do affect all bodies negatively, it can be a good idea to abstain from ingesting them where possible. Especially for those who have been personally affected by any of the health ailments described herein, it may be a personal development task of their own to work to change their diets to avoid those not-so-natural additives that may have contributed to their health problems. There is some truth to the saying that you are what you eat, and eating healthy makes one feel better, as does good exercise.

As more people become educated about these issues, there will be less sickness in society and things should be able to improve relatively quickly in the larger scale of time as the good of knowledge should be able to overcome the bad of ignorance in this day and age. For example, regarding health problems, people can look into the work of functional medicine doctors who are working to find the root causes of many chronic illnesses and to dispel some of the dysfunction that has occurred lately in medicine through diagnosis and treatment symptoms rather than what is causing them. Many doctors are in the progress of fixing misinformation from small topics such as educating about how diet does influence acne to large topics such as the causes of depression and countering the damage being done by overmedicating instead of living healthy.

Despite the fact that a great amount of struggle has occurred in the world due to oblivious inexperience and unawareness in the wake of scientific innovation and the pursuit of profit, the strength of wisdom and good will must eventually overcome setbacks due to ignorance. God has seen this all occurring and has been rooting for our development since the start, knowing that in life the only way to learn sometimes is through the experience of mistakes. It seems cruel, but that is part of life—and any who have ever enjoyed anything in life must know life truly is a gift, even though bad can occur along with the good in this reality. That is why we must all simply strive to avoid doing wrong and learn from past errors while living. We all go through phases, but the progression of those stages must be of improvement in the long run, through learning from any failures and set-backs along the way. Mistakes and wrongdoing are merely side-effects of God’s true blessing of free will.

Many of the faults and errors of modern society, as well as many past societies, have been mostly unintended results. For instance, the fact that many people have become more and more superficial and unrealistic in expectations regarding beauty has been influenced by the work of make-up artists on models (and even image editing on top of that) for movies, magazines, and ads. The people
selling movies and magazines have made such changes in attempt to make them more aesthetically pleasing with the idea of increasing their sales, rather than with the intention of making everyone more superficial and less satisfied with reality. And because most of the media will probably continue to portray unrealistic expectations of superficial beauty as it continues, it will always be on the part of the individual to personally develop to not be caught up by such superficial representations.

The superficial glamorization of popular culture, whether intentional or unintentional, has made those exposed to it more picky with their own appearance and the appearance of potential partners. So, seeing many glamorized models (in the standardized view of the popular culture) has had the effect of causing people to be more superficial. This could be seen to be somewhat detrimental to all people—both those who don’t look like the models, who are then sometimes led to have lowered self-esteem, and also to those who do happen to look like the models, because of the tendency of that to make them become vain. Of course, when talking of personal development, those who do not look like the models simply must rise above caring about such things, and those who do look like models simply need to keep themselves in check about not becoming vain.

Still, one does not need to get hung up on worries about such things, because superficial judgments can be easily brushed away on the part of oneself or if perceived from others. While it is important not to be egocentric and to not view oneself as perfect or infallible, it is also important to never be influenced to think you are defective or that there is something wrong with you. It does not mean there is anything wrong with you if there is anything that could be considered imperfect about your mind or body. In fact, one can view their mind and body as totally sufficient as they are. They are, after all, merely means for the spirit to exist through during this life. Though it can be hard to realize it in a materialistic culture, the truth is we are not our bodies. In truth, the body should rightly be viewed as nothing more than the spirit’s means of existing in physical life. With such an understanding, one accepts superficiality for what it is and thus transcends it.

It often seems that people are trained to be superficial too early in life and become enlightened to non-superficiality too late, but that can be changed. At any time, one can come to realize that the spirit is what is important in life; and one’s body itself does not necessarily reflect the spirit. Something nice to know about this realization has to do with true love. When individuals have true love, they are in love with one another’s spirits, and their souls will be able to choose any form they wish in the afterlife if they develop faith in God during life and are good to everyone. That is a priceless gift that comes with the true wisdom of spirituality and the eternal life promised by Christ. This knowledge should help people move past getting hung-up on body characteristics of their own or others in life.

The truly important thing about one’s body is its health, and creating and maintaining a healthy body is best done through a naturally healthy diet and exercise. Getting exercise and maintaining a healthy diet which includes a variety of natural foods and discludes unnatural additives is also good to stave off the depression and anxiety that can come about through today’s unhealthy culture which is largely materialistic and often completely lost in denial of spirituality. Now, if being healthy and in recognition of the Divine purpose of developing the eternal spirit on one’s own is not enough, it is good to seek help from others. Indeed, it is good to be involved with others for spiritual support even if one is
healthy and doing well on their own. There are many spiritual organizations in many communities which one can choose to be involved in for this, especially churches.

Developing solid and true faith in God is perhaps the most central component there is to being mentally and spiritually healthy. In truth, most problems in life stem either from lack of spirituality or spiritual misdirection. This means that focus needs to be regained in the spiritual rooting of life for many in order to help them resolve their problematic issues.

As was talked about in the preface of this book, the focus on money today is very detrimental, on both individuals and society as a whole. The idea that one will be happy once they get enough money is an ideology that will always leave one unhappy. Instead, if one takes on the mindset that they can be happy no matter the amount of money they have, they can always be happy. Furthermore, happiness should not be contingent on material things like money, or even on experiences—though the prior can be a necessity and the latter certainly can be a source of joy.

Life is wondrous in many ways; and, above all non-permanent materialistic things, it is most about the process of navigating it as an agent of change for the better. But still, while working for the future is important, one should not set happiness as something off in the future. Thinking of happiness as a state that one may get to someday will always leave one unhappy because that very mindset blinds one to the fact that happiness can be self-actuated here and now. This is part of why it is true that money cannot buy happiness. The focus on money for happiness, in itself, assumes that things money can buy bring happiness to an individual—which makes it seem as though happiness is something of non-self that a person needs to take in, when in reality happiness is a state actuated by the self within. This is why it is silliness to think that happiness can come from accumulating possessions.

A child can often be influenced to associate material things with happiness because of the experiences that can be facilitated by things, but it is a confusion to think those things are the source of happiness. It is the process of life itself which is the essence from which happiness comes from, and that essence is given by God, not by money or things. It is true that money can facilitate great things like helping others, but the money is merely a facilitator in the process of helping. Likewise, material things are merely used in the process of life—so want for material things in themselves is a misplacement of value by the evolved mind.

Still, because material things are needed in life, it isn’t entirely senseless to want them for the utility they serve. Nonetheless, while it is not wrong to want things, having too much focus on want causes dissatisfaction. Sure, it may be nice to have some certain thing, but fancying that which one does not have now does one little good in the meantime. So it will almost always be better to let oneself enjoy the current situation rather than thinking of that which is not there.

So, while improvement is good, there is also wisdom in being satisfied with the current situation, whatever it might be. It is true mastery to be satisfied with things now and also use the ability to improve where one can without unnecessary rush. Things can only go as fast as they can go, and stressing to try to make them go faster does one no good. Allowing oneself to acknowledge this and aligning to it can allow one to be free from pointless suffering of dissatisfaction from time itself.
Such a mindset of seeing that one can be at peace with things but also happy to see things improve is the best way of thinking one can assume. And it is more liberating yet to not become dissatisfied when things decay. Problems to overcome always exist in the world, but that does not mean that one must suffer frustration or worry about those problems needlessly. While it is important that one never become indifferent to wrongdoing or neglectful to do what is right, it is truly a masterful philosophy to be indifferent to triumph or loss by merely being content with playing the game. This means that one can enjoy life while still not neglecting the fact that improvement should be made.

There is a level of enlightenment one can attain in which one goes about life experiencing the here and now while never focusing too much on want for themself or even having too much want for others. Such enlightenment includes having empathy without making another’s pain worse through extension into oneself, but to instead acknowledge the suffering and provide appropriate positivity. It is recognizing injustice and wrongdoing for what they are and working to solve them while also being able to tolerate that they exist, so as not to make all existence suffering just because some suffering exists. In this, always remember not to let yourself be tricked into the thinking that those who suffer deserve it, because such thinking is an excuse of the ego to be indifferent.

The bolstering of others’ egos by those who pride themselves on their judgments is an effect of misery loving company. Those with weak wills build up their excuses high to make themselves feel superior, but this is merely an outward response to their unrecognized subconscious feeling of weakness deep down inside due to the very fact that they must continually build up so many layers of armor for themselves to defend their own callous judgments, because they know they are wrong. The weakness of the inner ego that exists in all individuals (which makes for a personal task to conquer in the self-development of all individuals) can similarly be displayed through defensive responses to critiques.

It is a true measure of the development of each individual to be able to recognize the fact that all inner selves have some intrinsic selfishness (though the degree of that selfishness can be diminished though self-work) without becoming ashamed of that fact. The personal feat of acknowledging that some selfishness does exist in oneself helps one overcome any hidden subconscious self-loathing regarding that fact, the repression of which can result in one feeling a stimulus to become defensive about it. So, if one ever finds themself becoming defensive in response to accusations or insinuations of selfishness, true recognition and reconciliation of that fact may be in order. I tell you, it is not wrong to have some degree of selfishness, for there naturally must be some impetus for all work. Even in doing God’s work, I have not been free of some wishes for eventual reward, despite primarily doing it in faith that it will help others to help themselves and one another.

But while some amount of self-interest is natural, too much of it can be detrimental. With greed, people get trapped in becoming weaker and weaker as their ego succumbs to attachment and defense of their money. Greed can eat a person up just like any substance or activity addiction which one becomes furious if others criticize. It is very easy for a person to falter to trickery into the idea that everything is about them and pursuing what they want, especially when many influences have intentionally amplified that very type of mentality. There is a fine line between allowing oneself to enjoy and being consumed by the pursuit of enjoyment.
Industries have catered to egocentrism and exploited the susceptibility of people to empty pride as to profit off of it. Indeed, some marketers have thought themselves very wise to intentionally bring the worst out of people by marketing selfishness as though it were something to pride oneself on. It is really rubbish when some think themselves better than others for having more, with some even feeling the need to try to tantalize others with what they have (which is something much different from simply sharing what one is passionate about). Still, one is best to neither envy nor despise such actions; instead, simply acknowledge attempts to make one jealous as an acting out of a lesser stage of development, which they are. Even if one does feel a bit jealous, jealousy should be something easily done away with as one sees that it is a wasted energy to want to compete with the pride of others anyway.

The real substance of this means not letting oneself become a mere mindless zombie of the consumer media and its advertising, which has been engineered to fuel the ego in order to make one more profitable. It is also recognizable that the media has been manipulated to engineer people to reinforce the very thought patterns they use to make consumers more profitable to them—such as the ideas of manliness, egotism, and superficiality. Letting that manipulation occur to oneself actually indicates susceptibility, not some kind of elite specialness like the advertising would have the consumer assume. In the end, such egocentrism will be forcibly left behind us regardless, so it is not only beneficial in many ways to willingly leave the ego behind by one’s will through free choice while alive, but it is also a wise preparation.

For such reasons, an ego is something that a person is truly better without. Though the media has portrayed it as cool to have a big ego, it is actually a detriment to oneself in many ways including that it requires continual reinvestment to support the idea that one must be better than others. It has been said: “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.” This is true, and all will one day fall before God. But even during this life, having an ego causes needless agitations such as insecurities and jealousies, which are entirely counter-productive to one’s own personal development. If one works on letting go of their ego, agitations such as jealousy and self-consciousness become much less intense and less frequent over time.

And if one develops and strengthens such realizations through practices like meditation, those sufferings of the ego can eventually subside altogether. That is the trick to the serene inner-happiness exemplified by monks. They have rid themselves of the ego and what anyone thinks of them, and have grown beyond worry of such social constructs as what is “cool”. Freeness from such things truly is a much freer state of being and gives a liberated feeling of nirvana. This, again, is a characteristic of the enlightenment which has been portrayed as so elusive, but truly can be blossomed fairly easily and developed over time through study of dependent co-arising for understanding and self-training in meditation to sustain a more lasting attainment of peace.

And still, no matter one’s status—whether high, low, or some mix of the two—you should not let yourself be drained by judgment, either by self-judgment or the passing judgment of others. One can skillfully navigate through the sucking drains of judgment which some others have been turned into without succumbing to them by either being led to think poorly of yourself or being fooled to think
yourself superior. Equally, it is important to try not to judge anyone vainly or think badly of them, as that is often a reflection of one’s own inner lack of development.

It is to be a saint to avoid treating people badly or talking badly about them, even if you think they won’t find out or deserve it if they do. Among everything in life, including all the influences that one encounters during their journey of personal development, one must remember they are merely souls put in different placements in life as peers under God. With this understanding, one can see that most egotistical goals and expectations are merely offshoots from the more important and purposeful road to helping the Divine will for creation, which most simply entails cooperation toward shared goals of mutual wellbeing.

At this time, probably the most pervasive problem in the development of the self is in people’s worldviews regarding others. Closed-minded worldviews in which people accept only those who have similar beliefs to their own causes blind prejudice which could otherwise be avoided. There is no need for people to get into that type of thinking in which they assume they must be right and others must be wrong. Such thinking is a mere misplacement of the highly overrated idea that there are winners and losers in life, which is true to certain degrees but can be seen past if one chooses to highlight all the good in life. To overcome such thinking, it is good for one to become more accepting of others on everything from differences in opinion on religion, to politics, to social problems.

Admitting that parts of different worldviews can be right, or at least simply being alright with the fact that different worldviews exist, is a crucial step in moving towards the enlightenment of making it part of one’s own personal goals to contribute to others—rather than only thinking of what is in things for oneself, as if in a competition with all others. Not viewing life as a competition in the way many have been trained to think is a means of deprogramming oneself from the delusion of life, which can actually make life much more naturally enjoyable instead of feeling like combat. Such personal development means ridding oneself of the ideas of false enemies that have been placed into their minds to fight.

For many religious people, this means not being stirred up to fight other religions. For those politically involved, this means clearing one’s mind from seeing fellow citizens and enemies. And for the rich, it is a work of personal development to not blame the poor for troubles in society. Likewise, it is a work of development for the poor not to blame the rich. Most people are good, hard-working citizens across all social classes who have genuine good will for others but have merely been taught to fight one another through iniquity. Once the mind is consciously cleared of biased misperceptions, all should be able to see that it is the obscure inequality which is the source of problems that is truly to be blamed.

It is misdirection for anyone, rich or poor, to make their ultimate focus in life money. Beside the fact that money and material things have no intrinsic worth in themselves, no one can take anything with them when they ultimately leave this life anyway. In the end, all of the material things anyone has associated themselves with will be bulk which is stripped away as only the spirit passes through to the other side. (For those with many possessions and attachment to them, this process truly will be like a camel through the eye of a needle.) In truth, the only thing that a person can take with them when they die is their own essence, which is why it is so important to develop oneself through the experience of
In this, it is notable that helping others is both a way to develop oneself and an enactment of a developed self.

All things considered, if you do your best to be a good person, you will be a victor of life. Do not be ruled by the useless subconscious fear of ridicule, or care at all of what others might think about you for that matter, and simply shake it off if such things do ever get to you. You are not what others think about you, but rather you are who you are no matter what anyone thinks, so there is no reason to take anyone else’s judgment or treatment of you personally. Be fearless, able to laugh, and remember to lift yourself out of any pit of hate you may fall into as soon as you recognize yourself having fallen. And know this most powerful secret: Pure love from the heart is stronger than all other emotions, and it can override any lesser emotion at most any time one wills it. So, of all the teachings, the one most useful to keep closest to the heart is to remember to be love.

Being a relaxed and cooperative person through the bright acceptance of love for all and the light enthusiasm that it brings is a key toward a warm and harmonious inner life which is resilient to any disturbances which may occur. Of course, in the sacred experience of life, there are many ups and downs. Remember that one’s truest understanding can be forgotten or partially dimmed at times, but the innermost truths will remain and can be rediscovered eventually if they do happen to become momentarily lost.

Beyond personal development on the part of oneself, it is nice that individuals can also develop together in groups. As most groups naturally need leaders, some must venture to take on an entirely new level of self-development through learning how to be a good teacher. While it is nicely possible for individuals with awakened spirits to make progress with appreciable others, the fact that some may freely choose to remain cynical must be plainly accepted for what it is—as everyone must realize for themselves that negativity is simply no way to live.

Love is God’s truest intended purpose for everything, and through giving life God has provided us the opportunity to achieve spiritual wholeness through developing ourselves to actually become our own sources of love and appreciation. The ability to unlock these capacities within ourselves is the greatest gift God could give, and realizing that leads to being happier always. By purifying oneself with the God-given support of love throughout life, one can find the true personal peace needed to freely work toward progress with others.
Chapter 24

Social Change

(Enacting Societal Evolution)

There is nothing more honorable than the will to make the world a better place. This purest of wills which many have in their youth is sometimes diminished through life, as individuals often find over time that it seems like they can’t make a difference in the world. But the truth is that all individuals continually make a difference in the world through all of their interactions. Simply by being pleasant and helpful in life one makes the world a better place by their very existence. While the effect of individuals’ contributions through the enactment of such a well-developed worldview may not be noticeable on the world directly, it is the combined effects of all individual worldviews that results in what the world is.

Though vast improvements in one’s own perception of the experience of life can come from simple changes in outlook, larger societal changes come from organized activity. As such, significant impacts are made in society through the organized focus on improving things beyond individual selves, but actual parts of greater society external to individual selves and personal actions. So while individual efforts are important as the foundational basis of all change, working through the collaboration of group organizations is where larger progress can be made.

The coordination in the world is greater today than ever, and as already noted, individuals can make impacts through contributing to things like global humanitarian organizations that work through diverse approaches. Participating in or contributing to humanitarian organizations can make big improvements as they work on their particular goals to relieve problems and make the world a better place for everyone to live in. Aside from this new opportunity to participate in the global culture of international improvement, individuals are still rooted in their own regions, which they continually influence through local, state, or national governments by political participation. Through voting in democracies, social change can be enacted through directly voting on laws and electing representatives to work within the current system. Additionally, groups can work toward larger legislative reform.

There has been an awakening throughout much of the world recently in regard to many of the subjects which have been discussed in this text. Many countries filled with insightful and free thinking people have proposed and made intelligent reforms. Through democracy, many of the insightful reforms proposed in this text and elsewhere can be accomplished with time. All this requires is the spread of information and the disbandment of ignorance, which badly needs to occur at this time to regain lost ground in places such as the truly great nation of the United States of America.

Especially in the United States, citizens of democracy need to wake themselves out of the programmed coma they have been placed into through the use of propaganda which has heavily influenced thinking through repeating certain viewpoints, many of which have included misinformed
half-truths, again and again to turn the public against itself. Television and other media have been used, in part, to literally program beliefs while simultaneously training the mass public to silence or ignore anyone who questions the popular beliefs. And true freedom has been hijacked by stigmatizing questioning the centralized government as unpatriotic.

Democracy can only truly function properly when people think independently, and it can be misused if the citizens of the public simply accept whatever they are told by the masses as true. This means that people must educate themselves on issues including sources of information which are not centrally controlled. Where it is possible, greatly positive governmental change could occur through reform to have local representatives stay in the region they are elected from, rather than all going to the same place (e.g., Washington D.C. in the case of the U.S.) where they can be influenced by groupthink. Keeping the representatives in the public zones they actually represent would not only facilitate more independent reasoning, but would also make them more available to the populations they are intended to exemplify. This change would be very possible today with the use of electronic communications which allow organized actions without having to be in the same room. Furthermore, this move should be considered better for national safety than having all of the delegates placed in the same city.

No matter how a democracy is organized, it is up to the people in their own respective areas to participate by voting. Social change in favor of the people occurs from the public level upward. This is why the organization of the United States of America is a great format in which the public by state is allowed to vote directly on laws. (For example, the topics of public water fluoridation and the legal status of cannabis are state legislation measures which can be petitioned for enough signatures toward one petition to go on the state ballot to be voted on by the public.) The federal government must uphold the states’ rights to state laws so long as they are not in violation of the constitution. Moreover, the federal legislation itself can be changed through the actions of Congress in which measures are voted on first by the House of Representatives and then the Senate by officials directly elected from the states for designated terms.

The United States government is truly a well-designed example of government, though some recent questionably unconstitutional federal legislation—such as that included in the USA PATRIOT Act and certain Homeland Security measures—will have to be repealed if the United States of America is going to truly be a republic which stands for and upholds individual rights. In most countries, there are many possible changes that could be made to make the government better represent the people. As noted by the Foundation for Democratic Advancement (an independent, non-partisan democracy reform and advocacy organization based out of the fair Canada which analyzes research and makes wise educated suggestions regarding how to positively reform national legislations), campaign reform with regard to lobbying is oftentimes crucial to making electoral systems better represent the public.

Furthermore, serious lobbying reduction for legislators in office would be a good idea to help representatives honestly vote based on their morals and what is good for the people without influence by what fattens their pockets. Avoiding roundup for easy influence by lobbyists would be another good reason to allow regional delegates in national governments to stay in their own representative regions rather than being centralized. Likewise, lobbying and other types of bribery should be reduced in the
non-political arenas as well, especially in organizations related to healthcare. In the highly influential United States, the food regulations that have been discussed herein must be brought up to FDA—the processes of which truly should be made more democratically responsive to the public as to reduce corruption, perhaps through public election of auditors rather than having them appointed.

For all countries, it is important for citizens to become informed about issues, especially ones to be voted on and the views of the candidates as to vote for the individuals that truly best represent them. So long as national governments are as transparent as possible and free from corruption, civilized political process can be brought about through the law over time. In established governments, political and legislative means are the safe and effective way to go about reform. While rallies and peaceful protests can be useful to call attention to important topics that the government has ignored, disruption in the form of destructive activity such as rioting is not an efficient way to bring about positive change and should be avoided, as it may simply result in continued reinforcement of disinformation. So, civilized cooperation with patience for timely improvement is the means best used for steady progress.

Oppositely, rioting and militant revolutions such as that brought up at the outset of this book were examples of last resorts which are only helpful in cases where the government is in the form of dictatorship which does not uphold legitimate elections or allow for the public to be heard and reflected through democratic legislation changes. Because almost all of the countries in the world at this time consist of democratic nations in which citizens are becoming more educated and more informed about important issues, great progress should be made through peaceful processes toward a better world through the continued processes of positive, forward-moving social change.

As time progresses into the future, governmental reform and technological advancements should allow for an improvement in the quality of life for people in nations all around the world. Though technology does not need to be adopted by everyone and can be passed on where unnecessary, it can surely be a nice option for individuals to be able to use. Exploitation should be continually diminished nationally and internationally as cooperation and the slow and steady enactment of the Golden Rule continues to be carried out with more people sharing their actions for the common good in the genuine will of helping others. Such activity not only leads to improvement in the world, but also the improved mental health of all the individuals who participate in it. It is a much more healthy-minded way to go about life thinking about how one is contributing to the world’s experience and how much one can help others rather than trifling over how much stuff they can get.

Regarding this progress, it should be noted that there is something which could be called a value system disorder that has been programmed into larger secular modern society. As a resultant confusion which grew from the explosion of consumerism, many people have been misled to think in a purely materialistic mindset in which monetary wealth is seen as the most important thing in life. While material things are necessary for living, they should not be the true primary instigator for action in life. A mentality of narrow materialism is limited to a level far below all of the rest of the higher processes life truly consists within, and thinking only on that bottom level leads to many problems. Focus on stuff, money, and the trained fascination with wealth has obstructed what should truly be the most central values in life, which are more holistic.
Understanding regarding all of the topics involved in this book will increase as more people read it and other sources of wisdom that have been the shared result of others’ learning. True spirituality should increase in all of the world’s religious practices, and tolerance should increase largely as religion in general will hopefully become more globally spiritual with focus on universal wellbeing, which truly reflects the benevolent wishes of God, becoming the more primary focus in people’s lives rather than dogmatism. As such, along with the progression of modernization and technological advancements, there should be a regrowth of the old spiritual wisdom of the World Tree from some wisdom teachings of the past which represents interconnection overcoming sectarian divisions. The instilment of this focus throughout the world should help for the salvation of all individual participants and the world together.

People should begin to realize how much influence they really have over the world as focus on what is really important in life becomes more encompassing. The idea that everyone is powerless in regard to saving the world should be blown away by acknowledging how much influence people really have on things. For instance, the power the mass public has to give sports stars and television or movie celebrities millions times more than they need for an enjoyable life can also be applied to give millions of common working people what they do need for an enjoyable life—which, for many, isn’t much more than what is needed to live comfortably with love. While enjoyments of modernity such as sports and media progress, people will hopefully also be able to have a renewed appreciation for more naturally wholesome forms of art which can continue to enrich life as the world becomes more inclusive of those who had been blocked out while the world was more segregated and self-centered in the past.

Hopefully wisdom will be used in what is chosen to be integrated into both developing regions and developed ones through globalization since we have made learned from many mistakes in the process of technological advancement. The wisdom of the better parts of cultures should be shared while the confusions and blunders are discontinued. Both technological expertise and acumen with regard to nature will be needed if our civilization plans to continue on for hundreds or even thousands of years. Considering how resourceful a species we are, we will surely survive that long, so it is essential that we institute more reasonably sustainable practices while continuing to enjoy life into a new modern culture which will be able to prosper long into the future.

As people continue on living their lives wherever they may happen to be throughout the world, moderation in most everything will help for harmony. People do not have to be too avid about the choices of others, or even necessarily too avid of their own choices, but merely living in a way that allows their heart and soul to be at peace. For many, this may include choosing to avoid some things like media and intoxicants, while others may choose to be consumers of such things while simply being reasonably aware of the possible harmful effects such things could have on them.

Life is good to enjoy and to develop throughout, and it can be wise to realize that some seemingly attractive things are actually sources of frustration better avoided while others are more healthy and wholesome. In order to instill the wisdom and character to tell the difference, it is certainly wise to learn through good sources so that one doesn’t have to learn everything for themselves through trial and error. Once one develops the ability to attune with their wisdom sources—whether from learning vicariously through teachers, listening to good guidance from their guardian angels, or from
personal insight through experience—they can then teach others through involvement with them and their associations.

Individuals who are committed to evolving themselves and evolving humanity can collaborate toward change through community organization that get people involved such as meeting in local community centers, by participating in larger networked organizations, or both. The internet is a great tool that has recently become widely available to facilitate and coordinate such work. For instance, it has been nice to see the Dalai Lama spreading a message throughout the world by organizing meetings and talks with people and also using electronic communications to globally communicate through things such as Facebook messages like:

Education is the proper way to promote compassion and tolerance in society. Compassion and peace of mind bring a sense of confidence that reduces stress and anxiety, whereas anger and hatred come from frustration and undermine our sense of trust. Because of ignorance, many of our problems are our own creation. Education, however, is the instrument that increases our ability to employ our own intelligence.

The effort people put into campaigning for change results in measurable and physically viewable changes throughout the world. This can be done through one’s individual works, and progress can be seen through this if one tries. The small changes that come to the world through individual acts and improvements in worldviews are truly real, but it can be hard to notice their contribution to slow and steady progress. So again, if individuals are the type who want to be part of larger scale change than can be seen through individual works, becoming involved in organizations (including perhaps some of those listed in the chapter on global social problems) is the best way to do it.

The organizations one might wish to choose to be a part of in their continual interplay in social change can vary in orientation from secular to spiritual. Individuals might like to involve themselves in political and religious organizations, or they may wish to go it alone. There should be some groups in most all communities with good in mind that a person can be a part of if they wish. Along with local community organizations such as churches and activity groups, online communities—for example, that put together by the Thrive Movement—facilitate learning, discussion, and effort toward improving the world today and enacting social evolution toward a more optimistic looking future.

Gandhi has been popularly quoted to have said: “We must become the change we want to see in the world.” The wisdom in that statement, whether or not Gandhi actually said it, gives very useful guidance to people when thinking about how they should act in this continually changing world. In addition to becoming agents of the change people wish for the world today themselves, major change in the future will occur through instilling education in the youth of the next generation. Because any individual’s worldview is largely shaped in their youth, parenting and education are some of the most influential ways to influence the future.
As many wise people have said, the future is in today’s children. And the things that children are exposed to in development shape them significantly into the people they will become. While each child does have some intrinsic characteristics of their own, they are largely blank slates impressed upon by all of their experiences and various influences. So beyond keeping a child’s nutrition healthy and free from unnatural toxins in a safe environment, a parent needs involve reasonable consideration into what types of experiences their child is exposed to through both how they are treated directly and the influences in their surroundings.

A child learns through life and soaks up experiences like a sponge. While having various temperaments and being surprisingly resilient, impressions are made on children quite quickly. This can be seen from how they mirror actions starting from a very young age and how they tend to repeat sayings they commonly hear after they are able to talk. It is uncertain at what time a child will develop lasting memories, but they commonly begin to form around the age of one or two years old. It can be fun to see how quickly a child develops and how they enjoy life and their accomplishments.

Because of how impressionable children are and the importance of the roles of parents in their development process, it is good for parents to keep some simple things in mind while raising a child. In utter simplicity, children are mirrors to what they are exposed to. This means that the first and foremost role of a parent is to exemplify the behavior they wish to see out of their children and to avoid types of behavior they do not want to see out of their children. A child absorbs learning through all of the actions they are exposed to, not merely from what a parent tells them to do or not do.

Generally, yelling at children should be avoided, unless the child physically cannot hear you while speaking in a plain voice or if the situation is urgent to where immediate action is necessary. Because children are like sponges and absorb what they are exposed to, if they are commonly yelled at, they will probably simply begin to yell themselves. Likewise, if they are ignored, they are more apt to ignore. And, as research has proven, if a child is exposed to physical abuse they are more likely to be physically abusive toward others. As such, physically and emotionally abusive treatments should generally try to be avoided and loving teaching should be applied instead where applicable.

For instance, when inappropriate behavior such as lying occurs, that opportunity should be used to teach the child why lying is wrong. Lying is immoral because no one likes being lied to and because it can hurt people. Furthermore, lies are detrimental to society and everyone involved. Besides that, it is a fact that people naturally do not like liars, so it is good to teach a child not to be a liar if you love them and want them to be liked. One might as well learn early in life that ultimately God sees through all lies
anyway, so one should avoid lies and go with the truth in life—though not all truths necessarily have to be told. This is comparable to teaching a child not to steal, not only because it is illegal, but because it is immoral since no one likes to be stolen from.

Being a good example of clear consistency and giving explanation for things is important to maintain credibility as a parent. So when a child becomes curious and reaches a stage where they keep asking “Why?”, give them the best answers that you have. Whenever it is possible, children should be given sufficient answers to questions that they ask. If a child indicates they are at the stage where they are ready to form a question about something, it indicates that they are at the appropriate time in their development to be told the true answers to those questions.

For example, questions about sex at a young age should be answered truthfully with enough information to suffice to answer the questions. A parent should not avoid certain subjects because doing such only increases curiosity and fascination with them. Through a basic effect of the psyche rooted in simple curiosity, forbidding something without good reason will almost always drive an individual to want to do it more than they would have otherwise. So if a child is repeatedly told not to do something, it will just draw more attention to it and make them want to do it more. This is why making things taboo frequently backfires and why simple education should be used instead.

It is confounding to teach children that sexuality is shameful or sinful. Giving someone the idea that sexuality is bad will make them judgmental about themselves and others, because most people naturally have a sex drive beginning with puberty. So if they are told that sex drive is bad, that makes them think that part of them is bad and causes inner conflict. In truth, sex drive is not bad, but rather quite natural. Still, it is good to teach that it is wise to wait for sexual interaction until after developing a healthy loving relationship because sex is most meaningful when between individuals who know and love each other, which makes it an act of making love.

In the past, it was very important that a couple be seriously committed before having sexual relations because if they led to intercourse there was no way to prevent having children or contracting sexually transmitted infections and diseases. That was one reason why it was so stressed that a couple should be serious enough with one another to become married prior to having sex. But even in this day and age in which contraceptives are available to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted illnesses and unintended pregnancy, there are still many wise reasons for people to wait until having formed a committed loving relationship with one another before becoming sexually involved, and of course to be faithful to one another when they have formed a committed relationship.

Plainly, we are not born guilty little sinners, but rather we are born good and sinless! People should not be made to feel guilty for having desires, but rather only truly need to feel guilty for breaking the Golden Rule by treating others in ways they do not wish to be treated. Thus, it is really only non-consensual sexual acts or acts of infidelity that are truly wrong and should be considered adultery. I hope such education can help return the sacredness to sex in this modern age in which it has been used as a superficial marketing tool and debased.
Still, expectations should not be set too high for anything in life. And this is getting a little ahead of where this discussion needs to be regarding early parenting. Yet, especially for children, it is detrimental to set impossible standards of perfection which will ultimately always make their efforts pale in comparison. This has actually been an underlying problem created by the old Christian view in which Jesus has been depicted as utterly perfect, because that ideation has been used to make all other people feel like incompetent sinners in comparison who could never live up to his total lack of mistakes, which has led some to not even try. Though it is right to promote goodness by setting ideals to always strive to uphold, that striving for absolute perfection mentality has made it very hard for many people who have been exposed to it to admit or accept making any mistakes of their own, due to having been subconsciously put up next to this idealized individual who is supposed to have been perfect in every way. (Even if Jesus was perfectly sinless, which he very well may have been, the emphasis of him as perfect above all others has made for quite unrealistic expectations and lowered self-appreciation of others. Indeed, such possibly false portrayals may be how Jesus was truly betrayed.)

But while taboos can backfire, and unattainable expectations of perfection can be detrimental to self-esteem, it is nonetheless essential for parents to have some reasonable expectations for their children. Parenting experts have recommended that emphasis be placed on progress and learning rather than placing focus on outcomes such as winning. High expectations like too much focus on winning can be detrimental because it may cause a person to feel dissatisfied even when they have performed to the best of their ability. Still, this certainly does not discredit the fact that goals are great tools for positive improvement. Progress toward goals in itself can be viewed as success even if the goal outcome is not achieved. That way, so long as effort is given, even failures can be viewed as partial successes.

Above all, good moral standards such as simply teaching the Golden Rule will always be the most solid ethical teachings for parents to instill. In many cases it can be found that the things that parents place the most focus on when raising a child will become the things assumed to be most important for that person as they grow in life, unless consciously changed later in life. For that reason, a parent can remember they are instilling values in a child from most whatever they draw their attention to, though it is certainly true that children have many other influences in life than only parents.

Because a child will run into other influences elsewhere in life, if it is essential that parents instill a healthy work ethic into their children. Whereas focus on rewards can lead a person to be superficial and unhappy, helping a child to see that mindful effort is the most essential thing in life is the best way to lead them toward being happily successful in whatever they do. In almost all cases, it is good to focus on doing quality work, and doing a good job can be a proper source of pride. Performance is almost always improved through looking at the process as the meaningful part rather than the outcome.

It is good for children to be able to develop skills and self-esteem through activities in life. Giving opportunities for learning in a non-stressful way allows a child to build their own confidence through making achievements of their own. This is best accomplished after loving interaction with a child has allowed them to develop secure emotional attachment to trust parents through their responsively attending to needs and spending time with them to communicate kind guidance, give appropriate praise, and be an example of the all-important gratitude. In being a loving parent, it is also important to
allow children to develop independence and respect for others and themselves through free time on their own and with peers. In the consistent use of balanced parenting, the parent allows independent freedoms but also upholds reasonable standards for developing discipline through setting limits and instilling responsibility through things such as having good manners in their own behavior.

Once a child has been instilled with morals through the encouragement of altruism over time and taught to exert politeness, consideration, respectfulness, and responsible effort toward fairness through identifying with the exemplification of such desirable qualities in their role models, they should be ready for the intellectual stimulation of education—whether in the home or at a public or private school. No matter where a child is educated, they should be taught through discussion the ways in which the whole world is on the same team and how separation between groups is trivial compared to greater balance. This should help prevent there from being so much continued bias in the world. Such teachings will be beneficial to the child in being secure with themself and fostering their ability to share and cooperate with others, which will be helpful for all in the long run.

It can be good for children to see people different from themselves—racially, ethnically, and from different socioeconomic status—at school, church, other activities such as 4-H, or elsewhere in the world so that they can develop equal compassion and expand their worldview to include respect for everyone sharing the Earth from the narrow view which can occur if one only sees one class of people. Interaction with less familiar people than a person’s own family is helpful for learning how to connect with others and to see the importance of making the world a better place for all. This is one benefit of public schools, though a drawback is more exposure to popular culture and other quite possibly negative influences. However, a person cannot be sheltered from the world forever.

It is good for most any person to have comprehensive development over a wide range of categories, which has been facilitated fairly well by public schools. However, in education even in developed countries in the world, there has been some neglect for certain categories and some misdirection in general programming altogether. One of the greatest things that has been lacking in education has been the diffusion of knowledge regarding the world religions. And perhaps the greatest misplacements of focus in education have been on mere memorization and over-stressing grades.

As an application of the fact that it is the process of learning in life that is the important part, people should teach in homes and at schools that actually learning and understanding concepts is more important that merely filling out worksheets for homework and cramming and regurgitating information for tests. Good teachers educate on the application of the knowledge they teach with regard to life. For example, there is far more importance in history to teach what can be learned from historic processes and development rather than merely memorizing dates and names. Likewise, in geography, cultural differences and their implications on their societies can actually be learned from, as opposed to just memorizing the names of countries and capitols.

Even the less analytical and more pragmatic subjects like reading, writing, and arithmetic can have their real world implications taught while also teaching the basic skills. In all societies, it would be vastly beneficial if better fitness and nutritional information regarding the differences between naturally
healthy foods like fruits and vegetables and detrimental processed junk foods full of artificial substances were taught to children so that they could knowingly participate actively in protecting their health. For example, education about not-so-naturally produced food additives like fructose corn syrup and MSG could help to prevent so many from developing health problems like type-2 diabetes and obesity.

On the subject of intrinsically useful information regarding the body, it is right for health classes to teach information regarding the natural developments of puberty before they occur, along with the fact that puberty occurs for different individuals at different times simply according to genetics. Along with this, reproductive health education including the use of contraceptives may as well be taught to get it out of the way so that individuals undergoing sexual development can be informed in case they do become sexually active. Self-respect which overcomes sexual development can be informed in case they do become sexually active. Self-respect which overcomes sexual development can be informed in case they do become sexually active. Self-respect which overcomes sexual development can be informed in case they do become sexually active. Self-respect which overcomes sexual development can be informed in case they do become sexually active.

In everything one may encounter through the experience of life, it should be helpful to know that, in the long run, all minor situational anxieties will be viewed as trivial, and it will be good honest learning that maintains value. So any wise person should know inside that so long as one keeps themselves from falling to become one of the careless or cruel, as they do not wish to be treated cruelly themselves, any and all of their worldly social anxieties will be blown away like dust in the wind with only the good, truly important things like love, joy, and inner peace left to stay in the end.

Anyone who has been given the opportunity and gift of learning how to read can use books, libraries, or the internet today to educate themselves on the vast amount of wisdom and information that has become available to the world. While there is a wide amount of information available online today, through using a critically opened mind, one can use reason to deduce what is true and what has been mistaken in the wide array of relevant topics.

It is important that biases and prejudices or other assumptions are not passed down to new generations. Instead, pass down useful information and helpful wisdom. It is only possible to stop ignorance by sharing good knowledge such as that included throughout this book (which you are welcome to independently research and critically contemplate for yourself) to build well-informed, knowledgeable individuals throughout the whole world as to improve the future rather than have it lead into more corrupt detriment.

Now, to move on with a clear and refreshed mind, it is important to be able to forgive the wrongs of the past. After letting go of old hostilities or grudges, one can receive true forgiveness of their own and be able to enjoy living with gratitude for life’s gifts in appreciation of God. The next and last part of the book talks about just that in the final chapters regarding forgiving and appreciating.
Part Seven

To Be Blessed:

Peace Be With You
Chapter 26

Forgiving

(True Salvation)

Finally, the book has come to the topic of forgiveness. The reason this chapter has been titled “Forgiving”, rather than “Forgiveness”, is because forgiving is the active part of forgiveness. It is crucial for a person to be able to forgive themself and others before being able to truly receive forgiveness. The type of things that a person may need forgiveness for basically fall into two categories: mistreating others and disrespecting God. It is the derivatives of those two things which are the wrongs that truly require repentance for forgiveness.

If one has been guilty of mistreating others or disrespecting God, which are the two wrongs for which there is truly cause for guilt, it has probably had a negative effect on their psyche. Feeling true remorse for such misdeeds can leave one guilt-stricken and in need of some type of forgiveness, for which some advice will be given shortly. But first, it should also be noted that another common response for people who do or have done things which they subconsciously or consciously know or worry to be wrong is actively building an outward stance of hate against others to fend off or distract from their own sense of guilt. Thus, outward hatred can be a sign of hate which grows within oneself and is then projected onto others as a source for it external to oneself. It can also be the fear of having to admit one’s own guilt for something that defensively builds up as hatred toward others. In all such cases, forgiving and forgiveness are the cures.

The first step that one must do when dealing with feelings of guilt (or perhaps the hate that can be used as a mechanism to cover up a fear of that feeling) is to find the root cause of that negative feeling and forgive it. In many cases, it may be hate itself which one needs to be forgiven for. In the case that someone has wronged you or others and you have responsively grown hate for them due to the hurt those misdeeds caused, which I can say I surely understand anyone’s struggle with, it may simply be that one needs to forgive the fact that bad things can happen in reality. In the case that it is a lack of empathy in others that you hate, which is surely understandable, one may need to forgive the fact that some others have been led through their life’s experience to lack empathy. Sometimes, if it is actually something in oneself that a person has been taught not to accept and to thus hate in others, it may be that they must forgive the fact that that quality can exist in people. Whatever it is that is causing the negative feelings, one must find a way to forgive it.

Forgiving oneself or others simply in one’s own thoughts can actually give a person a feeling of relief. That is how forgiving can be greatly beneficial for a person to receive their own forgiveness. To really get over the past and move forward more freely into the future, one must let go of all of their own resentments. (To do this, it is helpful to understand that all individuals have been largely influenced by
factors which were beyond themselves.) If one refuses to let go of their own resentments, they bring the feeling of unforgiveness along with them into their own future. By letting go and forgiving instead of clutching to resentment, one stops unintentionally blocking their own self from forgiveness.

So it is through forgiving — whether forgiving others, forgiving yourself, or even forgiving God for some misfortune — that one moves themselves toward forgiveness. But if it is not a resentment in one’s heart that needs to be forgiven, or some target of hate or unforgiveness that one must work to find it in themself to forgive, but rather a true guilt or remorse one feels for something they themselves have done, that feeling too can be helped by working on the process of forgiving.

If one feels a sense of guilt for doing something, there is a simple process that a person can go through to healthily seek forgiveness and get over that guilt. Through this process, it is possible for one’s feelings of guilt to truly subside and for them to accept forgiveness. The first thing that one must do if feeling guilt for something is to realize the possibility that it can be forgiven. To acknowledge this, one must recognize that beyond individuals and oneself, it is only the Higher Power which is the Spirit of God that has the power to forgive. Knowing this, the individual must merely recognize the thing in their heart which they have remorse about, and at that moment wish forgiveness for it by simply praying that the Holy Spirit that is God may forgive it.

Along with doing this, one must accompany that wish of forgiveness from God with true forgiveness from themselves. Considering all the factors which go into everything — all that have been beyond one’s own control as well as the factor of responsibility in each individual’s own choice — a person must simply accept all responsibility that is theirs and get over the responsibility that is others’ and let the negativity and anguish over all of it be freed from their heart there with God. By simply recognizing past things are now out of one’s control and rightly turning them over to the Holy Spirit for handling, they have made a crucial change required to actually be forgiven.

For many, that is all that one must do. In other cases, if one still feels anguish beyond that process, forgiveness may still be accomplished through working on more personally recognizing the pure love of God. If one has some great wrong which they still cannot forgive themselves or someone else for at first, or if one wants to proceed further from merely being forgiven to becoming a source of forgiveness themselves, more advanced internal work through meditation may be helpful. This meditation would be to the effect of transforming one’s own essence through tuning into God’s unconditional love and radiating that energy out from their entirety. Such a work can help one purely forgive most any wrong that they have done or that others have done, at least during that meditative moment.

But even with the purest love and forgiveness for oneself and for others, including such guided meditation of embodying God’s love and forgiveness, it may be hard to forgive some wrongs. Often it is not our own wrongs or being wronged ourselves that is hardest to forgive, but wrongdoing that has been done to others, especially to loved ones. Considering such cases, it is always certainly much harder to forgive if one does not believe that someone actually deserves to be forgiven. But even if through all one’s work they cannot find it in their own heart to forgive, they can at last turn it over to God and know
that God will ultimately serve justice rightly to all; and that means one does not have to hold any of the spiritual poison of unforgiveness within themself over it.

One can remember that it is through being loving and forgiving that one truly becomes a better person by being the very forgiveness and love they seek. And by at least letting go of unforgiveness up to being God’s duty as the true Judge, one can greatly alleviate negativity from themself to allow them to accomplish work. In some cases, something one felt guilt or shame for may not even have actually been wrong, in which case forgiveness from God would not actually be needed but rather only a process simply for the individual to get over it themself. If anyone has difficulty with such useless regret as remorse over some social embarrassment in life, I tell them to just forget it! Remorse is only useful to the effect that it guides us to seek and to ask for forgiveness from individuals we have wronged and from God; but beyond that, regret for past actions that can’t be changed now has no productive end. So, though one better have a conscience to keep them from doing wrong into the future, it is no good for one to be tortured by guilt over the past. If you have felt bad about something, you have obviously recognized it, which is the important part, and further feeling bad about it is unneeded. We can have a way of magnifying things out of proportion, and sometimes even feel regret for things that are out of our control. But we simply are not perfect or all-knowing, and hindsight is only obvious in retrospect because of the learning that has occurred since.

True wisdom reveals there to be no need for endless remorse over the past. We may have been misled by others in our actions, or perhaps we were confused or didn’t know the full truth, or maybe even had little to no control over the situation we were placed in. So even if a person has actually done wrong, recognizing it and asking forgiveness from God is all one can do to start them on their path to forgiveness. Of course, after that start, they must make change to no longer do that which they have recognized they needed to ask forgiveness for, if they can and have not already. Finally, if one has corrected their ways from that which was wrong so that they can truly forgive themselves through their progress, they have done all they can to move themselves towards being forgiven by God.

In addition to this, if one makes their intention in life to help others through their work, or at least not to do others unjust wrong, they should receive a lasting forgiveness that continues with them as they move onward in life. If one has done wrong—or even if they have not but simply have the good will to help—giving effort to improve the lives of others can help to make up for things one may have been guilty of in life. Thus, good works can be an active part of one’s forgiveness, or simply enjoyable activity to build one’s positive karma, as described in Eastern traditions.

Because one’s actions do play an active part in their forgiveness, salvation is not merely about accepting God—though that is certainly one’s best help in the process. The best thing that one can do in life is praise God for creation, give empathy for the negative things which have happened within it at the cost of reality, pray forgiveness for anything one may have done which would upset God including any mistreatment of others and perhaps even harsh thoughts, and work to be a good individual into the future. (Following those directions in that last sentence is most central to forgiveness, among all other teachings from any tradition one may participate in.)
While it can be difficult for some to feel that they deserve to be forgiven, and perhaps yet more difficult for others to realize they could use some forgiveness themselves, through faith in God and doing good works a person can prove to themselves that they truly do deserve to be forgiven. If one wishes for all others to have enjoyable lives and actually makes their behavior match these intentions, there is no doubt that they can be forgiven and receive salvation.

Once one finds it in their heart to forgive others for past wrongdoing, and also gains the serenity to forgive themself, their mind can rest over the past. And the past is ultimately something one must settle over, for all anyone has control over is their choices today. Once one has accomplished the sometimes difficult task of truly giving and receiving that forgiveness, it should be relatively easy to maintain it. To upkeep one’s forgiveness, all that is required is that they continue to intend to be part of having the world an enjoyable place for everyone, and that they show this through their actions—each day treating all others as best as they can.

So, though it is important that one acknowledges God, salvation is not really just about what one believes. Rather, salvation is about how one acts and the mindset one has in so much as what they wish for others. This is simple to see in the example that if one wants to be treated well, they need to actually put treating others well into practice, because simply believing in treating others well does no one any good. So while it is most important to have faith, one should also have works where possible and within their means.

Jesus Christ taught that we should love all others as ourselves—forgiving our transgressors and even praying for those who have been defined as the enemy. And as Christ has become the greatest example of a teacher the world has ever known, all must be wise to practice his teachings by not treating anyone as they do not wish to be treated unless it is to protect them or others from harm. This should be applied by everyone, everywhere, no matter what religion they may choose to practice.

So, as has been noted many places, right action is needed beyond just good will and faith. But I tell you in truth, if you honestly and purely choose to wish good upon all others, ridding yourself of cruel judgments and choosing to leave condemnation up to God to be the Judge of, you have become fit for Heaven and may receive salvation.

Once one has received forgiveness, as most any should be able to from finding the truth of the words of this chapter, they can move forward in neither shame nor ignorance while enjoying the gift of life. And there is truly much in life to be appreciated.
Chapter 27  
Appreciating  
(Truly Living)

Though much of the subject matter of this book is quite serious, not all in life should be taken so seriously. Having concern to help resolve or alleviate the issues in the world is surely good, but too much stress over minor issues or problems out of one’s control can be unhealthy in itself. So it is good and useful advice in enjoying life to notice all of the things worth appreciating just as much or more than focusing on problems. With that advice, understanding problems should never prevent one from also appreciating life. Even if one attains all the wisdom in the world, they can still remain a kid at heart able to enjoy having fun playing.

Rather than being fretful and anxious about things, we are meant to be able to enjoy the blessings of life. And though it can be quite a good idea to try to avoid some of the pollutants and adulterations of life, it is not really necessary to become absolute ascetics by renouncing all but the most basic pleasures of life. It can be a fun part of life for one to work toward goals and to have possessions they like and experiences they enjoy, and it is surely good to be able to laugh.

You are loved! Know that it is true that God loves you. Even when people in life do not treat you well, this is not a sign that God does not love you, but merely a sign that people have been given the free will to make their own decisions. So, while it may be hard to appreciate life at times, it helps to know that all who are good at heart are truly appreciated by God.

God has great appreciation for your simple existence; for the mere fact that you have achieved the ability to think and to act intelligently is a great success of the universe. It is really a remarkable thing that your body does all it does to be living and thinking with all the capacity that you have. Because of this, you yourself are a beautiful work of art. Do not let anyone’s judgment of you, even your own, lead you to think otherwise. Any superficial idea of beauty is not a measure of true beauty anyway, as true beauty exists in the way individuals use their free will to treat one another kindly. Remember that always.

And if you ever forget and find yourself not treating others well or regressing into feelings of resentfulness, remind yourself that it is only failing to become bitter. Let go of any resentment against any who may have wronged you or judged you and decide that no matter what happens, you will not let anything turn you against yourself and others. For if you want to truly be able to best appreciate life, you must stay afloat above the waters of bitterness and hate. Indeed, to recognize that is to have learned one of the greatest tricks to clearly navigate through the murkiness in life.
To be a well-inspired appreciator of life, wish well upon others and treat others as they wish to be treated, even if you have not been treated as you would wish. Such virtuous action on the part of any can help them feel good about life, and it is also bound to make the world a better place as the influences of action reverberate through others and cycle back. Because of the causal relationships connecting events, one is sure to be an active agent in the good appreciation of life if they work to have their own choices instill and reinforce positivity.

While everyone is influenced by the web of interdependence we are each immersed in, each individual also has the ability to perceive and to break themselves from mere reaction as to make their own actions a positive source initiating improvement within the greater cycles. Each individual awakened self has the power to influence through their own impact on others and perhaps even the unseen oscillations underlying reality which flow through all of us continually. You can harness that energy through the limitless ability you have been granted by the Divine through your existence.

This happens continually through all of one’s interactions with others, but can also be expressed through other directed activity. People can meet in groups or organizations to develop their own growth and impact on one another and the world. For all religious individuals, know that any opinion others may form of you are trivial compared to God’s esteem. So have tolerance for others who have different ways and opinions. If one is ever frustrated by difficulties with others, a person can always be positive and praise God for diversity—for diversity comes with free will, and it is surely good to be free.

While it is certainly a gift to be able to progress, one does not have to stress it too much. Though it is good to be careful not to slip backwards in spiritual development, there can be flexibility in most of life. So long as there is not a time set which one must uphold for the sake of coordination with others, one can take their time and enjoy life. Life can be more wholesomely fulfilling if one prevents themself from getting too caught up in stress, or to have a break from it at least. If one does have a stressful life, it can be good to take a moment to relax and perhaps meditate on peace and thankfulness.

It is good for appreciating life to have times for rejoicing gratefulness. People can celebrate thankfulness in many ways. For those with extravagant or stressful lives, it may be more fulfilling to celebrate by actually reducing stress by simplifying life, giving some of one’s excess to help others, and slowing down to be able to enjoy the simpler pleasures again. Being at or getting to a natural baseline at which one can enjoy life without any addictions is something worth celebrating, and can be viewed as celebrating life in itself—though that type of thinking may be a hard to fathom epiphany for those who have been caught up in the idea that enjoyment must come from more consumption.

Though enjoying fine things and feasts can surely be involved in celebrations, it is perhaps the greatest gift possible to have a renewed appreciation for subtleties in life. It is to be truly blessed to be able to appreciate simple things, such as the intricacy within natural phenomena such as a sunrise or sunset, the simple enjoyment from a meal, or seeing other appreciable details of life. When one has their eyes opened in appreciation, they can take notice of the beauty in many things, from things so big as the skyline to things so small as nature’s detail in individual leaves. Many busied people get into a mindset where they are always in tunnel vision, perhaps from continual focus on either business
matters or distractions of entertainment, and forget to allow themselves to absorb the actual beauty within the experience of life and the natural wonders that are there all the time.

It is the greatest gift to realize one can enjoy what they already have available in life, to really be at peace with what one has without any necessary feeling that there is something else or something more one might want to have. Still, there is surely good reason for upkeep and nothing wrong with improving or having future plans for improvement. It is great wisdom to have to know that simply looking at the appreciable parts in one’s life can improve their enjoyment in life without changing a thing. But, of course, there is greater beauty yet to know that they can also improve things in their own life and in the lives of others on top of this!

Sometimes it takes a near-death experience for a person to have their eyes opened in this way. Hopefully you can enjoy this gift without such an experience. But whatever it took to have one’s eyes opened, if it has happened, you can thank God for it and enjoy the refreshed understanding of life that comes with truly receiving it. As has been discussed, this gift comes along with letting go of resentments and personal regrets and accepting the present process of life for its gifts. With such an appreciation, worries or fears over both the past and the future can be vastly diminished. Such an awakening allows one to center back in to the present moment that is continually flowing.

When a person lets go of useless regret over the past and unnecessary fear over the future, they can also let go of illogical hatred in the present. This is calmly accepted if on realizes that everyone is just trying to find happiness as best as they can. In knowing this, one can become able to see there is beauty in most everyone, and this can vastly help one to appreciate life. A person can even appreciate when others are happy enjoying things that they do not, with empathetic joy just because of the fact that life is being enjoyed. If you are happy for everyone, you can feel a bit of their happiness in your own heart along with them.

Hopefully such a view may give you lasting peace. And if you ever feel under-appreciated, think of how God must have felt all these years, with so many people hurting one another in His sight and having to see so many in total denial of His existence. God made the whole universe for us to bloom in and share in existence with one another, and yet He has had to hear so many curse in His name more often than they remember to give Him praise for all of life’s gifts. Instead of living that way, let yourself be awakened and appreciate God and go about doing works that will make life on this Earth more like Heaven for everyone while they are here.

In knowing these things, one can uphold any traditional belief system they wish. But whatever freely spiritual or organized religious way you choose, let it recognize God. The many messengers can be thanked, and some may even wish to remember their pantheons for cultural value, but remember that true worship should only be intended for God, with just veneration for the rest. Of course, the works of God’s messengers do not have to go unappreciated, so long as there is no mistake that the Holy Spirit is the One True God above all. Of course, if any have known their Savior and Redeemer in Christ to have been incarnated by the Spirit of God, then their worship through Christ has been understood to be for God all along.
Though you do not have to worship anyone else’s description of God or particular belief system, you may surely choose any structured or non-structured religion you wish. Any who are appreciative of existence and give thanks for it to God can know that Source, Maintainer, and Ultimate Judge will be pleased with the recognition—no matter how formal or informal its form. God is not petty, but appreciative and benevolent, and would never deny His acceptance through one particular faith or another. Still, any who treats others wrongly or speaks against God must surely know their fate is doomed to Hades without repentance where it is due.

The ultimate fate of each individual will not depend upon which religion they practiced, but rather their actions in life toward others. Of course, a developed faith through religion can help with a person’s actions. While one person may choose to give appreciation to God through group worship, another may choose to through private meditation, and any one individual can surely do both. Better yet, the two can be combined. Regardless of how one’s culture practices religion, it can be accepted so long as one truly believes in the Holy Spirit in their hearts and practices being good to one another along with their appreciation of life.

While one can be of acceptable spirituality without any religious affiliation, organized religious practice works to help individuals remind one another of faithfulness and facilitates a support group for those in the religious community. What is most important is that a religion provides caring activities and facilitates development of ethics through instilling wisdom that one can follow to appreciate life safely and respectfully. As such, religious traditions can be sources of good advice to individuals so that they may prosper in life.

God truly cares for all and wills for us to happy, though we have to make that manifest for ourselves within this reality. Think about it, God certainly didn’t create the universe in hope of guilt, remorse, bitterness, and resentment! Rather, God created it so that there could be love and appreciation, and knew those two things would make it worth it even though there would also be suffering. As such, suffering is a side-effect that comes with the good of reality, and experiencing the reality of non-Heaven is the only way we could truly appreciate the eventual reward of Heaven.

Having reality is the only means by which you could exist aside from God, and so it is how God has allowed more than just Himself to get to enjoy existence. And reality provides you a ground basis upon which you may build your own view of Heaven. That way, Heaven can truly be Heaven for each individual who is good in life and gets there, and thus it could never failing any expectations. So do good to others while appreciating life, and you will be able to experience and appreciate your own Heaven after life! Of course, that is provided that you have come to find that appreciation for God and have molded your actions and wishes to help make His creation more like Heaven itself while alive.

For this reason, I cannot overstate the importance of thankfulness. A person must be grateful for all of their blessings and give credit to God, for they would not have been able to experience a thing had it not been for God as the Original Source in the first place. In recognizing that all anyone has ever accomplished has been made possible by God, and also by the combined work and accomplishments of many other individuals, one humbles themself. And this is a necessary step required if one is to receive
Heaven after death. But even if one looks merely to the short term, scientific studies have shown that taking an attitude of gratitude can help people enjoy life itself more. For example, counting one’s blessings in life by taking note of all the things to be grateful for can actually help a person become happier in the now.

For these reasons, one can always find reason to praise God—whether in their own way, in the way of an organized religion, or both. No matter what kind of spirituality you practice, never forget to include the fact that God cares about all. And do not be blinded to think that God prefers you over any other, for we are all equal parts of God’s creation. Because of this, your neighbor’s happiness is just as important as your own happiness. If you are truly able to see it that way for yourself, then you have received sight that is in the likeness of God’s.

Remember that it is by God’s grace alone that you will be forgiven to have your misdeeds and transgressions against one another blotted out. While some may be able to see this already through their own spiritual worldview, others may like to participate in regular weekly worship to learn it or to be reminded. Thus, as already stated, though proper spirituality does not require accordance with any creed, it can be truly beneficial. As is well-known to many, it has been recommended that there should be at least one day a week in which religious service is remembered. There is a good model for this in churches, but let every one worship in whatever way they feel is suiting to them.

Participating in religious service can remind people that not only does God care about them, but that others do too. And it can be useful to not only give thanks to God, but also to stay involved with one another and to collaborate enjoyably. Knowing that you are loved and cared about can help tremendously in appreciate life. It is good for children to practice sharing in appreciation of God and goodness early in life, to uphold good values in development throughout life, and for reminder as older adults. We should always try to have kindness in interaction with one another, accepting one another with courtesy and respecting dignity, and religious services have been great for that.

The Benevolent Creator loves all and cares about every individual, and that is something to appreciate and celebrate. Knowing this helps foster inner peace and tranquility in one’s life, when at all possible. Surely though, it is greatly difficult to experience this inner peace when one is suffering from malnourishment or in the midst of turmoil and strife—which is why many religious and non-affiliated organizations work to alleviate poverty and war. It is more possible now than ever for everyone to be nourished and for there to be peace. Everyone must simply stop fighting against one another! There is no need for people to be led into being taught to be one another’s foes.

There has been a lot of harshness endured in the past—famines, plagues, natural disasters, wars, etc.—on the way to getting us here to this point, but the world is now better equipped to maintain through such difficult times. Because of the great advancements that have been made, none should have to fight with one another for mere survival, or any other reason really. In the past when civilization was first emerging, there was vast inequality and civilizations were as islands among savagery, so those civilizations had to develop weapons to defend themselves from robbers. But now civilizations are no
longer islands among savagery, but rather the whole world has civilization spread throughout most all the land. So now the world should be ready to enjoy one interworking civilization of peace.

Now, instead of investing in warfare, all should be able to share in much more appreciable lives through investing in things like education and more efficient medicine. All it would take is a change in mindset, to have all the citizens of the world no longer letting themselves be stirred up to hate one another by warmongers and to instead listen to those preaching peace. After millennia of life struggling to get by, there have now been enough technological advances made for all to be provided for and to get educated on the track to sustainable, enjoyable lives of moderation.

Today, the common person in a developed nation enjoys amenities similar to that previously available only to royalty a few decades ago. Some have become so accustomed to the wide availability of food choices, travel, entertainment, and so on that they do not even notice it anymore and forget to appreciate it. And still, a person does not have to live like royalty to be truly happy. After all, most can be truly happy by appreciating whatever it is they do have in life so long as they have a comfortable living. All that is needed now is that individuals develop the spiritual wholeness of true faith in God to share with the world so that this abundance can become truly widespread.

Heaven on Earth can finally be ushered in, if everyone chooses to do so together. All of the little impacts individuals can make through sharing positivity and experiencing love with one another will combine to form larger waves which will make global changes actualize. Think of all the progress that has already been made—all the progress that you have made personally, as well as the progress that has been made in the larger development of the world. With all the grueling work and suffering endured in the past and currently, we’ve come too far to neglect this opportunity to develop the world for progress through education and proper medicine to greatly improve living conditions and get things on the right track for everyone now that the possibility has presented itself.

May those in the world who are doing well enough to appreciate life today with enough and extra to spare truly recognize that great blessing and choose to be generous to groups providing humanitarian work—especially those providing education with supplies to build a more positively appreciable future for the world. After all, a prosperous heart does not have as much to do with the amount of money in the bank as it does with having appreciation for the aspects of life which are truly valuable. So positive improvements and helping one another should be involved in life, at least in some part, for all with who have properly spiritually developed.

In the end, each individual will be able to know the truth, and they will be able to see just how everyone truly came from the same place. Then, at each individual’s figurative Judgment Day, when they leave this world of impermanent things and enter into the everlasting eternal realm, or at least visit it prior to reincarnation, they will truly be able to understand. But for now, the living can enjoy within the temporary limitedness of perception, simply accepting what can be known from here and giving thanks for the pleasures of this life each day.

Let everyone open their limited perceptions as much as they can, and they will come to see that God’s greatest intention in creating the universe was pure unconditional love. And now that the
development of civilization here within creation is fully blooming, most all have been given a prime opportunity to share love and acceptance of one another. By reducing judgment and condemnation through continually increasing that love and acceptance, everyone will be able to appreciate life more openly, and life on Earth will be more like Heaven here and now. What a truly beautiful gift!

So experience the warmth of life and let yourself be able to enjoy the type of happiness that is free. Remember that we become more truly happy the closer we get to what we are truly supposed to be, and with that you can knowingly follow your true happiness. Everyone should be able to enjoy the good in the experience of life along with helping others. In doing so, we notice that our souls become more at ease within ourselves through living and acting in good ways. This is the divine nature in all of us letting us know when we are at peace. By listening to your good sources of guidance and following your feelings within reason, you will be wise and learning throughout your life.

The key to life is finding inner peace and harmony. This means that, above all other things, it is most important to live in a way that you may be at peace. Choose not to do things that would be hurtful to others, for when you look back on life you may have to see all you hurt. Instead, be good to one another and make decisions that will help others, so that your eternal self will be able to look back and see all you helped. Doing these things throughout your life, from this judgement’s day forward, will allow you to enjoy pure peace after your end of days.

In the meantime, following your heart will make life much more appreciable for you and everyone else involved with you in this experience of life in which we aspire to understand the Divine from which we all originated. Regardless of anything else, by doing your best today with appreciation of God in your heart, you can enjoying living life knowing both you and God are most likely to be pleased.
Appendix

Calendar Reform

(13 Month Calendar)

There have been, and continue to be at the time of this writing, many different calendar systems used throughout the world. The numerous various calendars have been used in different regions for different periods of history simply because they were the best calendar system the people had to agree upon at the time. Periodically, societies within evolving civilization have chosen to reform their calendar or convert to an entirely different one when there were sensible reasons to and more logical long-term benefits than short-term inconveniences involved with the change.

The most shared calendar system that is currently being used in the world at the time of this writing is called the Gregorian calendar. The Gregorian calendar is an adaptation of the Julian calendar which was enacted by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 to clear up a problem that had occurred in the Julian calendar that had made it incongruent with the true solar round, which was notable by its physical markers such as the vernal equinoxes. Basically, the Julian calendar had been slowly becoming incongruent with the solar round because there is a drift of about 3 extra leap days per 400 years, due to the solar year being slightly less than 365 ¼ days. (In essence, all that is needed to prevent this is to skip one leap day—which is regularly added once every four years to keep the civil calendar congruent with the solar round—every 132 years, though the Gregorian systems uses an odd way of accomplishing that.) At that time in 1582, what the calendar reform meant was skipping ahead 10 calendar days for the extra leap days that had occurred. Some groups did not initially follow this change due to gripes of inconvenience, but most all eventually did for reason of being congruent with one another, as is shown in most of the world today being on the Gregorian calendar.

But while the Gregorian version of the Julian calendar has been the internationally agreed upon calendar in the modern world, there are many other calendars still being used. And aside from the fact that some regions have chosen to keep their older calendars for sake of tradition, many have not adopted the Gregorian calendar for the reason that it has components which do not make sense—such as not having consistent months but instead having the number of days per months differ between 28 and 31 days quite arbitrarily based from simple
dictation by Julius Caesar in 45 BC ad-hoc to the already irregular twelve months in the Roman calendar being used prior to that time. Moving beyond the continued use of this old calendar from a collapsed totalitarian empire would be emblematic of outgrowing that mentality.

The different number of days per month in the Gregorian calendar has been a pain to remember for this calendar system and has caused monthly dates to fall on different days of the week continually every month, instead of being able to know what day of the week it is from the date of the month, as would be possible if the months were regular. This irregularity has also caused incongruence through monthly bills being the same price despite the months differing in number of days. Obviously, the calendar would make more sense for all purposes if each month were simply the same number of days. This would make the new global civil calendar a more sensible calendar for all countries to adopt.

Of the many advocates for calendar reform who have promoted improving the current calendar, one of the most revolutionary was José Argüelles. José Argüelles, who was an expert in decoding the Mayan calendar, proposed that humanity should adopt a regular 13 month calendar. His argument for this included that the Moon revolves around the Earth roughly 13 times per year, and that this forms a natural rhythm which we could model our calendar after to be more in harmony with natural rhythms.

Further reasoning for a 13 month calendar is that the year can be equally divided into 13 regular 28-day months of four solid 7-day weeks. Thirteen months of 28 days each totals 364 days, almost perfectly dividing the year into regular months. The one extra day per year was proposed by José Argüelles to be nicely used to celebrate a yearly global holiday called the *Day out of Time*. One *Day Out of Time* per year would need to not be considered a part of any week in the calendar as to keep all of the months a solid four 7-day weeks continually. This *Day out of Time* could be celebrated as a day of peace through art. In accordance with the Mayan calendar from which José Argüelles drew much of his wisdom, the *Day out of Time* was calculated to fall on July 25th of the current Gregorian calendar.

While the 13 Moon calendar José Argüelles promoted is quite different in name from the currently used Gregorian calendar to which much of the world is already familiar, there are some compromises between the two that could be proposed to make it a more feasible change everyone could agree upon. Basically all that would need to be done to reform the Gregorian calendar would be to add one month and then to make all of the months an even 28 days. I will propose one way to do this that would keep the familiar Julian names from the Gregorian calendar and simply adding one new month which I propose could be named “Arguelles”.

The month of Arguelles could be added in the middle of the year, to keep the other months relatively evenly spaced in their previous arrangement and seasonal expectations. It
would be fitting to keep the *Day out of Time* on the same day in the solar round as was originally proposed by José Argüelles in the month of Arguelles. With the shift in the days caused by making all the months a little shorter to 28 days, the *Day Out of Time* would fall in the 8th month, between the 8th and 9th days (which could be signified as 8/8.5 for schedules to denote the day, though it would not be considered as a named day of the week as to keep each month a solid for weeks). Every fourth year, for leap year, there could be a double *Day out of Time* celebration (which could be signified as 8/8.33 and 8/8.66, though again neither would be considered named days of the week). As not to miss the critical change instituted to the Julian calendar with the Gregorian reform due to the length of the year being 365.2425 days, one leap day would be skipped every 132 years.

Adding Arguelles as the 8th month would change the calendar to the order of: (1) January, (2) February, (3) March, (4) April, (5) May, (6) June, (7) July, (8) Arguelles, (9) August, (10) September, (11) October, (12) November, and (13) December. In this new calendar, there would be slight changes made in the dates of some events. For example, the equinoxes and solstices would now fall on different days. These changes would be easy to place throughout the year by the related experts. All historical events could simply be collated in their same order in the solar round to their new date from prior to the change, with such things as record high and low temperatures being transposed into the new calendar dates. Most holidays could stay in their current placement within their respective months. Slight changes would occur in the day of the year on the solar round in which holidays were celebrated, but this would not really mean much, so long as the holidays were still celebrated.

One slight personal inconvenience that would happen with this switch to a more logical calendar would be the celebration of birthdays not having the same date. However, with the official codification of the calendar, all birthdays could simply be transposed into the same day of the solar round, merely designated by the new date in the new calendar—as to still be celebrated on the same reflective day. Of course, after a hundred years or so this temporary incongruence would phase out as newer generations would no longer have birthdays in the old irregular calendar. Though seeming like forever in individual lives, a century is a short time in the larger scale of progress. Yet, in that time the world could be radically changed away from the old empire-type ignorance and careless mistreatment that has characterized this last age from which humanity is in the process of graduating from into the New Age.

This proposed calendar reform is totally feasible and would result in widespread improvement in logicality and ease of memory for everyone using this shared global civil calendar. It could be instituted on a new year’s day throughout the world to reform the existing Gregorian calendar with organized planning set forth in advance. Because this calendar reform renovates the previously familiar international calendar instead of replacing it with a totally
different one, it could be a smooth transition. The slight changes would make it easy to get used to for those living today, and the inconveniences would be worth having a regular calendar with even months for lasting sensibility for all those to come thousands of years into the future.

Such a change would not have made sense while people were living as though there were no tomorrow due to the ideation that the end of the world was coming around the corner, but now it is time that the world wake up to the fact that civilization on this planet will surely last for thousands upon thousands of years. This new calendar would signify that the people of the world intend to have a global civilization that is changed to one of peace and equality instead of war and injustice, with everyone on the same organized global team working toward progress and sustenance.

The very ideation that some have discouragingly formed in which it is perceived that no one can change anything is the truest inhibitor of progress there is. We cannot let such negative thinking hold us back in this new technological era in which more progress and coordination is possible for us than ever before. Actually deciding on enacting this calendar reform would prove that the people of the world can use reason to improve things today, just as people have always been able to do through reform in the past, and would signify the dawning of a more sensible social environment for everyone. As with all possible improvements that are realized in life, the sooner the change is made the better.

All that needs to be done is to have an international committee plot out the new calendar as described, with nations arranging their national holidays within it as they choose, and to set a target year that can be agreed upon to implement it. As January 1st, 2017 will fall on a Sunday, which would be the logical day to start the regular four week months to keep the months aligned into solid four week blocks, it would seem that 2017 would be a good year to implement the change. (If that opportunity is missed, 2023 would be the next opportunity to begin on a Sunday and stay on track of weeks from the Gregorian calendar.) With this new calendar in place starting on a Sunday for the 1st of the year, the 1st of each month would dependably be a Sunday and one would always be able to tell the day of the week simply by the date of the month, which would make a lot more sense than the current erratic system.

Surely, humanity has the potential to make the changes needed to improve the world vastly without this proposed calendar change; but this new calendar would help facilitate a major transformation. It would be a manifestation of the idea that the way the world works can actually make sense. Things don’t have to remain illogical just because that’s the way they are right now and the way they were in the past. I’ve named this new calendar the Arguellan calendar in dedication to José Argüelles and all of his work promoting this as a way to transform the culture of the world into a more interconnected Culture of Peace.