

Philosophy and Psychology, East and West

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[Written almost exactly nine years after my initial spiritual opening, during my second quarter in grad school at CIIS (then CIAS) in San Francisco for the Institute's basic "Core Course," this essay was judged the best paper in a class of over 60 students. It is loaded with technical terms from each of the traditions, and so makes for a fairly good introduction to each of our Sacred Traditions. I've added italics and boldface for emphasis and readability. Note that this is a brief survey work; much more material on each of the spiritual traditions is available at other sections of this website, and, specifically for the Eastern traditions, in the upcoming historical volume, *India's Sages Source Book: Nondual Wisdom from Hindus, Buddhists, Jainas, Tantrics, Sants, Sikhs and Sufis*, Wake Up Press, 2007.]

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All the major spiritual traditions agree that our only real problem is our tendency to ***mistakenly identify ourselves with what we are not***. We are truly *Ātman/Brahman, Puruṣa, Sat-cit-ānanda, Nirvāṇa, Buddha-nature, Śūnyatā*, Mind, *Tao, Allāh*, Pure Spirit, God, (etc.), and yet we are always identifying with a petty self-image, the "me," which we fabricate out of ignorance and which serves to create the feeling of separation and alienation from the rest of our true Being, which is now considered as "other." This root feeling of separation and alienation leads to a syndrome of myriad desires to "have" Being in a satisfactory way. Such desires bring the inevitable frustrations and anxieties and traumas when these demanding desires go unfulfilled—for Being, our true identity, cannot be "had," but only "be-ed," and it will not cater to the demands of the "me."—Hence, we incur a multitude of derived problems—anger, fear, hate, grief, envy, boredom, etc.—all stemming from our root problem of wrong identification.

The remedy for wrong identification is, of course, ***right identification***, and this only comes through *a total transcendence of our usual egocentric "me" tendencies* in all their forms. When this transcendence, which is a kind of inner *stopping* and *release* has occurred, realization of our True Nature happens spontaneously, instantaneously. It follows from this view that *not* "anything goes." The spiritual traditions all prescribe definite moral injunctions: some behaviors, both physical and mental, are "wrong"—don't do them. This applies not only to such obvious evils as killing, lying, stealing, lusting, and so on, but also to the subtler kinds of selfish, egocentric indulgences: thinking too much, trying to be "one-up" on others, coveting subtle states of happiness and "spiritual entertainment," and so forth.

The greatest masters and adepts carry this morality to the level of virtual perfection, allowing themselves no egocentric indulgences at all, no moments of activity produced out of the ordinary "me"-consciousness. The stopping of the "ego-tripping" on subtler levels is usually considered possible only through the practice of *meditation*, including *self-inquiry*. When perfectly successful, meditation eliminates all the subtle ways in which we like to ignore our true Identity and misidentify with the narrowed-down, egocentric "me"-sense on different levels of experience, be they physical, emotional, mental, astral, causal, heavenly, or whatever. When we have awakened to our true Identity, there then remains only the miracle, the wonder of Being, and the exquisite, indescribable peace, bliss, light, love, power, and beauty which flow from this Being (or, indeed, *are* this Being).

Such is the essence of the highest philosophy and psychology, East and West.

Let us elaborate in more detail the unique viewpoint that each of the traditions we have studied (so far in this course, anyway) bring to this subject. It will be seen that, while they are in fairly general agreement as to the overall problem of wrong identification and what needs to be done—or should I say "un-done"—about it, their views do differ in many ways.

Let us start with **Hinduism**, which in itself has several viewpoints. "Hindu" is a Persian word simply meaning "Indian," so "Hinduism" is simply the "ism" of the Indian people. This "ism" has never been

split into such separate disciplines as we have in the West—psychology, philosophy, religion—so we must take it as a whole, a way of life. The *Vedas* are the oldest and most basic of Hindu scriptures, being regarded as *śruti*, “that which is heard,” supposedly heard from the gods by certain *ṛṣis* (sages) of old, who then handed them down via a sacred oral transmission to the *brāhmaṇs* (the priests, one of four castes, the others being the warriors/leaders, merchants and farmer/laborer castes, along with the “outcasts”). The legendary poet-saint Vyāsa is said to be the compiler of the *Vedas*. The most important of the four *Vedas* is the oldest, the *R̥g* (c1500 BCE), followed by the *Sāma Veda*, *Yajur Veda* (split into *Śukla-Yajur* and *Kṛṣṇa-Yajur*), and the later, stranger *Atharva Veda*. Each *Veda* has two distinct parts: *Samhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa*.

Out of the latter portion grew two other sections or stages of Vedic literature, called *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad*. The *Upaniṣads* contain, for our purposes, the relevant philosophical and psychological ideas. The *Upaniṣads* (of which there are said to be a total of 108, some 14 or so which are truly ancient) themselves contain various contradictory strands of thought, which some thinkers believe are irreconcilable. These contradictory ideas mostly relate to 1) the nature of reality: is it non-dual (*advaita*), non-dualist in a qualified way (*viśiṣṭādvaita*), or dualist (*dvaita*)? The *Upaniṣads* themselves don’t really discuss this issue in such terms, only later philosophers like Śaṅkara (c700 CE), Rāmānuja (1017-1137), Madhva (1199-1276) and others; 2) whether the ultimate reality, known as *Brahman*, *Ātman*, or *Puruṣa*, is *with* attributes (*Saguṇa Brahman*) or *without* attributes (*Nirguṇa Brahman*).

Leaving aside these philosophical differences over the nature of the Absolute, the *Upaniṣads* are unanimous in urging us to realize *Brahman/Ātman/Puruṣa*, and thereby attain Immortality and transcend the painful rounds of rebirth. A basic teaching of the *Upaniṣads* is that the one *Brahman* has become many beings through his creative power (*māyā*), and dwells in each being as *Ātman*, the unexperienced Experiencer of experiencing (the unseen Seer of seeing, etc.). Through good or evil action (*karma*), a being can either attain to pleasant or painful worlds, but will sooner or later die in such worlds and be reborn as a human. This process of transmigration continues endlessly unless a being realizes *Ātman/Brahman*, thereby leaving behind all worlds, becoming immortal, never to be reborn again. This realization comes from the yoga (unifying discipline) of *jñāna* (knowledge) of *Ātman / Brahman*, which in turn is achieved through meditation and/or insight.

In addition to the straightforward injunction to “Know the supreme *Brahman/Ātman/Puruṣa/Self*” found throughout the *Upaniṣads*, there are other recommended meditation-insight practices which include the following: hold the body steady, with upper part erect, turn senses toward the heart, and meditate on the primal vibration or creative sound *Aum*[1]; still the senses, mind, and intellect by becoming detached and desireless[2]; steadily discriminate or “separate,” the Self from the body[3]; behold all in the Self and the Self in all[4]; realize *Brahman* in every state of mind[5]; through meditation become serene in *buddhi* (subtlest, discriminating intellect)[6]; be absorbed in meditation through one-pointedness of mind[7]; meditate on *Hara, Rudra-Śiva*, the Supreme Lord/*Īśvara* (this is the only theistic, person-to-person element in the *Upaniṣads*)[8]; unceasingly practice truth, austerity, continence, and knowledge[9]; meditate on the Self[10]; “die” to the world[11]; worship the inner light[12]; meditate on the mind and on the *ākāśa* (space; poorly translated as “ether”) as *Brahman*[13]; see, hear, and understand nothing (in particular)[14]; and so on.

Notable ideas in the *Upaniṣads* include the famous equation of Self with self: “That which is the subtle essence—in it all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art (*Tat tvam asi*)”[15]; the idea that *Brahman* can truly only be described negatively as “Not this, not this (*neti, neti*)”[16]; the idea of four possible states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, sleeping, and the transcendental, pure, undifferentiated consciousness (*turiya*—“the fourth”)[17]; the idea that the *Gāyatrī mantra*, addressed to *Brahman* as the *Puruṣa* in the solar orb, is the most potent of all mantras, next to the primordial sound *Aum*[18]; the idea that *Brahman* is most accessible to a human by meditation with mind on the “*ākāśa* in the cave of the heart”[19]; the idea that That in us which sees, hears, thinks, etc., is none other than the Self/*Ātman*, or Divine Reality/*Brahman*. [20]

Because they are the culmination of the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads* and *Āraṇyakas* are called *Vedānta* or “end of the Vedas.” Two other works, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahma Sūtras*, sometimes considered part of a “fifth Veda,” also are regarded as Vedānta—though they are only viewed as *smṛti*, of human authorship. Together with the *Upaniṣads*, they constitute the *prasthāna-traya*, the main three canonical books of Vedānta. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, only part of a huge epic, the *Mahābhārata* (supposedly also written by Vyāsa—the name “Vyāsa” is probably more a title of an ancient class of editors) sums up the Upaniṣadic teaching on the Absolute *Brahman/Ātman*, but brings out a new element not really touched on in the *Upaniṣads* (except for a very brief passage in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, mentioned above): devotion to and worship of the Supreme as a Personal Lord. This is the resounding theme of the *Gītā*. Thus, in addition to the *karma-yoga* (which formerly, in the *Vedas*, was the yoga of ritualistic action, and is now defined in the *Gītā* as the practice of any action in the spirit of detachment, surrendering the fruits of one’s actions to the Lord), and the *jñāna-yoga* (yoga of intuitive knowledge of *Brahman*) of the *Vedas* and their *Upaniṣads*, we have *bhakti-yoga*, the way of devotion to the Personal Lord, which, in this case, may be directed to Lord Kṛṣṇa—for Kṛṣṇa is an *avatāra*, i.e., a perfectly conscious incarnation of God in His creative or Viṣṇu aspect (the idea of the *avatāra* is also historically new). Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna: “Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; prostrate thyself before Me; so shalt thou come to Me. I promise thee truly for thou art dear to Me. Abandoning all duties (*dharmas*), come to me alone for shelter. . . . I shall release thee from all evils.” [21]

Thus it is to be understood that the realization of *Ātman/Brahman* delineated in the *Upaniṣads* is only the first step in the true spiritual process, just preparation for the eternal spiritual union of loving and being loved by God. This theme was later picked up by the authors of the *Purāṇas* (huge mythic epics, the most famous being the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), by the Vedānta philosophers Rāmānuja (11th cent.), Madhva (12th cent.), et al, by the bhakti cults in South India like the Krishna-loving *Alvārs* (8th cent.), the *Śaivas* of Tamil-speaking lands (11th cent.), Bāsava’s *Vira-Śaivas* (12th cent.), and by the great medieval *bhaktas*: Rāmānand (14th cent.), Kabīr (c1440-1518), and Tulsi Dās (c1532-1623) in the north; Jñāneśvar (c1275-96), Nāmdev (14th cent.), Ekanāth (16th cent.), and Tukārām (1598-1649) in Mahārāṣṭra and Caitanya (c1485-1533) and Rāmprasād Sen (1718-75) in Bengal.

The *Brahma Sūtra* (also called the *Vedānta Sūtra*), the third canonical book of Vedānta, also said to be authored by “Vyāsa,” often thought to be the sage Bādarāyaṇa, is an attempt (unsuccessful, some say) to harmonize the various teachings of the earlier Vedānta canon. They are rather obscure, however, so their meaning must be explicated by commentators. Rāmānuja and Madhva interpreted them in a more or less dualistic way in accordance with their *bhakti-mārga* (devotional path) views. It was Śāṅkara’s nondualist commentary on them, however, that has been the most widely accepted, and, along with his other commentaries and works, has established the *advaita Vedānta* view as predominant in India. According to this nondual view, one must wake up from, or go beyond, the dualism implied in a love union with God and attain to the completely liberated state (*mokṣa*) of *being* God, i.e., being *That Absolute Reality* which allows the illusion of a dualistic situation of Lover and Beloved to arise in the first place. Thus, Śāṅkara is trying to reestablish *jñāna-mārga* as the supreme yogic path over *bhakti-mārga* (though this does not mean that the latter cannot be a preparation for the former) and establish the attributeless *Nirguṇa Brahman* (Formless Reality) as the ultimate goal over *Saguṇa Brahman* (Reality with forms, i.e., the cosmos and Personal Lord). For the purposes of this paper, there is no need here to judge which of the two Vedānta views, or the *yogas* they imply, is “better.” Besides, this is a question which can only be “answered” through direct experience, not by mere speculative argument.

We now must consider a popular, orthodox Hindu system outside of Vedānta, namely, the *Sāṃkhya-Yoga* system. Sāṃkhya, more philosophic in its outlook, supposedly comes to us from the legendary Kapila (c7th cent. BCE). Iśvarakṛṣṇa’s *Sāṃkhya-kārikā*, a work of the 3rd cent. CE, is the earliest available text here, and shows signs of having been influenced by Buddhist thought, since it labors

hard to assert the reality of a self-principle (which Buddhists apparently deny—see below). Sāṃkhya is plainly dualistic, positing two basic principles: *Puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, knowing *subject* and known *object*. *Puruṣa* is the true Self, pure noumenous spirit—eternally peaceful and unchanging, beyond space/time. *Prakṛti* is “matter” or “nature,” the basis of all objective, phenomenal existence, whether physical or psychical. *Prakṛti* is an unmanifest noumenon when its three basic constituents, the *guṇas*—*satto-guṇa* (quality of *sattva* or harmony), *rājoguṇa* (quality of *rājas* or passion/agitation), and *tamoguṇa* (quality of *tamas* or inertia)—are in equilibrium. When this balance is disturbed by the “exciting” presence of *Puruṣa* (exactly how the *Puruṣa* excites *prakṛti* is never really explained), the *guṇas* begin their dance of interaction in different ways, creating and evolving a differentiated world. The “offspring” of *prakṛti* are *buddhi* (discriminating intellect, the stuff of consciousness), *ahamkāra* (ego-consciousness), and, from the sattvic aspect of *ahamkāra*, *manas* (mind), the 5 *indriyas* (organs of perception), the 5 instruments of action, and, from the tamasic aspect of *ahamkāra*, the 5 *tanmātras* (the elements: ether, earth, water, light, and air). Thus comes the common, usual experience of a psychophysical world of known objects. Sāṃkhya holds that discriminative knowledge, the result of purified *buddhi*, releases the *jīva*, the empirical individual or soul, from the world of *prakṛti*, allows it to experience itself as *Puruṣa*, eternally free of *prakṛti*.

This “salvation” in Sāṃkhya is, of course, only phenomenal, for the true Self is *always already free*. Bondage is the condition of one who lacks discriminative knowledge feeling oppressed by *prakṛti*; release is the condition of one who has discriminative knowledge, feeling free of *prakṛti*.

It might be added here that, in the released state, the *Puruṣa* finds itself to be actually only one of many *Puruṣas*. How these are all inter-related is, however, never specified, thus causing a problem for our rational minds which are trying to logically figure out how a multiplicity of purely noumenous, formless, boundless spirits can exist together in a differentiated way. In some Sāṃkhya systems, the reality of *Brahman* is posited as a unifying principle which embraces all *Puruṣas*, along, with *prakṛti*.

Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra*, written around the 2nd cent. BCE (the last chapter, however, 2nd cent. CE) accepts the Sāṃkhya metaphysics, but goes on to give us a set of age-old, yet very sophisticated and highly practical instructions on how to realize *Puruṣa* as always already free from *prakṛti*. Patañjali calls this perfectly free state *kaivalya*, or *nirbija samādhi* (the “oneness/absorption without seed”), also known as *dharma-megha-samādhi*. The methods for realization have come to be known as *rāja-yoga*, the “kingly” or “highest” yoga; Patañjali himself terms them “*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*,” the yoga of 8 limbs— involving *yama* (restraints), *niyama* (observances), *āsana* (postures), *prāṇāyāma* (regulation of breath), *prāṅyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses, or of mind from senses), *dhāraṇā* (concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation or contemplation), and *samādhi* (“sameness, oneness or absorption of the *buddhi*”; poorly translated as “trance”); the last three of these are collectively known as *saṃyama*, a term which Patañjali uses throughout his 196 sutras.

This may all sound very complex, but it is not. Patañjali simply defines his *yoga* as “*citta vṛtti nirodhah*”[22]—inhibition of the mind-modifications (“mind” here being the composite structure of *buddhi/ahamkāra/manas*). A major aspect of this inhibition of mind-modifications is the elimination of the all-important five *kleśas*, or obstacles, which preclude discriminative wisdom and *kaivalya* or *nirbija samādhi*. These *kleśas* are *avidyā* (ignorance, lack of awareness of reality); *asmitā* (“me”-sense); *rāga* (binding likes or attractions); *dveṣa* (binding dislikes or aversions); *abhiniveśa* (desire for mortal life). Success in eliminating the *kleśas* and modifications of the mind through the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (especially the threefold *saṃyama* component) allows *Puruṣa*, the Seer, to be “established in his own essential and fundamental nature” (*svarūpa avasthānam*).[23]

In other words, once again we have a case of an individual getting over a case of mistaken identity and realizing the True, Supreme Identity. A curious element in Patañjali’s system which philosophically and psychologically distinguishes it from the atheistic Sāṃkhya system is Patañjali’s positing the existence of a Supreme *Puruṣa*, the Lord (*Īśvara*), who is already eternally free of *prakṛti* and not

playing the game of being oppressed by *prakṛti* like ourselves. Patañjali maintains that the *jīva* can, as an alternative to the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, simply (if not so easily!) surrender the sense of the normal “me” to the will of *Īśvara* through self-abandonment, letting go of all desires into the Divine Will. This way is “*Īśvara-praṇidhāna*” “self-surrender to the Lord.”[24] One might think this to be identical to *bhakti yoga*, but it differs slightly in that it tends to be less emphatic on emotional, devotional love of God and more emphatic on losing the sense of the petty “me” (*asmitā*) in the Supreme, Infinite “I.”

Two unorthodox Indian systems (unorthodox in that they do not accept the authority of the Vedas) are Jainism and Buddhism (a third unorthodox system, the *Cārvakā*, is a skeptical, materialist, irreligious school which, because of its relative unpopularity and irrelevance for a paper on spirituality, need not be mentioned further here). The **Jainas** follow the historical individual **Vardhamāna** or **Mahāvīra** (599-527 BCE), who himself systematized the doctrine of the tirthankaras (founders of the path), the first three of whom were supposedly Rṣabha, Ajitanātha, and Aristanemi (all of ancient date, mentioned in the *Yajur Veda*). The Jainas basically held that the *jīva*-soul, which is both the true and empirical self, is bound up in matter due to the “inflow” presence in the self of “karmic matter,” caused by wrong belief, non-renunciation, carelessness, passions, and union of the self with mind and, body and speech. The way to deliverance (*mokṣa*) from its bondage is through the “three jewels”: *right belief* (in things as they are), *right knowledge* (of which there are five kinds: ordinary cognition, scriptural knowledge, extraordinary knowledge, mental knowledge, and perfect knowledge—the last two of which are infallible), and *right conduct* (consisting in *ahiṃsā* or freedom from injury/*hiṃsā*, falsehood, theft, unchastity, and worldly attachment). The Jains advocated a strict asceticism to stop the inflow of karmic matter into the self, and to destroy the karmic matter already in it; this asceticism involves different kinds of austerities, controls, observances, meditations and concentrations.[25] The liberated state for the Jaina is similar to that posited in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga system, wherein we find a multiplicity of distinct selves or *puruṣas* having realized their true identity as divine selves, pure *jñāna* and *darśana* (knowledge and intuition), infinitely peaceful and unchanging.

Siddhārtha (Pali: Siddhattha) Gautama, also known as Śākyamuni, the sage from the Śākya clan, most widely known as **the Buddha** or Awake Enlightened One, lived roughly from 563-483 BCE, and it was his momentous enlightenment (*bodhi*) and the teaching that flowed out of this, that gave rise to the psychospiritual system known as Buddhism, which has spread to all corners of the globe. The Buddha was straightforward in his approach: he clarified the essential condition of life in Noble Truth number one: all is dissatisfactory[26]; he succinctly pointed out the cause of the problem in Noble Truth number two: dissatisfaction arises from craving (*taṇhā*) or thirsting desire (*trṣṇā*), which keeps us in the rebirth cycle. Siddhārtha offered hope in Noble Truth number three: dissatisfaction can be stopped in the complete stopping of craving. He then illuminated the means to the complete stopping of craving in Noble Truth number four: namely, the Noble Eight-fold Path: right views, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Walking this eight-fold path—which is neither ascetic nor indulgent (it is the “middle way”)—verily leads to *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāṇa*), the perfect state of the Unborn, Uncompounded Bliss, Peace, and Release.

The Buddha accepted the Hindu concepts of rebirth and *karma* (he clairvoyantly saw for himself that they were true) and realized that *the six possible realms of life*—those of the *deva*-gods, the jealous “demonic” *asura*-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-dwellers—were all dissatisfactory, not providing a perfect, ever-lasting state of well-being. Declared the Buddha: “Everything is on fire with the flames of greed (*lobha*), ill-will (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).”[27] These are the “3 evil roots.” The Noble Eight-fold Path, which boils down to the triple training in virtue/morality (Pali: *sīla*; Skt.: *śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā/prajñā*), eradicates these triple roots, thus allowing for *nibbāna*, the “unconditioned condition” wherein the fiery life of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of transmigration, the round of rebirth) is “extinguished” (the literal meaning of *nibbāna*). In his hugely important psycho-spiritual theory of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda/pratītya-samutpāda*)[28], the Buddha declares that ignorance (*avijjā/avidyā*) is the underlying cause of everything, including

craving and the three evil roots. From ignorance comes karma, then consciousness, then mentality-materiality, then the six sense-organs (including mind), then contact, then sensation, then craving, then attachment, then existence-becoming, then birth-aging-death, culminating in another rebirth, and so on. In this way of explaining things, the task is to eliminate ignorance. In doing so, all else is resolved. To this end, the Buddha recommends wise insight along with the practice of meditation.

Buddhism offers basically two kinds of meditation: the path of absorptive concentration (*samādhi*) and that of insight (*vipassanā/vipaśyanā*). The first, probably adopted by the Buddha from his early teachers of yoga, takes the practice of *samādhi* through eight stages (*jhānas*) of increasingly subtler absorption, culminating in a state of “neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). This is also called *nirodha* (cessation), a state of undifferentiated consciousness. It does not necessarily produce *nibbāna*—for after the meditator comes out of this temporary state, he may still be afflicted by ignorance, craving, the three evil roots, etc.

The other meditation path, *vipassanā*, “insight” or “clear seeing”—what the Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa calls “seeing what is,”[29] is the most widely practiced in Buddhism. It involves developing *samādhi* to the first *jhāna*-stage, and then continuously examining or studying life in terms of its “three marks”: *anicca*, *anattā*, and *dukkha*. The first mark, *anicca* (Skt.: *anitya*, impermanence), means that every possible form of experience, even in the heavens, is impermanent; *anatta* (Skt.: *anātman*, selflessness) means that every apparent “thing,” “being,” or “someone” is empty of any real substance—thus the world and “me” experiencing it are only illusory; *dukkha* (Skt.: *duḥkha*) means that there is no possible satisfaction to be derived from an illusory world. *Vipassanā* begins with the selection of one of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas*, or meditation objects (ranging from colored discs to corpses to attributes of the Buddha to formless states to the breathing process—each is suited for individual needs). Then one closely observes/feels what happens in experience while meditating on the chosen object, perfectly realizing how one’s experience is *anicca*, *anattā*, and *dukkha*. This ultimately brings about a series of more and more profound knowledges (*ñānas*, concerning the rise and fall of phenomena, appearance as terrifying and dangerous, dispassion and equanimity, etc.), culminating in *paññā*, perfect wisdom, “knowledge in conformity with Truth,” which effectively destroys ignorance, craving, and the three evil roots, thus spontaneously allowing for *nibbāna*.

It should be noted that, true to his *anattā* view, the Buddha would not posit any distinct “someone” “having” the experience of *nibbāna*. Some thinkers hold this *anattā* to be a denial of Hindu Vedānta’s reality of *Ātman/Brahman* and a positing of a nihilistic state, a state of non-existence. But this is a false interpretation of the Buddha’s view. The Buddha was *not* recommending nihilism. Nihilism is, in fact, a terrible heresy in the Buddhist view. No, *nibbāna* is simply a totally holistic “unconditioned condition” of utter freedom, wherein no distinct, individual, separate “me” or “you” can be found. We must realize that the concept of *Ātman* had, by the Buddha’s time, probably already become reified in a petty intellectual way. The Buddha’s own experience, proficient yogi that he was, led him to see that the realization of *Ātman/Brahman* in direct experience resulted in a totally indescribable state that simply could not be conceived in terms of a distinct “someone” “having” the experience. So it is said in the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa’s spectacular 5th century CE compendium of Buddhist psychology, “Nibbana (extinction) is, but there is no one in it; although there is a path, there is no goer.”[30] In the Buddhist view, individual selves are only illusory; they are aggregates (*khandhas/skandhas*) of form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations/reactions (*sankhāra/samskāra*) and egoic cognizing consciousness (*viññāna/vijñāna*). All of these aggregates are in a continuous process of rising and falling—yes, even cognizing consciousness, which is born and dies like every other element in the world, fading out completely, for instance, in deep dreamless sleep or *nirodha* trance state. So the Vedāntin *Ātman/Brahman* is not a distinct “someone” “having” a state of enlightenment. It, too, is *nibbāna*, the extinction of the false sense of self, and the realization of the “unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded [i.e., devoid of aggregates], and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, no escape could be shown here for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.”[31]

This is the essence of Buddhist teaching. Of course, there is much more to it than this: the scriptures of the oldest school of Buddhism, the Theravāda, the *Tipiṭaka*, contain thousands and thousands of pages supposedly listing the verbal instructions of the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. Some noteworthy ideas which emerge from these instructions are the four stages of attainment or realization (“stream-entry”; “once-returning”—i.e., to a rebirth in this world; “non-returning”; and attainment of *nibbāna*); the *iddhis* or supernormal powers that stagger the imagination[32]; the 121 possible *cittas*, or states of consciousness, ranging from the worldly to the heavenly (with its spectacular visions, sounds, bliss, etc.—all considered by the Buddha to be “pseudo-nirvana”) to the formless and even beyond all that into the altogether supramundane (the *lokuttara-cittas*).

Some 500-600 years after the Buddha, the ideal of the *Arhat*, the perfected Buddhist saint who has realized *nibbāna*, had evidently led in many cases to a rigid monastic “in-group” which was not showing enough concern for the laity’s welfare and was too obsessed with scholastic conceptualizing of various intellectual elements of the tradition. And so, a new school of Buddhism arose, the **Mahāyāna** or “Great vehicle”; the older schools were pejoratively labeled “Hīnayāna” or “little vehicle.” The Mahāyāna held forth its ideal of the *Bodhisattva* or “enlightenment being” who continually puts off his own final *nirvāṇa* until all sentient beings are liberated. This historical development is often considered to show the superiority of the Mahāyāna over the “Hīnayāna,” but we should not dismiss so easily as inferior the “Hīnayāna” or what emerged in southern Asian Buddhism as the Theravāda (“Way of the Elders”). After all, the ultimate destiny of the *arhat* is to attain Buddhahood, and it is not ruled out that a Buddha cannot appear again on the earthly scene for the sake of all beings. Besides this, a widespread Theravāda Buddhist meditation practice is based on four of the *kammaṭṭhānas* known as the “illimitables” or “Divine abodes” (*Brahma-vihāras*)—*mettā* (Skt.: *maitrī*, loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and, when the process is complete, *upekkhā* (equanimity). The practice of cultivating these qualities in meditation involves directing them towards all sentient beings, friend or foe. In countries of Southeast Asia where the Buddhist monks are practicing this meditation, the laity support them, knowing that they significantly benefit from such practice by the monks. So it is not true that the monks of the “Old Wisdom” way are not concerned about the laity and are hopelessly locked in the head with their concepts, not coming freely from the heart of freedom.

A second difference between Mahāyāna and “Hīnayāna” is that the former talks about our ultimate identity in more affirmative terms, and maintain that it is *always already the case*. Early Mahāyāna thinkers, such as the great sage **Nāgārjuna** (2nd cent. CE), defined our true identity as *Śūnyatā*, the Void or Openness-Emptiness, which is a slightly more affirmative way of putting it than “*nibbāna*.” Later Mahāyāna teachers and text authors began to use even more positive terms: Buddha-nature (*Buddhatā*), Self-nature, *Dharma-kāya* (Truth Body), Suchness (*Tathatā*), Clear Light, Mind, and so on. Tarthang Tulku, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher of modern times (Tibetans consider themselves to be a third school of Buddhism, the Vajrayāna “Diamond Vehicle,” but it historically emerged out of and is intellectually close to the Mahāyāna), has written the following passage about Mind as our true identity:

“According to the Buddhist way, . . . Mind is not just ‘being aware of’ an object.... In the West, for example, it seems that when anyone talks about “mind,” it is “mind-sensing” that is meant—relating mind to a series of perceptual processes.... Beyond this level of perceptual processes and interpretations... there is a more pervasive substratum of consciousness [not to be construed here in the sense of one of the aggregates], termed *kun-gzhi* in Tibetan, which is a kind of intrinsic awareness which is not involved in any subject-object duality.”[33]

A final difference between Mahāyāna and “Hīnayāna” is the virtually theistic element in the former, evidently introduced by Nāgārjuna. Here we have the notion of Amitābha/Amitāyus Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light/Life, by whose saving grace one can be totally liberated and attain to the Pure Land. This way of relying on the power of the Divine “Other” is termed “*tariki*” in Japan, whereas the

other form of Buddhist practice is termed “*jiriki*,” relying on one’s own power. (A true spiritual master, however, might have us see through the difference between these two paths by asking us, “Just how is it that ‘I’ am not the ‘other?’”)

Before leaving the subject of Buddhism, I might list some of the major schools that emerged within: Mahāyāna Buddhism: Madhyāmika (Doctrine of the Middle Way), founded by **Nāgārjuna**; Yogācāra (Way of Yoga) or Vijñānavāda (Mind-only Way), founded by two other Indians, the brothers **Asaṅga** and **Vasubandhu**, 4th-5th cent. CE; the Chinese T’ien-t’ai (Lotus; known in Japan as the Ten-dai), founded by **Chih-i**, 6th cent.; the Chinese Ching-t’u (Pure Land; Jodo Shin-shu in Japan), founded by **Hui-yuan**, 4-5th cent.; and the Chinese Ch’an or Meditation school, known in Japan as Zen, brought to China from India by the Indian sage **Bodhidharma**, c6th cent. ; this school has two main lines existent—the Rinzai and the Sōtō—the former started by the Chinese master **Lin-chi** (9th cent.) and brought to Japan by **Eisai** (12-13th cent.), and the latter originated by **Liang-chieh** (9th cent.) and brought to Japan by **Dōgen** (13th cent.); in Tibet, the Lamaist or Vajrayāna school, brought by the Indian sage **Padma Saṃbhava** (8th cent.); this has split up into four main sects: Kargyūtpa, Gelugpa, Nyingmapa, and Sakyapa; it is the Kargyūtpa sect, the “meditation” sect, that produced probably the most famous lineage of masters: **Tilopa** and **Nāropa** of India, **Marpa** and the great **Milarepa** (1043-1123) of Tibet.

We have seen that one of the lands where Buddhism found a home was China. Hundreds of years before its arrival, though, the Chinese already had a sophisticated tradition of thought, albeit less systematic and metaphysical than Indian thought, and more humanistic than the latter. **K’ung Fu-tzu** or Master K’ung (Latinized as **Confucius**) (likely 551-479 BCE) is well known to us for his rules on proper conduct and propriety in social relationships, his theory of ideal government, and so forth. He is not so well known for his mystical spirituality, which he definitely possessed and lived, but which is not emphasized in his selected sayings, known as the *Lun-yu*, or “Analects.” In fact it is said that, much in the spirit of the Buddha, he deliberately avoided references to “Man’s nature” and the “ways of Heaven.”[34] He himself maintained that “Superior men are modest in their words, profuse in their deeds.”[35] Nevertheless, we constantly hear him talking about how the *chün-tzu*, the “superior” or “gentle” man, functions according to the spiritual principle known as *Tao* or Way and the *Jên* or Good—and it is here that his sublime spirituality shows itself. “Set your heart upon the Way, support yourself by its power, lean upon Goodness.”[36] “He who doesn’t understand the will [*ming*] of Heaven can’t be regarded as a Superior man.”[37] He spoke of the need for continuous concentration on the Good[38], which integrity, altruism and love; renunciation (*jang*)[39]; looking within, or self-reflection[40]; self-sacrifice for the Good Way[41]; detachment[42]; following the tracks (of the ancients) into the “Inner Room”[43]; freedom from desire[44] and from vanity, resentment, and covetousness.[45] In a few places, Confucius talks of the status of the Divine Sage (*Shêng*) whose divine essence (*ling*) produces a mystic power or virtue (*teh*) which effects goodness.[46]

Confucius apparently thought that this state of being a Divine Sage was not the destiny for the vast majority of people, but belonged only to a few rare beings willing to dedicate themselves to the Way and the Good. Thus Confucius’ thought is not quite as profound as the Hindu, Jaina or Mahāyāna Buddhist views (or others that we shall be hearing about), which hold that we have a liberated, absolutely perfect identity at the core of our being. Still, Master K’ung was concerned with the establishing of ourselves in our best, most perfectly human nature through the realization of the state of the *chün-tzu*. Only through this realization can we stop the usual “me” activity of what Confucius calls the “small” or “common” man and begin to practice the Good. And, as mentioned above, Confucius did seem to feel the need for a kind of ongoing, continuous “meditation” or “concentration” on the Good, so as to best effect the harmonization of oneself with/into the universal moral order (*ho*). Thus we can say that Confucius, like all the other ancient sages, was concerned about the problem of realizing right identity through a spiritual discipline or training in meditation. (That Confucius thought highly of meditation is an idea that emerges from a story related by Chuang-tzu which will be reported below.)

Mang-tzu (Mencius) (371-289 BCE?), hailing from the Confucian school of thought, was another individual concerned with our true identity, but in a somewhat more profound way than Confucius. Consider these words he uttered which deal, like India's *Upaniṣads*, with the need for realizing one's true identity via the heart: "For a man to give full realization to his heart is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven, retaining his heart and nurturing his nature he is serving Heaven." [47] Again: "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small; the mass of people cast it away, while superior men preserve it." [48] "Those who follow that part of themselves which is great are great men; those who follow that part which is little are little men." [49] In these passages Mencius is referring once again to the *heart*, which is the seat of the refined *ch'i*, the subtle aspect of the all-pervading energy, the energy that constitutes the universe. Mencius advocated a kind of spiritual practice that involved being meditatively centered in the heart whereby *ch'i* was cultivated:

"... *Ch'i* is, in the highest degree, vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity and place no obstacle in its path and it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is ... *ch'i* that unites rightness and the Way. Deprive it of these and it will collapse. It is born of accumulated rightness and cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of rightness. Whenever one acts in a way that falls below the standard set in one's heart, it will collapse.... You must work at it and never let it out of your mind. At the same time, while you must never let it out of your mind, you must not forcibly help it grow either." [50]

We find here in this passage many mystical ideas: the need for moral "rightness" in order to increase the store of the refined *ch'i* in the heart; the need for ongoing mindfulness during this whole process; and the need for not forcing this process in an unnatural way. This last idea anticipates the concept of *wu-wei* ("no action," i.e., no ego-motivated doing) that was central to Taoist thinking (see below). Mencius gives us a picture of the man in whom this spiritual process has had its effect: "A gentleman transforms where he passes, and works wonders where he abides. He is in the same stream as Heaven above and Earth below. Can he be said to bring but small benefit?" [51]

Mencius is, of course, most well known for his view that men are good by nature: "Human nature is good... there is no man who is not good. [52]... The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike, likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong.... Benevolence, dutifulness, observance of the rites and wisdom are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in me originally." [53]

In other words, our true identity is flawless, perfect, at one with Heaven and Earth. Any imperfections in our behavior are due to what Mencius has called "disturbing circumstances," which make us go against our good nature, just as water, "disturbed" and forced to run uphill, is made to go against its natural tendency to flow downwards.

The most profoundly mystical of the early Chinese schools is contemplative **Taoism**, which is mainly based on two works: 1) the *Tao Teh Ching*, (Way and Its Power/Virtue)—a highly elliptical, cryptic, paradoxical, and sublimely poetic little work often placed around the 5th cent., but most likely not appearing until the 3rd cent. BCE. This much-translated scripture is attributed to the legendary **Lao-tzu** ("Old Boy") (6th? 3rd? cent. BCE), whose historicity some scholars now doubt but others have reaffirmed. 2) The second major ancient text for Taoism is the *Chuang-tzu*, attributed to the sage of that same name, an historical individual who lived probably from around 370 to 286 BCE.

According to the *Tao Teh Ching*, the source and true nature of all apparently different beings is the undefinable, indescribable, all-embracing, omnipresent, omnipotent Tao: "The Tao produced one, one produced two, two produced three, and three produced all things. All things arise from the Tao and are nourished by its *Teh* [Virtue or Power]. Tao is all-pervading."

Since the Tao is the origin and sustenance and very being of the “ten thousand things,” the Sage merely has to realize that it is his true identity (“knowing the self is enlightenment”⁵⁷) and live it perfectly from moment to moment in the spirit of *wu-wei*, “non-doing.” This notion of *wu-wei* requires elaboration. It is not sloth, quietism, inertia, or any other ego-motivated strategy of indulgence, but is simply the absence of any unnatural, agitated busy-ness or conniving on the part of a “me” who is diseased with desires, ambitions, aversions, and so on *ad mortem*. The Taoists, though they evidently did recommend a meditation in stillness as part of an ongoing discipline[58] were not advocating catatonia: “The sage *goes about* doing nothing[59]... A truly good man does nothing, *yet leaves nothing undone*[60]... *Practice wu-wei, work without doing.*”[61] [emphasis added to point out the dynamic tense of the verbs.

Some people think that *wu-wei* is simply to have license to go along with one’s conditioned tendencies; but in Taoism the individual is *not* allowed to remain stuck in the groove of unnaturally conditioned behaviors that resist the Tao; rather, the individual is enjoined to make the “effortless effort” (“The Tao of the sage is work without effort”[62]) and thereby become thoroughly transformed in the Way and Its Virtue:

“In meditation, go deep in the heart.[63]... Attend fully... become supple... wash and cleanse the primal vision... love all men... work, yet not take credit.[64]... Surrender yourself humbly[65]... Stay with the ancient Tao, move with the present; knowing the ancient beginning is the essence of Tao.[66] ... Wait quietly while the mud settles [in your own muddy pool of being].[67]... Empty yourself of everything, let the mind rest at peace.... Attain the divine [and] you will be one with the Tao.[68]... Realize one’s true nature... cast off selfishness.[69]... [The sage] remains unattached and calm.[70]... He takes care of all men and abandons no one.[71]... Be like a child... return to the infinite ... return to the state of the uncarved block.[72]. Cultivate *Teh* [virtue/power] in yourself... in the family... in the village... in the nation... in the universe and *Teh* will be everywhere.[73]... Care for others, serve heaven.[74]... The sage seeks freedom from desires.[75]... The sage wears simple clothing and holds the jewel in his heart.[76]... The sage works without recognition. He achieves what has to be done without dwelling on it.”[77]

Chuang-tzu accepted the *Tao Teh Ching* (and the figure of Lao-tzu) as authoritative, yet expands upon it in many ways. He tends to emphasize in his own writings a spiritual discipline of meditative stillness slightly more rigorous than that spoken of in the *Tao Teh Ching*. Evidently there was current in his time a yogic practice, *tso-wang* (“sitting with blank mind”)[78], which Taoists were utilizing to better facilitate both the realization of the Tao as our supreme identity and also the building up or accumulation of *Teh* as a kind of supernatural force or power. Consequently, we find him giving us many revealing instructions on this esoteric practice, often metaphorically:

“...If the superior man will keep the faculties lodged in his five viscera unemployed, and not display his powers of seeing and hearing while he is motionless as a representative of the dead, his dragon-like presence will be seen; while he is profoundly silent, the thunder of his words will resound; while his movements are unseen like those of a spirit, all heavenly influences will follow them, while he is thus unconcerned and does nothing, his genial influence will attract and gather all things around him.[79]... [Chuang-tzu has the sage Kuang Ch’eng-tzu telling Huan-ti in answer to the latter’s inquiry about proper care of the body:] I will tell you the perfect Tao. Its essence is surrounded with the deepest obscurity; its highest reach is in darkness and silence. There is nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. When it holds the spirit in its arms in stillness, then the bodily form of itself will become correct. You must be still; you must be pure; not subjecting your body to toil, not agitating your vital force; then you may live for long. When your eyes see nothing, your ears hear nothing, and your mind knows nothing, your spirit will keep your body and the body will live long. Watch over what is within you, shut up the avenues that connect you with what is external; much knowledge is pernicious. . . . Watch over and keep your body, and all things will of themselves give it vigor. I maintain the original unity of these elements and dwell in the harmony of them. In this way I have cultivated myself for twelve

hundred years and my bodily form has undergone no decay.”[80] [Chuang-tzu has Lao-tzu telling Confucius:] You must, as by fasting and vigil, clear and purge your mind, wash your spirit white as snow, and sternly repress your knowledge. When the body is completed and the vital power is restored to its original vigor, the man is one with Heaven. ...When the body and vital power are not diminished, we have what may be called the transference of power. From the vital force there comes another more vital, and man returns to be the assistant of Heaven.”[82]

“By gathering his nature into a unity, by nourishing his vital power, by concentrating his virtue, he will penetrate to the making of things. In this condition, with his heavenly constitution kept entire and no crevice in his spirit, how can things disturb his serenity?[83] ... Be... large-minded, like space. . . hold all things in your love, favoring and supporting none specially.... What should you be doing? What should you not be doing? You have only to be allowing this course of natural transformation to be going on.[84] He whose mind is thus grandly fixed emits a Heavenly light. In him who emits this Heavenly light, men see the true man. When a man has cultivated himself up to this point, thenceforth he remains constant in himself. When he is thus constant in himself, what is merely the human element will leave him, but Heaven will help him. Those whom their human element has left we call the people of Heaven. Those whom Heaven helps we call the Sons of Heaven. Those who would by learning attain to this, seek for what they cannot learn. Those who would by effort attain to this, attempt what effort can never effect. Those who aim by reasoning to reach it, reason where reasoning has no place. To know how to stop is the highest attainment. Those who cannot do this will be destroyed on the lathe of Heaven.”[85]

I have quoted such a large amount of material here to show that there was a powerful Taoist yoga going on in ancient China. Some scholars have tended to think of the Taoist tradition only in terms of two aspects—the “contemplative,” which is seen as a kind of child-like, dazed wandering through misty mountains; or the “religious-liturgical”; which is viewed as degenerate, superstitious magical practices. I think it is useful to know that a genuine yogic tradition was apparently operating covertly within Chinese society, a yogic tradition that holds much in common with Hindu and Buddhist yogic traditions. Before leaving the overall subject of *tso-wang*, I might point out that in the *Analects*, Confucius’ favorite disciple is obviously Yen Hui; this same Yen Hui is reported by Chuang-tzu—perhaps apocryphally—to have greatly impressed Confucius by his meditation practice:

“Yen Hui said, ‘I am making progress.’ Confucius replied, ‘What do you mean?’ ... ‘I sit and forget everything.’ Confucius changed countenance and said, ‘What do you mean by saying you sit and forget everything?’ Yen Hui replied, ‘My connection with the body and its parts is dissolved; my perceptive organs are discarded. Thus leaving, my material form and bidding farewell to my knowledge, I am become one with the Great Pervader. This I call sitting and forgetting all things.’ Confucius said, ‘One with that Pervader, you are free from all likings.... You have, indeed, become superior to me! I must ask leave to follow in your steps.’[86]

Before leaving Chuang-tzu, we ought to benefit from a few more of his gems of wisdom relevant to our study: “The sage comprehends the connections between himself and others and how all constitute one body.[87] ...The perfect man has no thought of self.[88]... Selfish indulgence is a disease.[89] ... The perfect man is spirit-like.[90]...There is the great awaking after which we shall, know that this life was a great dream.[91] ... The perfect man directs the energy of his spirit to what was before the beginning and finds pleasure in the mystery belonging to the region of nothingness. He is like the water that flows on without obstruction and expands into the Grand Purity.”[92]

Needless to say, with such elements as “*Tao*,” “*Teh*,” “*wu-wei*,” “*tso-wang*,” “life-is-a-dream,” “nothingness,” and so on, Taoism provided a very supportive and crucially important base on which Indian Buddhism could establish itself when it arrived in China. The writings and sayings of the great Ch’an Masters show that Taoist terminology was perfect for expressing the Buddhist Dharma-Teaching, especially on the issue of realizing right identity as “a True Man of the Tao.” We might even wish to say

that, although the religio-magical cult appropriated the name of “Taoism” for its own practices, and has carried the “Taoist” label down through the centuries, the real contemplative and yogic Taoism of the *Tao Teh Ching*, and the *Chuang-tzu* (and a few other works) has survived to this day as part of the essence of Ch’an and Zen Buddhism.

In concluding this section on Chinese thought, I might relate the account between the great Ch’an Master Hui-hai and a questioner, who asked, “Do Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism really amount to one doctrine or to three?” The Master replied, “Employed by men of great capacity, they are the same. As understood by men of limited intellect, they differ. All of them spring forth from the functioning of the one Self-nature.”[93]

Moving on to the Middle East, we come to the mystic tradition of **Judaism**, which at present is based on three sources: The **Tanakh** (the Hebrew Bible, what Christians pejoratively call the “Old Testament”) and rabbinical teachings concerning it, the **Kabbalah** (literally, the “tradition” of mystic writings and sayings, of which the *Zohar*, “Book of Splendor,” c13th cent., is the most important, authored by **Moses de Leon**), and the living tradition of Kabbalist and Hasidic masters, especially that lineage which arose in Poland in the 18th century.

In the *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible, we learn that the One True God, Yahweh—the “I AM WHO AM”—is the source of all. The task for man is to realize his true identity, for he is created “in the image and likeness of God.”[94] But in the *Tanakh*, this true human identity is not considered in any way the equivalent of God. Even though we find it written in the Psalms, “I say, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you...’” this does *not* elevate man to the ontological status of Yahweh. Contrast this view with that of, Advaita Vedanta, for instance, where man’s true nature, *Ātman*, is considered to be identical with the Supreme Reality, *Brahman*. The Jewish view, in its older, Talmudic form, is therefore definitely dualistic, positing the empirical individual, along with the rest of creation, as real-in-itself, an actual entity other than Yahweh. Thus, unlike in some of the Eastern views, man can’t simply “awaken” from the “dream” of manifest existence and realize himself to be actually the “Dreamer” of it all; rather, man can only ascend to a level of dualistic union with God. The classic meditations given in the Hebrew Bible for the attainment of this union are “The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,”[95] and the Psalmist’s “Be still and know that I an God.”[96]

In Kabbalist literature, a nondual monism emerges to a certain extent: “Nothing [exists] in reality but His glory.”[97] “What is below is above, and what is inside is outside.”[98] This nonduality would seem to me be more a conceptual artifact than an empirical fact for most Kabbalists, for they have superimposed upon it an elaborate pattern of multiplicity which seems to be felt by most Kabbalists in a very dualistic way (a subjective impression from reading the literature). According to the Kabbalist view, man’s spiritual progress involves an ascension through myriad hierarchical levels of reality. The ten highest of these are the *sefirot*, the “realm of the divine emanations. . . the world of the divine attributes. . . in which Cod’s creative power unfolds.”[99] The tenth and final of these *sefirot* emanations of the Divine is the *Shekhinah*, which is explained by Gershom Scholem, the eminent scholar of Jewish mysticism: “In Talmudic literature and non-Kabbalistic Rabbinical Judaism, the *Shekhinah*—literally in-dwelling, namely of God in the world—is taken to mean simply God himself in His omnipresence and activity in the world and especially in Israel. God’s presence, what in the Bible is called His “face,” is in Rabbinical usage His *Shekhinah*. Nowhere in the older literature is a distinction made between God himself and His *Shekhinah*; the *Shekhinah* is not a special hypostasis distinguished from God as a whole. It is very different in the usage of the Kabbalah. . . Here the *Shekhinah* becomes an aspect of God, a quasi-independent feminine element within Him.”[100]

The *Shekhinah* also came to be identified with the *Neshamah*, the divine innermost spark of the human soul, beyond sin:

“The sphere of the *Shekhinah* as the dwelling place of the soul—this is an entirely new conception. The highest abode of the soul known to older Jewish systems was in or under God’s throne [*Merkabah*]. The notion that the soul had its origin in the feminine precinct within God himself was of far-reaching importance for the psychology of the *Kabbalah*.”[101]

But lest one think that here we have a view of man’s nature as already free and divine, one should realize that, alas, much of the time this *Shekhinah*, this “feminine precinct within God himself,” is actually in exile (*galuth*) from Him. In other words, “a part of God himself is exiled from God.”[102] Why and how this is so is a matter too complex for the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that a lot of elaborate, highly symbolic ritual and prayer was/is employed by many Kabbalists to reunite the *Shekhinah* (and thereby the human soul’s highest abode) with the rest of Divinity. This whole endeavor tends to become weighed down with all kinds of magical enterprises, and, reading the literature on the subject, one can’t help but get the feeling that here Kabbalistic thought is becoming preoccupied with something which seems somehow not as “refined” or as “pure” or as “lofty” as one would expect from a sophisticated spiritual tradition. On the other hand, Scholem, in his article “Meditation” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, describes contemplation or meditation, practices (known as *hitbonenut*, also, as *kavvanah*, “holy intent” in Martin Buber’s view) which obviously require great proficiency in concentration and strength of spirit:

“Contemplation [is] both the concentrated delving to the depths of a particular subject... and also the arresting of thought in order to remain on the subject.... The vision of the *Merkabah* [Throne of God] is bound up with immunization of the mystic’s senses against absorption of external impressions and concentration through an inward vision. The contemplation of divine matters does not end, according to the Kabbalah, where the vision of *Merkabah* mystics ended, but is capable of ascending to greater heights, which are no longer the objects of images and vision.... Spanish Kabbalists in the 13th century know that ‘higher’ type of meditation leads to the communion of the meditating mind with its higher sources in the world of emanation itself [i.e., the *sefirot*]... Such meditation results in the joining of human thought to the divine thought or divine will—an attachment which itself comes to an end, or is ‘negated.’”

Elsewhere, Scholem, in discussing the issue which is most relevant to this paper, namely, the realization of right identity through meditation/insight, writes: “Man, in attaining the deepest understanding of his own self, becomes aware of the presence of God. And only from there, standing as it were at the gate of the Divine Realm, does he progress into the deeper regions of the Divine. ., and into the depths of Nothing.”[104]

This “Nothing” is *Ein-sof* (*Ain-soph*), the boundless, unmanifest, or hidden, “infinite, transcendent Godhead.”[105] In light of the existence of such a profound idea, which was undoubtedly temporarily realized in fact by various Jews from time to time, it is disappointing to find that the works thus far available in English on Jewish mysticism offer us few cases of spectacularly God-realized individuals. [Note: This has changed since I wrote this paper in 1980—with dozens of books on Jewish mysticism having since then been published.] There are many devoted and pious men (yes, as is the case with most of the other traditions, the lives and teachings of few if any women are recorded by the male historians) appearing over the centuries—Moses, the Prophets, the rabbis, the German, French, and Spanish Hasidim (“Pious ones), and, more recently, the Hasidic masters of Poland in the 18-19th century—but only a few of these compare favorably with a Buddha, Jesus, Hui-neng, Milarepa, Sankara, Francis of Assisi, Ramakrishna, Sai Baba, et al. Moses had his lapses of faith, the Prophets were said to have rained down hell-fire on their adversaries, and so on. In *Souls on Fire*, a book dealing with the lives of the Polish Hasidim, the author, Elie Wiesel, informs us that a number of the masters, even the first and greatest of them, **the Ba’al Shem Tov** (Master of the Divine Name), **Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer** (1698-1760), were afflicted by, and struggled against, periods of extreme melancholy and other “negative” emotions.[106] There might be a certain attachment to themes of “exile,” “God’s wrath,” “Why isn’t the Messiah here yet?” and so forth. The fact that Kabbalah and Hasidism are overlooked by countless

Jews who prefer to seek out spiritual experience by becoming Buddhists (“Ju-bus”), Hindus (“Hinjus”) and even “Jews for Jesus,” would seem to indicate that Jewish mysticism apparently doesn’t help us as many Jewish people as do the other traditions in the quest for realization of our true identity. [Note: Again, this situation has changed since these words were written in 1980, with the taking off of the Jewish Renewal movement of mystical spirituality in the USA, Europe and Israel, led by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Arthur Green, et al.]

Rather than close with such a negative judgment of Jewish mysticism, I would rather leave the reader with the briefest sampling of views of some of the great *tzaddikim* or holy men revered by the Polish-Ukrainian *Hasidim* [“devout ones”] on the subjects of right identity, relationship to God, etc.:

“*Let atar panui minei,*’ the Ba’al Shem Tov had proclaimed, God dwells in all things—even in sin, and assuredly in the sinner.” “This is the mystery of the oneness of God, that at whatever place I, and tiny bit, lay hold of it, I lay hold of the whole.... Man should unite all things of the world with all his thinking, speaking, doing, toward God in truth and simplicity. For no thing of the world is set outside the unity of God. But he who does a thing otherwise than toward God separates it from Him.... All, above and below, is one unity.... The indwelling Glory prevails from above to below.... That is the mystery of the word, ‘And you animate them all.’ Even when man does a sin, then too the Glory is clothed in it, for without it he would not have the strength to move a limb. And this is the exile of God’s Glory.... Evil too is good, it is the lowest rung of perfect goodness.... The indwelling Glory embraces all worlds, all creatures, good and evil. And it is the true unity. How can it then bear in itself the opposites of good and evil? But in truth there is no opposite, for the evil is the throne of the good.... If it should happen to you that you see a sin or hear of one, seek your share in this sin and strive to set yourself to rights. Then even that evil man will turn [to God]. You must only embrace him in your turning according to the meaning of the unity, for all are one man.... Many a man who thinks he has God knows nothing of Him.... If you have already fulfilled all kinds of commandments, know still that you have done nothing.... The perfect *tzaddik* [holy one], in whom there is no evil, sees no evil in anyone.”[107] “Imagine two children playing hide-and-seek; one hides but the other does not look for him. God is hiding and man is not seeking. Imagine His distress.” [Rebbe Barukh of Medzebozh][108] “A friend knocked on Rebbe Aaron’s door. It was late at night. ‘Who is it?’ ‘It is I,’ the visitor replied innocently, sure of being recognized. ‘God alone has a right to say ‘I.’ Earth is too small to contain two I’s. Haven’t you learned that where you come from?’ His friend understood that he still had much to learn and returned [from whence he came]. [109] “Do you know where God resides? I’ll tell you: He resides wherever He is allowed to enter.” [Menahem-Mendel of Kotzk].

The mystics of **Islām** are known as **Sūfīs** (the word is ambiguous in its etymological origins—it is usually translated to mean “wearers of wool” after their simple garb). Sūfīs in some circles consider themselves to predate and transcend Islām—they hold that a Sūfī is simply anyone who knows and loves God. In this paper, we shall assume that a Sūfī is one of the Islāmic mystics following in the steps of the **Prophet Muḥammad** (571-632 CE). The basic truth revealed to Muḥammad by the angel Gabriel, and the first article of faith for every Muslim and Sūfī, is *Lā ilāha illa ‘Llāh*—“There is no god but God/Allāh.” This is enlarged upon by Sūfīs to mean that *Allāh is all*.

The *Korān*, the basic scripture for orthodox Muslims and Sūfīs alike, gives orthodox support on this point, declaring: “Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allāh.”[111] In Sūfism, therefore, we have a pure monism. Accordingly, the aim of spiritual practice is *not* considered to be a dualistic *union with* God—for what exists as “other” relative to God which could then possibly become united with Him? No, the aim of Sūfism is *fanā*, perfect “extinction” of the felt sense that there is a “me” or a “you” or a “them” which exists independently in their own right outside of Allāh’s Being. Rūmī (of whom we will hear more shortly) once wrote: “Verily my singing His praise were *dispraise*, for it would prove me existent, and existence of a ‘me’—is an error.”[112] Martin Lings, in his *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on Sūfism, says, “The path of Islamic mysticism may be said to consist in anticipating the inevitable extinction of all things other than God.” The *Korān* states: “All things in creation suffer ex-

tion and there remains the face of the Lord in its majesty and bounty.”(55:26-7) Thus the Sūfī’s task, his/her labor of love, is to surrender to extinction the self-sense, as quickly as possible. In the *Ḥadīth*, the compilation of the traditional sayings of Prophet Muḥammad, he bluntly states: “You must die before you die.”

This extinction or death of the self is accomplished by seeing through it, by knowing what it truly is—as Muḥammad would customarily say, “He who knows himself knows Allāh.” Or perhaps it is better to say we must see through the self by knowing that it simply *isn’t*. The earliest great Persian poet-saint, **Ḥākim Sanā’ī** (d.1131), stated the matter succinctly: “You think you are something. That ‘something’ is *nothing!* You think you amount to something? So do the dots on a dice.” The poet-saint **Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī** (1207-73), inspired by Sanā’ī and others, and, in turn, the saintly inspiration for the Mevlevi Order (one of the major Sufi Orders [*turuq*; singular, *ṭarīqa*, lit., “way”]) along with the Qādiriya, the Suhrawardiya, the Naqshbandiya, the Rifā’īya, the Shādhiliya, and the Chishtiya) wrote in his greatest work, the 25,500-line poem of rhyming couplets, the *Mathnawī*, a passage that can be translated into prose as follows:

“The Truth [*al-Ḥaqq*, the Divine Noumenon] *is* yourself, but not your mere bodily self; your real self is higher than ‘you’ and ‘me,’ This visible ‘you’ which you fancy to be yourself is limited in place, the real ‘you’ is not limited.... This outward ‘you’ is foreign to your real ‘you’; cling to your real self; quit this dual self. Your last self attains to your first (real) self only through your attending earnestly to that union. Your real self lies hid beneath your outward self.”[113]

The knowing of one’s true identity as Allāh is, as in so many other traditions, best achieved through a meditative/contemplative discipline. The *dhikr* (lit. “remembrance,” after the recurring phrase in the *Korān*, “Remember God often”[114]) is one widespread method: “having God constantly in mind and heart.”[115] “The concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon the Divine Truth represented by the Supreme Name (*Allāh*) or some other formula which is uttered aloud or silently....”[116]

The colossally important Muslim theologian turned Sūfī mystic, **Muḥammad al-Ghazālī** (1059-1111), in his monumental work, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Sciences), delineates for us a way of realization that involves, among other elements, *faqr* (poverty), *zuhd* (self-denial), *maḥabbat* (love), *shauq* (yearning), *niya* (resolve), *murāqaba* (contemplation), *muḥāsaba* (self-examination), and *tafakkur* (meditation). In addition to al-Ghazālī, there are several earlier and later mystic theologians who attempted to systematize Sūfī doctrine. Therefore, the mystical path to the realization of Allāh in His Unity of Being, (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), and thereby the attainment of major sainthood (*wilāya-i-kubra*) (the phrases come to us from the great Ibn ‘Arabī, 1165-1240), is conceptualized in different ways depending on the particular school of thought. Other versions of the way to realization are found in the *Kitāb al-Luma’* of al-Sarrāj (d. 988), in the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), in the *Futūḥāt-al-Makkiya* of Ibn ‘Arabī, and in the *Al-Insān al-kāmil* of al-Jīlī (d. c1412). The last gives us the notion of the three mystical stages of *tajallī* (illumination): the mystic, ascending through the stages of *aniya* (I-ness), *huwiya* (He-ness) and *ahadīya* (Oneness), finally, by being stripped of every attribute in the process of *fanā*, becomes established in *fanā-baqā* (“extinction” and “remaining” in God). He is the Perfect Man, having returned to the Unity of Being as Absolute to Absolute.[117]

Allow me to end with a few selections from Rūmī’s long, beautiful *Mathnawī*:

“He [Allāh] is neither this nor that—He is void of form.[118]... Make yourself pure from all attributes of self, that you may see your own [i.e., Allāh’s] pure bright essence.[119]... Thy real self is thy treasure and thy kingdom.[120]... When these ‘We’ and ‘Ye’ shall all become one Soul, then they will be lost and absorbed in the Beloved.[121]... Arab, water-pot and angels are all ourselves![122] I died as inanimate matter and arose a plant. I died as a plant and arose again an animal. I died as an animal and arose a man. Why then should I fear to become less by dying? I shall die once again as a man to rise an angel perfect from head to foot! Again, when I suffer dissolution as an angel, I shall become what

passes the conception of man! Let me then become non-existent, for non-existence sings to me in organ tones, 'To Him shall we return.'[123] Thus it is that eternal life is gained by utter abandonment of one's own life.[124]... When God appears... seekers vanish. Though that union is eternal, yet at first that life is annihilation.[125]... Say not two, know two, call not on two. [One must be] lost and dead and buried in his Creator!"[126]

In recent times, many psychologists, especially the so-called "transpersonal" psychologists, have re-discovered the highly valuable insights and practices of the spiritual traditions. John Welwood's *Meeting of the Ways* contains reprints of many articles published over the past decade or so (primarily from the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*) that reaffirm the "Perennial Philosophy" of the spiritual traditions, which holds that our real identity is beyond the conventional, "personal" one, and is of a most profound nature, call it what you will—"Brahman," "Tao," "Buddha-nature," etc. These articles have also begun to validate the "Perennial Psychology" of the spiritual traditions, which holds that our "normal" experience is dominated by a pathological egocentricity,[127] born out of ignorant attachment to, or obsession with, our idea of ourself, i.e., our self-image. Psychologists are recommending the age-old practice of meditation/insight as a (the) most effective way to dissolve or undo or stop the egocentricity, the obsession with the false self. These modern psychologists are careful to assuage the fears which their unaware colleagues tend to have about this subject; they are explaining that the egolessness which comes as a result of realization of our ultimate identity through meditation "in no way precludes the development of effective functioning in the world, which the Freudians would call "ego-strength";[128] they are clearing up confusion and/or ambiguity about the concept of the "unconscious"—reassuring depth psychologists that the experience of the unconscious developed in meditation is not "a purely interior journey that would neglect one's relationship with the world," or "a dangerous indulgence that could work against relating realistically with the world's demands,"[130] but that, rather, meditation cultivates an "active diffuse attention"[131] which allows conscious realization of deeper grounds of experience, previously unconscious to us, on which we are already holistically functioning.

In this course on Philosophy and Psychology East and West, I have appreciated the direct or indirect attention given by most of the lecturers to what I believe is the central, crucial theme in the spiritual traditions: *the need for realization of true identity thru meditation practice*. Also appreciated were the attempts by each lecturer to discuss a few of the more subtle topics in each tradition: the nature of the Absolute and the possible ways of talking about it; *māyā*; asceticism; and the historical and present-day relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism and how they agree and disagree on various issues (V. Naravane); the Sāṃkhya system, the *kleśas*, the etymological origins of the term "Ātman" (Mary Tasch); the 121 cittas mapped out by the Theravāda Abhidhamma psychology (Rina Sircar); the elaboration of the six *pāramitās* in Buddhist thought from a Vajrayāna perspective (Ira Rechtshaffer); the phenomenological presentation of the Buddhist "three marks of existence" and the discussion of neurosis from the viewpoint of Buddhist psychology (John Welwood); the rescuing of the concept of *wu-wei* from those indulgent folks who would pervert its meaning; the different meanings of "love" in the thought of Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Christianity; the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese mind and its view; and the fine outline of the different schools of Chinese thought that was mimeographed and presented as a hand-out (by Elgin Heinz; it would be nice if other lecturers would prepare some materials to facilitate the presentation of their point-of-view; much time is lost by having students and lecturer discuss topics that could be neatly spelled out on a piece of paper).

As a final note, I might mention certain issues that I did not have the chance to discuss in this paper, issues that have figured in the history of the spiritual traditions and are relevant for a course on philosophy and psychology East and West: the role of a guide or *guru* (and if a guided is needed) in the quest for true identity; how attachment occurs on subtle levels of spiritual growth; the *siddhis* or supernatural powers that are reported in much of the literature concerning the great masters, saints and yogis; the need for a strong moral component as a foundation for true spiritual practice to prevent the "anything goes" kind of pseudo-spirituality.

Notes

1. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. II.8. (From Swami Nikhilananda [Tr.], *The Upanishads*)
2. *Katha Up*. II.iii.10.
3. *Ibid.*, I.iii.17.
4. *Īśa Up*. VI.
5. *Kena Up*. II.4.
6. *Mundaka Up*. III.i.8.
7. *Śvetāśvatara Up*. I.3.
8. *Ibid.*, I.10.
9. *Muṇḍaka Up*. III.i.5.
10. *Brhadāranyaka Up.*, I.iv.15.
11. *Taittiriya Up*. II.x.6.
12. *Chāndogya Up*. III.xii.8.
13. *Ibid.*, II.xviii.1.
14. *Ibid.*, VII.xxiv.1.
15. *Ibid.*, VI.xv.3.
16. *Brhadāranyaka Up*. II.iii.6.
17. *Māndukya Up*. VII.
18. See *Brhadāranyaka Up.*, V.v.2-3; xiv.1-7; and *Chāndogya Up*. III.xii.1.
19. See *Muṇḍaka Up*. II.i.10; II.ii.1,8; III.i.7.
20. *Brhadāranyaka Up*. III, passim.
21. *Bhagavad Gītā* XVIII.65-6. (Translation by Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan.)
22. *Yoga-Sutras* 1.2. (Translation by I.K. Taimni.)
23. *Ibid.*, 1.3.
24. *Ibid.*, 1.23; II.1,32,45.
25. *Tattvārthādhigama Sūtra* IX.1-39.
26. *Samyutta-nikāya* V.423
27. *Ibid.*, IV.19.
28. *Ibid.*, XXII.90.
29. Trungpa, Chogyam, "An approach to meditation," in *J. of Transpersonal Psychology* Vol 5, No. 1, 1973, p. 62, reprinted in John Welwood (Ed.), *Meeting of the Ways*, NY: Schocken Books, 1979.
30. *Visuddhimagga* XVI.90.
31. *Udāna* 80-1.
32. See *Visuddhimagga*, chapters XII-XIII.
33. Tarthang Tulku, "A view of mind," in *J. of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol 8, No. 1, 1976, p.42, reprinted in J. Welwood (Ed.), *Meeting of the Ways*.
34. *Analects of Confucius* V.12. (Translation by Arthur Waley.)
35. *Ibid.*, IV.24.
36. *Ibid.*, VII.6.
37. *Ibid.*, XX.3.
38. *Ibid.*, VI.5
39. *Ibid.*, VII.1.
40. *Ibid.*, VII.21.
41. *Ibid.*, VIII.13
42. *Ibid.*, VIII.18; XII.6.
43. *Ibid.*, XI.19.
44. *Ibid.*, XII.18.
45. *Ibid.*, XIV.2.
46. See Waley, in *The Analects of Confucius*, pp.18, 239.
47. Mencius VII.A.1. (Translation by D.C. Lau.)
48. *Ibid.*, IV.B.14.

49. *Ibid.*, VI.A.14.
50. *Ibid.*, II.A.3-4.
51. *Ibid.*, VII.A.13.
52. *Ibid.*, VI.A.2.
53. *Ibid.*, VI.A.6.
54. *Tao Teh Ching* 42 (Translation by Gia Fu-feng.)
55. *Ibid.*, 51.
56. *Ibid.*, 34.
57. *Ibid.*, 33.
58. *Ibid.*, 15,16,47, and *Chuang-tzu* II.1.
59. *Tao Teh Ching* 2.
60. *Ibid.*, 38.
61. *Ibid.*, 63.
62. *Ibid.*, 81.
63. *Ibid.*, 8.
64. *Ibid.*, 10.
65. *Ibid.*, 13.
66. *Ibid.*, 14.
67. *Ibid.*, 15.
68. *Ibid.*, 16.
69. *Ibid.*, 19.
70. *Ibid.*, 26.
71. *Ibid.*, 27.
72. *Ibid.*, 28.
73. *Ibid.*, 54.
74. *Ibid.*, 59.
75. *Ibid.*, 64.
76. *Ibid.*, 70.
77. *Ibid.*, 77.
78. See A. Waley, *op. cit.*, p.116n.
79. *Chuang-tzu* XI.2.
80. *Ibid.*, XI.4.
81. *Ibid.*, XXII.5.
82. *Ibid.*, XIX.1.
83. *Ibid.*, XIX.2.
84. *Ibid.*, XVII.6.
85. *Ibid.*, XXIII.7.
86. *Ibid.*, VI.14.
87. *Ibid.*, XXV.2.
88. *Ibid.*, I.3.
89. *Ibid.*, XXIV.2.
90. *Ibid.*, II.8.
91. *Ibid.*, II.9.
92. *Ibid.*, XXXII.7.
93. Blofeld, John, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p.103.
94. See Genesis 1:26.
95. Deuteronomy 6:4-5.
96. Psalms 46:10.
97. Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 223.
98. Scholem, G., *On the Kabbalah*, p.122.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 35
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
103. Scholem, G., "Meditation," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.
104. Scholem, G., *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 216.
105. Scholem, G., *On the Kabbalah*, p. 73.
106. Wiesel, Elie, *Souls on Fire*, p.106.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 74; Martin Buber, *Hasidim and Modern Man*, pp. 191, 199, 207-10.
108. Wiesel, Elie, *Souls on Fire*, pp. 83-4.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
111. *Koran* 2:115.
112. Jalaluddīn Rūmī, *Mathnawi* I. (Translation by E.H. Whinfield.)
113. *Ibid.*, VI.
114. *Koran* 3:191; 33:35; 63:9.
115. Arberry, Arthur, *Sufism*, p. 77.
116. Lings, Martin, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, p. 92.
117. See Arberry, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 104-5.
118. *Mathnawi* IV.
119. *Ibid.*, I.
120. *Ibid.*, IV.
121. *Ibid.*, I.
122. *Ibid.*, I.
123. *Ibid.*, III.
124. *Ibid.*, III.
125. *Ibid.*, III.
126. *Ibid.*, VI.
127. See Washburn, N. and Stark, M., "Ego, egocentricity, and self-transcendence: a Western interpretation of Eastern teaching," in John Welwood (Ed.), *Meeting of the Ways*, Schocken, 1979.
128. Welwood, J. and Wilber, K., "On ego strength and egolessness," in Welwood, p. 111.
129. Welwood, J., "Meditation and the unconscious," in Welwood, p. 153.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 158.