

REFLECTIONS ON SALVATION
versus ENLIGHTENMENT—A Hypothesis.

By Michael Graham

As a man formerly persuaded by the Far Eastern spiritual tradition out of India, with 28 years of disciplined practice, thousands of hours of meditation, and multiple charismatic experiences behind me, I feel qualified to comment upon and make a distinction between the concepts of “Salvation versus Enlightenment.”

Drawing from over 45 years of experience in spirituality, Far Eastern, “New Age” and finally Christian, I continue to speculate on spiritual themes, seeking to unravel elements of the Mystery. In approaching conclusions, I value the distinction between the concepts of improbable, possible, probable and certain. Though I believe that absolute certainties, (within the confines of reason) are dodgy to proclaim, I do hold that matters can be established as true beyond reasonable doubt.

It is in this spirit that I offer the following reflections as a hypothesis, though I have had serious doubts about mentioning it at all, since credibility can be unnecessarily damaged by saying too little rather than nothing at all about a topic that requires more explanation than has yet to be given here.

I am aware that those heavily invested in a romantic relationship with Far Eastern spiritual systems and gurus may recoil from my conclusions. If the reader does so, I respectfully invite you to relax and consider the following thought I coined in my book, *From Guru to God—An Experience of Ultimate Truth*:

“A thinker is someone with whom you can raise any subject and receive a reflective rather than a reflexive response.”

I have had my own experiences of Enlightenment in three forms variously named. The first one occurred at age 19 before ever going to India to absorb myself in Indian metaphysics. I considered this first spiritual experience to be an experience of Ultimate Truth. I had walked onto the back verandah of my father’s home and seen a seagull passing across the sky through the silhouette of a tree at dusk. For some reason, the moment struck me as immensely beautiful. What instantly followed was beyond words and beyond even experience. In that moment there came a total annihilation of self and an ineffable ecstasy. The moment I realized

what had happened, the experience disappeared. The experience could not co-exist with the recognition of its being had. Its most distinctive feature was an absolute dissolution of self. Very strictly speaking what happened could not be even described as an experience. An experience consists of someone, a self, experiencing something. No one was left to experience anything, yet...? In this there was no union or oneness, only dissolution absolute. And somehow it was accompanied by unalloyed ecstasy. This experience was the end of the road. There was no question of beyond. The concept of beyond or more is always attendant to a notion of self or a “than” or a point. When the whole dichotomy of self and other disappears, when there exists not even the oneness or union, then nothing can be said, yet...this was the essence of Godhead before all forms and labels. This apperception was non-conceivable—beyond self, thought, space, time and all existences. To the enquirer, bound by reason alone, this is absurd, but to “me” more real than reality itself. It remained for me the Ultimate and Absolute Reality at the time.

Years later, concerning this experience, I found the Sufi term, *fana*, which means ‘annihilation in God.’ This was close, but annihilation...with no notion or label to follow was closer, since we are talking about God before ‘He’ is named. Upon reflection it seemed to me that the Hindu term *sat-chit-ananda* (meaning: existence, consciousness, bliss) indicating the highest reality in that tradition, would better conform to my experience, if translated as a double negative: not-not existent, not-not conscious, bliss. There was another term, ‘*Nirvakalpa Samadhi*,’ designating the highest state in some schools of Hinduism, this being not so far removed from the ‘*nirva*’ in *nirvana* in Buddhism, the designation for “blowout of self” indicating the state of Enlightenment. Then there was the yogic concept of ‘*laya yoga*,’ one of about fourteen different schools of yoga, the word *laya* meaning ‘dissolution.’ However, this word is used to denote different things in different Sanskrit scriptures making it hard to pin down the word’s true meaning. So, these various terms within the context of the Traditions most aptly fit my experience.

Then I had a second experience with a main part in common with the experience above. This occurred some 10 years later while sitting close to my Indian Guru, Swami Muktananda, under whom I practiced for 13 years. In his proximity, over one week, I disappeared in this absolute sense about five times but without the attendant bliss. It happened most distinctly but within a second—a moment of cosmic relief in the annihilation of a self. As soon as a ‘self’ returned to recognize its absence, the experience could no longer exist.

The third experience occurred around 1987 in Elmira, upstate New York. One day while doing a spiritual exercise, suddenly the width of my visual perception began to increase. I got up and walked out into a foyer and stood there for about 30 minutes watching two men chatting. One of the men was sitting on the ground with his back against the wall, the other was standing. They were talking in earnest. As I looked at them, the whole scene appeared as an illusion. They were no more real than puppets in a puppet show. It was a fascinating perception; a full-blown experience, yet with no change in the appearance of objects. It wasn't merely a thought or philosophical overlay; it was a direct perception. Life and what I was witnessing seemed an illusion—ordinary perception giving a false impression of reality. It wasn't as though common perception was worthy of derision, rather it was a muted joke. Every trace of the weight and sting of life had vanished. Even as I watched I knew I was enjoying the classic Vedantic realization that all life is an illusion—a dream—a mere seeming. It's called the Turiya state in the Hindu scriptures. It is what one branch of the spiritual Indian tradition promulgated as a key truth and a mark of Enlightenment. Here I was in the middle of it experientially. Seeing from this perspective, nothing really mattered as I had assumed it did. This perception shut down after about 30 minutes.

Despite having these marvelous experiences, I was intrigued by them having zero impact on my life at all. None. All that remained was a memory of an experiential access to “highest realities.” Okay, I was grateful for that. It was a bit on the thrilling side, but it did not add one jot to the quality, texture or function of my conventional life or spiritual activities, which was also true with the following.

All of this proved to be a serious eye-opener. It was years later, that on this point I had a clue to the basis of the whole Far Eastern tradition of spirituality and how it contrasted to the Christian one. In a purposive sense, Buddhism and Hinduism were about escape and transcendence, leaving an unreal world—life-negative; Christianity rather, was about engagement and fulfillment through Christ—life-positive.

On further reflection: to Buddhist doctrine, life is suffering; to the Hindus, an illusion or at best a play of consciousness. Squarely faced, both these viewpoints do not affirm the value of the created world as plainly experienced by all people. It seemed to me that both viewpoints are a dodge and a highly sophisticated one at that. A whole metaphysical, philosophical system is built around this dodge, including a way of life, sets of values, and for those in earnest, a system of spiritual

disciplines and techniques.

Reflections upon my perceptions above and those of others, understandably lead to conclusions, but ones that I believe are flawed. The experiencer assumes that such experiences, because of their loveliness or superiority, is true reality, or at least a truer reality, and therefore something to be pursued. Yes, in my case a filter was pulled off and a new dimension of reality opened up. Yes, it was immensely encouraging to me at the time, “Wow, this is what they are talking about.” But much later I concluded that historically, teachers and practitioners like Gautama Buddha, Shankaracharya and Ramanuja (renowned Vedantic Hindu masters) had such experiences and began to teach saying, “Look what I have found; devote your life to its discovery.” The promulgators of these quests may have experienced such states for one second, a minute or a day or maybe a week. Perhaps in the history of mankind there are those to whom it has fallen for half a lifetime. But ultimately these experiences are unsustainable. They quickly pass. Does not their impermanence bring into question their true value or significance? Is it not possible that these Eastern spiritual objectives are unsustainable pathways of spirituality, and understandable miss-takes on the true purpose of life when contrasted to the teachings of Jesus and His apostles? Perhaps Far Eastern systems of spirituality do not conform to the real reality for which, by design, we were created to enjoy. This is what I was beginning to suspect.

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It can be correctly affirmed that these generic mystic states or classical forms of Far Eastern Classical Enlightenment are real and valid states of consciousness, but are states rarely attained. If experienced, they are rarely, if ever, sustainable. Further, reckonings from years of personal experience, among thousands of aspirants I’ve known and books I’ve read, lead me to believe that classical Enlightenments of the types described are very much a brain-chemical or synapse-altering phenomenon inextricably linked to the physical body and a phenomenon that ends with physical death.

Mystic states can precipitate spontaneously or can be induced by rigors of spiritual or mental disciplines, just as athletic rigors can induce muscular enhancement and control leading to amazing athletic prowess. And particularly, classical mystic states can be induced by pranayama or “scientific” manipulation of breath or by drugs like LSD or psilocybin in magic mushrooms. The latter point supports the idea that it all begins and ends with chemical changes in the brain. Further, I know from experience that mystical phenomena arise from stirring the Kundalini energy,

as some of them have been in my own case. This spiritual power is spoken about by the Hindus who believe that Kundalini has its roots in the physical body, a force that can induce experiences beyond bodily boundaries as well. My guru, Muktananda, would say, “The entire universe dwells within the body.” (Ok, that’s a big one; we won’t go into it here.) However, I believe that Kundalini too dies with the body. And whatever post-death state a Vedantin, Shaivite, yogi or Buddhist finds him or herself in, is not related in any way to earthly spiritual disciplines, manipulations or psycho-physical phenomena, coming from whatever source. I am suggesting that none of this leads to genuine Salvation or an eternal liberation.

Nevertheless, since we are postulating that all these so called states of “liberation”—Moksa, Satori, Nirvana, Sahaja Samadhi, Nirvakalpa Samadhi, Fana (Sufism) and so on are actual realities, I do believe they are part of God’s creation. But as such they are only sub-realities and part of nature, being on the top of a *natural* vertical continuum. They are referred to as being beyond nature or “super-natural” (above the natural) only because they are so uncommonly experienced. Being of nature, all these experiences lie within the potential of a human being to experience through multiple means, unlike Salvation, which is above or beyond all forms of nature to apprehend.

(I’m not going to go into the differences between the Hindu and Buddhist goals, characterized by the realization of Self (capital “S”) and the no-self of the Buddhists, Sufis and “secular” mystics and so on, because those points of difference are not salient to the distinction between Salvation and Enlightenment).

I believe classical Enlightenment experiences (or Self-realization as it is sometimes called) exist within a closed loop, on the outer fringes of the loop never providing liberation beyond the loop’s boundaries.

On the other hand, the potential for Salvation in contrast to Enlightenment, takes us beyond the loop, to another dimension beyond space and time, called heaven (This Christian concept is elaborated on later in the text, in the way it radically distinguishes itself from Buddhist and Hindu concepts of heaven). The Gospel teaching of Salvation and the power of its accomplishment does not lie within bounds of the creature or *natural* man or woman to accomplish, but originates from without. Salvation rests in the hands of the Creator alone existing beyond nature, space and time, being His prerogative alone to confer. The gate to this reality is the person of Jesus Christ alone. Jesus’ disciple John relates Jesus as saying,

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (John 10:9)

By no self-effort can a man bridge the gap between the natural and the place of God Himself. This is the place of Him who is the Creator of all these things. That place of eternity being beyond our notions of space and time is named heaven, by Jesus Christ. Here, perfect relationship in intimate union with God is given as a free gift to those placing full faith or trust in the person of Jesus Christ alone. In the eternity of Christ's heaven, God and the believer remain separate beings, but perfectly yoked or united with a now perfect believer's 'self' remaining intact, unlike Enlightened mystic states where self is annihilated, or merged with Brahman as Self-realization, where 'Self' is designated as being identical with Brahman.

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Here I have stressed the importance of understanding the difference between Divine Reality and the natural potentials of mystic states—Nirvana, Nirvakalpa or Sahaja Samadhi, fana and so on, these differences implying the notions of ***Salvation and Enlightenment not being synonymous.***

Judging from my own experience and contrasting biblical statements and those of Far Eastern scriptures, it becomes clear to me that the ultimate condition of Salvation is quite distinct from the ephemeral experiences of being Enlightened, being one with pure consciousness, Paramashiva or Brahman, or experiencing nirvana, moksha or satori. These states are forms of *natural* phenomena. Being part of nature they all eventually perish along with the body or bodies of natural man and finally along with nature herself. The states die.

I speculate that what the "Enlightened" guru experiences is not God, but the image of God within and even that experience is not sustainable. According to biblical revelation all humans are made in God's image and likeness. Thus within one's own nature the image of God is cast. Perhaps that image can be directly apprehended. So? What's in an image? Only that. It's not the same as staring directly into the face of the real Person, or being yoked or united to that Real Person.

Further, on the question of being united to God, we become as one with God according to the teachings of Christ, but not identical with Him, an identity that many Far Easterners claim as the ultimate reality, especially Advaitins who declare in their mantras, "ahambrahmasmi" (I am Brahman) or, "soham" (He, I am, i.e.

God) (though not maintained as true by Dvaitins like Ramanuja and Madhva). We may unite to a marriage partner as one in sexual intimacy, but obviously in the strictest sense of that concept we remain separate.

It is this full merging, Monism or ‘oneness’ of everything that postulates the Self-God Identity as the ultimate truth. I believe it is a flawed idea. At best it’s an understandable error; at worst it’s an ultimate form of cosmic narcissism, or even worse; it may have its roots in the Garden of Eden story, when Eve was tempted with the words, “*you can be like God.*” She and her man bought it, and look what happened, not only to her, but to all of us by inheritance—the Fall of mankind, all born imperfect.

The radically elastic ethics of the most famous monist Far Eastern god-men of the Twentieth Century, coupled as they are with the claim to “Soham,” (He, I am), I believe, reflects a corruption. All worldviews have consequences. In the case of the Monist worldviews consequences ensue—Mary Poppins movies, the holocaust, good and evil, sin and righteousness, a plastic bucket, a pin and a Ferrari are all One—God manifest. According to this rationale, ultimately, *nothing can be impugned* because it is all God. And much of the culture of India and their gurus reflect this. (However, delving into this case is beyond the scope of this essay.) I don’t mean to be un-gentlemanly in my speaking, but I speak from considerable experience across the wide spectrum of spiritual possibilities.

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All created worlds and states lie beneath the Heaven of which Christ spoke, including all conditions that the oriental spiritualists reach for.

The one who seeks Enlightenment and the one who asks for Salvation are looking to the tops of different peaks. In my opinion, Jesus Christ is the Everest of all hopes and endeavors. One endeavor is predicated on self or Self, or even the “no-self” of the Buddhists; the other predicated on the Creator God alone with His free gift of grace. This grace assures an arrival at the summit of all possibilities—different aspirations, different states, one of natural man, the other of God alone. (And, to my own thinking, this reality cannot accommodate some Shaivite or Dvaitin ideas that one can scramble by self-effort to within 10 feet of the summit but only by grace can one cross the last 10 feet.)

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Let's look more at points related to the difference between Salvation and Enlightenment. Again, in my opinion the source of Enlightenment lies in the physical brain only: A friend of mine, Professor John Wren-Lewis, was poisoned on a bus in Thailand, causing a permanent loss of a sense of "self." Well-read and well-informed on higher spiritual subjects, John believes that this is the state of Enlightenment. Last I heard, he was writing a book called, *The Nine-Fifteen to Nirvana*, a title referring to the eventful hour the bus departed. Take the case of another, Ramana Maharishi, the famous South Indian saint who died in 1952. He was a simple village boy, when at the age of 18 he had "death" experience, rendering him dysfunctional over a period of days. He woke up from this condition in altered state of consciousness. As time went on, wanting to know what happened to him, he searched the scriptures and found something resembling his condition. He then began teaching a volitional doctrine seeking to induce volitionally in others what happened to him spontaneously. A similar case exists with contemporary American spiritual teacher, Byron Katie. I knew her personally. She came to a state of consciousness, organically or naturally. It happened over time and was not induced by volitional practices at all. She now teaches ways and means of attaining the same realization that she herself had. In my view this contradiction demonstrates an inconsistency between what she teaches and her own route to 'Enlightenment.' Then there was the Christian mother of another friend of mine. She became a virtual saint for months following a stroke, until she recovered and returned to normal—alas. Take another case, Douglas Harding, in whose home I stayed in the '70s. He was a charming English architect. One day, while walking in the Himalayas, his "self" disappeared, never to return. It happened naturally—spontaneously. In vain, he devised all sorts of ingenious tools for trying to get people to apperceive that all notions of the self were illusory. He wrote the book, *On Having No Head*. His tool kit was called *A Tool Kit for Testing the Incredible Hypothesis*. Then there was the remarkable U.G. Krishnamurti, an Enlightened being, also personally known by me from the early '70s in Mumbai and recently dead. He wrote the book, *The Mystique of Enlightenment*. He vociferously insists that Enlightenment is entirely and only biological in nature. He is most quoted in the book edited by Mukunda Rao, *The Biology of Enlightenment*. If this and my Enlightenment hypothesis are true, well? What are its implications for the reader or spiritual seekers and those who look to Far Eastern gurus for Salvation?

As to whether these high mystic revelations or whether Enlightenment are described as realization of the "Self" as in Hinduism, or as the no-self, "blow out" of the self as in Buddhism, it is somewhat moot. Both conditions are monistic, eliminating the distinction between the seer and the seen—realizations that are

non-dual in nature. In contrast, shown by the teachings of Jesus, the relationship between Creator and creature remains everlastingly dual, while at the same time becoming fully united. According to Jesus, this gift of union comes about only for those who have been given new life through Him.

Salvation is available to everyone; Enlightenment only to elite practitioners. In my view, Jesus did not come to bring Enlightenment in the Far Eastern classical sense at all. Rather, he came to give Salvation far beyond the reach of the descriptions of Far Eastern conditions or states. The grace of His Salvation is given independently of our own conditioning, genes, intentionality, cleverness, piety, techniques or disciplines.

This is the very reason why God, in, as and through the person of Jesus Christ, came to provide a way for *all people* to have access to immediate eternal security and Salvation, and *not* coming as someone to promote a pathway for spiritual “success” accessible to a the rare few—a pathway only accomplishable over eons of painful lifetimes to reach the end.

Making Salvation a free gift to those alone who believe in Jesus, makes this way from God the only religion of true access and compassion, since by any other means than by grace alone, it is impossible to attain.

How wise or compassionate would it be to tell the populace of the whole world: Everyone, please, this is the True Way, go, train hard, represent your country in the 100m sprint in the next Olympic games. Little chance of success, no?

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Thus, a significant distinction is being made here again, between the two real realities of Enlightenment and Salvation. Salvation and Enlightenment are not the same. Enlightenment comes from within; Salvation is given from without.

On the periphery of their teachings, all of the Five Great Traditions are similar. They preach morality, kindness, helpfulness and love and so on—sin-free as far as possible. But at their core they are not marginally different but radically so. However, going deeply into the worldviews and teachings they promote is a subject beyond the scope of the main issue here.

Briefly, to give the authentic Christian understanding: Christianity is the way of Grace alone, through faith alone, because of the work of Jesus Christ alone. St Paul writes, *for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9) What then was the work of Jesus Christ? It was to fulfill two things, **two things of which no human being is capable in their own strength, merit or practice** 1) To fulfill the Law of God *on our behalf*—perfect alignment with God’s moral perfection (called, ‘holiness’) and principles. 2) To take upon Himself, through His death on the cross, *everything that separates us from God*, being our sin or “karmic” debt—all accomplished in our stead, on our behalf. Believing thus, and placing one’s entire trust in Jesus Christ alone for Salvation, our binding debt is paid. That’s grace. Without grace in this absolute sense, no human being can attain the heaven of which Jesus speaks. (wholly different from the heavens of Buddhism and Hinduism, to be explained later) This is why Jesus said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6).

A significant difference between the way of Jesus Christ and the way of others is that Christ salvages us by fiat, not by process. Being co-eternal, co-equal and of one will and substance with the Father and Holy Spirit (in contrast to Avatars, yogis or Buddhas who belong to another reality), Christ’s salvaging power operates at the same level that created the universe. Paul, by revelation given to him from the ascended Christ through the Holy Spirit, states in Colossians 1:15-17, that *“He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for by Him were all things created, in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*

To point up another difference between the path of Gautama Buddha, as stated in the original Pali Canon, where Buddha declared; *“I can do nothing for you; here is the dharma, go work out your own Enlightenment.”* Jesus Christ declared the opposite, *“I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in Me and I will abide in you and you will bear much fruit; of yourself you can do nothing!”* (John 15:5) Nothing means nothing. “Nothing” is an absolute term. What’s added to nothing is grace alone, and that not of ourselves. And that grace is appropriated by the seeker through faith, a faith of which Christ is author and finisher... (Hebrews 12:2).

Then, in some forms of high Hinduism and Buddhism there are systems that propound the need for disciplines and grace (of a guru) working together for

“salvation.” Within the Christian doctrines (teachings), this admixture of works and grace [works being self-effort, practices, rituals] as a means to reach Salvation is called Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism, both considered error.

Most typically in the original form of Buddhism (Theravada), it was all about self-effort alone. This brings us to a few other thoughts: If it’s true, by their own admission, that no yogi, Hindu or Buddhist can attain liberation (moksha) without breaking the bonds of karma, taking eons of sweat to accomplish, then may it not also be true that Jesus Christ, who, on our behalf, broke all bonds of our sin or “karma,” becomes the only “doable” way to eternal Salvation? Millions have resorted to Him in obedience, with earnest faith in His word and His atoning death on the cross for the gift of Salvation. They follow His path. And this, to be free from the groaning momentum of everlasting entrapment—an eternal separation from God, called by many names, “hell” being chief among them.

Again, in my view, Jesus did not come to bring Enlightenment in the Eastern sense or anything like it. He came to bring Salvation. Salvation begins in this life, progressively leading to psychological integration—a movement towards a more Christ-like character, wholeness, holiness, and it secures eternal and immediate release at the point of death into the supreme company and reality of God proper—no coming back into one form of un-satisfactoriness or another.

Christ came to salvage those who otherwise would have been separated from the Supreme Reality eternally. Eastern Enlightenment is ephemeral, Christ’s Salvation eternal. The two realities differ radically from one another both in meaning, significance and implication.

The line that separates all states of consciousness from the Heaven of which Jesus Christ spoke cannot be crossed, except by His grace. This special grace gives “*birth again from above*” as described by Jesus in John’s Gospel 3:1-13. Here is a brief paraphrase of the scene described in the Bible: In Jesus’ day, among the Israelite people, there were men called Pharisees. They were the learned ones who taught the Jewish people the ways and laws of their religion. Once, under the cloak of night, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to see Jesus and started complementing Him saying, Jesus you must be from God because of all the miracles you’ve performed (like healing the blind from birth, the lame, and raising the dead and so on). Jesus cut him off and said, “Nicodemus, you must be born again from above.” Nicodemus was confused. “How can I enter my mother’s womb again,” he replied.... Then Jesus said, “Not even you, Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, know what I am talking about.” You see, Jesus was talking about a ‘new’ phenomenon

He was to bring to earth as a gift of free grace to all those who would believe in Him. This assures Salvation there and then, and begins the process of sanctification. What we are given through the Creator's grace and power is a new Spirit, not an old one restored. This is what is meant by Jesus telling Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, that he must be "born again from above." (John 3:1-21). A new spirit is to be birthed, not an old one woken up. We have become through the Creator's hand, a New Creation. No human can birth themselves physically or spiritually.

Further understandings: The creator God's, or Yahweh's, heaven is the abode of Ultimate Reality, the eternal presence of the Creator. The six heavens and eighteen hells vividly described in Buddhist scriptures, and thoroughly endorsed as true by the popular current 14th Dalai Lama, as affirmed by his endorsement of the book, *The Words of My Most Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rimpoche, names hells galore—the "Great Howling Hell," "The Hell of Ultimate Torment," "The Rounding-up and Crushing Hell," "The Intense Heating Hell" and so on, each one being vividly described. The Hindu scriptures speak of multiple heavens and hells in the similar way. Even my former Hindu guru, Muktananda, claimed to have visited a hell.

None of these heavens (and hells) have anything remotely to do with the heaven pointed to by Jesus Christ, the place from which Christ descended being the only one to have done so. It is described as the place of eternal Salvation, in saying (John 3:13), "*no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven.*" Further, we can safely understand that Jesus didn't descend to earth from some regular cosmic nice spot, for John also tells us that Jesus said (John 6:38-40), "*I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*"

Unlike Christ's realities, Hindu and Buddhist heavens and hells, according to their own doctrines, are impermanent abodes, sub-realities to which people come and go as their behavioral merits and demerits dictate. Therefore, the semantic confusion over the word "heaven" in relation to Jesus' teachings can be misleading. It is misleading particularly for those who have no depth of knowledge of the Far Eastern traditions, and have but scant knowledge of authentic Christianity. Unfortunately, many such people erroneously believe that the Christian "heaven"

is only a cute idea or a reality of a lower order than highest states of Nirvana in Buddhism or Nirvakalpa Samadhi in Hinduism.

Each and every state attained by mystics under whatever flag falls short of the reality of the Supreme Being, through whom all other realities come into existence, including Nirvana, forms of Samadhi and mystic rapture. Even the Christian mystics—and I strongly believe this—are not eternally salvaged by these states or their experiential “union” with God at all, but through their implacable faith in the power of Jesus Christ to Save them independently of their own efforts and reveries.

Without this faith in Christ, heaven eludes them. In fact, those of any stripe, who volitionally set out on the path of mysticism, are bound for a destination other than the ultimate reality of Christ’s heaven. Their reach is for Enlightenment, their faith or trust is in the reality of it and in their self-reckoning and their walkway is to a destination involving an eternal separation from the one who created them in the first place, the one without whom they would not exist.

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An interesting story: In the Himalayan mountains one day, I came across a young American girl who had come in search of a Buddhist master from whom she hoped to receive the shaktipat transmission or initiation. As we talked she shared that she wished she had been around when the well-renowned Swami Muktananda was alive, since he was the one most famous for transmitting such things. She nearly fell off her stool when I mentioned that I had been with him for 13 years and with his group for a further three, and had been his first Australian devotee. I then briefly shared my story. It turned out that she had flirted with the healer-type, Benny-Hinn-oriented style of Christianity, but had fallen away. By the end of our discussion and the telling of my story, I felt I had dealt my full deck of cards. Though she seemed attentive and mildly impressed, I had the feeling she was still committed to searching out a Buddhist master. Thinking that her interest may have been a tiny bit kindled by our conversation, I felt obliged to end our brief connection with what I must. The time was short. I recommended that night she pray. She was to take pause, find a sincere spot within herself, then make a fervent or most determined request of Jesus, for his touch, help or direction, and expect Him to deliver by first light next morning. Surprisingly she agreed to do so. I left her, thinking “O well, that’s it, what else could I have done, given the short time and circumstances, to save her from going on a wild goose chase?” I thought that would be the last I’d hear of her.

Next day a friend told me that she had been desperately looking for me. Hours later we bumped into each other and she told me something amazing. Jesus Christ had appeared to her early the next morning in a vivid vision. He clearly told her, “What you are looking for doesn’t exist!” Including other qualifications and words I have regrettably forgotten. Following her encounter with the Eternal Guru, Jesus Christ, the girl felt it imperative to leave India by air within 48 hours. I wonder what became of her?

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(A point I would like to affirm again, for some readers, particularly Christian ones, is that these states of Enlightenment are real and not delusional. They exist under heaven. For example, to get the gist of what is being pointed to, one has to know that these generic mystic states are supra-rational. Some of them exist beyond conceptual grasp and are therefore not able to be adequately described. Descriptively, one can do no better than “fingers pointing towards the moon.” In my own case [and there are other variations of the no-self state], the “experience” existed beyond space and time, its proper description non-conceivable. See what I mean; completely confounding to the intellect. The point: It is not legitimate to dismiss these realities just because their description confounds ratiocination or logical reasoning.)

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What then might be the practical implications of this hypotheses if it turns out to reflect the truth? Here is another supporting illustration that may help. Take the current 14th Dalai Lama. Perhaps there has not been an aspirant more thoroughly and rigorously spiritually trained from the earliest age. Yet despite the rigors of his training, he admits that he has attained little or nothing spiritually save the comfort of hope. In his book, *Spiritual Advice to Buddhists and Christians*, he displays extreme honesty, an honesty profoundly admirable, and rarely found among Hindu Gurus (or their derivatives) from my own lengthy experience of them. I applaud his open confession. In this book on page 42, he describes his typical day. He shares the following:

“...I must say that I am a very poor practitioner. Usually I get up at 3:30 in the morning. Then I immediately do some recitations and some chanting. Following this until breakfast, I do meditation, analytical meditation mainly. Then after each analytical meditation, I do one-pointed meditation. The object of my meditation is

mainly dependent arising. Because of dependent arising things are empty. This is according to the Madhyamika philosophy of Nagarjuna and the interpretation of Chandrakirti. So, meditation on this gives me a kind of firm conviction of the possibility [emphasis added] of cessation of afflictive emotions.... If you ask me about experience in my practice, I think it is better than zero.... Transformation is always possible. So therefore, you see, there is always hope.”

Then he goes on to describe how he meditates on reincarnation and the process of death, and on higher beings that he calls, deity yoga. He says, “So from around 3:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. I am fully occupied with meditation and prayer, (and some prostrations, he adds later) and things like that.” He finally concludes with “Whether these practices of preparation are really going to benefit me at the time of death, I do not know at this moment. I suppose with all this preparation for death, I may still be a complete failure! That is also possible.”

My point is not to deride the honest Dalai Lama or anyone else, but to point out the relative futility of Far Eastern spiritual quests if only to attain Enlightenment. After all the Dalai Lama is now 76-years-old and has been trained and practicing assiduously for over 70 years, but to what effect? Among other examples, I have a Tibetan Buddhist monk friend who just returned from a one-year monastic meditation in Nepal. There, he meditated for six hours per day. I asked him, “What did you experience?” “Nothing,” he said (no, he wasn’t referring to the “nothing” of nirvana). Then I asked, “What was the point?” He answered, “Well, I gained merit for my next life.” Wow, I thought. What if there isn’t a next life in the Hindu and Buddhist sense?

This brings us to another big problem with Far Eastern spiritual tradition—the belief in reincarnation. I have some personal experiences in this area. These are my comments included from my book, *From Guru to God—An Experience of Ultimate Truth*. It is a published account of a 28-year spiritual odyssey leading to new life in Christ. Among these was the experience of past-life regressions. The religious theory of past lives had never been interesting to me. Thought through, it seemed implausible and facile in the extreme, especially as it was linked to the notions of karma pay-back and learning, throughout lifetimes, with no consistently knowable “who” to learn, or to suffer or to enjoy the pay-back. However, the primary purpose of this excursion for me was freeing myself of unwanted attitudes or feelings, which, according to the theory, had their origins deep in the past, most likely in past lives. I had about 30 hours of this non-hypnotic processing. In response to questions asked, hundreds of images did appear, most of which could

have been attributed to mere fantasy. Some few however, were compelling enough to get my attention. There was an incident pictured of being trampled to death by a formation of Roman troops on the run. Feelings and flinching accompanied the mental image. There were a number of other images that were particularly vivid. It was enough for me to think, "Maybe this stuff is true." However, profound doubt still lurked. There were lots of Julius Caesars and Mary Magdalenes, to whom some others had attested to being. That didn't help.

Along with my own experience and confirmation from a discerning friend of mine, Paul Rogers (who by the way, is not a Christian, and who had been a facilitator of thousands of hours of this process), I finally concluded that the whole notion of past lives was a fanciful delusion, but an understandable one.

Interestingly, there is no reference to reincarnation in any Indian scriptures before 700 BC. It's a relatively recent doctrine. Certainly it has been shown by valid or spurious research, I don't know which, that deep within the memory bank are images not attributable to this lifetime. The best explanation for this phenomenon, I believe, is that imbedded in the DNA of every human being is a comprehensive record of the experiences along the ancestral genetic lines going way back. By a potential of consciousness this genetically stored information can be accessed and decoded to appear sensibly to the human mind under certain conditions. This memory of the historical body lineage, containing all stored sense impressions, has nothing to do with the person or spirit who believes they were that person in another life. *It's just bloodline memory.* Those lives were not mine at all. Metempsychosis or reincarnation was not a fact as commonly believed. This is about as close as I could get to an explanation without being irresponsibly dismissive of a strange phenomenon that, I believe, has been wrongly interpreted.

To be noted about reincarnation: The whole reason for it is because of karma. But the whole reason for karma is that you have to redeem yourself through multiple life times to pay off your karmic debt. No one can pay off that debt for you. But Christianity in all of its uniqueness said, but there was one who came and died for our sin (debt). He took our sin, our karma. He suffered in our place. There is no need therefore, for reincarnation. In Hebrews 10:10-14 it reads, *...And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all** ...For by a single offering He has perfected **for all time** those who are sanctified* (sanctified meaning set apart for Salvation. Bold emphasis mine)

So the fallacy of reincarnation is another problem that distorts the picture of real Reality and leads people far astray, in my opinion.

To add weight to my general hypotheses, I found something; an older article recorded in the Times of India, 13 Feb. 2010, sitting on a friend's desk.

It reads:

DAMAGE LEADS TO HIGHTENED SPIRITUALITY?

“The roots of spiritual and religious attitudes may lie in areas of the brain that, when damaged, lead to greater spirituality, suggests new research.

“The study involves personality traits called self-transcendence, a vague measure of spiritual feelings, thinking, and behaviors. Self-transcendence ‘reflects a decreased sense of self and an ability to identify one’s self as an integral part of the universe as a whole,’ the researchers said.

“Before and after surgery, scientists surveyed patients who had brain tumors removed. The surveys generate self-transcendence scores.

“Selective damage to the left and right posterior parietal regions of the brain induced a specific increase in self-transcendence, or ST, Live Science reported.

“ ‘Our study is the first demonstration of a causative link between brain function and the ST,’ said the lead author Cosimo Urgesi from the University of Udine Italy.

“ ‘Damage to posteria parietal areas induced fast changes of a stable personality dimension related to transcendental self-referential awareness. Thus, dysfunctional parietal neural activity may underpin altered spiritual and religious attitudes and behavior,’ he added.

“Previous neuroimaging studies had a linked activity within a large network in the brain that connects the frontal, parietal, and temporal cortexes with spiritual experiences, ‘but information on the causative link between such network and spirituality is lacking,’ Urgesi said.

“One study reported in 2008, suggested that the brain’s right parietal lobe defines ‘Me’ and people with less active Me-Definers are more likely to lead spiritual lives.

“ ‘The finding could lead to new strategies for treating mental illness. If a stable trait like ST can undergo swift changes due to brain lesions, it indicates that some personality dimensions may be modified by influencing neural activity in specific areas,’ said Professor Salvatore Aglioti from Sapienza University in Rome.”

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In conclusion: The Bible tells us, *by their fruits you will know them*. (Matthew 7:20) I tracked this whole game for 28 years among thousands of Far Eastern-persuaded Western devotees. By and large, with a small number of exceptions, I found that the moment people got involved in the beliefs and practices associated with the gurus being cleaved to as God-men, the devotee's lives went into slow inexorable downward spiral—dis-integration. It was a bit like the frog in water that slowly warms to boiling, the frog too slow to wake up and jump out before it's too late.

In my view, what makes pursuing grand Far Eastern spiritual goals regrettable, is their Enlightenment states are ephemeral or unsustainable on both sides of the grave. Is it not a waste of time to pursue unsustainable ends? If disciplined practitioner of the quality of the Dalai Lama and many others, including myself, can't make it by the means of the Far Eastern traditions, what hope do you the reader have?

In contrast to Enlightenment, Jesus Christ offers eternal Salvation. Salvation through Jesus Christ is immediately available to anyone who reaches for it with a humble spirit. He offers, forgiveness, existential rest and Truth through the free gift of grace alone received through faith alone. A change of heart ensues, Repentance (Gk., metanoia, meaning "to change one's mind") and an eternal union with the Creator. Millions can attest to this rest from the "works of man" and reliance on the works of Christ in loving trust of the one "*in whom are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom.*" (Colossians 2:3)

I could find nothing better after 28 years of intense search and discovery.

The reader needs to bear in mind that I have placed my life's wager on Jesus Christ and his Gospel as being the Truth, and therefore I cannot reconcile the radical differences between the views of Jesus Christ and Far Eastern gurus. Most Far Eastern spiritual positions are not marginally but radically at variance with Christ's teaching and Way. And this is in respect to their worldviews and to all the *core* issues of their faiths.

In whom or what are you going to place your trust? What are you going to believe? Believing is a choice. You have obviously chosen to believe something or someone. What or Whom? Beliefs have consequences.

With all good wishes for your spiritual journey.

Michael Graham

P.S. You can read of my twenty-eight-year spiritual odyssey in the published book, *From Guru to God: An Experience of the Ultimate Truth*, or a synopsis version of that story in the booklet, *Encountering the Eternal Guru—Ten True Stories*, (General Editor: Michael Graham) in the section titled, “Down the Cosmic Road”

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