

THE NECTAR OF MUHAMMAD

(Reader: For background on this writing, you might start with the reading entitled
The Nectar: The Interior Castle.)

Let not Muhammad to have lived in vain. Let no man curse his name. Many things have come about in the world as a result of his existence 1500 years ago.

At the present time, nearly one-quarter of all humans are Muslim. Islam is the dominant political and religious force in about fifty countries. Muslims probably control more of the world's wealth than anybody wants to admit – including them. And yet, most people in the Americas, and Australia, have very little accurate first-hand knowledge of Islam, and even less about its origin Muhammad.

In reality, there are many different “religions” and societies that go by the name of Islam, there are many different reasons why people are loyal to one of them, and there are many different images they hold of the man Muhammad. There was a time when Muslim and Jewish and Christian communities co-existed side by side and enjoyed a peaceful and cooperative relationship. Their respective dogmas did not seem to conflict that much. That was before 1492. But then the Christian mystics and the Inquisition came along. The mystics were claiming direct experience of God, some to the extent of hearing his voice and following that instead of the Catholic Church; but the Vatican held to the teaching that this is not only sinful, but impossible for ordinary humans. The mystics were looking too much like Muhammad. They were excommunicated, locked up, persecuted, and in some cases anyone who followed them was martyred. And then two hundred years after their deaths, many were canonized as saints!

And so, history took a big turn. Tensions within all religions mounted, as each sought to establish itself as solid and unique. We have arrived at a point, just during the last thirty or so years, at which the entire world has been painted a picture of Islam as a rigid, polemic, defensive, politicized and militant entity. In this era of mass communication, the masses define their reality based upon second- or third- or fourth-hand sources. We have all been made to feel the presence of this entity of Islam, through the heavily edited medium of one form or another of mass communication, and not in a kind, or even a neutral way. It is probably fair to say that, generally, most non-Muslims fear Islam. It is seen as an enemy. Its followers are seen as enemies. And extreme anti-Muslim factions of Christians have held Islam up as the anti-Christ. So it has joined the ranks of the long list of things in the world that have been called “the” anti-Christ. Perhaps Osho, one of the ones who has been called the anti-Christ, brings a little balance in his words: “There is no Christ, so how can there be an anti-Christ?” Every person sees a reflection of himself.

The twists and turns of the limbs and branches of the tree of Islam, planted as a seed by Muhammad, are the same as those of all religions, and the most radical twists occur when large numbers of people join. The more people there are in any group, the more diluted the original spirit, the more distorted the original purpose, and the less of humanity remains in each participant. The official, the public, the professed agenda of Muslim leaders has to always remain Muhammad-ish, or at least Quran-ish; the rhetoric is not much different than centuries ago. However, the spirit is not the same, just as no pope has ever lived the life of a Jesus Christ, or taught as he taught, or taught *what* he taught. The spirit of Muhammad is difficult to find among Muslims -- or their spiritual leaders -- today. In order to follow Muhammad, sects of mystics such as the Sufis had to split away from mainstream Islam. They are looking for what he taught us to look for: Allah-consciousness as the One and Only Reality. They resemble closely the Christian mystics who, since the second century Fathers of the Desert, have had to leave the Catholic Church in order to follow the way of Jesus, which was to seek first the kingdom of heaven -- and not as a member of any congregation! But in both Islam and Catholicism the masses remain bogged down in the quicksand of the externalities of their religion, which shelter them from direct experience.

The Messenger is the message. And he frequently retreats from the world -- to a silent monastery, an austere abbey, a desert hermitage, a Gethsemani garden, or, in the case of Muhammad, a cave on Mt. Hira. Who wants to follow that? The few whose destiny it is to come into face-to-face contact with a pure mystic find something that moves them to let go of the average person's fear of insanity and persecution and allow their transformation from ego to soul to occur. They have seen something far more pure than what any organized religion can offer. But those whose destiny it is to merely hear or read about him or her keep their distance from this fire. They don't want to risk losing the tenuous hold on the *semblance* of sanity and self that they have pieced together over the years. For the millions, the idea of, the faith in, God or Allah or Abraham or Moses or Krishna or Mahavira or Lao Tsu or Gautam Buddha or Jesus suffices. They hide in the shadows when the Light of direct experience begins to stop their thinking, unraveling who they think they are and showing them who they *really* are.

So only a few, of any religion or no religion, have ever been able to truly follow Muhammad's profound example. They prefer to play with the toys of their rituals, and to comfort themselves with the words of their sacred scriptures, as filtered through their imam or guru or rabbi or pastor, and in the warm community of like-minded believers. They won't relax their grip on anything they have gained in the outer world. But the truth is that if you are not every day becoming more a mystic than yesterday, more like Muhammad or Jesus or the Buddha, and less connected to the outer world, you are just ignoring their real teachings, twisting everything, using the man and his exemplary religiousness to suit your own ego's purposes. Either you persevere in a more and more continuous awareness of the living presence of Allah within you, and a will-less submission to that guidance, or you are a hypocrite. When you are a hypocrite, you become the world's problem -- and your neighbor's adversary. He and she are probably fighting every day for a share of the same power, money, sanity, sex, and oil that you are.

A religion is the perfect political tool; anyone who seeks to manage people, at any level, brings religion, or at least creed, into it in one way or another. With religions being what they are today, all governments want their people committed to a creed, taking a side. And the best are the big dogmatic religions. However, it is not in the interest of governments for people to be truly *religious*. Truly religious people, the ones who have dedicated themselves and purified themselves to the point that they are able live in God/Allah-awareness, do not need a religion or creed; in fact they do not need much of anything from a society or a government. They are not greedy. So they do not have anything the government can use, and they can't be motivated by what the government can offer. But a person who *professes* to be religious needs many things. He needs to maintain his identity as a part of the religion, and to do this he needs to uphold a certain image in the eyes of others. He is probably working for money and what it can buy; all religions want their people to appear successful, "blessed." So he is worth manipulating, and an easy mark.

The more of its citizens who are institutionalized by a particular religion – affiliated and visibly active – the easier it is for a government to do whatever it wants. Getting the citizens into religion is better than getting them into the political party! The more involved they are in their religion the more neutralized they are. They are sort of castrated, because churches tame raging bulls. The bullish have to be good, have to become a little sheepish, because they represent the entire congregation, and even the religion itself. Their time and energy must be spent in the sorts of inane things that religions organize. They have to lead harmless, law-abiding lives, at least as far as anyone can see. They have to be able to put up with things that other people would not. They are mechanical and predictable and easy to track. No need to fear that they will deviate, think for themselves, reflect, intuit, or act on impulse. They have to be peacemakers – maybe even informants. An unpaid police force. They can't be seen with the wrong people, and often this means anyone who is not a member of their religion. There are severe social sanctions for frequenting brothels and taverns, and to be seen standing on street corners with thieves, drunks and addicts. And domestic violence is taboo in almost every religion. One is made to simply feel guilty and "repent," which often amounts to suppressing many things that are better amplified in consciousness and worked out. And if the respect they get from the rest of the congregation is enough to keep them in line, and keep them coming to church or synagogue or mosque, they are stuck in a kind of quagmire. They may be getting social, business, financial and romantic benefits through their contacts in the congregation, and probably are obligated to several fellow churchgoers. They are kept distracted from really looking at the situation and admitting that they are being used. And since they have been castrated, blocked from spontaneous expression of hormonally motivated behavior, they are very pleased with the puny, "missionary position" ones that the religion provides and legitimizes. And over and above all this, if a person can be convinced that through his religion he will enjoy the special protection of a supreme Power, if he is *that* gullible, the government can easily control him. He *wants* to be controlled, he wants to remain blind to the deep scary things that his ego dreads, he is greedy for power but will not take the responsibility and develop the creativity to do it for himself. Therefore, he will donate time and money to whatever convinces him that it can offer him this special protection of a supreme Power. He will sit quietly and listen, he will comply, he will make few demands, he will suppress, he will

put up with all kinds of nonsense in the name of forgiveness and acceptance and atonement because he believes that this will gain him some reward in some afterlife.

So, if you are a psychopath or sociopath, if you enjoy manipulating people's minds or their money, there is no better legal way to do it than to set yourself up as a flock leader.

Is this what Muhammad was all about? Did he envision where his life work would lead? Did he want Islam to arrive where it has? Was he motivated by money and power and fame? A person who has not spent a significant amount of time meditating alone in caves of some sort would not be able to credit him with any motive more noble and wise than this. He would see Muhammad as like himself. A person who has found the Interior Castle might see Muhammad as an authentic messenger of God, as a man who lived his own religiousness, who did the work he needed to do, privately, in order to purify himself and to allow a will larger than his own to determine his every action. It appears that he was not one to live by mere faith and hope, but sought and found a real connection, a certainty of a connection, and a certainty that what he was connected with was wiser and more real than anything else he might follow. Perhaps he felt a love and felt a loving so intense that it dwarfed his own ideas and emotions and attachments to the world. Perhaps in the stark silence and naturalness of the cave he was able to remember something in the depths of himself that was deeper than himself.

As long as a person believes in mere faith, and in hope, and believes that his ideas and emotions about God or Allah are IT, his religion is on a par with teenage romance. It is so fragile that he has to keep being reassured, he can't miss a Sabbath, and he must slash down anyone who insults his beloved. Over the centuries, each succeeding generation of Muslims has further diluted the taste that was Muhammad. Each has wandered one more step removed from this essence, this nectar. But due to "civilization" – a pretty word for what is really the replacement of the natural man and world with artificial ones – we hardly notice what we have lost. We now have zero capacity to feel the essence, to savor the sweetness, because it takes a tremendous amount of constant attention to survive in the "civilized" world -- it is not natural to us. We have to "modernize" the interpretation of the teachings of the master because their deep and vast other-worldly aura makes no sense to our narrowed, mechanized minds; we are deaf and blind to the living reality. The Light gets dimmer and dimmer and dimmer, and all we have left to cling to are a few cherished words that we can compute and understand. But the Prophet is dead. He cannot be revived. He can't help you anymore. You have to do the work yourself. Remember, he had no human teacher to guide his steps, only a non-human voice, that no one but himself heard, in a cave.

We can still retreat to caves. There are places. But in the Muslim world of today, few do. Few would listen to messages from a non-human voice, then emerge and try to carry that unearthly state of awareness and follow this voice. So the religion has very little credibility. This is what is destroying the Muslim world, not the Christians, not any nation with a bigger army, not a war with Israel, not economic developments. Because the Muslim world has become almost the antithesis of Muhammad's message, it can't last. While one is busy trying to qualify for the forty mysteriously embodied virgins in Allah's afterlife – (where there are no bodies!)-- he is missing the

joy that this metaphor used by Muhammad offers right now in this moment. So it behooves anyone who wants to live a real human life, to know what a sincere path feels like and where it leads, to take the first step back to the Source and study the lives of men like Muhammad, and figure out how and why all that has come about has come about.

None of it has been a mistake. There are no mistakes. Everything is demonstrating for us a perfectly clear and essential lesson. The evidence that something is the best thing that could happen is that it happens. The time and place of all that was and is is just right. Pain, loss, “evil” prompt one to investigate “Why?” Once one studies and reflects one can see the purpose and the perfection. One can appreciate things in a new light. When there has been for a long time a large deviation from equilibrium the correction often seems at first sight to be a worse deviation. But with a vast vision, from the eagle’s perspective, we can appreciate and wonder at the perfect symmetry. Something has stopped and stunned us, and we fell for a few moments into the Great Silence which mothers all turns toward the Light which is seen with eyes closed, the only real beauty. Without an Age of Ignorance in the oppressive Persian Empire and at the same time the Dark Ages in the confounded Byzantine Empire, there could not have been a Muhammad. Sometimes, historical events which cause suffering to many people awaken only one single man into the Pure Consciousness of the One, the True. But not one single moment of all that suffering is wasted. And as we all reflect and meditate on the man Muhammad and the situation in the world today, none of our inner work will be wasted either. We must continue to chip away at this iceberg and stop singing the same old hymns. New Light is going to dawn. Perhaps it will be one single person, but more likely it will be all persons this time. As an entire humanity, simultaneously, while we are all lost in our own most reverent practice – be it prayer, chanting, movement, or stillness, each of us will feel his own personal solitary taste – the connection to the One True Source of us all. At this equilibrium point, we will suddenly SEE what we could not before see. It is nonsense to wait for a new Prophet, or Savior, or Buddha, or even a new Billy Graham or Pat Robertson to walk the earth. Such days are over.

In some ways, we can see signs that we are currently stuck in an Age of Ignorance similar to the one that spawned Muhammad. The times seem to be ripe for *something*. But now the human is a vastly different creature than he was in Saudi Arabia in 600 A.D., with few exceptions. Ages ago, the ignorance was of the nature of isolation, brutality, illiteracy, scarce resources, and preoccupation with finding and protecting sufficient food and water to survive the scorching daylight hours. The people had little knowledge of the teachings of the Prophets before them: Abraham, Moses, Solomon, David, Lao Tsu, Mahavira, Gautam Buddha, Jesus, and others. In contrast, we now have access to virtually everything known worldwide about these and other Prophets. Plus, we now have Muhammad, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Yogananda, Anandamayi Ma, Ramana Maharshi, Gurdjieff, Rajneesh/Osho, Sunyata, and many others. We have the powerful tool of the internet to gain instant access to at least a feel for the common denominator in all these teachings and teachers. In one day we can find more information on things mystical than the average Arab in Muhammad’s time could encounter in a lifetime. A diligent seeker of truth today needs no new prophet or guru outside himself. No new religion is

needed; no new religion could work. In addition to the real prophets, every angle has already been tried by enterprising holy psychopaths. And can the earth stand another Jesus and Christianity, another Muhammad and Islam? Thanks to the symmetry, the balance of events in history, we have matured beyond that stage.

However, in spite of all our advances and advantages, we have to admit the darkness of our “New Age,” a darkness that in some ways may make it just as difficult for us to contact the One True as it was in Muhammad’s day. Our darkness is not the backwardness and deprivation of 600 A.D. Arabia, but just the opposite: our man-made world tempts us and showers us with *everything*. We need not store up for an afterlife; we are led to believe that we can have it all right here. We are blinded by the promise of heaven on earth. The constant turn-ons are scientifically engineered, by some very clever men and women, to appeal to our lower nature. This artificial world in fact exceeds nature itself in its capacity to capture and control our attention. Unless you do live in a cave or in the middle of a desert, your consciousness is incessantly being diverted from its natural condition -- the pure, clear emptiness in which Allah, God, Reality is awared. And the experts -- the people whose special training is in how to design products and advertisements that are most effective in taking control of your mind -- compete with one another and earn big salaries to do it. The influences are everywhere; they are subliminal, you cannot escape them if you live in any civilized society. We are inundated; virtually everything is artificial. And it is not just visual, but it is auditory, in recorded music as well as in the harsh grating sounds of motors and machinery, and also the smells of a city. Anyone born into a competitive society after about 1950 has had his consciousness debased to this level since the moment he was born. We all feel more at home in it than we do in our own natural silence. The most salient feature of the natural environment is the absence of human sounds, especially voice and words. Many people will say that they prefer a dog or a cat or a horse over a human companion just because the animal can’t talk! We are so accustomed to loud and sudden and unharmonious sounds and synthesized music that we often can’t appreciate, maybe even can’t notice, natural sounds in the background, sounds that call us back to our true being. If you live in a city, you may not have a single waking moment of your day in which there is total absence of man-made intrusions stimulating your senses. And this may last your entire lifetime. You know no other world, unless you have managed to remember your pre-natal experience. We do not know what our true, natural consciousness is. We do not know who we are.

Let us go back now to Muhammad, and see what he brought to the people who did not have this kind of darkness. Our comments on him and our interpretation of Islam may not meet with the approval of many Muslims. The features we have chosen to emphasize are those which are most relevant to the Interior Castle.

It is difficult to compare this man with any man in modern times. And yet we know quite a bit about him historically. Some people mount an argument that Jesus was mythical, or at least that the crucifixion story is mythical, but we cannot claim that Muhammad and major events in his life were mythical. He appears to think in a way similar to the way Jesus and the Hebrew prophets before him thought; his conscience went with the masses of the poor and the oppressed, and he

set forth a comprehensive plan for an egalitarian society and a world government. But as far as we can tell, his goal for the society was not worldly power, in the same way that modern superpowers compete for control of people and money and territory. Muhammad's society was based on every person finding his own connection to Allah. This was the power that Muhammad was working with. In his mind, with this power, and no other, all men could peacefully co-exist, since all worldly power is subordinate to Allah's power. But without the people living in that state of Allah-awareness, the mechanical laws of worldly power and economics rule. So everything was aimed at, and depended upon, planting the seeds of this mystical connection in the soul of every person. Muhammad worked out in great detail first the practices that would give a person the experience of Allah as a source of true guidance, and second the framework for a world-wide society that could sustain man's continuous connection to Allah. And, he rightly intuited that if everyone could remain in "the state of grace" (not just a Christian concept), the society could not fail.

Muhammad must have been supremely passive, trusting, and able to stabilize in a deep zone that few men have ever even reached. This one talent is far more significant than any of the personality or strategic or political talents usually ascribed to him. These all were not really "him," but followed naturally as long as he did not stray from Allah's will. From this standpoint, we are on the wrong tack trying to establish whether he was brilliant or lucky, aggressive or reticent, moral or immoral, sane or insane. He was just extremely interior, consistently interior, intensely interior, and he gave up his own will to do whatever the angel he found in his Interior Castle told him to do. We hope that, for the purpose of deepening your awareness, you the reader can make good use of this way of looking at Muhammad the mystic.

As far as we can determine, Muhammad could neither read nor write throughout his life, and the Quran was compiled into book form by others, after his death. Several of his closest followers had memorized the entire text as he spoke to them, and the consensus of what they could remember became the written scripture. He was born into a noble family, and would have had access to a good education. However, the grandfather who raised him treated him as a "different" child, and apparently allowed him to choose not to be educated. The boy was not ambitious or anxious to compete with others. He was comfortable with common people. Many mystics have rejected or otherwise avoided education, probably they intuited that it is an advantage to not use the mind for thinking from an early age. An empty mind allows the intuitive faculty to grow wings. Even Einstein would not cooperate in school as a youngster. The imposition of the faculty of disciplined logical analysis before a child develops intuition results in a narrowed, "blinkered" mentality. Almost all Western-educated children suffer from this limitation and don't even know there is another way. They all feel a frustration, but don't understand why.

By the standards of the aggressive, masculine societies of the West, the young Muhammad would be considered passive and effeminate. He would not fit in. But he radiated a lightness and a joy and a sincerity that were rare, to the extent that he was commonly known as Al Ameen -- the Trustworthy, the True. He exhibited early the traits of kindness, quietness, and humility. His interests were not social but solitary. He avoided attention, refused to pose for portraits, and later forbade that likenesses of himself be displayed. The stories of his unusual qualities as an infant,

suggesting a mystical connection even at birth, exist. Probably he was aware of this connection as a youth. He was not interested in finding a wife until late, and did not go out looking; at age 25 he married his employer. As he matured and became an object of hero worship, with the responsibilities of general of an army, he demonstrated clarity and confidence in his execution of the directives he received from "Gabriel," and has been called by some "a brilliant strategist." However, historians who have portrayed him as a proud or pretentious man are off the mark; he was not motivated by ego needs to the extent that most people are. His actions were not for personal gain. Instead, he felt a tremendous pain for the ragged people around him, whom life gave no opportunity to know the experience of Allah as he did, for he knew that if they could, their outer lives of deprivation and confusion would change.

Historians, even non-Muslim historians, agree that Muhammad did have a special ability to move people. Some say that he was loved and respected by everyone who came in contact with him, even his adversaries. Only a person of the highest moral standards is given the name Al-Ameen. Here we offer a list of qualities of character attributed to him, toned down a bit and adapted from a modern-day Muslim scholar:

1. Very kind and merciful to all, and full of concern to help anyone who wanted to find Allah.
2. Acknowledged by Arabs everywhere as "The truthful and trustworthy".
3. Never spoke out of his own desire; what he conveyed in his words was all from Divine inspiration and for the good of all.
4. Advocated and promoted free education for all.
5. Declared what may be the first Charter of Human Rights in history.
6. An ardent advocate for individual freedom, the right to work for all, the right to be treated humanely.
7. Was benevolent to servants and to those he conquered, helped orphans, the oppressed, and women.
8. Established the concept of the equality of all human beings – all have equal value because any human can still find Allah.
9. Eliminated discrimination and favoritism on the basis of wealth, race, language, and where one lived.
10. Treated in a tolerant manner those who refused to pray to Allah.
11. Taught and practiced "Collect from your affluent and return it back to your poor and needy."
12. An affectionate father, a dutiful and lovable husband.
13. An ideal neighbor, a trustworthy and honest trader, an efficient administrator, a foresighted statesman, and a brilliant military leader.
14. Kept his followers active, involved and motivated in service to mankind. He taught them to be good to others, to be trustworthy, to be of a benevolent disposition.

(Adapted from Siddiqi: *Muhammad: The Only Hope for Mankind*)

The impact that the man Muhammad had on the people is reflected in this quotation, which is claimed to be authentic:

O king! We were plunged in the depth of ignorance and barbarism; we adored idols, we lived in unchastity, we ate the dead bodies, and we spoke abominations, we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood were neglected; we knew no law but that of the strong, when Allah raised among us a man, of whose birth, truthfulness, honesty, and purity we were aware; and he called to the Oneness of Allah and taught us not to associate anything with Him. He forbade us the worship of idols; and he enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of the neighbours and kith and kin; he forbade us to speak evil of women, or to eat the substance of orphans; he ordered us to fly from the vices, and to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, and to observe fast. We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunctions to worship Allah and not to associate anything with Him, and we have allowed what He has allowed, and prohibited what He has prohibited. For this reason, our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to make us forsake the worship of Allah and return to the worship of idols and other abominations. They have tortured and injured us, until finding no safety among them, we have come to your country, and hope you will protect us from oppression. (<http://muslimarchives.blogspot.com/2008/04/04-02-2008-muhammadpbuh.html>)

One of the most scrutinized events in Muhammad's life, by both Muslims and their opponents, is his letter to the Byzantine emperor Heraclitus, and the emperor's reaction. Muhammad was by this time becoming more forward in his efforts to extend Allah to all the world, and he offered Heraclitus an alliance if he would turn to Allah. The emperor was also an astrologer, and he interpreted some symbols in a dream, and perhaps something he saw in the stars, as indicating that Muhammad was a true prophet. Heraclitus took an interest in Muhammad, and arranged to personally question someone close to Muhammad in order to get some accurate information. This meeting and conversation can be found verbatim on several websites. (Ed.: Without getting caught up in the modern-day argument surrounding this incident, we try here to simply recount a summary of the dialog and of ensuing events to convey to the reader the impact that Muhammad must have had on the emperor.) Heraclitus asked what kind of person Muhammad was, how he treated people, if he kept his promises, what he taught, whether his followers were loyal and sincere or not, and if the movement was growing. The answers he received confirmed his divination that Muhammad was a true Prophet, and he encouraged the lords of his empire to accept, if not to embrace, Islam. It is reported that he stated concerning Muhammad: "If I were with him I would wash his feet." However, the Byzantine lords – Heraclitus' subordinates – remained against Islam gaining a foothold in their territories; it would have been a shock to many of the people and to the society itself. So for political reasons, Heraclitus did not convert to Islam even though he believed Muhammad to be a rare prophet.

Muhammad did not teach or practice celibacy, but chastity outside of marriage. Sex in the context of a commitment to the total being of one of the opposite sex was seen as a way to discover the futility of earthly pleasure, and thus foster a turn to Allah for both partners. This view is the same as that of the Hindus. His first wife, his wealthy employer, was a widow who was fifteen years

older, with children. Even though polygamy was widely practiced among the Arabs, Muhammad remained monogamous with her for 25 years, until her death at age 65. Halfway into the marriage Muhammad was alone in a cave and had his first revelation. He became devoted to spreading the teachings, and his wife's wealth and family and social connections helped him to attract the interest of influential people; however, very few of the social elite became followers.

After his first wife's death, Muhammad accumulated eleven other wives polygamously. Some were widows in need of a livelihood; virginity at the time of marriage was demanded by most men, and widows often remained alone and destitute. Others of Muhammad's marriages were to help the woman to live in Allah as he did. Others were for political alliances, sometimes as a way of providing proper guidance for the daughter of a friend. This was probably the case with the youngest of his wives, who was a mere six years old (he was in his fifties) at the time of betrothal and ten when the marriage was consummated. It is difficult to claim that Muhammad was so above and beyond his animal instincts as to be immune to the pleasures and emotions of sex and romantic attachment.

In the beginning, Muhammad must have struck many people as a puzzling, strange character; they had never seen a man like this before, so apparently religious, sincere, and unobtrusive leading a small band of poor and illiterate folk, and teaching such a strange way of life. There were Arab mystics, but they remained hidden, uninterested in participating in groups of people. And personally he seemed harmless enough. But what he was saying was radical, often directly opposed to those in power. After his band swelled to about eighty followers, and it became apparent that his influence would continue to grow, it began to be dangerous to be seen with him. It is said that he had personal protection due to the influence of an uncle. But about five years after his first revelations serious persecution began. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that nearly all respectable citizens and Arab "wise men" in Mecca renounced him, his influence continued to grow.

In 622, about ten years after he first began teaching, he was forced to leave Mecca. He settled his community in Medinah. Up until now he had remained separate from politics, and was just a religious figure, confining his teachings to only what helped one to find the experience of Allah. But in Medinah he was caught in a crossfire among tribes of Jews and pagan Arabs which had been feuding for generations; members of each were interested in his teachings. He began to communicate with leaders of each of the tribes, and through patience and perseverance managed to secure a signed agreement among them, complete with pledges and promises. This document has been called "The Constitution of Medinah." It was a remarkable achievement, and brought him a lot of attention as a peacemaker, And it was even more remarkable because whereas the whims of public opinion had always ruled, authority was now shifted to heeding the will of Allah. And this always came from Gabriel through Muhammad. Even though there were almost immediate breaches of promises, Muhammad's feat of securing any agreement at all won him the respect of many observers and critics. This was a big turning point.

The word "Allah" was not new to the people; it, or close homonyms, existed in many different languages and religions. But it carried different meanings for different people. The Jews sometimes referred to their Yahweh as Elohim. Some pagan groups used the word Allah for one aspect of their pantheistic array of gods. Muhammad taught Allah as a universal –The One, The True – not partial to any group as Elohim was partial to the Jews. And the pagan Allah was seen as blind, insensible, and unresponsive to men as it determined their fate, whereas Muhammad taught that each person has his own communication line with Allah within his own Self, and that dedication to Allah can affect one's own fate. This aspect is strikingly similar to the Hindu law of karma, and the fourth of Gautam Buddha's Four Noble Truths which is "There is a path that one can follow to end suffering."

Muhammad's Allah was not a mere concept or belief or hope. It was not intellectual. It was integral with this man's experience of himself and of everything. It WAS the Unity of the All. He felt within and as himself the Divine. He knew how to stay in the consciousness of this which he knew to be the One and Only Source of true guidance and love; more accurately, he had to exert no effort. It was a gift, and existed as an ancient, enduring Memory, the Only Reality. *This is true monotheism.* Nothing else – nothing in the world or in your mind or body needs to be consulted for guidance, appealed to for protection or love. No prayer in the sense of asking for something is needed. Whatever Allah provides is trusted, no time or energy is wasted on trying to gain or preserve or admire anything temporal. There are no idols, no fetishes, no attachments. Regardless of what problem might arise, there is only The One Solution: stay connected to Allah/God-awareness. *This alone is real monotheism.* Many claim to serve only one Supreme Being, but look at their lives. Very, very few actually do. All the rest think about God, talk about God and their faith, pray to God, sing to God, and cry out to God when their entanglements in the world trap them. Still they refuse to let go of their false idols that are trapping them.

When Muhammad saw that he might be able to remove the blindness to the experience of The One in a few people, and that their connection would be their liberation from their misery, he was moved to act. He sought a way to actively wake up the people to their true nature. What has been called Muhammad's diplomacy and strategic brilliance and growing political influence was really nothing more than a compassion so deep that he became transfixed and driven by the guidance he was receiving. As people responded, he kept on, guiding them step by step to see the most fundamental things in life in a new light. A new world order began to take shape around his experience of Allah.

But not everyone experienced Allah. Not everyone tried. Not everyone could submit to Allah's guidance. So besides those who actually did experience, there was a growing crowd of those who merely believed because of social or political advantages. And his followers were mostly the oppressed people. Most of the powerful and financially secure rejected Muhammad's "way." When he anticipated conflict, he immediately tried to open up communication. He was no ordinary diplomat, sent out as a representative of a power base, with a political or economic agenda designed to cut the baby in half. He was just a sincere man who wanted everyone to find the peace within, the state of mind of Allah-awareness that makes all worldly things seem

unimportant, but at the same time, sets everything in order. His demeanor, in this state, often soothed hostile feelings. But as the numbers grew and he was unable to personally address every conflict, failures began to predominate. Muhammad's first response to any attack was flight. He taught his people to accept such humiliations, but as his group of followers began to include many who had no mystical connection, he received much criticism from his own for not being more aggressive. Fear turned many from dedication to Allah-awareness to dedication to mundane matters. They saw that he was powerful enough to begin to resist the power they had always feared: the corrupt and ruthless government. So there came a point where joining forces with Muhammad in his radical new community was seen as a way of not humbling oneself before the will of Allah, but of fighting – and winning. So, out of necessity, to take responsibility for the vulnerable position he had put his people in, and to prevent unnecessary violence, Muhammad became the general of an army. Still, he claimed that all of his decisions came from Allah and were conveyed to him through angel Gabriel. In any case, there were a few amazing victories, and usually Muhammad's forces were outnumbered and with inferior weapons. The victories, in turn, attracted a still more militant kind of follower. Still, Muhammad resisted taking the offensive except when circumstances predicted a wholesale slaughter of his unprepared people. He was tireless in his efforts to negotiate agreements, create an atmosphere of tranquility and compassion, and awaken Allah in the souls of adversaries; if that failed he took to flight when he could. Perhaps some of his more aggressive military moves, especially toward the end, demonstrate a lapse in trust of Allah. We do not attempt to judge.

The teachings of Muhammad were simple and practical, usually in poetic symbols, metaphors, and parables that the common people could appreciate. It is easy to strike up a romance with the poetry of the Quran and miss the profound meaning. This is why Osho once referred to it as "99% rubbish." Some critics have claimed that either Muhammad was a well-traveled and well-educated man of the world, or somebody else wrote the Quran. But it is all just what any mystic, of any epoch, would say. We find incredible similarities between Muhammad's expressions and those in the earlier Tao, Hindu, Jain, Advaita Vedanta, and the words attributed to Gautam Buddha, not to mention Jesus' essential teachings, and those of later mystics such as Teresa of Avila, Rabindranath Tagore, Kahlil Gibran, Hendrik Ibsen, Ramana Maharshi, Sunyata, and Anandamayi Ma. When one touches the very substrate of truth, what he says has a universal quality. The linguistic expressions available to convey this are very limited. The expressions will strike anyone with a mystical connection, any seeker of truth, as a resonance. The same themes surface in different places and eras, and many times there is no way that one writer could have come into contact with the writings of the other, or be otherwise influenced. Those who are in a moment in the throes of something so profound as to be inexpressible, find in nature and in passionate human love metaphors to try to capture their experience. There is but one Allah, one God, one True Reality, no matter whether the person caught in the glimpse lives in 10,000 B.C. or 10,000 A.D., in a palace or a prison, in the body of a three year old or a ninety year old.

If one studies the cosmovisions, the ancient teachings on the nature of things, which have been handed down since before the written word mostly by personal transmission in various cultures,

the same incredible similarities are seen. Two cultures could have developed for centuries, for millennia, with no contact with one another, and yet their cosmovisions, when more recently written down and compared, contain the same essential elements. Such universality of an element strongly suggests its fundamental truth. What can be more true than a personal, private insight, frantically scribbled down in poetic allusions, which turns out to be virtually identical to another scribbled down by another person in a completely different place and time? These are not people who have been conditioned by a common culture to think or write in the same way, they are people of entirely different cultures who have touched something universal, and are struggling to share it, in spite of cultural pressure to treat it as just crazy. A mystic knows what truth *feels* like. He hears “the ring of truth.” There is actually an atmospheric change when truth is manifesting, a change in both inner and outer atmospheres, such that they are no longer distinct from one another. It is not parallel worlds or separate realities. It is all One.

Let us take one example. There has been a great interest in the similarities of the writings of San Juan de la Cruz of the sixteenth century to the Quran and some of the writings of Sufis. Authors have pointed out not only similar teachings, but even the same poetic constructions, symbols, and metaphors for the ecstatic experience of dissolution into the One, God, Allah. Some have gone so far as to call San Juan a Sufi. Investigations have been made to try to substantiate the theory that San Juan had actual contact with Sufis or Sufi writings, or the Quran, similar to the theory that Muhammad learned many of his expressions from other mystics or wise men. Both are possible, but no evidence has been found to support either of these theories.

Readers of San Juan’s poetry who are not mystics, and who try to read it as poetry, just come away confused, wondering how a supposed saint could be so obsessed with the erotic. But if one reads it the way a Sufi mystic reads the Quran, it is illuminating, intense, inspiring. A levitation! San Juan himself said of his writings that they came directly from his own mystical experience, and that when brought down to the level of thinking and words were just “nonsense, nonsense, nonsense.” And that is all he says in defense of it. So we needn’t demand that Muhammad, or Islam, explain the Quran. It is nonsense!

Muhammad’s community began to resemble a society of many different kinds of people who must find a common root or the community will just go the way of every other political body. So Muhammad had to make a decision: to disband, or to set a new standard of conduct for every aspect of life. With the hindsight of history, we can see that it is precisely here where the original essential teaching – the individual connection with Allah-consciousness – had to be compromised. What is interior and personal can’t be exteriorized and shared; heaven cannot be reestablished in hell. As soon as any man, saint or sinner, turns his attention and his followers’ attention to the world, it is only a matter of time before misunderstandings explode into conflict. The entire spirit of the endeavor shifts; it is no longer “soul work,” to borrow an expression from Jung, but it becomes just work.

In order to participate in the goal of keeping the society running, each individual must impose some limits on his soul-searching. He must at times interrupt an important inner development in

order to crank up his senses and his thinking function to deal with something outside himself. Even one incident like this can be a tremendous setback, if one's goal is to find Allah, for openings into such realms are rare and unpredictable. We can't expect them to follow our worldly timetable. On the contrary, we must be prepared to drop everything and let what is unfolding within us unfold entirely, for we may not get another opportunity if we refuse this one. This is why people become hermits, and why hermits grow into very different kinds of humans than those who are regularly responding to societal demands. A society like Muhammad's, on the other hand, is perfect for those who have not yet developed the capacity for individual stillness and the trust in Truth, the Real, God, Allah. Such persons need to learn to give up their own plans and follow those which benefit the spiritual awareness of the larger group. This is the value of monasteries. When Muhammad's community began to attract large numbers who still needed the support and guidance of a community, who still needed purification from ego, perhaps he could have seen where this would lead, and then, perhaps, he would have disbanded. But what is apparent is that it was The One Will for events to occur as they did.

So Muhammad was called upon to engineer a brand new society, in addition to a brand new religion. Certain practices such as the *dhikr*, the chanting, the three prayer sessions per day, the observation of silent periods, fasting, and the plain garments to be worn were and are still found in the Roman Catholic abbeys and monasteries and seminaries, some more austere than others. Also in Zen Buddhist and Chinese Taoist monasteries. But what Muhammad was attempting was different: he was laying down these proscriptions for *everyone*. Every person in his society was treated as an initiate into a priesthood or religious order! It is exciting to imagine that all humans might be able and willing to attain to such a dedication to the spiritual, forsaking many worldly freedoms and pleasures. It is wonderful that this experiment has been tried and tested for 1500 years. It is a credit to humanity, and especially to the peoples of the Muslim world. Some of the practices must be effective in opening up large numbers of people to something that they feel to be sacred in themselves; many practicing Muslims must have had glimpses of the blissful state. *Dhikr* especially, repeated for long periods and often, could certainly break up the mechanical production by the mind of ordinary, mundane habits of thinking, and it is into this silence that God-awareness comes.

On the more worldly aspects of the society, Muhammad introduced many new emphases. Probably no society before Muhammad offered free and equal education, equal access to the justice system, or the concept of the fundamental equality of all humans. There were slaves in Muhammad's society, but they were to be treated with the same dignity as anyone else, because their connection to Allah was no less than anyone else's. (See how this differs from the solution arrived at in the U.S. in Lincoln's time: give the Negro slaves their freedom, but continue to treat them as a lower form with limited opportunities. This perhaps gives the appearance of compassion, but lacks the spirit.) In Muhammad's society, both men and women were admonished not to take their relationships with one another lightly. Each had responsibilities to the other, which were for the purpose of facilitating the partner's relationship with Allah. Polygamy was not male chauvinism in his society; each wife was a major responsibility. It was

similar to modern psychology: when women are made conscious of how they are using their bodies to control men for their own female ego purposes, they realize that they have a choice, that their bodies can be used for a higher purpose. And husbands were expected to work and to take many risks, including his life, so that a wife had a safe and quiet place in which to practice her religion.

Many of the proscriptions generated tension, such as the garments to be worn and the restraint to be used both socially and sexually. From the standpoint of spiritual purification and clarification, these tensions have great value. It is like putting on the brakes. One must stop and look at what he is doing and why, and at where he is. One who is stopped, or at least slowed down, is not generating so much karma; the result of this is that less is demanded of him by the external world and his muddy mind can settle down and clarify. One may temporarily feel lost and afraid when he is not running on automatic at the pace of the mechanical world, but soon he feels in this vacuum a new possibility, a more integrally satisfying state of mind. This “deautomatization” is a central practice in the teachings of Gurdjieff, and also in our modern Western psychology of consciousness. When women keep themselves covered and do not tease men, there is tension because they feel left out of an age-old power game, but they also find that they are less likely to be treated as toys -- and mistreated. This opens up attempts at new ways of relating, for both the man and the woman, and an appreciation of the opportunity for deeper communication. This opportunity does not exist when men’s hormones are constantly being stimulated by scantily clad, enticing women. A man’s fantasies are easily aroused, and these keep his mind at a gross level, interrupting any deeper reflections, whether he likes it or not. And a woman who needs food and shelter can hardly resist using her body when she finds a vulnerable man.

A wholehearted forsaking of the teasing flirting game by a sincere person who can see its falseness is a great advance. However, the truth is that most men and women who follow the letter of such a law are just suppressing something that they want to do. This is a split in the person, one part of the psyche fighting another. It operates and spreads like a disease throughout the being, and it blocks real spiritual progress. This right here is only one example of trying to legislate morality. More laws aren’t the answer; they merely lead to perversions and deceit and split psyches – and ultimately a more vicious, twisted kind of immorality. In Muhammad’s society there must have been many sincere people with the right intention. It is said that relationships became consecrated, crime and corruption were greatly reduced, and exploitation by the rich through practices such as charging interest on loans was forbidden. But after Muhammad was poisoned, everything began to revert back to old Arabian habits, only now it was in the name of Islam, and a *concept* called Allah.

All of Muhammad’s inspirations for the religion and the social order came during a twenty year period beginning at age forty. The teachings were basic and consistent. He taught that each and every moment, each and every decision, is important, because each of us is totally accountable for our fate. Through single-minded dedication to remaining in a state of prayerfulness, through aligning our lives according to the will of something beyond our own egos, we cause our fate to take a turn toward the beneficent; during falterings, during ego-assertions, the good fortune would

reverse. This is never achieved by a wielding of personal power, but only by quiet, humble submission to the will of Allah as it is played out in life itself. It is not that we *have* a great talent; we do not own anything – we are mere trustees. But how does one impart this great lesson to followers? How to lead them to trust it enough to even try it? How can one convert an egoistic person into a humble one? Most just react fearfully, as they would to a cruel pagan god, rather than developing in themselves a subordination to the divinity within, out of love. So a project like this, society-wide, proscribed for the masses of people who could not or would not dedicate their time and energy to the soul-search, was bound to fail.

None of Muhammad's teachings about Allah/God and how to find him were new. All of the practices had existed in other places and times, stretching back a thousand years. They were a part of many societies and religions before Muhammad, though perhaps not codified in such detail. Probably he had not been exposed to the ancient Tao of China, or Confucius' teachings during the Golden Age of China. Probably he was unaware of the Buddha's teachings. But he probably was aware of the Hindu tradition and its inescapable law of karma. The teaching of One True God was not only Judaic and Christian, but it was also Jain, centuries before Muhammad. And also centuries before Muhammad was Advaita Vedanta, the direct mystical path that Muhammad also taught. His teachings, though, were necessary reminders, refreshers, specifically suited to the mentality and the needs of the people of Arabia.

Muhammad's relationship with the Jews and Christians of the region has been of great interest. It is a good example of changes in Muhammad over the years. In the beginning, he thought of both Jews and Christians as natural allies, sharing many core principles with Islam. He referred to both Jews and Christians as "People of the Book" whose religion and scriptures directed them toward the One True God. He spoke well of the prophets revered by the Jews, and also of Jesus and his mother. Early on, he instructed his people to face toward Jerusalem when they prayed. As part of the Constitution of Medinah, he granted the Jews religious and cultural autonomy. Thus, he expected and anticipated their acceptance and support. But in spite of such efforts, the Jewish scholars in Medinah rejected Muhammad and Islam. The Jews were fighting even among themselves as well as with the Christians, and Muhammad was unable to keep everybody focused on the essential thing: experiencing God/Allah-consciousness and living in it. And so he had a change of heart toward the Jews.

This rejection by the Jewish religious authorities may have been one of the biggest factors in a personal change in Muhammad, from agenda-free sincere mystic to persuader and thence to conqueror. Originally, his appeal was leveled at the deepest part of the human individual, and sometimes this awakened – or rather reawakened – this person's own natural mystical connection. This required no effort on Muhammad's part; all he needed to do was be himself. But it appears that over a twenty year span this evolved into sometimes using military victories to try to win people over to Islam. This strategy probably did increase his following in terms of numbers, but not in terms of the quality and depth of their inner transformation. And, during his last few years, he found himself at times caught in the situation of losing a battle, running, and then finding some vulnerable enemy to attack in order to save face.

One such attack, on a Jewish settlement, is what got him poisoned. This is another one of those stories that is told in different versions nowadays. Perhaps similar events occurred in more than one location. It appears that after he conquered this settlement he was not merciful as he had been in the past; in some accounts it is said that he ordered that several of the Jewish leaders be beheaded. Then, during a meal served by a Jewess, he was poisoned, and never recovered, though it was three years later that he died. In one version of the story, he was asked if the woman should be killed and he said no. Some claim that the poisoning was not intended to kill him, but was a test to see if he was a true prophet with “real power.” In any case, perhaps at this stage he was no longer always an innocent and faithful servant of the will of Allah but was following, at times, the will of the famous and powerful man that he had become. Perhaps all of the worldly involvement that had crept into his daily life, the need to fight to protect something accumulated, left little time to retreat to the cave. Perhaps if he had remained pure, true to Allah alone, he would not have attacked that settlement, and would not have been poisoned. How long can any human remain pure when his rich interior life has been usurped by preoccupation with an outer institution? Perhaps he knew that he had let it go too far as a worldly endeavor; perhaps Islam could have been a very different religion than it is today.

When Muhammad died, factions developed immediately over who should be his successor. He could not name a successor; he had found no one who was as he was. These and other tensions within his community indicate that the people had not found the harmony that goes with Allah-consciousness. They were still dependent on a prophet outside themselves, and a group. This situation was the beginning of the process of casting Islam in stone. What had been compassionate, beautiful, joyful, reverent, fluid, and responsive now itself began to evolve into an icon – rigid, unforgiving, dictatorial, worldly, and rife with legends and secrets. Those few who had found their own Inner Light disappeared into the desert and lived as hermits. These Sufis and other mystics developed separately from mainstream Islam, and their respective interpretations of the Quran were and are worlds apart. Irreconcilable. All that happened was just very much a repeat of the history of Christianity after Jesus. There was no one who could embody Allah-consciousness and prevent the majority from lapsing into a worship of money and power, and a relegation of Allah to the status of a mere concept to pray to, just as they had always done with their pagan gods. And no one has come along in these 1500 years who could put the Muhammad back into Islam, though some have claimed.

Within a century after his death, Muslim scholars were to begin to twist his clear insights about the essential nature of things. What had been living intuitions were now concretized as philosophies, debated by “experts.” This vulgarization marks the beginning of a span of five centuries which has been referred to as “The Golden Age of Islam.” Most of us in the West know the philosophical systems of existentialism, phenomenology, and empiricism in association with names of European philosophers – Locke, Barclay, Leibnitz, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty. But these famous thinkers borrowed their ideas from Muslim philosophers, who had developed these philosophical systems several centuries earlier. So the twisting has been at least a two step process. The origin was Muhammad’s intuitive insight, supposedly from Gabriel in the cave on Mt.

Hira. He saw and understood that the human being is of no importance except in his ability to reconnect with his Source, Allah. Worldly achievements count for nothing. Thus, the differences we see among men, the inequalities, are not really inequalities, but just surface appearances. One man may go down in history as a “beautiful soul” or a great statesman, another’s life may never be recorded, another may commit vicious crimes and be condemned by all as the worst possible human. And yet they are equal in this: their lives brought Light to the world, in one way or another. Humans around them learned exactly what they needed in order to take the step they were ready to take. And, in one way or another, they themselves attracted exactly what was needed in order to see who they really were. So, if we are relating only to the surface appearances of people, there are inequalities. Muhammad was instructing us not to do this, but to always see the Light, the way to Allah-awareness, through every person. He may have been the first to teach that regardless of heritage or circumstances, we are at a deep level pure. Unblemished. Perfect. A *tabula rasa*. And each with the capacity to “move mountains.”

But this was completely, completely misunderstood and distorted by the Muslim existentialists. They began using the term *tabula rasa*, and the concept that a human being is that, as an argument in favor of environmentalism and against heredity as what makes up the (surface) attributes of a person: we are a blank slate at birth, and our environment shapes us entirely. As for the personal mystical connection with Allah, this was treated as a mere epiphenomenon – an “honorable mention.” Then, some of the European existentialists, notably Sartre, carried this a step further, using the *tabula rasa* concept as support for the assertion that *there is no God!* Allah/God-consciousness, Muhammad’s cause of everything, was unnecessary to the theory! And somewhere along the line a basic tenet of existentialism became the phrase “existence precedes essence.” This is the view that man is worthless, his existence is of no value, he has no essential nature, until he proves himself worthy of existing by his actions in the world. He has to create meaning himself. God or Allah as a source of meaning is not part of the equation. In a sense, the concept of meaning was used as a replacement for God/Allah, and there was no meaning (anomie) except that which an individual carved out for himself through his deeds. A famous aphorism by Paul Claudel expresses it: “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” Thus is Golden Age Muslim thinking, except that many Muslims today might frame it: “Be ashamed to die unless you are winning some victory for Islam.” Muhammad’s one and only God was not only ignored by those who made use of his insight, but the distortion of his insight was used as a proof that God does not exist!

A similar distortion which amounts to a reversal of Muhammad’s insight and teaching is found in the “feminist existentialism” of Simone de Beauvoir. Her view was: “One is not born a woman but must become one.” Her belief was that the female is valueless until she has done all the things that a woman is supposed, according to the norms of the culture, to do. But nowhere in her philosophy does she make room for what was all-important to Muhammad: her awareness of Allah in her solitude. (Unlike the Roman Christian church, Muhammad accorded to women an equal priestly possibility of finding God/Allah awareness.) He was for what might be termed “*existentiality*” – a living, organic process of finding and re-finding the connection with Allah, and

finally dwelling continuously in that awareness. Existentialism is a mere philosophy, whether written by members of some religion or pure atheists – a lot of words put together in a way that appeals to obsessive thinkers. It is sterile. It pushes one to the brink of suicide of the soul.

We see how far from insight people are in examples such as the life of John the Baptist, an Essene hermit. He left the world to prepare himself, and others, for what he sensed was about to come – the birth of a Christ-conscious being. He left pleasures and comforts behind, purified himself, cleared his mind of all clutter, and remained in the Allah-conscious empty mind state as much as possible. Thus he was a bizarre figure, wild, but not in a mean or animalistic way, just unable to be tamed by the society. He didn't mind offending egos, and one of the egos he offended was Salome, the wife of a government official. His example did not move her to explore within, and she eventually had John's head brought to her on a platter. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that she *was* greatly moved by John, disturbed enough to make her have him killed. Muhammad too: his example and life work was not enough; he accumulated enemies, and was eventually poisoned. Very few can learn from such people how to take up their own crossing of the river from existence in a dying body to life in the eternal. Muhammad probably loved his work, the artistry of his journey on earth, the plunging into the deepest part of his being, the light in the eyes of those dedicated followers who had found their connection. Probably his fire for Allah, in the herenow, was enough, and he did not concern himself with trying to foresee where it all might lead. He stood aside, and let Allah direct it all.

During the five centuries of the Golden Age of Islam, devotion to Allah as the One True God was fast eroding away. Educated Muslims turned to worldly achievements as their first god. As the Muslim world expanded to include and blend the knowledge and culture of Arabia with those of Persia, North Africa, and parts of Europe, incredible advances in philosophy, science, mathematics, technology, architecture, art, literature, society, and government took place. Once again, children in the Americas were taught that many of these achievements should be credited to non-Muslims, but this is not the truth. Most Anglos do not even know the names of some of the greatest minds who ever lived, because they were Muslim. Here are a few examples of their contributions.

In the philosophy of science, strong emphasis was placed by Muslim investigators on pure experimentation, objectivity, and careful control of variables centuries before "scientific method" was "discovered" by Isaac Newton and others. With this powerful methodology, Muslim science left the Europeans far behind, even before America was colonized. Muslim medical science was a blend of the two ancient medical systems of Greece and Arabia, and was so far ahead of that in Europe that an Islamic text, *The Canon of Medicine*, was for centuries the standard in leading European universities. Astronomy and mathematics were more advanced than those taught in Athens, Rome or Paris. Muslim architecture was, and still is, imitated world-wide. And though many well-educated Anglos and Latins have heard of Avicenna, few have ever been exposed to Avicennan logic. We follow Aristotelian logic in virtually every aspect of life, as if it is the only way to think. But Avicenna developed an alternative to Aristotle which showed us that there is not just one way to think, which of course shakes the very foundation of all Western education and

philosophy. And yet, Avicennan thinking has been almost entirely ignored in the Anglo world. How we think is more a religion than it is a reflection of reality.

As you might expect, though, all of these advances were part of the growing Muslim ego. The pinnacle was itself the beginning of the deterioration process. Over the centuries, Allah-consciousness receded more and more into the background, and many Muslim countries have in modern times fallen below the world standard in terms of most of the principles which Muhammad himself put forth. Areas of particular criticism are: violation of basic individual human rights, harsh treatment of dissidents and non-believers, oppression of women, classicism, and racism. No Muslim country today is socialistic, or egalitarian, or even a true democracy. Political rights, civil liberties, freedom of choice, freedom of religion, equal access to justice, opportunities for a good education, and workers' rights are today generally considered the marks of a civilized society. Muhammad implemented them 1500 years ago in his society, but many Muslim countries today do not offer them to their citizens, or offer them only to some of their citizens. Millions of people are affected.

To be sure, the situation in some of these countries can be and is blown out of proportion and made into a political or religious weapon by opponents of Islam, just as the rhetoric of a government "for the people and by the people" can be a sham. Socialists and communists are susceptible to slipping into a jealousy of wealth and dictatorial power, especially if it is associated with a religion, and in the midst of exercising their own power, "empathy", against oppressors of the weak, can lose sight of any real compassion. Another complication is that the tone of rulings by any government which emphasizes spiritual practices often sounds harsh. People who live for material success and temporal pleasure, as well as those who have a distaste for the austere and oppressive and like to take the side of the underdog, want to hear government officials sounding as if they respect their citizens. But monks and nuns, in any religion, are little concerned with their pride, their egos, or their own "human rights." They will accept the austerity of a plain existence with little complaint, as long as their solitude and their quiet time for reflection are not threatened.

The more one applies the usual secular criteria in dealing with a large religion that is also a political body, the more circular the reasoning becomes. In reality, it may be best to skip the criticisms of specific actions of a government and get to the bottom line: the spirit in which any policy is put into effect. So we are right back to the day when Muhammad first declared that Allah was number one. If a government is sincerely facilitating and encouraging its citizens to do whatever works for them in their quest for Allah-consciousness or God-consciousness or Christ-consciousness, and that is what the citizens want, how can we criticize specifics? If the spirit is right, rough roads will smooth out, and the raw edge of things will be softened as everybody sees that the goal, the true purpose of life, is not being forgotten. But if there are people professing Allah, Allah – or Jesus, Jesus --all day, but it is hypocrisy and the real goal is money or power or ego-identity, things will never work out. Such a society will be rife with conflicts and jealousies, and ultimately break down. It is the universal law of equilibrium at work, and he who exalts himself will be humbled, he who humbles himself will be exalted. Give up your ego-willfulness,

stay attuned to Allah-consciousness, and everything will fall into its proper place. One must DO IT, or he will never know that such a miracle is possible, because logically it is not possible. Logically, consciousness itself is not possible; and yet we all know that we are conscious. Logically, the experience of what Muhammad called Allah is not possible, and yet many people have felt an unaccountable shift toward bliss, coupled with beneficent fortune, at times. Logically, he who has the strongest will should never be defeated by one who is will-less, and yet eventually it happens. To approach such things we must learn how the Akasha works, and how to work with the Akasha.

Humans sometimes have an experience which is expressed in words such as “there is something in the air.” We can’t say exactly what it is that is “in the air.” Another human may say “Well, I don’t feel anything” as if this is supposed to negate what the other feels. Maybe the time is right, something in the atmosphere has changed, and maybe only a person who is at that moment attuned to that particular sort of thing would feel it. The mystic is one who is attuned to many things “in the air,” much more than other people, not because he has a special faculty, but just because he is much more passive, more open, more allowing, to the totality. He will let himself be swept away, be dissolved, be moved, by subtleties and oddities that others will not. The atmosphere, the vastness all around, is called in Sanskrit the Akasha. Through the Akasha we come to the root of all things. In the Hindu Ayurveda, Akasha is one of the five elements that make up the universe. It is the basis and essence of all things, the first element to be created. Its symbol is sky, but it is present to some degree in all things. One may say that Akasha is the substrate, the most subtle, knowable only to the few who can remain passively alert for extended periods. In the Japanese Godai (Five Elements) Akasha corresponds to the element “Void.” Ancient wisdom claims the illogical view that this Akasha or Void contains all knowledge, in the same sense that in the West we say that God created the world out of nothing. The English equivalent is “Ether,” and early in the development of physical science in the West there was a great flurry of effort to objectively verify the existence of this ether, as if that discovery would confirm the validity of physical science itself!

The sincere seeker opens himself without reservation, without analysis, to whatever may be “in the air” at any given moment. Since all knowledge is available at any time, what is felt to be in the air at a particular place and time is due to the “stratum” to which the most sensitive and passive person there is attuned at that moment. This in turn determines what is about to manifest so that those less sensitive can share in it. To use an analogy, the passive person is a door which opens and everyone can then see the light or feel the wind or whatever the sensitive person is most open to. He is not really creating or influencing or even discovering; he is more passive than that. He is just constantly letting go of the fetters of his old limits: ideas and feelings and desires and fears. He goes beyond even imagination into a crazy territory where others in his world can’t go, and where anything can happen. Everything was always right there in the Akasha, a Void which permeates all things -- and gives them their power to be perceived as things.

Although we may feel that we are the author of our own ideas and words, everything comes from the Akasha and is just passing through what we call “I,” in the same way that wind passes through a flute and makes beautiful intricate sounds. And the sound in turn passes back into the Akasha.

The purity of our passivity determines what and how much can occur to us and pass through us. If we are absent, or nearly absent, but still conscious, we are allowed to receive the most subtle and delicate “strata” of the Akasha. We enjoy, but we barely notice the contents. We are absorbed in the joy itself, undistracted by contents! But if we are dense our being itself is an impediment, in the same way that the hard earth short-circuits electricity. We become blocked up by contents, and we can’t stop our attention from becoming fixed on certain “strata.” There is no ability to enjoy the subtle as it passes. In this condition, a human does not know what real beauty is, and does not know how real power works. The most subtle and delicate is the most powerful; it attracts all that seeks it, and is impervious to all that can’t sense it. Allah, God, the One, Truth, are words for the most subtle, which exerts no effort, runs with all things, meets no resistance. And no matter to what “stratum” one is attuned, this is there, an atmosphere both outside your body and inside. It makes whatever you are “awaring” feel vast, light, empty, pure. Even in noise it is heard as a Silence that envelops. It is not localizable. It has the Quality of import. Of the profound. Of the Infinite. It has the Quality of Quality itself.

During an Age of Ignorance, the psyches of the people are not open and flowing and subtle, but are full of preoccupations with one “doing” after another – stutter steps. In sixth century Arabia, the desert dwellers were always “awaring” the pressure to escape starvation and dehydration. Resources to survive were scarce; theft, robbery, and assault common. What was “in the air,” both outside and inside the people, was the atmosphere of dark suspicion and tension. This made attunement to the more subtle strata of compassion and harmony almost impossible. People were blocked up by the awareness of their animal instincts, and in this state the taste of Allah in the Akasha is too ephemeral to stabilize. And, what is more, when one acts out of fear and not love, his “karma” becomes even more dense and hardened and cold. Unforgiving. This initiates an equilibrium cycle, and in the symmetry he is also unforgiven. What one does to others he really does only to himself, and vice versa: when one awares a dense stratum within himself, he makes the atmosphere which others can sense more dense as well. There is no God experienceable.

Today, in our present age of ignorance, we have the same akashic situation, even though we display outwardly an excited, sensory sort of joy, a self-satisfaction at our apparent successes and progress. We are extremely dense. You may ask yourself: “What is the Quality I feel in the air right now?” If you devote only a little time to this and let the powerful stimuli around you terminate your ability to sense, you won’t scratch the surface, and you will go on believing that that colorful plastic-coated surfaces held together by cement and steel, and filtered through the body’s sense organs, is “the real world,” and what is in the air in front of your nose and passing into it is less important. As long as you believe this, things seem to be okay, everybody seems to be going somewhere – relative to a dead body! You are so far from the real world that you can’t see how pathetic and meaningless your stutter steps are.

But if you can “stop the world” – if you can feel the atmosphere behind and within and all around things – a different eye will open. You will enter a different stratum of the Akasha where you will notice that there is a blockage. What is the Quality of this? It is not clarity, emptiness, vastness, purity, freedom, joy. It is telling you that you (as ego) are in danger, that you must stay alert, keep

moving, keep participating, that you must prevent your mind from going *too* far, that you must not stray from the common routines that others say make some things more important than others. It is from this kind of seeing, a seeing of the horror of what you thought was just fine, what you thought was your life, that the mystic departs from the non-mystic. Those who are not mystics see no other way to go except to escape this awareness itself. They speed up their immersions in momentary pleasures and diversions – socializing, sex, drinking, eating, drugs, denial. But this just further muddies up the Akasha, adds another load of karma, builds another wall against the Self, for everyone. Like the sixth century Arab, we have no time to “be still and know that the I Am is God.” We have zero Allah-consciousness, and thus no way to move from the fear stratum to the love stratum. But the mystic, when he sees the wasteland of his ego’s world, knows that there *is* another way to respond to this truth. This response is to do nothing. He allows the painful awarenesses to keep coming. He is following truth, trusting truth, further than ever before, leaving behind the fear of where it might lead. To feel that it is the true path is his only concern. Only such a passive person can be led into the subtle layers of the Akasha where Allah- or Christ-consciousness dwells.

An autistic, an idiot, an illiterate, and even a person with brain damage who can’t think can even today be a pure enough soul, not a part of the electronic mass communication clusterfuck, to attain to such a deep passivity. Perhaps, in modern times, no one else can let his programmed brain rest so deeply and continuously that an attunement to this stratum of the Akasha can occur. And this connection IS all knowledge, or we should say, it is superior to all knowledge – it is an all-knowingness. A knowingness of the All that is the Void. The entire Akasha is available to a person with no intellect in total solitude, even in a cave! The essence of every detail is awareable, the essence of any person living or dead can be touched, the Quality of all events past and future can be known more intimately than you know your own heartbeat -- if you are an idiot.

Lao Tsu said:

“Without going outside you may know the whole world.
Without looking through the window you may see the ways of heaven.
The farther you go the less you know.
Thus the sage knows without traveling.
He sees without looking.
He works without doing.”

Since the physical world and physical events are but crude reflections of the Akasha, one can take beginner’s steps in the approach to strata of the Akasha that scare him by attuning to the physical. As he purifies, and as his vision clarifies, he will be able to decipher the subtle messages. He will slowly recognize how dense, how contaminated, how false, how meaningless modern cultures and civilizations are, by means of contrast with the purity he feels within. He will begin to feel the foreignness of the man-made world as his Allah-consciousness reveals something more Real. He will have shocking glimpses of his powerlessness. Thus, the physical world is nothing but a reflection -- a reflection of all accumulated human knowledge as it has been applied technologically.

The internet is a part of this reflection. The internet is not a source of knowledge or information. It is a crude reflection of what has been activated in the Akasha, although the logic in which it is organized severely limits what we can learn from it.

The Akasha contains all possible ways of organizing, coding, and accessing what we call knowledge or information. Everything that is possible to happen in the mind is in the Akasha. The mind and the Akasha are one and the same, but ordinary consciousness of all contaminants/contents at any one moment is impossible. One must reject the vast majority of what he knows in order to see any one thing as distinct, to separate it out. Whenever one does this, he has descended from the mystical state of Oneness, his True Being. This forgetting leaves him with a “reality” that consists only of the one stratum, or platform or kosha or bit which is left over after he has rejected everything else. This leftover is the perceived world, and includes his own body.

When one is at perfect equilibrium, nothing occurs in the mind. This absence is pure bliss, pure awareness with no contents to contaminate and dilute and fractionate it. In this full absence, this ultimate joy and beauty, there is no desire for change. In Ayurveda this state is called Anandamaya. When a desire for change arises, change is instantly given; experience shifts from the perfection to the contaminants. Faster than light speed, “things” produce an entire world, feeding upon one another, reproducing into an impossible complexity. It is a disease, a cancer, and its cause is desire. In reality there is no cancer, but in experience there is cancer, because one has chosen what is unreal, and he must be corrected. And now he must deal with this unreality. He has forfeited his faculty of choice, and now must struggle with the crush of information, selecting and rejecting, selecting and rejecting. One has no time to just enjoy the silence because he has chosen to focus on the noise. Since he has forgotten who he is, he grabs something and identifies with it, like a man cast overboard in a rushing river who clings with all his might to the first available piece of flotsam. We have not enough sense to know that relaxing and drowning in the river is really what we want! We are insane, clinging to a meaningless piece of flotsam. We claim to make sense of our nonsense world of bodies clinging to flotsams by closing all of our eyes but one.

The reader will recognize in what follows a relationship to the five levels of conscience presented elsewhere on this website. (See *The Nectar: The Interior Castle*) It is oversimplified but useful in helping us to see how much we have forfeited. There are four main options for “eyes” with which to look at experience once the perfection of Anandamaya – true conscience – is forgotten. They are accretions around the True Self, referred to in Ayurveda as koshas or sheaths. Each one serves as a wall, shutting out all experience that would show one his insanity, but it is only after he clearly sees his insanity that he will let go of the piece of flotsam and blissfully drown into Allah-awareness. These four were referred to by Carl Jung as the four psychological functions – things the mind can do.

The first sheath or function is discrimination, or the feeling function. Its protagonist is Confucius, whose compassion for men moved him to draw distinctions between what was good for us and what was bad for us; he implored all men to live according to what was felt to be best for all

mankind. This criterion is that of the wise man, the self-sacrificing man. It makes life make sense. It is organized on the basis of feeling for our fellow travelers, a sense of our common struggle, a perspective on how past leads to future. When one adopts this “eye” he does receive the benefit of a deep joy and beauty, but only for half of his experience; the other half he must see as “evil,” or “worse,” or “unwise.” He attempts to eliminate this half, and thus cannot make use of it in its capacity to point us to the Real. But sometimes a bad example is the best example.

The second sheath, function, or eye is thinking. The one who falls into this mode of functioning of his being in an effort to organize his false reality severely, severely limits himself. He is allowing only one specific way of ordering things, only one sequence of movement of mental contents – that which has been taught to him as a system of logic and mathematics. Anything else which occurs to him that would contradict this sequence he simply pretends has no value. With practice, one can achieve this massive self-deception. But this wall is a cold wall. One forfeits much of vitality, spontaneity, joy and beauty in order to confine the mind only what can be thought and put into words or numbers. His world is all mere symbols of a very small system. And it will keep getting smaller and smaller, because thinking can never really arrive at perfect equilibrium; one thought always creates the need for another. One never arrives.

The internet is a reflection of the minds of thinkers – obsessional pure thinkers. It can deal with and organize only one tiny part of the Akasha. It may talk about many things. But out of the infinite number of ways to approach anything, the internet can offer only one. It breaks a thing down in the way that it can break things down, and ignores anything that won't break down in this way. This gives the thinker the dangerous illusion of mastering the thing, when in reality all he has done is distort it. Because he has the illusion of mastery, the thinker falls into a trap that is much more dangerous than total ignorance – the trap of complacency. He gets cocky. When one thinks that he has figured out THE answer, he loses the humility that attracts and recognizes truth. He believes that he can play with the devil and be immune to the other side of the coin; he believes that he can clever his way around anything. And so he stops searching for truth, thinking that he has already arrived at the pinnacle. The wall inside his being is so carefully reinforced that it blocks out all light. No other part of the being can grow.

Almost all the world is currently dominated by those who use this eye to the point that all others atrophy. Attorneys, politicians, economists, almost all scientists and technicians in any field including the so-called helping professions and healing professions rely on this sheath. In Jung's lingo, they are “one-sided,” unaware of what they need in order to become whole human beings. And yet they *think* that they are whole. The internet is the brainchild of such ignorant one-sidedness. You may be the most brilliant intellect. You may learn and understand every single bit of information that is on the internet. This will not bring you one iota closer to the joy of knowing your true nature as a whole human being. All that you have accomplished is to coldly wall yourself in. Your only joy is a mere thought of joy. Pink Floyd knew.

The only way back to sanity is back. You were once sane. The Memory is there in you somewhere. If you keep pressing onward through life, you just keep adding more shovelfuls of dirt onto your

grave. The flow of the Akasha is backwards, back to your original innocence and thence to The Source: Allah-consciousness, the Interior Castle. The hard and strong allowing itself to be overcome by the soft and the subtle, accepting the moment when one is incorporated and dissolved into the ocean/sky: it is THIS moment. Thinking is used by the thinker to advance, not to retreat. The meaning, the import, the value, the purpose of any particular bit of information is, to the thinker, to one who lets the internet influence his mind, the *opposite* of what they are in the Akasha. One who knows God-consciousness is not interested in going one single staggering stutter step deeper into illusion. He just wants to return Home. All of the fortifications and seeming stability that the wall offers, all of the preoccupation with safety and sanity, is unnecessary for one who lives in love and truth. But, of course, his way of arranging priorities and his interpretation of his experience is pure “nonsense, nonsense, nonsense” to the efficient, logical thinker.

How can the internet be used by men in our current age of ignorance that gives him a possible advantage over the sixth century Arabs? The internet does contain, at least second-handedly, almost everything that is objectively known and expressed in words about all mystics of all ages. This is the first time in history that a human – almost any human -- can instantly access all this information. What good is all this information? It has no value whatsoever to the one who already has found the deep passivity of a Muhammad, for the Akasha gives him the fruit, the nectar, of all knowledge without the distraction of all the confusing details! He doesn't have to climb the tree! But there are people at all stages of enlightenment. For beginners, stories are useful. For those a little more aware, identification with some personage, some mystic, activates something, and the objective information about how the mystic becomes and stays a mystic may aid in this. For those on the brink of direct experience, saturating the brain with such information at least serves the purpose of displacing all other more gross thoughts.

But behind all these is this: the work on the internet, searching for the nature of mystical experience, or the qualities of mystics, opens the mind. This has nothing to do with the computer or the internet per se. It is a matter of “keeping the wound open.” The frustration of not finding anything in a Google search is just as valuable as finding thousands of references. The one at the keyboard is going through a process interiorly that he is probably not aware of while he is on the computer trying to understand why Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. He is actually learning, unconsciously, how to access the Akasha directly. That is what his deeper being is doing, while his conscious mind is on the words and the concepts and the information. What he finds in his Google search may be all lies, but this does not matter. The foundation of his being is undergoing a transformation while he is on the computer, withdrawn from the ordinary world and its ordinary state of consciousness. It all depends on the spirit in which he is studying Abraham or whoever. He can walk away a different person, and not know why. Perhaps a sixth century Arab in the desert at night, gazing at the stars in the silence, could just as easily open to the flow of the Akasha, never having even heard of Abraham or Muhammad or anyone like them.

Another way in which the internet serves the useful purpose of “keeping the wound open” is that it functions as group therapy. Whatever one uploads is an opening up to the entire world. The feeling of doing this is therapeutic in itself, but also the feedback that one gets from readers will

surely offer a great broadening of perspective, and keep emotions conscious. So it is like a mini-akasha!

The Akasha can be awared anywhere; it all depends on which eye you use to see. You may be living like an animal, the only thing of importance being the experience you have of your body. You must keep it alive because it is your only source of pleasure and relief from the rest of your illusion world! Jung referred to this eye as the sensing function of the mind; in Ayurveda it is the kosha of the physical body. Even a person fixated at this most gross level, an agnostic, an atheist, an egoist, an extortionist, a rapist, does have interludes of mystical awareness, and can learn to elaborate them and extend them. After committing the act of murder it may happen that one can see for the first time what he has done, and what he is doing to himself. Our karma forces us to see something of the Akasha in a more sober way, and to let our wall begin to crumble.

And this brings us to the last of the strata, koshas, functions, eyes. This is Jung's intuitive function, the astral or pranic body of Ayurveda, and the energy body, ch'í, or ki of other cosmovisions. Man knows much, much more than he can ever tell. Each of us possesses a faculty which allows us to connect with anything. In this stratum of the Akasha, the distinctions between past, present, and future, and physical distances, are not important. Our own heartbeat, our own breathing, our own most secret thoughts and feelings are no closer than anything else. However, the way that we gain access here is different than our efforts to access any other kind of knowledge: there must be no objective. If you are actively searching for something, you can't use this eye. If you are in the habit of using your body to assert a position, or of controlling a line of reasoning, you are too dense to sense the subtleties of the astral world. Once again, it is a faculty that we all once had, but as we built our walls interiorly and carved out our separateness we lost our innocent passivity and trust. It can be regained through a long and intense process of purification; but once lost this faculty is difficult to revive. What we have to do is just remain still, let time pass unfilled, watch the walls we have so painstakingly built crumble to dust, and let beliefs that we have staunchly defended all our lives not arise again in our minds. In truth, it is a total reversal of who we think we are. It is a return to who we really always were.

An example is found in the effects of the unsupervised practice of tantric sex to generate rapid and intense movement of energy – the search for “the highest high.” (See also our treatment of this in the book *Why The Mind Works*) A related, more everyday example is eating “fast foods,” foods that are artificially designed to give a “kick.” It tastes great, it creates a craving for more and more of it, but it drains the life energy, depletes the organs, and kills our appetite for less fun more nutritious foods. Psychically, we are sacrificing the subtle and the lasting and the real for a gross immediate gratification experience. Like a circus lion that has tasted human blood, we are then at the mercy of powerful instincts that leave us wallowing in lower strata of the Akasha. At the time of a tantric experience, it seems to be elevating us, expanding us. But ego gets ahold of it, and the memory of the pleasure arouses a hell of irresistible desires; the deep lesson is lost. This is what happens if the spirit is not right while using the internet to learn about theologies and religion, mystics and mysticism. Just stuffing your head with data has the danger of trapping the psyche in a

habit of thinking that becomes irresistible, rather than allowing the essence, the nectar, to filter through the gross layers. We paralyze ourselves.

A sincere seeker somehow senses the ominousness of his task, and his helplessness before it. Wisdom will tell him to develop his astral, psychic level a little bit every day, and to learn to access completely different levels of the Akasha in this way. It is nothing like doing a Google search, for it probably will require great blocks of time devoted to nothing but solitude, and diligent practice at letting go of thoughts, desires, and fears. We learn to look within, to increase our passivity, and to discern the true from the false, without relying on anything or anyone outside ourselves – such as our socialization programming. Anything we find on the internet is taken into our solitude and subjected to all of our psychic and intuitive tests, to see if there is a kernel of truth, for us, in it. So we find the truth in our cave, not on the internet.

In our journey in a body, we really do not discover anything that we didn't already know. What we are doing here is merely recapitulating. The more whole and aware we are, the more faculties that are fully functioning harmoniously, the faster we recapitulate. This means that we allow the akashic record to play itself through our passive consciousness, and we don't get hung up, mesmerized by particulars. If we already can see that nothing is there, we don't have to live through the experiences in a mechanical way. But if we don't remember that we know, we slow to the pace of the manifested world as it moves on its time line, event by event. It is not that some people are gifted with Memory and others are not. It is the willingness to let go of the outer and listen only to what is told to one by his own inner Self. Then more of the knowledge of the Akasha is available to an individual at an unconscious level, enabling him to fly past things that may trap someone else for an entire lifetime. In general, the more one allows events around him to move, and the less he partakes in them, the faster he recapitulates. He soon finds himself blessed with the circumstances and attributes of the most spiritually advanced human. It may also be that the duration of human history behind him is an advantage in this recapitulation. Perhaps humanity as a whole does learn, and when something in the Akasha is opened up by, say a world war, all who live afterwards are less likely to be fated with such an experience – we have a “tacit knowledge” that makes living it through again unnecessary. We have learned that lesson.

Here is a very mundane example. Each young generation has to reinvent the wheel in a sense in its music, lyrics, and slang expressions. A parent, seeing his or her child going through a difficulty, may recall a song that helped him a great deal when he was going through that same difficulty. Maybe it was something like the frustration of communicating deep feelings to someone you feel close to. So the parent buys a recording of that music and gives it to the young person, who then listens to it; but it doesn't do anything for him. It doesn't seem to move him or to give him any insight, the way it did twenty years ago for his parent. Perhaps this difference is due in part to surface things such as the esthetic appeal of words or phrases, or the rhythm or instrumentals of the music. But it could be that the youngster doesn't need this lesson as his parent did. His generation has had the twenty additional years during which his parents were struggling with this problem, and the young people have observed this, and felt it all personally in their relationships with their parents. So in a sense, without being able to say this exactly, the young people already

have seen “what’s what” as far as this problem is concerned, and they will need very little time to get through it, and to move beyond it. In a sense, the song has been with them all their lives, is reflected in the state of the world, and the youth have already learned its lesson by observing life itself. So one recapitulates faster, in terms of this issue, than did his parent. The youngster is like a bird; his mother thinks he needs to be a lizard like her! He is a different species of human being than his parent because he is open to more of the Akasha.

So this may be an important way in which the current age of ignorance is less serious than that of the people in Muhammad’s time. He himself had to walk through many things in manifest form – marriages, a new society, battles, etc. -- that we may be able to bypass. We may already have the wisdom in our tacit knowledge of these aspects of the Akasha and how they have played out for 1500 years. Overnight, in deep sleep, we may be able to resolve what it took Muhammad twenty years to resolve. And if we allow ourselves to be stuck in the superficial, the mechanical, the external forms of his way, we may miss all the magic that is happening right now, magic that is happening much faster than it did in his time. Magic that if we can let it work will lead us along a more direct path to the Interior Castle.

All religions are dead, and there is no use in staring at their corpses. They were of immense value in their time, but they have been replaced by individual *religiousness*. The Prophet too is dead. He cannot help you. Your challenge today is to find what he found by your own personal work with the Akasha in the herenow. And this is exactly what Muhammad was saying, and demonstrating by how he lived: it is all up to the individual. You are on your own. Find Allah. Recapitulate as fast as you can. Don’t wait for anybody else, not your government, not your society, not your religion, not your neighborhood, not your family. They can’t help you. Everything you need is inside you; your sincerity alone determine which way it goes. If you buy into the contemporary insanity of struggling for material gain, money, and status, you won’t live long enough to back out when you see where it has gotten you. It will keep you busy until your dying breath. See through all of this, and escape where there is no exit.

Muhammad’s work was to show that egoless forsaking of one’s own will and submission to the “will of Allah” is an individual decision. He saw the human ego as “the epicenter of all the troubles and corruption on earth.” A problem in the world is not due to anything outside of the one who is plagued by the problem. Thus, the solution can come only from within that person. Muhammad’s teachings were to drop all pretentiousness and pride and greed and just be your simple, ordinary self. Placing Allah-consciousness first, allowing ego to recede into pure passivity and humility, generates a joy that will feel strangely familiar; it will remind you of who you really are. It is only when you fulfill this condition that wisdom and truth will be opened up to you. Only with the vision of this vast perspective will you be able to see the workings of perfect justice in the world; you will see that justice comes to the just, and that the unjust man’s life is nothing but one futility after another. With no ego in the way, you are open to the suffering of all men, and “co-passion” is there, but you can also see the value of this suffering. Like Job, you will see the wisdom in enduring suffering: it alone can show you what your past deeds produce. Then, like Lot, you will be able to walk away and never look back. Like Muhammad, you will be moved to help others to

find the key, but unlike Muhammad you have fifteen centuries of aftershocks of Muhammad which are opened up in the Akasha. Your way of “helping” need not be so mechanical, so external, so pedestrian. By instead suffering quietly with those who are in trials, by looking inward and correcting yourself, you set something free in the Akasha that is beneficent for all men – not just for your contrived society, not just for your ego’s selected favorites.

Let not Muhammad to have lived in vain. As we enter and learn to dwell in the Interior Castle, we will think of people who do not have this experience, and we desire to somehow share it with them, impart it to them. Heed the warning signs. In your study of Muhammad, you might have detected decisions that he made in the design of his society that you think were fatal mistakes. You may dream of the perfect society, the perfect place for humans to dwell in peace, and in the state that we have been calling Allah-consciousness. You may imagine how some particular government today could implement policies that would make for an Interior Castle, or you may be thinking about how you could promote the Interior Castle among your family members or a group of like-minded friends. But the lesson to learn from a careful study of Muhammad, the mystic, and modern day Islam, the result, is this: *the Interior Castle cannot be exteriorized*. As soon as one begins to muse about how it can be made into a system, how it can be demonstrated, how it can be shared, he is no longer in the Interior Castle. He is in illusion, in an in-between world that cannot be made to exist. There is no way to represent the Interior Castle in forms. The best thing that you can do to help others come to know the Interior Castle is to return to your own experience of it as soon as you realize that it has left you. Return to whatever meditation has worked for you. Forget the human bodies and the human personalities around you. These bodies and personalities are not what can enter the Interior Castle anyway. Not ever. You cannot detect the level of being, the substrate deep within all humans and all things, which can enter the Interior Castle, unless you are there yourself. Let go of all your ideas, accept what is, empty your mind, and intensify your passivity, your silence, and your solitude.

The early Christian hermits, sometimes referred to as “The Fathers of the Desert”, had a very strong admonition relative to this: *Never descend into hell to save someone who is in hell*. It sounds cold and very un-compassionate, but it is the ultimate compassion. You continue to suffer in co-passion with this person whom you love, but you do not ACT to relieve this suffering. One’s salvation, one’s liberation, does not consist in being plucked from hell. He still carries within him whatever got him into hell in the first place. He will just fall into another hell. Salvation consists in finding one’s own way out of hell, and into his own perfect Interior Castle. One who teaches himself how to fish will never forget; one who is given a fish will never learn the nature of a fish, how to relate to fish, how to humble oneself before a fish, and how it can become food. This means that he does not supercede any karma, but still carries it all. By remaining as deep as possible, immersed in your own Interior Castle/Allah-consciousness, not outwardly helping the person in any way, you open up at that very moment something of great value in the Akasha for anyone who is seeking, including those who have gotten themselves into hell. If you feel love for a person, you want the best for him, and not just temporary relief. The most effective love is kept interior, and as you just feel whatever there is to feel, and as you continue to deepen yourself, you

become one with this person. As you endure his karma with him, it is resolved. Space and time are no obstacle; you are working directly with the Akasha. He is freed when you are. Your “help” by outward demonstration is nothing compared to this. However, even the *thought* of the passive exercise of this power is an interference in its effect. Do you see?

The world does not need another Muhammad, nor does it need Islam. The world does not need another Jesus, nor does it need the Catholic church or any other that calls itself Christian. All that is needed now is this: Let every person who is professing a religion make the personal interior decision to take what he has learned about how to enter Allah/God/Buddha/Christ-consciousness and go home, and never return again to the church or the mosque or the synagogue. Let each person be more alone than ever before, be more silent than ever before, go one step deeper into the dark night of the purification of his being, accepting this more passively than ever before. Where ego disappears Allah comes to dwell. Teresa of Avila, in her book *El Castillo Interior*, states at the outset that God told her: “The soul of the just man is a paradise in which I take my delight.”

When one is real, and honest, and pure and just, he is filled with Divine Delight. This is our natural state; what you see when you look at other humans is not their natural condition. They cannot become who they really are by practicing a religion – that is only a preliminary step. They become that way *after* they have left the religion. Transformation then happens all around, and consciousness of such changes is neither necessary nor helpful. Remaining thought-free in the Allah-consciousness is the transformative power. One needs no social order to tell him how to do this. If someone proposes such a social order, that person is a fool. He doesn’t understand how it all works. He will only harm himself and those he yearns to help. You may recall that even Jesus’ closest twelve disciples were all killed for their association with him. And how many thousands more in the ensuing centuries?

In 610 A.D. the down-trodden desert dwellers – in fact the whole world -- needed a spark to ignite the fire within. Today, we are already suffering from inflammation and overstimulation. Our lives consist of putting out fires, and mopping up the mess! *We just need to be left alone.* We, practically the entire humanity, have passed through what we might call “The Golden Age of the Material World.” We have fallen for its glitter and gold, we have tested that promise of happiness-through-extroversion, physical pleasure, ego assertion, and money and found it to be a lie. Some still hang on, refusing to accept that they have been tricked. Maybe they will go on pretending, but nevertheless life has moved on. We are now in the throes of a new age: “The Golden Age of Virtual Reality.” We can’t predict yet how far technology will take us, but already we have built a reality around instantaneous electronic facsimiles of the human voice, knowledge formatted by microchips instead of actual human brains, friendships, romances, suicides and sex crimes with no physical contact, deadly weapons with invisible missiles, and delivery of millions of dollars electronically with no need for an armored car or security guards, or even for “real dollar bills.” We might as well forget about privacy; every move we make, every word we speak, can be monitored by some micro-device or other, and once one device has it, the whole world has it. Virtually any experience, including emotions, can be generated electronically and inputted into the senses, or even directly into the brain telemetrically. And a whole raft of other virtual realities –

states of consciousness if you prefer -- can pharmaceutically replace the ones our ego, or someone's ego, doesn't like. Our lives, our fates, now hang in the balance, with such technology at the fingertips of some unknown person anywhere.

Young people, having grown up with this as far back as they can remember, are not much perturbed that they don't have any way to distinguish "Real Reality" from a "false reality." It is *all* illusions to them; all just "it could be" – i.e., "virtual realities." All just games to pass the time. Many people today have no relationships with the people they live with. Their relationships are with the blips on the screen which signify a probability that some living and breathing human somewhere across the universe is sending them a message. In this virtual reality, *everything* is imaginary. The blips come in, usually forming familiar words and recognizable images, and the one on the receiving end uses his imagination to construct whatever impression of the blips he wishes to construct. He, or she, has no idea whether the one who sent the message really means it or is just playing a trick; he, or she, has no idea how many other people were sent the same intimate photo with the subtitle "I will love you forever." But if he wants to believe that he is a special person to someone, that is easy. He can live in the imagination of it, and he can avoid ever having his bubble burst, because he will probably never really get to know the whole flesh-and-blood person, much less feel his presence as a soul.

Before, when such technology was in the developmental stage, it was exciting to see what could be done – both electronically and pharmaceutically. As with all past Golden Ages, the geniuses profess to hope that their inventions won't be misused by anyone with "criminal intent." They don't reflect on how naïve this hope is, until it is too late. They don't *want* to reflect – that would spoil the fun. And it would also spoil the lifestyle they are living on the amounts of money that someone (with "criminal intent", undoubtedly) is paying them to press ahead with a technological breakthrough more advanced than the competition.

How many Golden Ages does the human ego need to pass through before we as a humanity say "Enough is enough"? Everybody has had their shot at it: India had a Golden Age, and China, then Greece and Rome and Islam and the Vatican, then Spain and France and Germany and Great Britain. In the Americas were the Tiwanaku, the Maya, the Toltecs, the Aztecs, and the Inca. Not a single one of them could make it last. By the time the U.S. was ready to take over, the people making the big decisions were determined that this time it was not going to fail, and everyone was pretty sure it would not be very merciful. It was "Go for the jugular" technology; it was another refrain of "God is on our side and whatever we do is good for the world, so spare no expense, take no hostages, and keep the body count top secret." And, as has happened with every single past Golden Age, as soon as the law of equilibrium set in and the inevitable decline phase began, the sharpened claws concealed in the socialistic pussy feet bloodied up the same world that they claimed they were protecting. The Golden Age of the Material World in the United States, one of the biggest bubbles ever, was also one of the shortest ever – a mere sixty years. At the present time, with the American dream not much more than a joke, and the rest of the world's peoples laughing and saying under their breath "It's about time" and "We told you so," those still working in the factories and the used car lots and welfare offices in the U.S. are slowly beginning to realize

that they are working for nothing. The Golden Age of the Virtual Reality is preferred to the Golden Age of the Material World, by almost everybody now. It seems to be a choice between sitting on a comfortable chair and playing electronic pinball and *National Enquirer* versus belching and farting as you stare at the numbers on your credit card statement.

It looks as if the “X generation” has found a way to win in a no-win situation. They don’t need any natural resources, or clean ecosystem; they are finding their breaths of fresh air in the blips on their screen. They don’t need a high-paying job; computers draw little current, and keep you out of all kinds of trouble out there in “the non-virtual reality.” We might call it psychotically split, dissociated from reality. But the whole question being raised in our current Golden Age is “*Which reality?*” What makes something real? The Golden Age of Virtual Reality, following on the heels of a whimpering Golden Age of the Material World, is forcing all of us to take another look. The physical “reality” is obviously not real, and even the physicists say so. If it were real it would last longer, it would be more stable, more satisfying, than what is not real, right? If the human body were real it could not be instantly destroyed by some trivial twist of fate, or some invisible microbe, could it? If the stable world can be disappeared by taking a pill, or a few toxic drinks, can we call it, or the mind that perceived it, real? The Golden Age of the Material World went so fast that the mind had to be able to flex the way a snake fights. It didn’t take long for the private lives of our gold medal athlete heroes and their fixed games, and the depression and pills of our billionaire pretty people movie stars to make it around the world to every kid who logged on, and we know well that all their money and pleasures just caused their destruction as human beings. All the things that seemed so real and kept us working for the glitter and gold turned out in a few heartbeats to be flimsy, and just full of hot air. We were betrayed. Tricked into spending everything we had. But the intelligent and insightful young people of “the X generation” didn’t organize a stupid outer revolution, like the hippies. They didn’t wait for the machinery of physical events to change the world; they just said “Fuck This Shit” and retreated into their bedrooms and fired up their desktops and their laptops and created their own personal individual realities. A reality that at least *feels* real to them, a reality that they can control, they can store what seems important and delete whatever bores them, a reality that they can be comfortable in. It is a private world that mom and dad and other aliens don’t enter; the kids are quiet, so leave them alone. And besides, mom and dad are too busy mopping up from their own dead Golden Age to care. And besides, these kids have all the power now; if mom and dad kick them out they can find a computer and the internet and a McDonald’s anywhere.

Look at what is happening from a psychological standpoint. We just got slapped down by our extreme extroversion, by our turning to the external world – money and real estate and possessions and pleasures -- as if this were heaven. The more we had the more we lost – or, maybe worse, we go on hoarding, and like Howard Hughes we waste away, terrified of losing it. We, humanity, react by turning into extreme introverts, closing the door behind us as we log on. Our world is now from *within us*; we choose which keys to press. Or at least we feel like we choose, and we are finding tremendous freedom in this introversion, tremendous satisfaction; we are gaining confidence in our own ability to create. And, we can develop any part of our minds

that we feel inclined to – everything we need is right there. For almost all intents and purposes, we are dependent on no one outside ourselves. And what was it that they told us in school about man being a social animal? Or that old song from the Golden Age of the Material World: “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.” (???)

Young people are finding out, perhaps on a larger scale than ever before in history, that aloneness is better than togetherness. And that one can feel more lonely in a crowd, or even in a family, or even in bed with a “lover,” than when alone in his room -- with his computer. The physical is nothing, for he can feel just as close to someone halfway around the world as to someone right in his own home. Closer. Time is nothing, for what shows up on the screen is instantaneous but can just as easily be ten thousand years old as ten thousand years in the future. The mind, the human mind -- held together until now by measured distance and duration, and by belief in the reality of a human physical presence and the value of human smiles and caresses -- has been blown. It has been blown the way a defective fuse is blown. It has been replaced by uncertainty. A delightful uncertainty that spells freedom to experience – anything. And in any sequence. And instantly. The people who had intimidated us into getting up pre-dawn to an alarm clock and putting on clothes until we look good, to *them*, and making it to the bus and to the school building and to the office so that we could do things, for *them*, and following all kinds of timetables and rules, for *them*, while we are out there fighting to survive in the world that *they* want, have been castrated. Generation X knows that we don't have to leave our rooms – all night, all day. We can get into a zone that allows us to lose touch with our bodies, to have true out-of-body experiences. And the word “should” doesn't work anymore, because the people who use that word don't have anything we want. And look at their lives. We know that the priest and the pastor and the rabbi and the imam are under the gun, and to survive they have to say whatever the congregation wants to hear; they are worthless as leaders. A man nowadays doesn't need a woman the way his father did, and a woman nowadays doesn't need a man the way her mother did. We know that people are married because they need sex or money; very few know how to generate anything truly transcendent in their relationship. And besides they are too busy to do the work of having a real relationship. And patriotism? Even the high school kids know that all politicians are just people who know how to manipulate the sentiments of those who know less about how to manipulate. It doesn't matter who is in office, the bottom line is that they just say whatever works to feed their own egos and fortunes. Every ten year old today has heard of karma, and the world works so fast now that every fifteen year old has seen this law work: the most powerful, successful, proud person, or nation, is the first one to crash and burn. *And the kids today see through sex and romance! The society can't fool them! Those false facades that sexy manipulators use to aggravate sentiments don't work as they did during the Golden Age of the Material Reality. This is a huge shift in consciousness.* People are getting smart, discerning. They are not fooled by society. They are not “joiners.” They are not worried about “fitting in”; they do not fear being called queer, freak, nut case, psycho, slut, bitch, whore, asshole, bastard, dildo, or just plain “abnormal.” They are not so ethnocentric, they are not much affected by criticism of their country, their religion, their school, their work, or even their family. The words that other people say to them just seem false, carry no weight. So very few are listening!

This Golden Age of Virtual Reality is a powerful and dramatic shift in humanity. Almost a reversal, from extroversion to introversion, from looking to the material world and a full schedule of social activities for happiness and a sense of meaning, to passivity, quietness, and exploring one's own experience in solitude. Yet, it is but an intermediate step for what is to follow. It is setting the stage for the Golden Age of the Interior Castle. It is exactly what the masses of ordinary men have been needing; it will open their eyes to the Infinite within. The computer has turned us all, more or less, into hermits. We are tired of listening to people talk. With a computer we are still limited mostly to the thinking mode of consciousness, but we are on the verge of something more expansive. We are on the verge of testing our wings with no support; we are in an unknown zone, alone, and beginning to trust ourselves there. We have let go of many of the cushions and crutches used by our parents and grandparents as insurance. We will continue on in the Golden Age of Virtual Reality until we are ready to let go of thinking, which means letting go of our one last crutch: the computer.

One day you will be sitting there after ending your session, and weary, perhaps in a sort of casual reverie, all at once your mind will stop. Your breathing has slowed way down. And you will be aware of it. You will notice that all is empty – not a care in the world. And you will notice that you like this. You may have never heard of the mystical state. And you don't need anyone, not even the internet, to teach you how to meditate. It has come upon you spontaneously. You notice that it just came, and it feels so natural that you wonder why this hasn't happened before. You realize that it is a gift. A free gift. You didn't have to work for it, you didn't have to pray for it.

We are going to enter the Golden Age of the Interior Castle like that. Without a prophet, without a Buddha, without a savior. And without even trying. We will be *pulled* into it, and we won't resist. We won't be afraid, to just sit there, to just let it linger, alone. We will look at our computer, and around the room, and feel a love, a gratitude, that we were in some strange way brought to this point in our lives. This will be the beginning. Muhammad intuited that one day mankind would reach this stage of individual religiousness – without a prophet. He predicted that he would be the last Messenger and that Islam would be the last major religion. Many people, thanks to the internet, will have spent many, many hours alone, communicating with what seemed most real and important and intense to them personally. Really, they are communicating with their Self. Slowly, perhaps over many years, they were severing their attachments to the world. Slowly, they were freeing themselves of their provincial prejudices and opening their minds and hearts to The Universal, the New. Slowly, their need to accomplish, their need to be treated as a body, their need for physical pleasure have been set aside to explore something different within that is moving them. They may have even sacrificed food and drink and sleep in order to press on with their search. Their familiar perceptions are weakening, since they are not out in the world as much. The mind is doing new things, changing. They are letting it be changed. Like a man after a buried treasure, they keep digging, not knowing exactly where, or even what for. But something inside them keeps telling them to dig, that there IS a treasure, and so they keep digging. For the most part, they are digging alone, and as they continue, they find this more and more to their liking. Somehow they do not feel alone, and they attribute this to having things in common with

whomever responds to their chatting. But the many friendships come and go, and with little regret, with little to lose. They are finding something more Real – they are provoking the ancient Memory of who they are. And, simultaneously, all around the world, millions of other people are sitting in rooms, in relative quiet and passivity and solitude, and discovering the same thing. Their minds too are changing; they too are having those moments of the empty mind state which was in former times available mostly to hermits and mystics and saints and others who practiced, who had to *try*.

The Golden Age of the Interior Castle will be the age of the free gift of enlightenment to the many, not just the few. The many will be accustomed to aloneness, passivity, stillness, and openness to the All, thanks to the internet. The many will think and think and think until they are weary of thinking; at that point when thinking stops naturally one returns to his original innocence. There is a period of darkness, but then joy and beauty replace it. And joy and beauty are the gateway to the Light. The One True. Allah-consciousness.

Allow this to happen to you. Set aside your fear. Let not yourself to have lived in vain.

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