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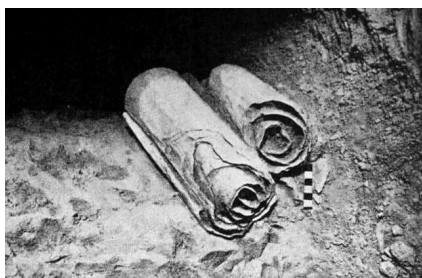
*An update on ultimate reality,
sometimes called God*

FIRST VERSES

My computer updated awhile ago.
Another version of that software of mine.
Everything's working well, though,
the windows are opening fine.

My old computer won't update,
and it's lagging and losing connection.
Some of the graphics won't display,
but it has apps I use on occasion.
So I'll keep using it while I can
but it'll probably crash someday,
cause updates seem to be *life* to computers,
just like the messages say.

And so it is with life itself,
this life that we're all living.
What updates thrives, what doesn't dies,
the world keeps on spinning.



Look back in time a thousand years,
or a thousand times three.
Scrolls are old, scrolling is new,
it's a very different society.
Computer science is presently booming
and all it touches is doing the same,
like research and technology,
and probing the depths of outer space.

But computers don't touch everything,
not in the same reality.
Some things move more slowly,
like religion and spirituality.
So we're due for an update on those things.
We're due for an update on that.
Our beliefs about God can't be quite right,
lookin' back.

Because ancient writings, centuries old,
say God is in the sky.

But times change, and now we know,
that's not where God resides.

But in churches and in doctrines,
in convictions and in creeds,
belief that God is *up above*
is still a common belief.

But there are other perspectives.

There are other religions.

Some people believe in a higher power,
but no particular tradition.

And some people say:

“It's all uncertain, God can't be proven.”

And some claim:

“There is no God, it's all just superstition.”

But even if we go that far,
to deny God's existence,
we still have those great mysteries,

those unanswered questions.

Like, how did everything begin?

How was the universe formed?

If there was a big bang, what before that,
and how was there any where for it?

We can deny the existence of God, it seems,
but not the problem of existence—

Why is there anything,
rather than nothing?

Think about it.

So we still have a need for *something*.

Something there in the beginning.

Something original, something primal,
something we humans can't quite grasp,

the universal mind, perhaps,

something beyond our rational thought,

and whoever or whatever that something is,
to me,

that is God.

*But God is not distant,
for the essence of existence,
is the essence of you and I.*

INTRODUCTION

This little book is for independent thinkers. It's for those who have questions. It's for those who are disillusioned with traditional religion, particularly Christianity, which is my heritage. It is an update on ultimate reality, sometimes called *God*, but nothing like the traditional concept of God.

The Bible depicts God as a king who lives above the sky. "The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind." This was the ancient Hebrew concept of God, which eventually became the predominant view of the Christian religion. But times have changed since those words were written. We're living in a different day and age. God doesn't seem to be *up there*, or *out*

there, so it seems time for a reality check. So it seems time to take a hard look. So it seems time to ask, if God exists, then where is God?

Coming to a realistic answer to that question is the purpose of this little book. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 look at how some traditional beliefs were formed. Chapter 4 comes to a logical conclusion of where God is, if not above the sky. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 recall some life experiences that support the logical conclusion. Chapter 8 proposes some revisions to Christian beliefs, number 9 is for all people, and number 10 is a summary.

I think my most important credential for this writing is simply a lifelong desire to know the truth: the truth about this life we're living, the truth about we human be-

ings, and the truth about ultimate being, also known as God. But I have some other credentials also: a Bachelor of Education degree, a Master of Divinity degree, and two years studying philosophy. I've worked as a teacher, pastor, hospice counselor, small business owner, and a few other things.

There are many religions in the world today, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, to name a few traditional ones. There are lots of others. And which one is the right one? Which one is the real one? Most people believe it's the one they were born into. That was true of me until age twenty, then I began questioning my beliefs. In the search for truth, nothing is sacred.

PD Shoemaker

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Babylonian Map of the World

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*“There have been many theories
about the origin of religion.
Yet it seems that creating gods is
something human beings have
always done. When one religious
idea ceases to work for them,
it is simply replaced. These ideas
disappear quietly, like the Sky God,
with no great fanfare.”*

*Karen Armstrong,
A History of God*

Chapter 1

ANCIENT BELIEFS

Long ago, ancient minds looked out at the world and tried to make sense of what they saw. They saw the land and the sea, the sun, the moon, and the stars, and they wondered what these were and where they came from. They looked for explanations and they came to conclusions. They formed beliefs, although primitive ones. They formed beliefs about the cosmos. They formed beliefs about that which they could see and also that which they could not see. This occurred in virtually all ancient civi-

lizations, including the ancient Hebrews who wrote our Bibles.

The first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1, depicts ancient Hebrew beliefs about the nature of the cosmos and God's dwelling place in it. Their beliefs were similar to those of the neighboring Near-Eastern cultures. Archeological discoveries such as the *Babylonian Map of the World* reveal those similarities. The ancient Hebrews believed that the world was surrounded by water. Genesis 1 speaks of the water above the earth and the water below the earth. They believed the world had been created when God moved over the water, as stated in the opening lines of Genesis 1.

These beliefs were similar to the Babylonian religion. But the Hebrews had some unique beliefs about the cosmos. They believed the water above the earth was held back by

a dome, or vault, or the firmament, as it was also called. This was their understanding of the sky. They believed the sun, moon, and stars were lights that were attached to the dome, attached to the sky, and they believed God dwelled above the dome, above the sky, above the water, as recorded in other books of the Bible.

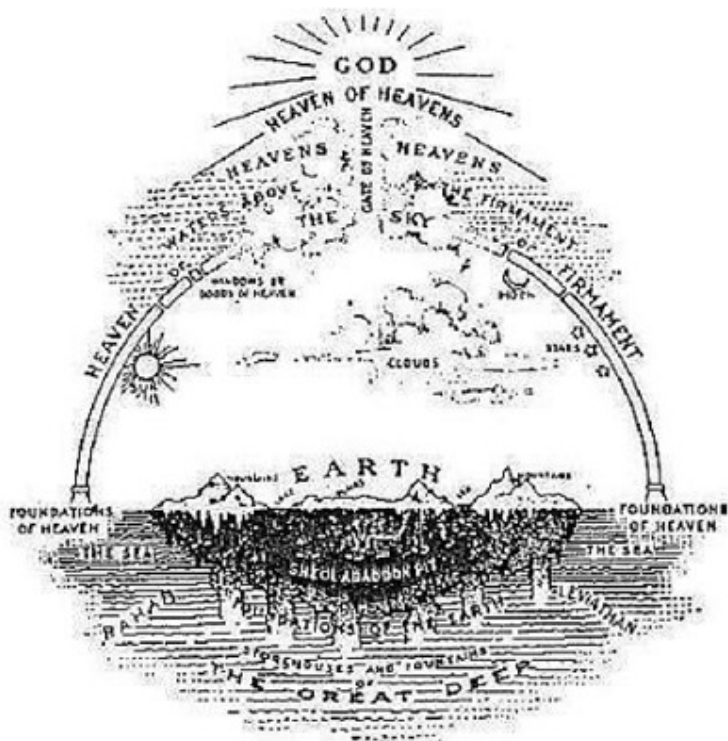
*(The Babylonian Map of the World was discovered on the banks of the Euphrates River in present-day Iraq in the 1800s. The Babylonian Epic of Creation, an ancient mythology engraved on clay tablets, was also discovered in Iraq. The original title of the epic, *Enuma Elis*, means: *when on high*, in the Akkadian language.)*

Archaeological evidence suggests that the religious beliefs of the ancient Hebrews were influenced by those of the ancient Babylonians. We don't know for sure. We

don't know how the process occurred, but we do know that those ancient beliefs are outdated, those beliefs in Genesis 1. We do know they're not accurate. We do know those ancient beliefs are quite different than present-day science, no matter where they came from. They're quite different than our present-day knowledge of the solar system we live in. They're quite different than our knowledge of deep space. The truth is, the Bible actually depicts a very primitive view of the universe and God's place in it. God isn't sitting on a throne up above the sky. And since the Bible depicts a primitive view of *where God is*, it logically follows that the Bible also depicts a primitive view of *who God is*. Or what God is.

An internet search of the phrase: three-tiered universe will bring up several visual illustrations of ancient Hebrew beliefs as

recorded in the first chapter of the Bible. I've included one here that was hand-drawn in the early 1900s. It's in public domain, which is the main reason I chose to use it rather than others. But I also like it for its artwork. Notice the detail. Notice the circular shape similar to the Babylonian map. Notice the dome above the earth and the water above the dome. Notice God on high.



Biblical Model of the Universe

George L Robinson

“Given that the ancient Israelites breathed the same cultural air as their geographic neighbors, it is no wonder that the biblical view of the cosmos has much in common with the broader ancient Near Eastern worldview.”

*Kyle Greenwood,
Scripture & Cosmology*

Chapter 2

REVERED WRITINGS

The Bible portrays God as a king who lives above the sky. Most people no longer believe that's true, but the belief that God is *up above* is still with us today. It's still very present in Christianity. It's still in Western culture. It's still in our language. We hear it in song lyrics, both religious and secular. *Spirit in the Sky* was a popular rock song back in my younger years. *Above All* was a popular Christian song in the early 2000s. Yes, the *Big Man Upstairs* is still up there, for many people. And why is that? How

has that belief been perpetuated for such a long time? And the answer is, because it was written down. It was written down and joined together with other ancient writings that eventually became our Bibles. The first biblical writings were written on papyrus paper and rolled into scrolls. Then gradually, through the centuries, writings were merged with other writings, and eventually, they were merged into a single collection of *books*, as they were called. The word “Bible” means books. The collection included writings from many authors, from different communities, and living in different eras. This process took quite a long time. It took about a thousand years. Scholars believe it was completed in the first century CE (AD). These books were considered authoritative and not to be questioned. They were considered unchanging and unchangeable, and thus was the birth of the Hebrew Bible, or at least that’s the simple version

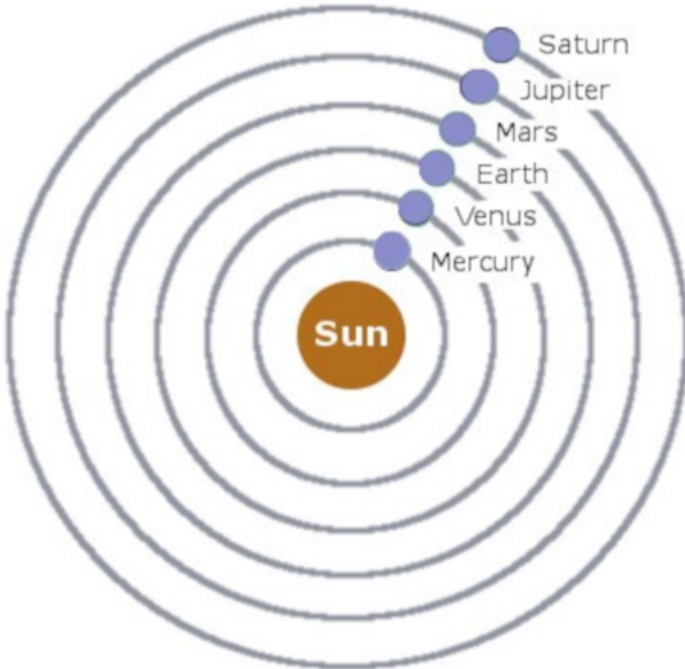
of it. (The Old Testament of the Christian Bible is essentially the same as the Hebrew Bible.) So the ancient belief in God who dwells above the sky was recorded in the sacred scriptures of the Hebrew religion.

Then also in the first century CE, the Christian religion developed as a branch of the Hebrew religion. It started small and humble, but soon spread throughout much of the Mediterranean region. In the year 380 CE, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and therefore gained a great deal of political power. But in the early years, just as in the Hebrew religion, there were Christian communities with their own specific writings and beliefs that were often in conflict with other communities, so it was necessary to unify writings in order to unify Christianity. So through a process of debate, councils, and edicts, Christian writings that were believed to be

authentic were merged into a separate collection of books. This process concluded about the year 400 CE, although debate continued afterward. And these books then became very important to Christians. These books were believed to be the new covenant with God, the new agreement, the New Testament, as it was called. And these books were also believed to be authoritative and not to be questioned, in the Christian religion. They too were believed to be unchanging and unchangeable. and they were joined together with the books of the Hebrew Bible, and thus was the birth of the Christian Bible, or at least that's the simple version of it. So belief in God who dwells above the sky was also recorded in the sacred scriptures of the Christian religion.

Then throughout the Middle Ages, from about the year 500 to 1500 CE, Christianity spread throughout Europe and parts of the

Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and this concept of God as a king who lived above the sky went with it. It went viral. It was recorded in scripture, established in doctrine, invoked in churches, and enforced by governments. In Europe, wherever Roman armies conquered, Christianity was established. So by the year 1500, Christianity had become the dominant European religion, therefore belief in God who lived above the sky became the dominant concept of God.



Copernican Model of the Universe

*“Facts which at first seem
improbable will, even on scant
explanation, drop the cloak
which has hidden them
and stand forth in naked and
simple beauty.”*

Galileo

Chapter 3

TIMES CHANGE

But times change. Beliefs change, both scientific and religious. By the year 1500, European civilization was emerging from the Middle Ages (the Dark Ages) unto a new cultural awakening. The Renaissance. The Scientific Revolution. Astronomers were beginning to grasp the planetary movements of our solar system. Nicolaus Copernicus theorized that our solar system was very different from ancient Hebrew beliefs (and also the Greeks). Copernicus theorized that the sun was the center of the solar system,

not the Earth. This view could not co-exist with Christian doctrine. His model was contrary to the Bible. So Christianity was opposed to the theories of Copernicus because they contradicted verses that say the Earth is the stationary center of the universe, such as this one: “The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.” Therefore his theories were denounced by all three branches of Christianity: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. His writings were officially banned by the Catholic Church for about three hundred years, his and those of Galileo who followed him.

But eventually, the truth prevailed. Eventually the scientific evidence became too obvious. In the year 1608 the telescope was invented, which gave astronomers a much more vivid view of the cosmos. They could present compelling proof. So eventually, religion was forced to accept the

truth of the Copernican model of the universe. Eventually the ban on the writings of both Copernicus and Galileo was lifted, but not until the early 1800s.

And as the truth about our solar system became more widely accepted, some people began to envision God in a different way. Some new beliefs developed in America and in Europe. Some new Christian groups began. Writers like Emerson and Thoreau were influential. But change is slow. Most people simply held on to their traditional beliefs. Most people and religious institutions simply pushed God further out. Farther out in space. Out there somewhere.

Then came the 1900s. Then came industrialization. Then came technology. Then came computers, space travel, and the Hubble Telescope, and now the James Webb Telescope. Life on Earth has changed dra-

matically. So now in a relatively short period of time, human minds have gone from believing that God is up above the sky, to peering at galaxies light-years away. We now know the universe is vast. We now know the Earth is just one planet among trillions. We now know our sun is just one star among trillions. We now know there are trillions of solar systems. We now know the sky is an illusion and God isn't sitting up above it. God isn't up there, and God doesn't seem to be anywhere else out in the physical universe either, at least not in the traditional sense. Not like a king on a throne.

So we seem to be in a quandary, we humans. We now know the biblical view of God isn't real, but we haven't replaced it with a more realistic one. We recognize the error, but we haven't fixed it. So let's work on that. Let's look at another place where God could

be. Let's look at another possibility. And for now, let's be logical. Logic has its limitation where God is concerned, but hopefully it can give us some direction. Hopefully it can point us in the right direction. Hopefully it can point us toward reality. Hopefully it can point us to where God is, realistically.

4000 BCE	Summerian Culture
3000 BCE	Ancient Egypt
2000 BCE	Akkadian Empire Babylonian Empire
1000 BCE	First Hebrew Writings Babylonian Exile
1 CE	Hebrew Bible Completed Christianity Begins
1000 CE	The Middle Ages
2000 CE	Copernicus & Galileo Scientific Revolution Information Age



NASA, ESA, CSA, STSci, Klaus Pontoppidan
(NASA-JPL), Joel Green (STSci)

Chapter 4

LOGICAL SOLUTIONS

And here we shift from focusing on the past to focusing on the present. And the future. Here we shift from focusing on how our beliefs were formed to forming new beliefs. God isn't up above the sky like ancient scriptures say, and God doesn't appear to be anywhere else out in the physical realm either, at least not in the traditional sense. We may recognize the presence of something greater. We may behold the wonders of the universe, the marvels of creation, but there's no specific being we can point to and say, "That is God." Yes,

it's true that we haven't looked everywhere. Maybe God really is farther out, beyond the reach of our telescopes. Perhaps on some distant planet. Or a separate universe. Through a black hole. But there's no evidence of these. There's no evidence of these scenarios. However, we do know of one other place where God could be. We do know of one other possibility.

There are two realms of existence that we humans know of: the physical and the mental. All things are one or the other, or at least that's how they appear. Physical things are made of physical matter or energy. Planets, people, molecules, and gravity are physical. The physical realm consists of physical things in three-dimensional space, according to classic physics. (Quantum physics is something else.) We humans typically live our lives according to this objective perspective of life. We perceive

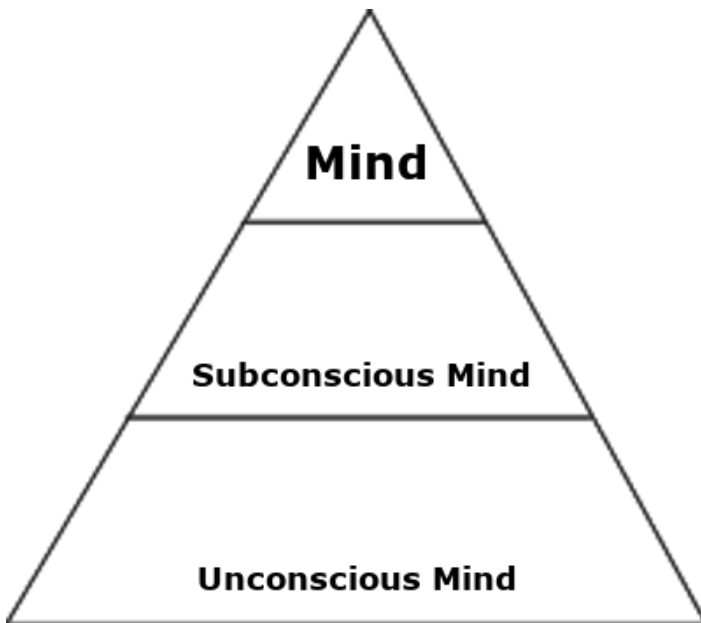
physical things with the five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, although some things are inferred, like gravity. There's a reality to this perspective. And also an illusion.

Mental things are different. Mental things have no physical substance. They're not made of physical particles or energy. Thoughts, emotions, and memories are mental. Cognition, perception, and sensations are mental, and imagination. They're not perceived by the five senses. I don't hear my thoughts with my ears, I don't feel my emotions with my hands, or see my memories with my eyes. Mental things are in our mind, although the mental certainly interacts with the physical. If I bump my head on my desk, it hurts. My brain processes the nerve impulses, but the hurt is in my mind. It's my awareness of it. It's my consciousness of it. Our brain is physical, but our mind is mental.

So, since there are only two realms of existence that we know of, it seems logical that if God isn't in one of them, then God must be in the other. If God isn't in the physical realm, then God must be in the mental realm, if God exists. That seems rational. If God isn't *out there*, then God must be *in here*. In our mind, and I don't mean imaginary.

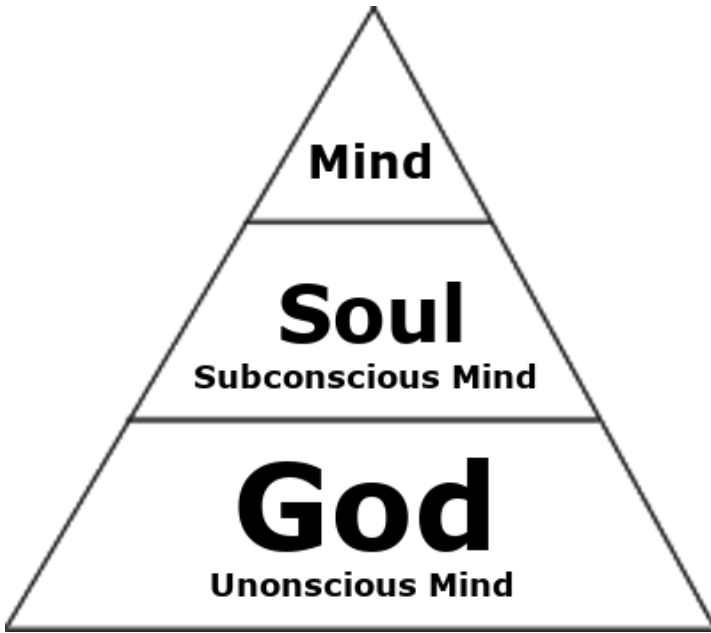
So what's going on in your mind? What's going on in there? For me, there are these thoughts I'm thinking. These words I'm typing. Operating my fingers. Correcting my mistakes. Staring at the computer screen, then glancing out the glass doors to the river behind my home. Breakfast suddenly appearing on my desk! Thank you, Sabrina! But I don't see God. God doesn't seem to be in my mind. Not really. Not actually. Not tangibly.

However, there are levels of our mind that we're not aware of. There are deeper levels. There are levels other than our everyday consciousness that we're so familiar with. The following is an illustration of these deeper levels. You've probably seen it before, or an illustration similar to it. In this model, our conscious mind is like the tip of a pyramid, with basic qualities and activities being beneath the surface of awareness. Hidden from us. Unknown to us. Like this:



These are the three levels of mind as perceived by psychiatrists about the year 1900, particularly Sigmund Freud. And multiple levels of mind are also found in other schools of thought, like Eastern religions, New Thought Christianity, and classical philosophy. The third-century Roman philosopher, Plotinus, has influenced this little book. He perceived that the universe *emanates* from deeper levels of the mind. Plotinus, like nineteenth-century psychiatry, also perceived that there are three levels of mind, which he called the Intellect, the Soul, and the One. The One was the deepest layer of the pyramid, in his view. The One is the source of the other two.

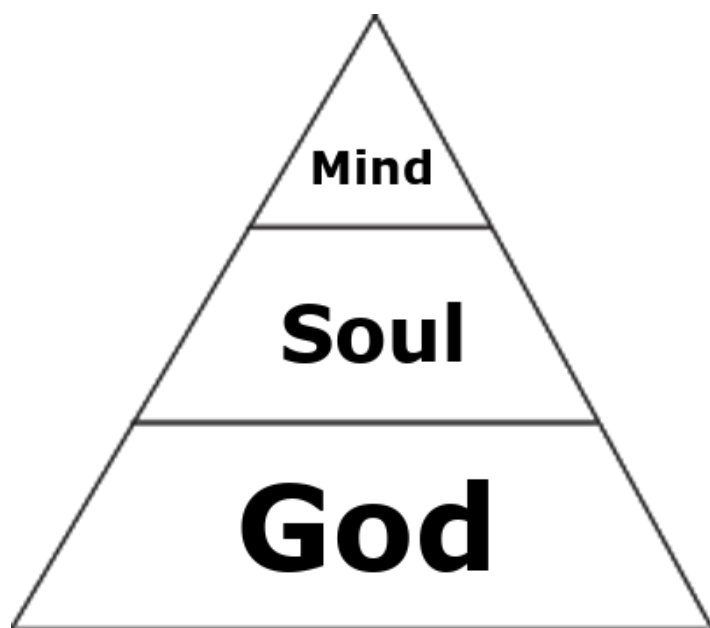
So, applying some logic to this idea of multiple layers of mind, it seems we can come to the following conclusion: If God is in our mind, then God must be in a deeper level. God must be in the deepest level. Something like this:



And in this model, the tip of the pyramid is our everyday conscious mind, the middle section is the subconscious, our soul, and God is at the base of the pyramid, the essence of all, the source of creation. And in this illustration, the *universal mind* would be a better subtitle, rather than the *unconscious mind*, in my opinion, although it's true that this level of mind is not conscious to us humans, usually. But sometimes it is, on rare occasions.

So, we now come to a possible solution to the problem of where God is. And my logic here isn't proof, of course. It's not absolute. But it does what we set out to do. It gives us some direction. It points us in the right direction, I believe. It points us inward. If God isn't outside of us, then God must be inside of us. God must be within us. And that may sound familiar to you. You may have heard it before. It's biblical in some Bibles. "The kingdom of God is within you" are words attributed to Jesus in the first English translations of the Bible, including the King James Version. (New versions use different words.) God is within you, in the subconscious realm, or an even deeper level. In a place not visible to human eyes. In a place that is hidden most of the time. And even though this concept of God doesn't fit too well with traditional Christian doctrine, it's scattered throughout Christianity. God is unseen, or in secret, according to

the words of Jesus, and there are parables of his that seem to illustrate this same concept, such as the parable of a treasure buried in a field, the parable of a valuable pearl that a merchant found, and the parable of fishermen who cast their nets into the sea and made a great catch. In each of these illustrations, there is something valuable that is hidden and then discovered, or caught, and it's the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, in biblical terms. We could call it the domain of God in computer lingo, and it's apparently not a physical realm. It's a non-physical realm. It's a mental realm. A spiritual realm. The word spiritual means non-physical. That's its definition. And in addition to the previous words of Jesus, it's also written that he said, "God is spirit."





C Welch

*“Let us settle ourselves,
and work and wedge our feet
downward through the mud
and slush of opinion, and
prejudice, and tradition, and
delusion, and appearance
till we come to a hard bottom
and rocks in place, which we
can call reality, and say,
“This is, and no mistake.”*

*Henry David Thoreau,
Walden*

Chapter 5

IT'S A PROCESS

But this is a different perspective of God than most people are accustomed to. So it's a process. It's a process to reprogram ourselves to think of God in a different way. It's a process to reprogram ourselves to think of God in a way that's different from our religious tradition, in a way that may seem strange to us at first, in a way that will probably require us to change our mental image of God, our concept of God, entirely. And for me personally, there were certain events that triggered this process.

There were certain events that brought about this change in my beliefs, this change in my life, and that eventually brought about a unique experience later in life. And because it's relevant to this little book (and hopefully somewhat interesting), here's how the process occurred for me. It'll be different for everyone.

I grew up in a religious home. My father was a Baptist pastor in the Christian religion. Christianity was very important to my family, but not overbearing. My parents were wonderful people. For a preacher's kid, I grew up quite normal. We lived on a small farm, then a couple of small towns in Kansas and Nebraska, USA. I was one of eight children. There was me and my seven sisters.

I went to college on an athletic scholarship, and in my junior year I was riding on a bus

that was involved in a serious accident, which made me start thinking. It made me start thinking in a serious way. It made me start thinking about life and death. It made me start thinking about God. And I wasn't particularly religious during those college years, so at first, I turned back to my Christian roots. I recommitted my life. However, in spite of my conviction, I was more of a lost soul. My life had no particular direction. My years as an athlete were coming to a close. I wasn't too thrilled with my college major, electronics technology, and really I just wanted to travel. I wanted to see the world. So I didn't return to school the following year. Instead, I worked some, traveled some, and then during the winter months, I rented an old house in a remote area near my hometown in Kansas. The area was remote but close to Kansas City. And by this time, my recommitment had faded, my recommitment to my Christian faith. It was short-lived.

And I certainly wasn't a hermit in that old house, but my solitary time there reminded one of my friends of the classic book, *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau, and I was given a copy. The book tells of Thoreau's solitary time in the woods in the early 1800s. It also dives deep into his thoughts. It dives deep into his beliefs. I opened the book, and it opened my mind. It opened my mind to a new perspective on life. It opened my mind to a new perspective on my religion. It opened my mind to a perspective that allowed me to question and even encouraged me to do so. So there in the silence and solitude of those four worn walls, sitting in front of an old wood stove late into the night, I continued my serious thinking but with newfound freedom. I began to question everything. I began to question my Christian beliefs. I began to question God. I began to question everything I'd ever been taught. Why do bad things hap-

pen, I asked? Why did God create a world in which that was even possible? Couldn't God have done it differently? Couldn't God have done better? And why can't we see God, I wondered? Where is God? Not up above the sky, apparently. And what really happens when we die? Is there really a heaven? Is there really a hell? Why would God create hell? Eternal torture seems quite cruel for a God of love. Didn't God create everything? And I knew the traditional answers to these questions, but they just didn't make sense anymore. They just didn't seem right anymore. And if they weren't right, then what is right, I asked? So I began seeking other answers, and I began coming to other conclusions.

And so began my search for truth. I left the old house in the spring and returned to school in the fall in Atlanta, Georgia. I played my final year of college basketball

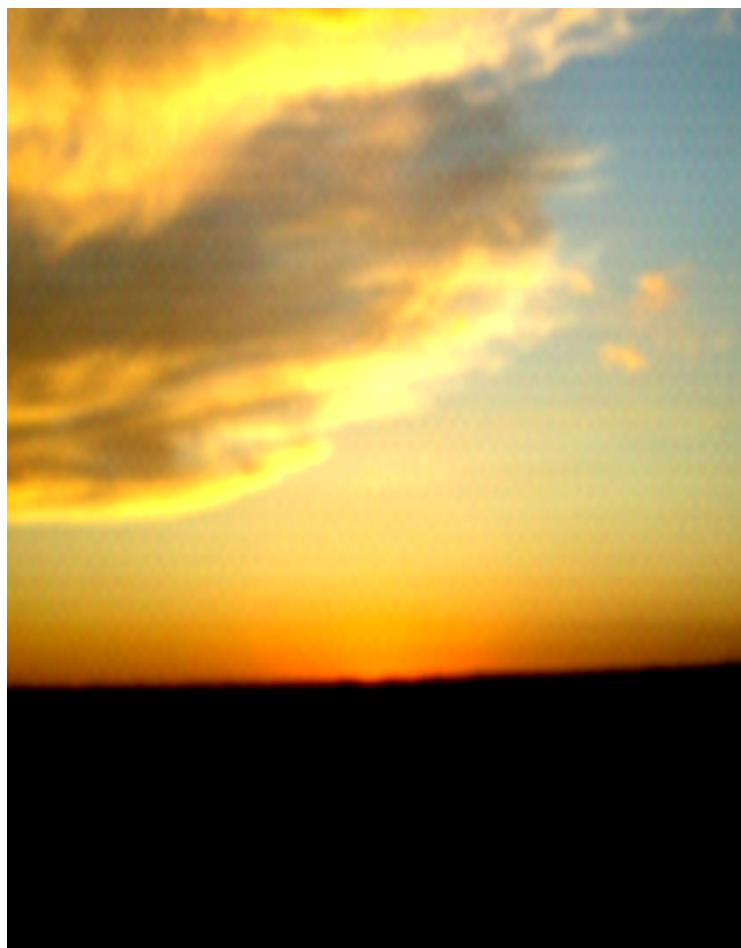
and changed my major to philosophy. And during that time I had an awakening to new religious beliefs. This process occurred partly through my college classes but mostly through my own reading, reasoning, and obsession with it. I was passionate about it. I learned about Eastern religions. I read about the Christian mystics. I read the writings of William James, Richard Bucke, Meister Eckhart, Plato, Plotinus, and others, and through these writings, I began to form a very different concept of God, very different than that of a king on a throne in the sky, very different from my traditional beliefs. During that time I came to believe that God is not up above, but rather, God is within.

That was the first part of the process. But for me, it was also just the beginning, because then I came to believe I could find God there. Within. Then I came to believe

I could experience God there. In the depths of my mind. In the subconscious realm. In my soul. Through meditation. And I was passionate about it, but not necessarily wise. Quite the contrary, in fact. So after two years in Atlanta, six hours short of a philosophy degree, I made the rather unpragmatic decision to move back to Kansas. Back to the country. Back to an ascetic life. A life of mental discipline, although in a different old house in a different part of the state.

But things didn't quite go as planned. Reality soon set in. I didn't really know what I was doing, or trying to do. I was immature. I had no structure. I was still just a free spirit, mostly. And then there were the little issues of how to make a living and the persistent desire for companionship. So a couple of years later, I moved on. On to adulthood, marriage, family, more edu-

cation, and career, but the longing for that spiritual experience never really left me, and apparently a seed was sown, because about forty years later, long after the passion had simmered, I did have an experience with that inner realm that I had tried to find many years before. I didn't see God there, however. I didn't go that far. I didn't go that deep, although I did visit the place I believe God to be.



*“A wider, sharper
consciousness, a more profound
understanding of our own
existence, lies at our gates.
But we are separated from it,
we cannot assimilate it;
except in abnormal moments,
we hardly know that it is there.”*

*Evelyn Underhill,
Practical Mysticism*

Chapter 6

NEW HORIZONS

I saw the horizon, but I didn't see the light. I didn't see God, but I did visit the realm of God. It's a deeper level of our mind. It's the subconscious realm, or an even deeper one. It's the source of our conscious mind, I believe. Like begets like. And our conscious mind returns to that deeper realm after the death of our physical body. Back to our source. Back to God.

The following experience occurred about twelve years before this writing. There were

a couple of things leading up to it that triggered it; there were a couple of things going on in my life at the time. First, a person very dear to me had recently passed from this life. My sister Elaine. One of my younger sisters. And even though I had worked as a hospice counselor for several years and had consoled others who had lost loved ones, I was grieving. I was struggling with it. And I was thinking about death, and reading about death experiences, and true to my nature, I was questioning my own beliefs.

That was one thing that was going on. The other thing was that due to my work, I was in a daily routine of sleeping from about 4 AM till 10 AM, then taking a nap in the afternoon. And when napping, I would typically fall asleep in the following manner: I would lie on my back with my eyes closed and slow down the flow of thoughts in my

mind, striving simply to be aware, aware of my inner self, my inner being. This is meditation for me. Then after a while, I would typically drift into a brief sleep, have a quick dream, awaken, ponder the dream for a few moments, then start the process over. This would usually occur three or four times, then I would fall into a deep sleep for about an hour.

But on one occasion, something quite different occurred. On one occasion, something very unexpected happened. On that day, I went through the same process, lying on my back, silencing my thoughts, being aware of my inner self, but then I immediately fell asleep. There were no dreams. There was a brief time I don't recall, then gradually I began waking. In a sense. Very slowly, I began waking to my conscious mind, but I was in a deeper level of my mind, although I didn't realize that at first.

I didn't realize anything at first. My cognitive mind was dormant. At first, there was just awareness; there was just me with no distractions. It was like a trance. Like being hypnotized, I think, although I've never been.

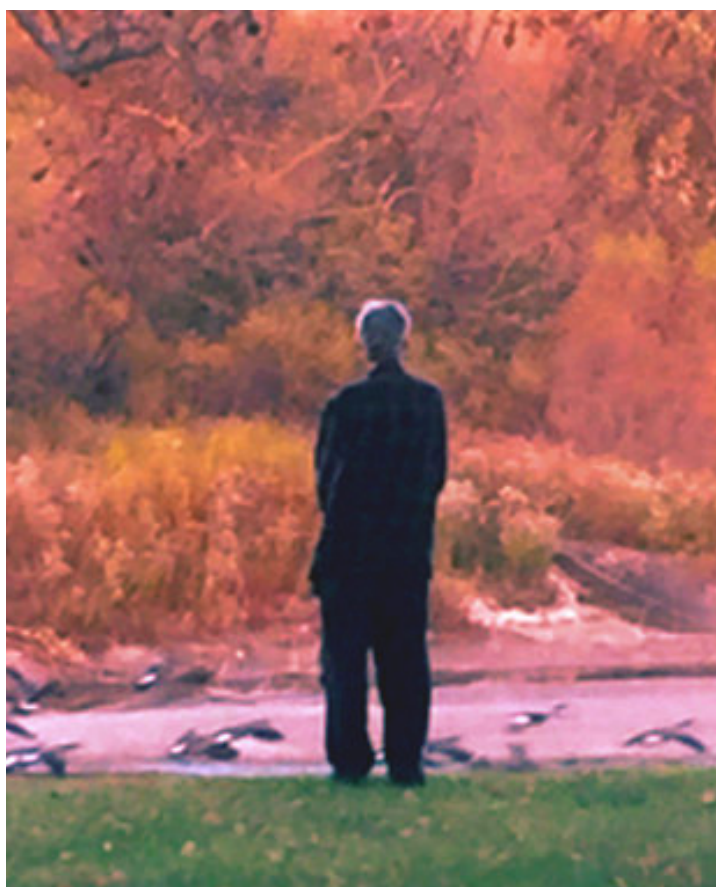
Then as the experience continued, I perceived a sense of space around me, although I still wasn't able to think about it or reflect on it. There was darkness in the distance and dim lighting where I was. Then after a while, I could see a horizon in the distance, glowing faintly from a light that was shining beyond it, out of sight. I was gradually moving toward the horizon. I was gradually moving toward the light. It was a state of serenity. It was a state of clarity.

But it didn't last long, because soon the silence was broken. Or shattered. Because suddenly, from behind me, a voice calmly

said to me, “This is what it’s like to be dead.” And in that moment, the meaning of those words didn’t have much impact because it was simply the voice itself, the sound of the words, that jolted me out of my reverie and snapped me out of the trance. My cognitive mind was suddenly engaged, and I was wide awake, although still in the inward realm. It was a rude awakening. It was chaos. I was desperate to get my bearings, but at the same time, I knew where I was. I knew I was in a deeper level of my mind. There was a familiarity about it, but also the feeling that I wasn’t supposed to be there. And then I started waking to the outer world.

Or more like traveling there, because that was a unique part of the experience also. It felt like the rush of riding on a jet plane as it’s taking off, except going backward. In reverse. It felt like I was being sucked back

into the physical realm. Back to my room. Then suddenly there I was, lying on my bed, staring up at the ceiling, bewildered by what had just occurred.



*“Think not that here is a dream
like the former. I say a
“dream,” because there the soul
seems to be as it were asleep,
though she seems neither fast
asleep nor yet quite awake.*

*Here, however, she is
thoroughly awake to God,
though fast asleep as to
worldly things and to
ourselves; for in truth, during
the short time that this lasts,
she is almost senseless and
unable to think of anything,
even if she wished.”*

*Teresa of Avila,
The Interior Castle*

Chapter 7

IN RETROSPECT

And in retrospect, it was just a glimpse, although it was a meaningful event for me. It was an insight. It was my self glimpsing my soul, I believe, my conscious mind dipping beneath the surface of the physical realm unto a deeper reality within. It was like being immersed. Like being baptized, symbolically. It was my conscious mind descending unto the subconscious realm, a realm that's usually hidden but one that's very real.

Some people may think it was just a dream, and it did occur in the same place, in the

subconscious, but it was quite different than a common dream. I've had lots of those. This was a unique experience. Except it was similar to what's called a lucid dream, in which a person is fully conscious as they dream. It was also similar to a near-death experience, I believe, like those reported by some people who have died and then been medically revived. So I wonder what I may have seen had the voice not spoken to me. Would I have seen the light? But the voice had something to say, apparently, something more important at the time. But I do not know whose voice it was. Was it the voice of God? Not in the traditional sense, I'm pretty sure. Was it my subconscious mind speaking to my conscious mind? Was it a separate soul? Or was the voice just part of the experience, like seeing the horizon, but audible rather than visual? It seemed to be the voice of a more enlightened being speaking from a more illu-

mined point of view, and that's all I can say about it for certain.

The experience was triggered by thoughts and emotions about death that I had been consumed with in previous weeks, and I believe the words I heard were truthful. I believe they were literal. I believe I experienced what death will be like for me. I believe I was in the same *place* that I will be at the time of death. In the spiritual realm. The subconscious realm. The realm of God. It's where we all go when we die, but the experience is different for everyone, like our lives here in the physical realm. Studies of near-death experiences illustrate this subjective nature. People report both similarities and differences in them according to their personal beliefs and expectations. I saw a horizon; others will see something else. The light is a common element, however. Most people report these to be won-

drous experiences (but not all). Two very important people in my life have had near-death experiences that they've shared with me. They were remarkable experiences for both, but quite different from each other, and quite different from my experience. One person saw the gates of heaven, which was natural for her. The other said it was like going through a door into a place of perfection.

I think my experience lasted about two minutes, but it made a lasting impression. It changed my perception of life and death. It's given me a sense of peace and certainty. I'm thankful for it. There was a fulfillment that came along with it. But it didn't change me much outwardly. It didn't make me pious. But the experience certainly affirmed my belief that God is within. It affirmed my belief that the spiritual realm is very real, and in my present moments of medi-

tation, I recognize the same pure consciousness that I experienced in that spiritual realm. It's who we are, essentially. I have yet to return to that deeper level, however, but I'm confident that I will eventually.

And there must be more to that deeper level. There must be more than I witnessed, more than I glimpsed, more than those having near-death experiences have witnessed. What happens when we don't come back? What happens after a week or a year? Different people have different beliefs, but no one knows for sure. Our religions don't know for sure. We may have great faith in our religious beliefs, but they don't provide proof of that which occurs beyond death. In the Christian religion, the general belief is that people either go to heaven or hell. There are variations of that belief, however. Judaism and the Muslim religion have similar beliefs concerning heaven and

hell, although different beliefs about who goes where, and why.

Eastern religions are different from those in the Western hemisphere. Eastern religions typically believe in rebirth. They believe a soul will incarnate on earth many times before attaining enlightenment. Eastern religions don't have the same concept of God.



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*“What is it about Christian
tradition that we love—
and what is it that we
cannot love?”*

*Elaine Pagels,
Beyond Belief*

Chapter 8

REVISIONS

As mentioned earlier, it was the issue of hell that eventually caused me to begin looking for answers outside of the Christian religion. How could a God of love (“God is love,” says the Bible) create a universe that includes eternal torture for millions of souls? That didn’t make sense. That seemed like something a God of hate would do. So I began looking for God in other places. I began perceiving God in a different way, different than a king on a throne, different than a guy in the sky. And eventually, I

came to believe that God is within me, which was a life-changing event for me. It was a new perspective. A new awareness. And as my beliefs about God changed, other beliefs had to change also. It was inevitable.

But yes, religious beliefs are just that; they're just beliefs. Most of them can't be proved. Or disproved. They can be disputed, however, and thus conflict ensues. And so it would be good for us humans to agree on some beliefs. So for the sake of progress, I offer you some of mine. I know what I've experienced, and I know what appears realistic to me. But I can't say for certain that my beliefs are true. No one can say that, except the person who has seen the divine, and that only to oneself. So in this chapter, I'm theorizing. I'm doing theology. I'm revising some Christian theology.

Some revisions were blatantly necessary. As my beliefs about God changed, my beliefs about heaven had to change also. If God isn't up above the sky, then heaven must not be up there either. So if heaven exists, then where is it? And the obvious answer is: heaven is wherever God is. So if God is within, then heaven must be there too. In the spiritual realm. In the non-physical realm. The subconscious realm. The realm of the soul. And so our soul goes to heaven.

And ultimately, heaven is the experience of God. This seems true even from a traditional perspective. Heaven is the experience of God in the spiritual realm. That's the ultimate heaven. It's the union with God, our conscious mind merging with the mind of God in the depths of our own being. It's been described as being immersed in light. It's been described as a oneness with the universe. It's been described as euphoric.

But not all people are good, as we well know. Some people are cruel. Some are malicious. Some have done some horrendous things. So if heaven is real, could hell be real also? Yes. But not in the traditional sense. Not like a fiery dungeon. It's the same process at work. It's the natural thing. We all go to the same inward *place* after death, but we all experience it differently. We experience it according to who we are, who we've become, and what we've done. It's subjective. So, for a corrupt soul, that place may not be too pleasant. It could be quite unpleasant, in fact. It could be hell.

But surely it doesn't last forever. Surely it's not eternal. What's the purpose of that? What's the rationale for eternal torture? Where's the love? Where's the goodness of God? A parent may discipline their child, but not lock them in a closet forever. In the natural world, when things die, they're

absorbed back into the earth. The trees of the forest spout and grow, and then after a season, they die and are mingled back into the soil. Human bodies do the same. Birth and death are both parts of the process of life. The earth bears fruit, and the fruit falls back unto the earth to replenish it. Nature operates in circles and cycles. The seasons change, night to day, we sleep, we awaken. Perhaps the life of the soul has a similar pattern. So even though a corrupt soul may experience the result of its own corruption, that experience eventually comes to an end, when the soul either awakens from the experience with the opportunity for redemption, or is absorbed back unto its source. It seems more humane for a soul to simply go out of existence, rather than be tortured forever. We humans even have laws against torturing people. Wouldn't God be as good?

I believe Jesus probably was a person who experienced *union with God* while living in this physical realm. I believe he truly was *one with God* during that experience, but everyone is. And he probably did speak in parables about the spiritual truth that he perceived, and probably he was crucified for it when he defied established religion. When it got political. (Jesus is mentioned in some historical sources other than the Bible.) Religion and politics were very intertwined in ancient Jewish culture, as in other cultures and other times throughout history. Religion and politics are even intertwined in current American culture, unfortunately. They've both lost sight of the goodness that they were meant to serve.

And to me, religion should be about growth; the evolution of the soul. Religion should make us more mature. Religion should inspire us to live in harmony with the greater

reality that we're a part of. Religion should inspire us to live in harmony with other people. It should inspire us to love our neighbors around the world. It should inspire us to love our enemies, even though that is difficult. It should inspire us to treat people as we want to be treated. These are some of the most important aspects of Christianity. These are some of the most important teachings of Christ, although they don't get much attention in the present day, except in certain groups.

And there are great differences in groups and doctrines within the Christian religion. Christianity has gone through many changes in the past, resulting in many divisions today. There have been schisms and reformations, new branches and denominations. During the 1800s, some new branches developed in America, including one now called New Thought Christianity. New

Thought then gained momentum in the 1900s, and now there are several worldwide organizations. And New Thought is just what its name implies, it's a new way of thinking of Christianity and therefore a new way of thinking of God. New Thought refers to God as Spirit and believes God to be infinite intelligence. The ideas put forth in this little book meld well with New Thought theology. It's been one of the influences on my own thought.

The world has changed a bit since the earliest biblical writings were penned about three thousand years ago. Life was much more primitive back then, and religion was too. And religion is much slower to change than other fields of knowledge and study, like science and technology, but religion does change, although stubbornly. Very stubbornly. So it's that old religious beliefs and attitudes are reasserting themselves

in the world today. That's occurring here in America largely for political purposes. But an underlying change is occurring. A shift is happening. New beliefs and attitudes are growing. The pendulum will swing. It's swinging. The world is moving in a forward direction; it doesn't go backward for very long. "Glory, glory hallelujah, truth is marching on."



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“So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed— We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men (all people) are created equal.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Chapter 9

FOR ALL PEOPLE

Life is a mystery. We can't explain it. We know life is bigger than ourselves. The universe is huge, and it's been around for a long time. We know that there is some sort of greater reality, but we don't know what it is. It defies our cognitive ability. The name *God* is a name that I grew up with. It's a word that comes naturally for me, although the meaning is very different now from what it used to be. Today, it's a name I use for that greater reality. It's a name I use for ultimate being. It's a name

I use for the mystery of mysteries. And God is known by many other names in many other cultures. God is the source of consciousness. God is within us, in the subconscious realm. The conscious mind is generated by the subconscious mind, the soul, which is generated by the universal mind, God. And so we humans are part of the process.

And if that's true, then it's true for all people. (No matter how we look at it, it's true for all people.) We all come from the same source and in the same way, so in that respect, we're all the same. Yes, we all have unique characteristics. We're individuals born into particular families and societies. We're diverse. We're like leaves on a tree, spiritually speaking. We're all similar, but we're all different. Some come from the same branch and some from different branches. But we're all made out of

the same wood. We all have physical bodies that are born into this world through physical birth (also from the inside out, from the womb unto the world), but we're more than just physical bodies. We're conscious minds. We're personalities. We're souls. We're conscious minds emanating from our soul, our subconscious mind, which emanates from an even deeper level of existence, the source of all things, that which I call God. This is the belief I've come to. God is the essence of life. God is the life that we are. God is the I am that we are. God is in me and in you and everyone else on the planet. We're all connected to God. Therefore, we're all connected to each other.

The realization that God is within is vital to the development of our conscious mind. It's vital to our growth. It's vital to the development of our subconscious mind, our

soul. It's spiritual growth. And the realization that God is within all people is vital to the development of our world. It's vital to the development of civilizations. It will make us more civil. The realization that God is within all people reinforces the American ideal that all people are created equal. God is the essence of all people (though people are at different stages of development). So this realization can break down the barriers that divide us. It can break down racial and cultural barriers. It can break down religious barriers. It will dissolve our prejudice. It will make us more compassionate, and as compassion grows in the world, then the world becomes a better place. Imagine how the world will be when we treat all others like family. Imagine how the world will change when we treat all others like we would treat God, for God is in all others. It will change dramatically. It could change relatively quickly. So the re-

alization that God is within is a crucial one. It's crucial to our world as we enter a new millennium.

The realization that God is within will make us more tolerant of others. It will make us more accepting of others. However, that doesn't mean we excuse bad behavior. That doesn't mean we tolerate those who harm others. Or infringe on the rights of others. We don't. We shouldn't. Thus we have laws, ethics, and morality that are intended to shape human behavior. And we have a sense of moral conscience, most of us, to guide us in the choices we make. We humans have free will, apparently. We have the ability to think and make decisions, and decisions have consequences. So it's good to make good decisions. It's good for ourselves. It's good for the people in our lives. It's good for our world.

But it's a chaotic world we live in right now. Some folks are makin' some very poor decisions. And I've certainly made my share of them, too, but at my present stage of life, I'm getting better at doing the right thing. But life is complex. We get confused about what the right thing is. There are influences. And some of those influences are intentional and are meant to confuse, like news agencies that don't tell the truth. Like politicians who don't tell the truth. And some influences are primordial. Like the competition between nations and races. It's the old law of the jungle. It's older than people, and unfortunately, it continues to live in the form of prejudice and hatred. These get passed down from generation to generation, and so the influence is deeply ingrained. And so the chains can be difficult to break.

But they do break. They can break. They break as we grow as conscious minds. They

break as we grow as souls. They break as we grow as societies. Yes, life can change quickly here on this old Earth. My dad's boyhood years were spent in the hills of Missouri with no electricity and no running water, except for the creeks. He went from that rustic life to living in the space age. He lived to be ninety-eight. His generation saw tremendous change in industry and technology, which transformed our society. Physically speaking, life is much easier than it was a century or two ago. It's much easier to start up the car than it was to hitch up the horse. But we have new challenges today. We have new problems. Plenty of them. Presently, we have a huge cultural divide in our population. We certainly do here in America. There's the left and the right and very little compromise, and a whole lotta disdain between the two. So what can we do about that? How can we change that? Well, by coming to the truth,

I'd say. By realizing that God is within. By realizing that God is within all people. And by treating people as we would treat God.



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“Is humanity ready for a transformation of consciousness, an inner flowering so radical and profound that compared to it, the flowering of plants, no matter how beautiful, is but a pale reflection?”

*Eckhart Tolle,
A New Earth*

Chapter 10

CLOSING THE FILE

So let's bring this to a close. Let's recap. Long ago, the ancient Hebrews believed the earth was a stationary landmass that was surrounded by water, even above and below. They believed the sky was a dome holding back an ocean of water above the earth. They believed the sun, moon, and stars were attached to the dome, and they believed God was a king-like creator who lived up above the dome, up above the sky, up in heaven, ruling over the earth below. Their beliefs were influenced by neighboring

cultures. These beliefs were written down about two thousand five hundred years ago, and then those writings were joined with other writings that eventually became our Bibles. Down through the ages, however, those ancient beliefs about our universe gradually yielded to scientific evidence. We no longer believe that the sky is a dome and God is sitting up above it, but here in Western culture, we still tend to believe that God is *up above*, which comes directly from those ancient beliefs.

But times are changing. Technology is changing us. We now have spacecraft that travel far beyond the Earth's atmosphere and telescopes that see much farther than that, so we now know that the sky is an illusion and God isn't up above it. There's no specific being we can point to and say, "that is God". There's no specific being out in space, no specific being in the physical universe.

But there is another place where God could be. There is another possibility. There are two realms of existence that we humans know of, the physical and the mental, so if God isn't in one of them, then God must be in the other. That's logical. That's reasonable. If God isn't in the physical realm, then God must be in the mental realm. If God isn't out in space, then God must be in our mind.

But God doesn't seem to be there. God doesn't seem to be in my mind, and I suspect you can say the same. However, there are levels of our mind that we're not aware of. There are levels that are hidden from us. There are subconscious levels. Therefore, if God is in our mind, then God must be in a deeper realm. God must be in the *deepest* realm. God is the essence of our being, the source of our consciousness.

And if that's true, then God is in every one of us, regardless of our many differences, regardless of who we are on the outside, regardless of our race, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, abilities, disabilities, or any other differences we may have. We've all been created by God. We're all children of God.

Although some children are misbehaving. Some are being cruel. Some are being deceitful. Some are making poor choices due to primitive mindsets. Some are making poor choices for the sake of power and greed. And so our world is in chaos right now. But hopefully this will change soon. But how? How's that gonna happen? What can we do? How can we make the world a better place? Pray? Visualize? Have faith? Work for social change? Run for public office? Spread the gospel of love? All of the above? Probably. And perhaps most im-

portantly, simply realizing that God is within. Within yourself. Within all people.

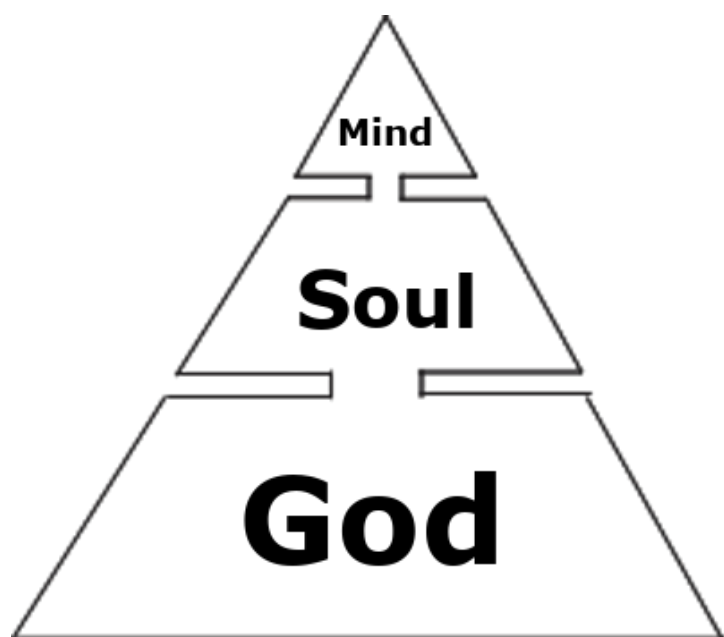
We're all in this together, you and I, we're all living this life. We're all conscious minds residing in these physical bodies. And the mind and body are two separate things, or at least that's how they appear. The mind is mental, like thoughts and emotions. The body is physical, like arms and legs. The mental and the physical are different substances, although they're connected. Although they're interactive. Our experience of the physical world actually occurs in our mind, so there's an illusion to it. And at the time of death, the illusion fades, the connection with our body is severed, and our conscious mind merges back unto the subconscious realm. We return to our source.

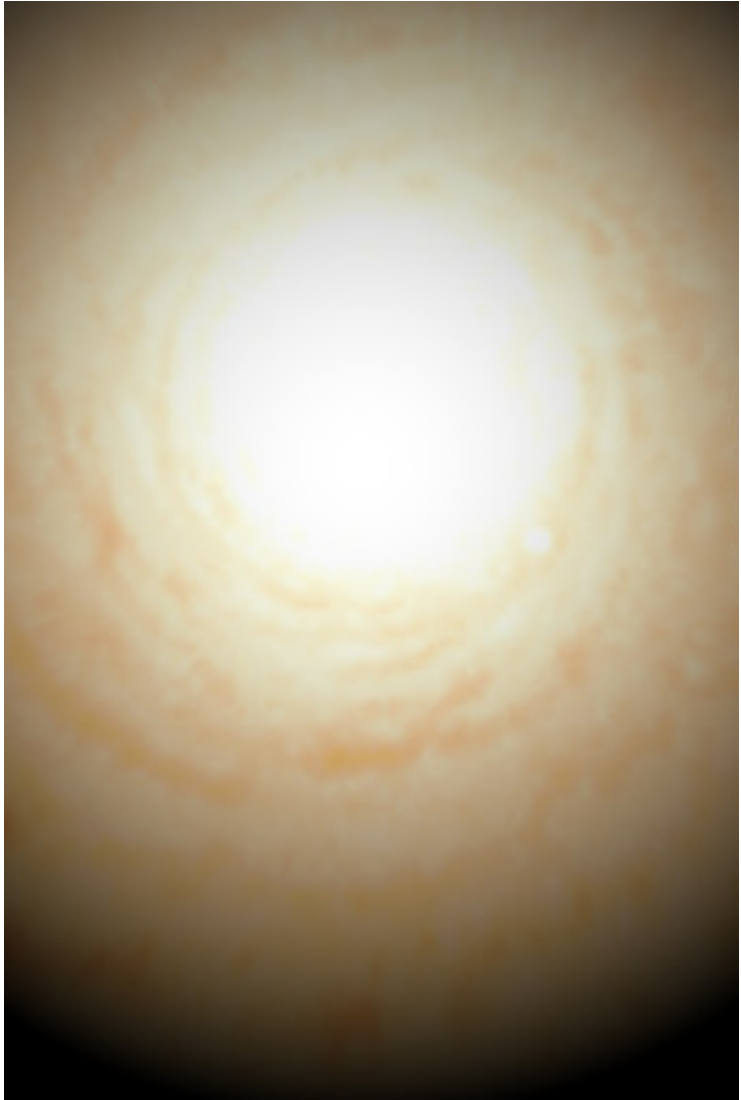
And there are accounts of persons who have experienced that realm prior to death.

There are accounts of near-death experiences. I once visited that realm through meditation and sleep, coupled with circumstances I was experiencing. It exists, the spiritual realm that I once glimpsed, and where a voice once said to me, “This is what it’s like to be dead.”

But the experience of God is the ultimate experience. The union with God. It can occur beyond death. It can also occur in this lifetime, although it’s rare. The experience can be developed. It’s true spirituality. It’s a discipline. It’s the awareness of our mind. It’s controlling our mind. It’s learning to be still. It’s spirituality. It’s the way, the truth, and the life. It’s the way to God, our destiny, eventually. It’s the growth of our mind, the evolution of our soul. Although it appears to be a slow process. One that appears to take longer than one lifetime here on the planet Earth, in my observation.

But we don't know for certain. We don't know for sure. We don't know how the process works. We don't know the works of God. No, we can't say much about who God is or what God is, but we can say something about where God is. We can come to a realistic conclusion about that, which is the purpose of this little book. If God isn't *out there*, then God must be *in here*. If God isn't out in space, then God must be in our soul. In the spiritual realm. In the subconscious realm. God is within us.





*“These highest experiences
that I have had of God’s presence
have been rare and brief—
flashes of consciousness, which
have compelled me to exclaim
with surprise— God is here!*

*John Trevor,
My Quest for God*

*Share this little book
with some friends.*

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*An update on ultimate reality,
sometimes called God*

PD Shoemaker

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