

Spirituality & Community

July 2008

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Jarvis the Duck
The Series The Comic Strip
Kurt Venables



The Pistis Sophia
Gnosticism

**The Madness of
Human Beings**
Steve Taylor

**Path of the
Winged Heart**
Brian Joseph

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Welcome! Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

A New Age of Light

Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment. We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light. We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



What We Do

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

Gnosticism

Pistis Sophia

Translated by G.R.S. Mead (1921)

The Pistis Sophia is a Gnostic text dated to roughly 150-300 AD. It tells the story of a fallen angel and the restoration of her "light" by Jesus. The major themes include faith in the highest light (The First Mystery- God), repentance, and equation of finding the inner light with salvation. For more, see: www.sacred-texts.com/chr/ps/index.htm.

Chapter 2

And that light-power came down over Jesus and surrounded him entirely, while he was seated removed from his disciples, and he had shone most exceedingly, and there was no measure for the light which was on him.

And the disciples had not seen Jesus because of the great light in which he was, or which was about him; for their eyes were darkened because of the great light in which he was. But they saw only the light, which shot forth many light-rays. And the light-rays were not like one another, but the light was of divers kind, and it was of divers type, from below upwards, one [ray] more excellent than the other, . . . , in one great immeasurable glory of light; it stretched from under the earth right up to heaven.--And when the disciples saw that light, they fell into great fear and great agitation.

Chapter 6

It came to pass then, when the disciples had heard this word, that they said: "Lord, if it be thou, withdraw thy light-glory into thyself that we may be able to stand; otherwise our eyes are darkened, and we are agitated, and the whole world also is in agitation because of the great light which is about thee."

Then Jesus drew to himself the glory of his light; and when this was done, all the disciples took courage, stepped forward to Jesus, fell down all together, adored him, rejoicing in great joy, and said unto him: "Rabbi, whither hast thou gone, or what was thy ministry on which thou hast gone, or wherefor rather were all these confusions and all the earth-quakings which have taken place?"

Then Jesus, the compassionate, said unto them: "Rejoice and exult from this hour on, for I have gone to the regions out of which I had come forth. From this day on then will I discourse with you in openness, from the beginning of the Truth unto its completion; and I will discourse with you face to face without similitude. From this hour on will I not hide anything from you of the [mystery] of the height and of that of the region of Truth. For authority hath been given me through the Ineffable and through the First Mystery of all mysteries to speak with you, from the



Beginning right up to the Fulness,. both from within without and from without within. Hearken, therefore, that I may tell you all things.

Chapter 7

For which cause I have said unto you indeed from the beginning that ye are not of the world. I also am not of it. For all men who are in the world have gotten their souls out of [the power of] the rulers of the æons. But the power which is in you is from me; your souls belong to the height.

Chapter 10

O Mystery, which is without in the world, for whose sake the universe hath arisen,--this is the total outgoing and the total ascent, which hath emanated all emanations and all that is therein and for whose sake all mysteries and all their regions have arisen,--come hither unto us, for we are thy fellow-members. We are all with thyself; we are one and the same. Thou art the First Mystery, which existed from the beginning in the Ineffable before it came forth; and the name thereof are we all.

Chapter 19

Now when Mary had heard the Saviour speak these words, she exulted greatly, and she came before Jesus, fell down before him, adored his feet and said unto him: "My Lord, hearken unto me, that I may question thee on this word, before that thou discoursest with us about the regions whither thou didst go."

Jesus answered and said unto Mary: "Discourse in openness and fear not; all things on which thou questionest, I will reveal unto thee."

Chapter 32

And Pistis Sophia cried out most exceedingly, she cried to the Light of lights which she had seen from the beginning, in which she had had faith, and uttered this repentance, saying thus:

1. O Light of lights, in whom I have had faith from the beginning, hearken now then, O Light, unto my repentance. Save me, O Light, for evil thoughts have entered into me.
2. I gazed, O Light, into the lower parts and saw there a light thinking: I will go to that region, in order that I may take that light. And I went and found myself in the darkness which is in the chaos below, and I could no more speed thence and go to my region, for I was sore pressed by all the emanations of Self-willed, and the lion-faced power took away my light in me.

Chapter 33

Mary again came forward and said: "My Lord, my indweller of light hath ears, and I hear with my light-power, and thy spirit which is with me, hath sobered me. Hearken then that I may speak concerning the repentance which Pistis Sophia hath uttered, speaking of her sin and all that befell her. Thy light-power hath prophesied thereof aforetime through the prophet David in the sixty-eighth Psalm:

1. Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto my soul.
2. I sank, or am submerged, in the slime of the abyss, and power was not. I have gone-down into the depths of the sea; a tempest hath submerged me.

Chapter 52

Jesus continued again and said unto his disciples: "It came to pass then, when Pistis Sophia had proclaimed the ninth repentance, that the lion-faced power oppressed her again, desiring to take away all powers from her. She cried out again to the Light, saying:

'O Light, in whom I have had faith from the beginning, for whose sake I have endured these great pains, help me.'

And in that hour her repentance was accepted from her. The First Mystery hearkened unto her, and I was sent off at his command. I came to help her, and led her up out of the chaos, because she had repented, and also because she had had faith in the Light and had endured these great pains and these great perils. She had been deluded through the god-like Self-willed, and had not been deluded through anything else, save through a light-power, because of its resemblance to the Light in which she had had faith.

Chapter 59

And Jesus continued again in the discourse and said unto his disciples: "It came to pass then, when Pistis Sophia had finished saying these words in the chaos, that I made the light-power, which I had sent to save her, become a light-wreath on her head, so that from now on the emanations of Self-willed could not have dominion over her. And when it had become a light-wreath round her head, all the evil matters in her were shaken and all were purified in her. They perished and remained in the chaos, while the emanations of Self-willed gazed upon them and rejoiced. And the purification of the pure light which was in Pistis Sophia, gave power to the light of my light-power, which had become a wreath round her head.

"It came to pass then moreover, when it surrounded the pure light in Sophia, and her pure light did not depart from the wreath of the power of the light-flame, so that the emanations of Self-willed should not rob it from it,--when then this befell her, the pure light-power in Sophia began to sing praises. And she praised my light-power, which was a wreath round her head, and she sang praises, saying:

- '1. The Light hath become a wreath round my head; and I shall not depart from it, so that the emanations of Self-willed may not rob it from me.
- '2. And though all the matters be shaken, yet shall I not be shaken.
- '3. And though all my matters perish and remain in the chaos,--those which the emanations of Self-willed see,--yet shall I not perish.
- '4. For the Light is with me, and I myself am with the Light.'

Chapter 60

'Grace' then is the light-power which hath come down through the First Mystery; for the First Mystery hath hearkened unto Pistis Sophia and hath had mercy on her in all her tribulations. 'Truth' on the other hand is the power which hath gone forth out of thee, for that thou hast fulfilled the truth, in order to save her out of the chaos. And 'righteousness' again is the power which hath come forth through the First Mystery, which will guide Pistis Sophia. And 'peace' again is the power which hath gone forth out of thee, so that it should enter into the emanations of Self-willed and take from them the lights which they have taken away from Pistis Sophia, that is, so that thou mayest gather them together into Pistis Sophia and make them at peace with her power.

Jarvis the Duck

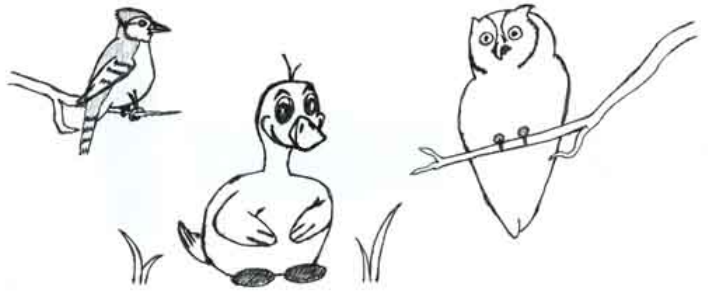
Kurt Venables

Bloodthirsty

Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.

Talon knew of the gorge, The White River Chasm. He explained that The White River is the major river that runs through this territory and that they now would follow it north most of the way to Temple Mountain. He said that the river was named for the white foam from the numerous rapids that ran along its length. The party continued to travel at night. It took them another week to bypass the gorge and rejoin The White River further upstream. They had no further incidents with Harpies; Sage's sharp night vision and Talon's knowledge of the area served them well. The air was becoming bitterly cold now. The ponds they passed were frozen over and even the mighty White River had thick ice extending far from the banks towards the middle of the river. The forest, it seemed, had taken on an even darker shade of black.

Talon had been thinking constantly about the encounter with Thor. He had become convinced that the Harpies were massing an army at The White River Chasm and that they were preparing to attack Heliopolis. He desperately wanted to warn his people. They were now roughly two weeks from Temple Mountain. He told them that he had given his word that he would take them to Gnosis and he would do so. Once they arrived at Temple Mountain, however, he would travel back southeast to Heliopolis to deliver his warning while the rest of the party had discussions with Gnosis. He would then return for them.



On a cold evening, just after sunset, the party was foraging for morsels along the river bank and preparing for another night's journey. The scene held an eerie beauty under the full moon.

"Isn't the river beautiful with all the ice shimmering in the moonlight," said Angeldown to Jarvis. The two were foraging a little ways away from the others. They had been sort of wandering off together in the evenings since they began the night flying.

"It really is," replied Jarvis, and after a moment, "and you're beautiful Angel." He couldn't believe he said it. He wanted to say it, but he couldn't believe he did.

"Thank you, Jarvis. You're a really sweet duck," replied Angeldown. She felt her face flush.

"Remember when I threw you into the water at your grandmother's at The Pond? It seems like an eternity ago."

"Yes, it really does. Please don't do that now."

The pair enjoyed each other's company a little while longer; then the party began their night's journey. They all flew peacefully for

several hours in the eerie stillness, but this was not to last.

“Do you hear that?” called out Sage suddenly. The party tightened their formation so that they could converse more easily.

“I don’t hear anything,” replied Jarvis.

“Man, we need to move on, as fast as we can,” yelled Sage, clearly disturbed.

“I hear them now too Sage,” yelled Talon.

The party flew on, as fast as they could. Within a short time, all of them could hear the high pitched screeches, and they were getting louder. The party flew on desperately for a while, but the source of the squeals continued to close, almost as if it was somehow homing in on the fleeing party. The hearts of the birds were now racing. They flew on, but the squeals seemed to surround them. Then they could see black forms zigzagging wildly in the moonlight.

“Vampire bats,” yelled Talon as they swooped down on the party, “fight them off with your wings.”

The bats were very fast, weaving this way and that. They seemed to be everywhere. They drove the party apart. Several bats each were occupying Talon, Sage, Jay, and Jarvis. A larger group, led by a particularly large bat was targeting Angeldown. She bobbed and weaved as the screeching mass flew on. Finally, she rolled and caught the leader with her wing, knocking him away. The larger group flew off with the leader momentarily.

Talon, Sage, and Angeldown were now occupied by several bats each. They bobbed and weaved, managing to hold off their pursuers. Jay, however, was doing quite well. He was out-flying the bats. He was zipping in and out around the bats with some ease. His interest in aerial acrobatics was now clearly paying off. On the other hand, the larger group and the leader were now targeting Jarvis. He was flying on, weaving and spinning to fight them off, but he was beginning to tire. The bats flew at him more viciously, as if they could smell victory.

“I can’t hold them off,” yelled Jarvis, but Talon, Sage, and Angeldown were too busy to even hear. Jay was gone. Then, the lead bat flew directly over Jarvis and spread his wings wide in preparation for a dive onto the flailing duck. At that split second, Jay rocketed down onto the bat in a power dive, striking the leader right in the spine with his shoulder at full force.

“OOOffff,” yelled Jay as he struck the bat. His voice trailed off as both he and the leader fell through the dark canopy. The other bats flew down after their fallen leader, and a moment’s later Jay popped up above the canopy. “Got that mother!”

The party flew on for a while in shock, just trying to get away from the place where the bats went down into the canopy. After they were quite clear, Talon yelled, “We’d better find a place to bed down, before we meet another pack!”

After they flew down to a giant pine next to the river, Talon explained in punctuated sentences, gasping for breath: “Those were Vampires. They hunt in packs. They target an individual and wear him or her down. Then they bite. Their fangs are poisonous. Once bitten, a victim will be down and paralyzed within minutes. The pack drains the victim’s blood. ... What Jay did was very brave. He could have broken his wing. He probably saved one of our lives. We should no longer travel at night.”

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Jarvis the Duck

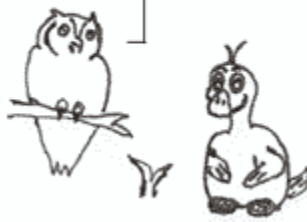
The Comic Strip

Kurt Venables

Sage, do you remember when birds used to bow to Ra, the sun god, at sunrise?



Some things are a little fuzzy, but yes, I do remember that. Not many do that anymore.



That's too bad because I believe that Ra shines on the inside as well as on the outside.



Path of the Winged Heart

Brian Joseph

Maria sank down into her living room chair. It had been a long day. She closed her eyes and replayed the events of the last few days. There had been another encounter with one of the crippled hearts. When she was done replaying the events of the past few days her thoughts drifted back to her first encounter with a crippled heart. It had been 30 years ago when she was 15 years old.

Sally had seemed like a friend, at least on the surface. She appeared to be kind and considerate. It took time to really get to know her. Sally was not who she seemed to be. Initially the crippled hearts that Maria had encountered had not been obvious. They were hidden. Hidden behind masks of make believe. Sally was the first person to befriend Maria after her family had moved to the area. She had known Sally for about a year. That had seemed like a long time. She thought back to the day that she really came to know Sally.

It was in the fall and she had stopped at Sally's house about an hour after school. They were sitting in Sally's room listening to music when Sally told her she had a surprise. Sally reached under her bed and pulled out a large laundry bag. She opened it and slid it off of a pay phone. Sally told Maria how she had noticed it was loose the night before when she used it and she had returned today with a crowbar to pry it off. Sally slid it back in the pillow case, put it under the bed, and told her that she was going to take it to the garage and bust it open the next day when she would have more time before her parents got home from work.

Maria's expression and comment that Sally was crazy to do such a thing was met by Sally telling her that she was being a 'goody two shoes'. Maria had told Sally that she wanted no part of it. Maria was heading out the door when Sally's mother came home. Two hours later Maria heard knocks on her door. It was a police officer. Sally's mother had found the phone. Sally had told her mother that she had been watching T.V. when Maria came to the house with the pay phone in the laundry bag promising to come back and pick it up the next day.

Maria told the police officer the truth. He took notes and told her that it would be investigated. The next day it was all over school that Maria had stolen a pay phone, had taken it to Sally's house, and when she had gotten caught had blamed Sally. Maria told her version of the events to a few people who seemed to believe her but the general buzz about school was that she had tried to save her own neck by getting Sally in trouble.

Justice had been served in the end, but it had taken four months. All throughout those four months and even after Sally continued to blame Maria. What had saved her were the words of Mrs. Contega the old woman who liked to sit on her front steps and chain smoke while she watched the goings on in the neighborhood. Mrs. Contega had

seen Sally enter the house with the laundry bag and also seen Maria come by empty handed. Sally was put on juvenile probation, ordered to pay restitution and to do 50 hours of community service.

The following summer Maria and her parents traveled to San Francisco. It was 1977 and there was a ten year anniversary celebration of the Summer of Love. Maria's parents were freshmen students at Berkeley in 1962 when Maria was born. It was an unplanned and unexpected pregnancy but both of her parents had managed to complete college. After graduating they spent the summer of 67 in the Haight-Ashbury district with 5 year old Maria in tow. Maria had remembered it as being like a circus and it had changed a lot in ten years but so had she. It was during this trip in 1977 that she had first heard the term "crippled heart." Her parents had heard that their former Guru of sorts was camping at a rural farm about an hour north of San Francisco and they decided to go see him. Maria had remembered Vee. He laughed a lot and used to call her Magic Maria.

Vee had remembered her too. When they arrived at the farm Vee hugged her mother and father then looked at her, held his hand low and said, "I knew that you were magic. You have gone from this to this small to this tall", he said as he motioned low and high with his hand. There were others who had come to see Vee. They sat around in a circle outside, reminisced and told stories. Then Vee gave one of his talks. Maria looked around and noticed tears streaking down some cheeks. Vee could do that. He could touch people in a way that could move them between laughter and tears. After his talk Vee retreated to a cabin and several people lined up to see him one by one. Maria asked her parents what the people lining up were doing and her mother explained that each of them had a question for Vee or were seeking guidance about something.

Maria got on line. She had waited for almost an hour. When she entered the cabin Guru Vee was seated on the floor on a large pillow cushion. There was a small round table with three candles burning. On the other side of the table, directly across from Vee there was another pillow cushion. Vee held out his hand towards the empty cushion. Maria told him of her experience with Sally. Vee listened with an intense smile on his face, interrupting only once after she had told him of Sally spreading the lie at school. Then he had said, "Mark Twain said that a lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes."

When she had finished her story Vee had asked, "And your question?" Maria blurted out, "How can someone be like that?" Vee stared at her and said, "You have had an encounter with a crippled heart. Hearts become crippled through injury." Vee had gone on to explain that these injuries are usually inflicted by other crippled hearts and that during an encounter with a crippled heart that one must exercise caution so as not to also become crippled. He had talked about crippled hearts and hearts that walk,

saying that each could influence the other during situational encounters. A crippled heart might help to cripple a heart that walked if the encounter was not handled correctly and mirroring occurred. A heart that walked that made it through the encounter without mirroring was a heart that was strengthened.

Maria remembered the words that Vee had spoken that day. "The heart that uses encounters with crippled hearts to its own advantage can reach a point where it no longer walks." He had reached for a small back pack that was beside the pillow he was sitting on. He opened a side pocket, fished around inside, pulled out something small, and passed it to her across the table. She held it in her hand and looked down at it. It was a golden winged heart. The wingspan made it slightly smaller than a penny. And it was about the same thickness. She had gone to pass it back to him and Vee had said, "It is yours." Vee told her that a winged heart could see through the masks of the crippled hearts. This gave the winged heart a decisive advantage in all encounters. "A winged heart can help the lame to walk." He reached across the table and put his hand on the front of her head and whispered, "Teach your heart to fly."

She had gotten up to leave but Vee said, "Wait." She sat back down. He fished around in the large compartment of the back pack and pulled out a small cassette player that he placed on the table. He fished around some more and pulled out 4 or 5 cassette tapes. He kept one out and threw the others back in the back-pack. He opened the cassette case and passed the empty case to her. It was John Lennon's *Imagine*. Vee searched for a song on the tape. That was the first time that she had heard *Crippled Inside*.

Maria spent the night in a cabin with her mother and father. She told them of her conversation with Vee. She thought that there was some kind of significance in the coincidence of Guru Vee having both the winged heart and a tape with a song that was related to the nature of their conversation.

The following morning people gathered at scattered picnic tables that were loaded with fruit. Vee came to sit at the table where Maria and her parents were sitting. Her parents and Vee talked about old times and what they had been doing for the last 10 years. Vee looked at Maria and said, "Raising a flower." Her father told Vee of Maria's wondering about the coincidence of his having the winged heart and a tape with a song that related to what she had talked to him about. Vee reached for his back pack beside the table. He unzipped a small compartment and placed 7 or 8 winged hearts on the palm of his hand. Then he went into another compartment and pulled out 6 or 7 cassette tapes. They were all Beatles and Lennon. "I'm listening to Lennon a lot recently. My friend Gabe has been discussing his lyrics with me."

After breakfast about 30 people gathered in a large circle in an open field and Vee gave one of his talks. She had remembered being at similar events when she was younger. Vee looked at her and said, "I am inspired to speak of the heart." Vee said that the heart was part the apparatus of perception and that some day science would come to understand this. He said that the brain receives what the eye sends to it and

that the brain hears what the ear sends to it. Vee said that the heart also sends information to the brain but the part of the brain that receives this information was underdeveloped in most people. This underdevelopment was due to training, education, and upbringing that was rooted in a culture that did not recognize the value of heart perception.

Vee said that there were times when people had flashes where the brain was able to receive what the heart was sending. Vee called hearts that this happened to "hearts that walk." He said that in some that part of the brain that receives the signal that the heart sends was not only underdeveloped but had also been damaged. He called these "crippled hearts." Most of what they felt was not genuine. In fact it was greatly distorted. Crippled hearts were motivated by fear.

Vee had said that hearts could learn to fly. That the perceptual apparatus of the heart and that part of the brain that receives it could be developed. It was possible to integrate perception. He looked around the circle. He was begging the question. At almost the same time two people said, "How?" Vee smiled and said, "I thought you'd never ask."

Maria returned from her memory and moved in her chair, catching herself as she was about to doze off. She was excited at the prospect of another opportunity to strengthen the wings of her heart. The higher she soared the more she saw. A bird's eye view. Looked at from a higher level everything appeared connected and part of the same ground. Everything on the ground was part of the same fabric of existence. This fabric is woven of love.

Maria was hungry and wanted to fix something to eat but first she went to her jewelry box. She took out the winged heart and looked at it. Then she pushed away some jewelry and took out the folded sheet of paper that was in the bottom of the jewelry box. It was the paper that Vee had passed out. He reached into his pack and passed the papers in both directions around the circle. Then he read it aloud.

Maria unfolded the paper thinking about how long it had been in her jewelry box. She read through it while thinking of that day long ago when Vee had read it:

Path of the Winged Heart

CONFUCIANISM:

*"Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you."
-- Analects, XV, 23*

JUDAISM:

*"What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire law, all the rest is commentary."
--The Talmud, Shabbat31a*

BUDDHISM:

*"Hurt not others in ways that your yourself would find hurtful."
--Undana-varqa: 518*

CHRISTIANITY:

*"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."
--Luke 6:31*

BAHA'I:

*"It is our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. Beware lest you prefer yourself above your neighbors ."
--Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, 315*

ZOROASTRIANISM:

*"That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good of its own self."
--Dadistan-I-Dinik, 94:5*

HINDUISM:

*"This is the sum of all true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by. Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee after."
--The Mahabharata*

ISLAM:

*"No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires of himself."
--Sunnah*

TAOISM:

*"The good man ought to pity the malignant tendencies of others; to rejoice over their excellence; to help them in their straits; to regard their gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way."
--The Thai-shang. 3*

Maria went to the kitchen and made a sandwich. While eating it she thought of how crippled hearts wallow in their own misery, much of it self created. For some the misery was almost constant and they did not recognize it as such because it was the only way they knew. She thought of the sadness in this and a tear tricked down her cheek. She ate the last bit of sandwich, went into the living room, and put a CD in the stereo. She stretched out on the couch and drifted off to sleep while listening to Lennon's *Instant Karma*.

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Brian Joseph writes inspirational short stories. He is the author of the mystical, musical novel, *The Gift of Gabe*: <http://www.giftofgabe.com>.

THE MADNESS OF HUMAN BEINGS

The Roots of Human Madness and How Spirituality Can Make us Sane

Steve Taylor

To an impartial observer – say, an alien zoologist from another planet – there must be very compelling evidence that human beings suffer from a serious mental disorder, and are perhaps even insane.

The last few thousand years have been an endless catalogue of insane behaviour. Recorded history is an endless catalogue of wars, and the story of the brutal oppression of the great mass of human beings by a tiny privileged minority. The terrible oppression of women which runs through history – and which still exists in many parts of the world – is another sign of this insanity, as is the hostile, repressive attitude to sex and the body which most cultures have shared.

In addition to this insane collective behaviour, an alien zoologist might see signs of mental disorder in the way that many of us behave as individuals. He or she would be puzzled by the fact that human beings seem to find it so difficult to be happy. Why do so many people suffer from different kinds of psychological malaise – for example, depression, drug abuse, eating disorders, self-mutilation – or else spend so much time oppressed by anxieties, worries and feelings of guilt or regret, and negative emotions like jealousy and bitterness? And why do so many people seem to have an insatiable lust to possess things? Why are we prepared to go to such lengths to obtain material goods which we don't actually need and which bring no real benefits to us? In the same way, many people have a very strong craving for status and success; they dream of being famous pop or TV stars, and try to gain respect from others by wearing particular clothes, possessing status symbols or going to certain places or behaving in a certain way. 'Why aren't human beings content just to be as they are?' the observer might ask himself. 'Why are they so driven to gain wealth and status instead of accepting their situation and living in the present moment?'

Primal and Prehistoric Peoples

However, there are many groups of people in the world who don't seem to be touched by this insanity – or at least, who weren't until recent times. 'Primal' peoples like the Australian Aborigines, the tribal peoples of Siberia, Lapland, Oceania and other isolated areas, generally had a very low level of warfare, if any at all. They also have high status for women, and are strikingly egalitarian and democratic. Almost uniformly, anthropologists have been struck by how naturally content and carefree these peoples seem, as if they are free of the psychological malaise which afflicts us.

Even more strikingly, archaeological records indicate that prehistoric human beings were free from this insanity too. Archaeological studies throughout the world have found almost no evidence of warfare during the whole of the hunter-gatherer phase of history – that is, right from the beginnings of the human race until 8000 BCE. Archaeologists have discovered over 300 prehistoric caves around the world, dating from 40,000 to 10,000 BCE, not one of which contains any images of weapons or fighting.

Prehistoric peoples have no signs of male domination either. On the contrary, they seem to have worshipped the female form. Their major art form was small statuettes of naked women, often with exaggerated breasts and hips. Literally tens of thousands of these have been found across Europe, the Middle East and Asia. These societies apparently had no different classes or castes either. For archaeologists, one of the most obvious signs of inequality are grave differences. Later societies have larger, more central graves for more 'important' people, which also have a lot more possessions inside them. Men generally have more 'important' graves than women. But the graves of prehistoric peoples are strikingly uniform, with little or no size differences and little or no wealth.

The Over-Developed Ego

This suggests that there is a fundamental difference between us and primal or prehistoric peoples, a difference which gives rise to the collective and individual insanity which plagues us. Why should they be free of the insanity of warfare, oppression and materialism? I believe that this fundamental difference is what might be described as our 'over-developed ego.'

We appear to have a more pronounced sense of individuality – or ego – than primal peoples. According to the anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl, for example, the essential characteristic of primal peoples was their less 'sharpened' sense of individuality. In his words, 'the limits of their individuality are variable and ill-defined.' He notes that, rather than existing as self-sufficient individual entities – as we experience ourselves – their sense of identity is bound up with their community and their land. He cites reports of peoples who use the word 'I' when speaking of their group and others who see their land as an extension of their self, so that being forced away from their land would be tantamount to death. (This is why primal peoples are often prepared to commit suicide rather than leave their lands.)

The naming practices of certain peoples suggest this too. For us, a name is a permanent label which defines our individuality and autonomy. But Australian Aborigines, for example, do not have fixed names which they keep throughout their lives. Their names regularly change, and include those of other members of their tribe. Other native peoples use tekonyms – terms which describe the relationship between two people – instead of personal or kinship names. On the other hand, our sense of ego is so defined and strong that many of us experience a basic sense of separation to nature, other human beings and even our own bodies. We are self-sufficient individuals who can exist apart from the natural world, our communities and even each other. I believe this over-developed ego is the fundamental madness from which we suffer from, and the root cause of our insane behaviour. Intense ego-consciousness is a state of suffering. It brings a basic sense of isolation, of being separate from other people and the rest of reality. We experience ourselves as fragile entities trapped inside our own heads with the rest of the world 'out there,' on the other side. And our egos send a constant stream of 'thought-chatter' through our minds, a chaos of memories, daydreams, worries and fears which disturbs our being and creates a constant state of anxiety.

In addition, because we live in our thoughts so much, we find it very difficult to live in the present, and to appreciate the reality and beauty of the world in which we live. The world becomes a dreary, half-real place, perceived through a fog of thought. As a result of this, most people feel a basic sense of incompleteness and discontent. And this negative state is the basic

source of the cravings for possessions and power and status, which are a way of trying to complete ourselves and compensate for our inner discord. We try to complete ourselves – and make ourselves significant – by gaining power over other people or by collecting wealth and possessions.

And in turn, this desire for wealth and power is at the heart of warfare and oppression. But just as importantly, our strong sense of ego means that it's difficult for us to empathise with other people. We become 'walled off' from them, unable to 'feel with' them and to experience the world from their perspective or to sense the suffering we might be causing them. We become able to oppress and exploit other people in the service of our own desires.

Perhaps the desire for wealth and power, minus the ability to empathise, is the root of warfare and the oppression of women and other social groups. Maybe it's also the root cause of our abuse of the environment. It means that we experience a sense of 'otherness' to nature, and that we can't sense its aliveness, and as a result we don't feel any qualms about exploiting and abusing it.

Beyond the Ego

However, there is a method of healing our inner discord and transcending our insanity: through spiritual development. The whole purpose of spiritual development is to transcend our intensified sense of ego, to blunt its walls of separateness and quieten its chaotic thought-chatter so that we can begin to experience a new sense of inner content and a new sense of connection to the cosmos and to other beings. This is what the practice of meditation aims to do: to generate a state of inner quietness in which the ego fades away. And this is what happens when we dedicate our lives to serving others rather than following our own selfish desires: separateness begins to fall away as we develop a heightened sense of compassion, a shared sense of being with other people and other creatures.

As we transcend the intensified sense of ego, we begin to see the world as a meaningful and harmonious place. We become able to live in the moment and accept ourselves and our lives as they are, without wanting. And we also move beyond the social insanity of warfare and oppression. Since there is no discord inside us, we no longer crave for wealth and power, and now that we are no longer separate, we have the ability to empathise with other beings, and so become incapable of abusing or exploiting them. When the ego is transcended, all of the madness of human behaviour fades away, like the symptoms of a disease which has now been cured. That is the only true sanity, and perhaps the only way in which we can hope to live in peace and harmony on this planet.

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