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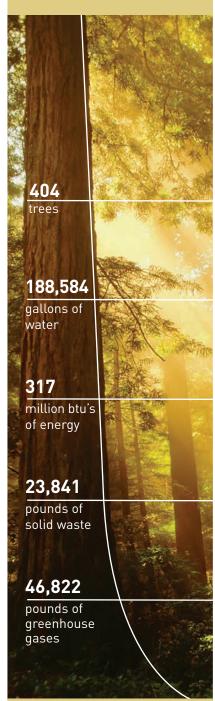
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What Is Enlightenment? is dedicated to a revolution in consciousness and culture. Guided by the evolving vision of founder Andrew Cohen, we are in search of a radical new moral and philosophical architecture for twenty-first-century society. We believe that finding this framework for transformation—rooted in the timeless revelation of enlightenment, reaching toward a truly coherent ethics for the postmodern world—is imperative, not only for the evolution of our species, but for our very survival. By asking the hard questions of the new science and the ancient traditions, of art and culture, of business and politics, What Is Enlightenment? seeks to create a dynamic context for conscious engagement with the greatest challenges of our times, a groundwork for the ongoing liberation of human potential.

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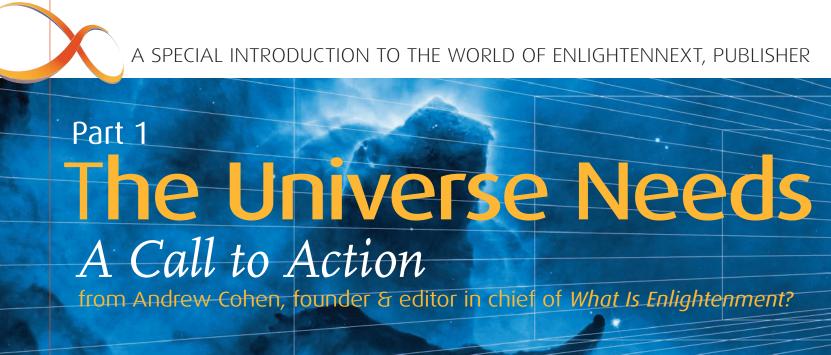
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# Dear friends, readers, and supporters of What Is Enlightenment?,

I want to tell you about a thrilling new initiative that we at EnlightenNext are embarking on. It's called the Universe Project. It's an exciting, perpetually developmental, integral forum and collective process in which as many people as are interested can actually participate in the most important cause there is—the evolution of consciousness and culture.

As readers of What Is Enlightenment?, you've been tracking this important and vast subject in the pages of the magazine, and I would like to take this opportunity to warmly invite you to participate in a broader cycle of transformative events and forums that my students and colleagues at EnlightenNext are creating. I firmly believe that if we want the world to change in a significant way, and if we're serious about creating a better future for us all, then it's up to those of us at the leading edge—which means people like you and me who have been blessed with education and free time—to make sure it happens. We have to be the ones to create the future.

Before I tell you more about

the Universe Project, I'd like to tell you a little about my background and how I came to understand that the evolution of our individual consciousness is directly related to the evolution of our collective culture and to the world that we create and share together.

I became a spiritual teacher in 1986, when I was thirty years old, after having been a dedicated seeker for eight years. In those days, I didn't really know much about the complexity of the evolutionary process, but I did know what consciousness was because when my seeking came to an end, IT entered my being so deeply that I was no longer the same person.

What I soon began to discover, however, was that awakening to consciousness doesn't necessarily, in and of itself, clarify for us how we are supposed to deal with the ever-increasing complexity of human life. I found that awakening to higher states frees us from the world but doesn't automatically tell us how to live in it. This is especially true for those of us who live in the current postmodern cultural context where, for many at the leading edge, traditional belief

systems have been superseded by an emphasis on the rights of the individual above all else.

If we are going to awaken spiritually, outside of the interpretive structures of traditional belief systems, then we need to come up with appropriate new ways to translate what the infinite nature of consciousness actually has to do with the reality of our life conditions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was my attempt to find the answer to this important question that led me to start *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine more than seventeen years ago.

The exciting inquiry that this magazine is dedicated to has gradually changed in its emphasis as I've developed in my own understanding as a spiritual teacher. While initially I was concerned principally with the experience of enlightenment and what its significance was in our post-traditional context, as time passed, my own perspective on what I was trying to do deepened. Slowly but surely, I awakened to the evolutionary perspective. I discovered the obvious and awareness-expanding truth

that my own inquiry was occurring within the larger context of a developmental process that began with the big bang fourteen billion long years ago. I began to see that the universe has an interior and an exterior and that the exterior is matter and the interior is consciousness. I came to recognize that my capacity for awareness was itself the product of time and that everything that we are, have been, and can be is all part and parcel of a process that is, even at this moment, awakening to itself through our very own hearts and minds.

I came to appreciate more than ever how the spiritual experience is the most important and powerful vehicle through which human beings connect most intimately with the process that has given them life. And it became more and more apparent that the way we interpret those experiences is principally informed by our cultural beliefs and shared values. It became impossible to avoid the direct relationship between the values and beliefs we share and cherish and the ways in which we consciously and not so consciously





interpret every dimension of our experience—from the gross to the subtle, from the mundane to the profound—in every moment. What makes this even more complex is that many of these values are culturally conditioned and therefore are not necessarily very apparent to us. As all this became clear to me, it also became obvious that unless we make a concerted effort to evolve our shared values at the very same time as we cultivate our capacity to awaken to deeper states of consciousness, it will be impossible to individually and collectively evolve in a comprehensive and truly integral manner.

All of our work at
EnlightenNext, including
what we are doing at What Is
Enlightenment? magazine, is
dedicated to bringing the light of
awareness to this delicate and
all-important multidimensional
process. We are also deeply committed to facilitating the actual
evolutionary transformation that
I am speaking about. Indeed,
our work is driven by a passion
to push this process forward, at
its leading edge. The Universe
Project is our attempt to facilitate,

for as many people as possible, a direct awakening to higher and deeper dimensions of consciousness beyond ego and the conscious evolution of our individual and collective value spheres. It's our bold endeavor to put all the pieces together. We want to help to define—in partnership with many friends, co-evolutionaries, and fellow seekers of truth and meaning—what the next steps for all of us actually are.

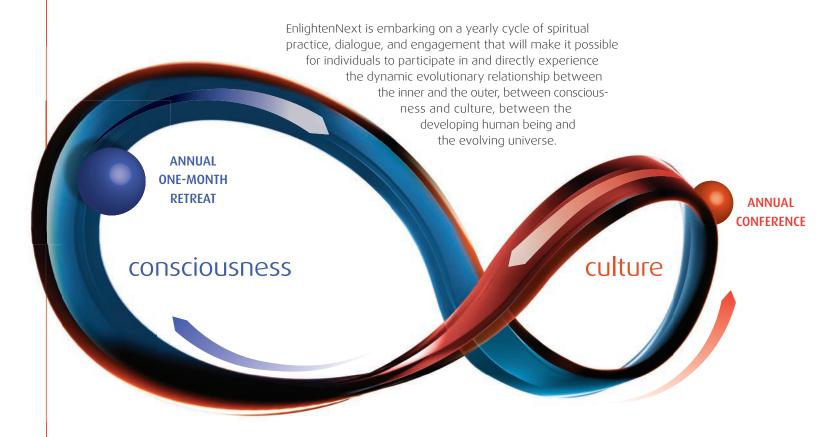
In order to facilitate this exciting project, we are going to initiate an annual series of activities centered around two yearly events that present opportunities for the deepest growth and collective development. One will be a month-long spiritual retreat dedicated to the mystical awakening of consciousness at both the individual and collective levels. The other will be an annual international conference, dedicated to being a forum that brings together leading-edge thinkers, philosophers, and visionaries from every possible field of endeavor who are committed to the transformation of our world in the context of conscious evolu-

# → The Universe Project needs Evolutionaries

We at EnlightenNext call our latest initiative the **Universe Project** because we are endeavoring, through all our programs and events, to provide individuals with ways to directly participate in the biggest project there is. **It's not "our" project. It actually is the project of our expanding universe.** 

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tion. Throughout the year, we will also be hosting a variety of programs on culture and consciousness—online, in print, at all of our eleven centers, and in major cities around the world.

What is unique about this idea is that both of these major events will be directly and *integrally* connected with one another. We are going to track the actual connection between individual and collective inner development and the evolution of our shared values—and how that affects the new world we are trying to create together. All of the revelation that is experienced and shared at the spiritual retreat will provide the ground of awakened consciousness upon which the conference will be built. The

most important themes that are brought to light in the conference will be carried into the spiritual retreat as questions for deeper contemplation and inquiry by the collective, as participants experience higher and deeper states of consciousness.

The theme of the Universe Project—the evolution of consciousness and culture—will always remain the same, but our understanding of what that actually means will perpetually develop. And that's the whole idea! The developmental relationship between the retreat and the conference consciously and directly engages with the actual connection between the inner and outer dimensions of life. This will be a real-time, public, and transparent

process of individual, collective, and intersubjective conscious evolution and engaged inquiry. This trajectory, from inner to outer, back to inner and back to outer again, will recur in twelve-month cycles—always within an ongoingly developmental context.

What will make this initiative truly significant is the strength of our collective intention to endeavor with all our hearts, minds, and souls to create a better world for us all. So once again,

I warmly invite you to participate in some of the events, programs, and forums we are already holding around the world today and be part of this exciting new initiative that we will be launching in the coming months. By signing up as an "Evolutionary," you can stay connected to the ever-evolving edge of this growing movement of passionate, like-minded spiritual activists who feel responsible for creating our future. I hope you will join us today!



Andre Colen

→ Sign up to become an Evolutionary at: www.enlightennext.org



# **Business Sponsorship Program**

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# Dear Reader,

My name is Kona Goulet, and I am the Director of Development at EnlightenNext, the nonprofit organization that, among other things, is responsible for bringing this highly respected and thought-provoking magazine into mainstream culture every three months.

EnlightenNext programs and publications, including What Is Enlightenment? magazine (WIE), are truly a labor of love. WIE subscriptions and ad revenues do not cover the cost of producing each issue of the magazine, and more than half our staff are volunteers, including some of the editors! WIE runs an annual campaign which provides the much needed funds to publish the magazine. We are grateful to all our readers who donated in 2007— thank you! Without this support, it would be impossible to sustain, let alone fuel, our mission of "catalyzing a revolution in consciousness and culture." If you would like to make a donation in support of WIE, please visit: wie.org/donate. Your contribution is invaluable, however large or small.

We are also building our financial base for WIE through a new initiative—the What Is Enlightenment? Business Sponsorship Program—launched in December 2007 by development team member Terri Hinton. Each year, we

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will reach out to organizations and businesses interested in contributing to *WIE* and, in return for their donations, honor them by providing visibility as a business that supports social and cultural transformation, as you see here.

Take a few minutes to look over the sponsor list, and as you do, please join us in a wholehearted thank you to all of them. They, along with many individual donors, make it possible for all of us to continue to enjoy and contemplate the stimulating articles and elegant aesthetic that we all have grown to appreciate from What Is Enlightenment? magazine. Additionally, we would like to encourage you to take the time to find out what these organizations are doing—help support the businesses that are supporting us. And don't forget to let them know how you found them!

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or suggestions, or if you are working with an organization that may be interested in participating in the next Business Sponsorship Program. We look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

Kona Goulet
Director of Development
kgoulet@enlightennext.org

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Andrew Cohen, What Is Enlightenment? magazine, Sept-Nov 2005 issue

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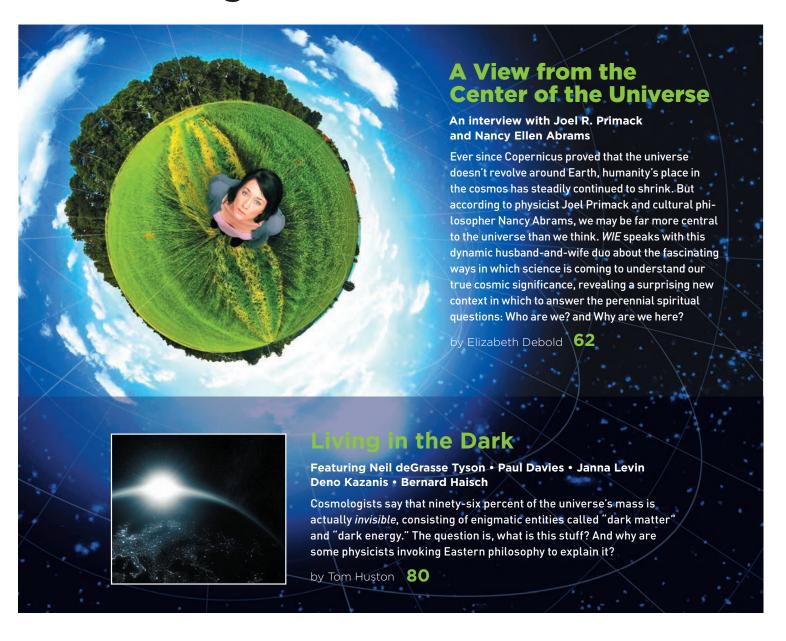
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# enlightenment contents





# The Mythic Life and Times of Deepak Chopra

He is the most famous face in the world of East-meets-West spirituality. But what's the real story behind Deepak Chopra's success? In this candid interview with spiritual teacher and WIE founder Andrew Cohen, Chopra offers a never-before-seen look at his remarkable life, proceeding from his formative years in India to his rise in the ranks of the Transcendental Meditation movement to the dramatic separation from his guru that set him on the path to spiritual stardom.

by Andrew Cohen 86

# **FEATURES**



# **Atheists with Attitude**

God has some new enemies. Led by Richard Dawkins and other outspoken voices, the "New Atheists" are on a mission to debunk religious faith once and for all. In an entertaining field guide, WIE surveys the personalities and tactics being employed in this latest iteration of an age-old culture war.

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THE GURU AND THE PANDIT

# A Kosmic Roller-Coaster Ride

What is the purpose of the universe? Is the evolutionary process God's merry-go-round, repeating in infinite cycles, or is it a deadly serious endeavor charting ever-new ground? Metaphysical sparks fly between the Guru and the Pandit as they tackle some of the biggest questions that philosophers have wrestled with for millennia.

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# Letters



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### JUNG'S IDEA OF EVOLUTION

I just finished reading Carter Phipps's article and am delighted to see Carl Jung take such a prominent position in this magazine, both in this article and Elizabeth Debold's article, "The Divine Feminine, Unveiled." However, his work is misrepresented per usual.

While I agree wholeheartedly with Debold casting Jung's cultural context as horridly Victorian, I disagree with Phipps's interpretation of Jung's archetypes as being fixed as first principles and "not toward the new, the novel, or the unknown." This very point is the reason Jung left Freud. Freud buried the instincts in the mechanical body, and Jung rescued them by connecting them to the archetypes. Jung never posited the archetypes as fixed. He spoke of the archetypes as directing the flow, the force of evolution, within each individual's life.

Jung's idea of evolution is best reflected in his particular method of dream interpretation. Where Freud was apt to find the meaning of dreams in frustrated sexual instincts, Jung found that

each dream had a telos, a way forward out of the repetitive madness of one's psychological patterns. As we spin in the amazement of a new symbol given to us in our dreams, this symbol points to our evolutionary futures. It is then that we begin to participate with psyche in "Eureka-like events," launching into a new worldview, a new context.

# Dr. Bren

via email

### **JUNG'S POWER OF NOW**

In his feature article, "The Cosmos, the Psyche, and You," Carter Phipps contrasts Jung's archetypal perspective with the new evolutionary worldview. He writes, "After all, the root of archetype is arche, which literally means 'first principle.'" He then quotes Dennis Ford, who says, "Archetypes deemphasize the emergence of the genuinely new."

We could think of the archetypal "first principle" not as past but as now and always. Jung discovered the principle in the moment, in his now, just as you and I are doing now and will continue to do through unending moments. As for the "genuinely new," think of "new" as what we keep rediscovering and improving our understanding of as we develop gradually.

Phipps writes, "Is there a way of integrating the essential insights of both Jung and Teilhard de Chardin, without compromising the fundamental truths of either?" He answers yes, and I agree. Look up to, not back at, the

masters of spirituality, psychology, and science. Focus less on what was or will be, because insight comes again and always from the *present potential*.

### **David Hauenstein**

via email

### THE NEED TO BE #1

I must admit to being somewhat taken aback and a little perplexed by Andrew Cohen's interview with Frank Zane. On the one hand I take my hat off to anyone who achieves such exceptional feats of personal accomplishment as to be crowned Mr. Olympia, no less than three times! Mr. Zane. it seems. is also a pretty evolved individual on several other scales of spiritual awareness. However, has he not also been driven most of his life by an extraordinary ego need to be #1?

A few years ago I remember having the pleasure of meeting Jack LaLanne at a social gathering in LA and marveling at his great shape and vigor for a man of his age, yet also thinking to myself that without the ego's help he would almost certainly not have been able to achieve his many extraordinary physical feats. Is there not a great paradox here for all of us interested in the mysteries underlying human motivation and our quest for fame?

### John H. Boyd

Toronto, ON

### A GIFT TO THE WORLD

Fantastique! I loved Ms. Raphael's article about the art of Adi Da Samraj ("The Heart Was Released from Images"). Thank you, Mr. Cohen and friends, for featuring this mysterious spiritual master's exquisite art. Even to merely contemplate the beautiful photos of his images in your magazine, I feel I am being shifted out of "point of view," beyond my ego perception. What a relief! Adi Da's art is clearly an incredible gift to the world.

# Robert H.

Seattle, WA

### **BEYOND FEMINISM**

Thank you for keeping the dialogue on the feminine gender rolling and stimulating debate. To a certain point it is useful to review how women got to be "what" we are now. However, I feel it is now time to acknowledge the Divine Spirit that all genders share, and look towards the work we could all do together. I agree with Elizabeth Debold ("The Divine Feminine. Unveiled") that women now need to perform this "heroic act" of freeing our souls from what we have been embedded in through the ages. It's time to drop our attention from any thoughts of victimization, underdogs, glass ceilings, and so on, and to value ourselves as the Divine Spirit, over and above any ego personas. We more than likely chose to be here as men in other lifetimes too, and one could sav men also face challenges of gender culture. We all have our altered egos to deal with.

When we enter this "new way of being," clear of many of our gender issues, *then* we will be free to fully engage in



# The conversation of the co

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# editorial

**THE JOURNEY THROUGH THIS ISSUE** of *WIE*, as the title of the nineteenth Guru and Pandit dialogue states, is truly a Kosmic roller-coaster ride! Elizabeth Debold's indepth interview with astrophysicist Joel Primack and his wife, lawyer and historian of science Nancy Abrams, is literally a voyage to the center of our universe, a mindexpanding and perspective-altering experience to read. These two pioneers are exemplars of a significant new phenomenon. They are both committed materialists who have devoted their lives to birthing a new creation story intended to inspire a sense of awe and wonder on par with spiritual enlightenment, a creation story that is not based upon mystical revelation but is founded on the most up-to-date research in cosmology, astrophysics, and biology. They aspire to bridge the chasm between science and spirituality, and even more boldly, they are trying to lay the foundation for a new, truly cosmos-centered spirituality that places human beings—and the choices they are making right now—at the very leading edge of the entire process. My dialogue with integral giant Ken Wilber for this issue turned out to be a perfect complement to the scientists' quest for cosmic purpose, because Ken and I are committed champions of Spirit and consciousness first and foremost. I hope you'll enjoy (as much as we did) our impassioned philosophical exchange about whether God's grand project of creating our universe is a cosmic game or the most serious endeavor that could ever be.

For quite some time now, I have wanted to do a different kind of interview with the larger-than-life explosion-in-motion called Deepak Chopra. I've been curious about his inner experience and what the source of his phenomenal energy is. Over the past two years, we've become friends, and so the opportunity finally presented itself. I'm sure the result will not disappoint.

Finally, executive editor Carter Phipps and our new associate editor (and fine young man) Joel Pitney have put together an entertaining and illuminating piece about the history and evolution of the concept of atheism. I'm sure you're going to have more than one dimension of your own inner cosmos and personal psyche touched by reading this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*—as we all did while creating it. . . . Have fun!

**Andrew Cohen** 

Founder and Editor in Chief





# **ZEITGEIST**

# The "O" Factor

With 1999's *The Power of Now*, which sold over two million copies, German-born mystic **Eckhart Tolle** was catapulted to the heights of spiritual acclaim. In 2005, he wrote *A New Earth*, a sequel with which he hoped to share his message "less forcefully, somewhat more gently." It sold well in its first few months but eventually found its way to the Barnes & Noble bargain bin.

Then **Oprah** spaketh, and the people did listen.

"When I read this book for the first time," she said in early February of this year, not long after endorsing presidential candidate Barack Obama, "I knew I just had to share it with the whole world. So I chose it as a book club selection. . . . I believe it is the future." Within days, A New Earth—a.k.a. Oprah's Book Club Selection 61—skyrocketed to the top of all major bestseller lists in the U.S., and its publisher ordered an additional three million copies to meet the sudden global demand. But things were just warming up. Oprah next announced that she and Tolle would be teaching an online video "webinar" together—a free, interactive, tenweek course dedicated to exploring each chapter of A New Earth. Within the first few weeks of enrollment, over 500,000 people, representing 139 countries, had signed up for "the biggest classroom in the world." And as this issue goes to press, the virtual classes are under way, popularizing authentic teachings of spiritual enlightenment on an apparently unprecedented scale.

Hey, has anyone given Oprah a copy of WIE lately?



# **NUMBERS**

# Do you believe in miracles?

Miracle Man, a new television drama being developed at ABC, is about a disgraced televangelist who becomes an atheist after being exposed as a fraud, only to later discover that God is now using him to perform real miracles. And if recent polls are right, the story is likely to resonate with most Americans. Four out of five believe miracles are real, and nearly two-thirds personally know someone who has experienced one.

Adult Americans who believe in	%	Change from 2005
God	82	_
Heaven	75	+5%
Angels	74	+6%
Survival of the soul after death	69	-1%
Hell	62	+3%
The Devil	62	+1%
Ghosts	41	+1%
UF0s	35	+1%
Witches	31	+3%
Astrology	29	+4%
Reincarnation	21	

[Harris Poll 11.29.07]

# •

# **IN PRINT**



# **Integral Ecology**

As the magnitude and complexity of our environmental problems increase, it's becoming clear that we need a higher, more integrated perspective from which to approach them. With their upcoming book *Integral Ecology* (November 2008), the Integral Institute's **Michael Zimmerman** and **Sean Esbjörn-Hargens** may be offering the largest step in that direction yet. Drawing on the work of **Ken Wilber** and

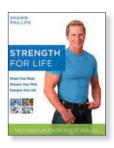
other integral pioneers, the book will explore how our ideas about nature—and humanity's place in it—have developed over time. Ultimately, the authors hope to provide a broad framework in which to navigate the landscape of conflicting perspectives involved in any environmental issue, and we're sure we're not alone in eagerly awaiting what they have to say.



## God Is Not Dead & Creative Evolution

As the New Atheists proudly carry the flag of scientific materialism into the twenty-first century (see p. 38), they must be prepared to do battle with those who don't believe that science and materialism go hand in hand. Enter **Amit Goswami**, quantum physicist. For years, Goswami has insisted that *consciousness*, not matter, is the primary substance of

reality. And in *God Is Not Dead* (June 2008), he aims to promote a new spirituality—called, intriguingly, "quantum activism"—in order to help us break through our materialistic conditioning once and for all. But that's just the beginning of his quantum crusade. In a second book, *Creative Evolution* (October 2008), Goswami will propose nothing less than a quantum "resolution between Darwinism and Intelligent Design." We can see schoolteachers in Kansas scratching their heads even now.



### Strength for Life

**Bill Phillips** achieved fame in the fitness world with his bodybuilding bible *Body for Life*. Now his brother, **Shawn Phillips**, is poised on the brink of similar stardom with a book that carries the *Body for Life* approach forward—and upward—into the realm of mental and spiritual as well as physical vitality. *Strength for Life*, due out on April 29, features Phillips's

fullest presentation to date of what he calls "Focused Intensity Training," his system of mind-body strength training that incorporates insights from Eastern disciplines like yoga, meditation, and the martial arts. With detailed plans for transformation alongside simple, accessible chapters on how to eat, think, and orient yourself to "life at full strength," Phillips brings over twenty years' experience to a manuscript we can't wait to sink our teeth—and biceps—into.



# **WILBER WATCH**



### **Integral On-the-Go**

While the world's most prolific integral author continues his courageous task of writing no less than six books at once—including *Kosmic Karma*, the massive sequel to his 1995 magnum opus, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*—his personal assistant, *Colin Bigelow*, has decided to appease the public's rabid appetite for new Wilber works by feeding them a bite-sized snack. *The Pocket Ken Wilber*, edited by Bigelow and due out from Shambhala's popular Pocket Classics imprint this fall, is literally a pocket-sized, 3-by-4½-inch, collection of some of Wilber's most pithy and profound expositions on the nature of spiritual consciousness, transformation, and enlightenment. Has **Thomas Cleary**'s *Pocket I Ching* finally met its match?



# **CONFERENCES**



### **Integral Theory in Action**

SAN FRANCISCO, AUGUST 7-10, 2008 www.integraltheoryconference.org

Billed as the first major academic conference devoted to the burgeoning field of integral theory and practice, and being jointly sponsored by Ken Wilber's Integral Institute and John F. Kennedy University, this landmark occasion for integral scholarship and networking will explore topics spanning art to politics to global warming (and pretty much everything else).



Integral Leadership in Action BOULDER, OCTOBER 9-12, 2008 www.integralinaction.com

In partnership with Boulder, Colorado's Center for Integral Living, the 3rd Integral Leadership in Action (ILiA) Collaborative will be a weekend devoted to strengthening the growing integral community, with speakers including WIE editors Carter Phipps and Elizabeth Debold, EnlightenNext's Jeff Carreira, philosopher Steve McIntosh, and Zen teacher Diane Hamilton.

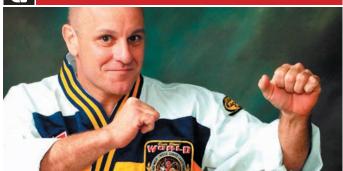


Parliament of the World's Religions MELBOURNE, DECEMBER 3-9, 2009 www.parliamentofreligions2009.org

Book your tickets early—Melbourne, Australia, has been awarded the bid to host the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions. First initiated in 1893, the Parliament has reconvened every five years since its 1993 reinstatement to promote goodwill between the world's religious traditions. *WIE* covered the 2004 Parliament in Barcelona (see Issue 27), and we'll be back in 2009 to help push the edge of interfaith—and *intra*faith—evolution.

# pulse

# **KUDOS**



Kudos to TOM CALLOS, innovative martial arts educator and founder of the Ultimate Black Belt Test (see WIE Issue 31), for a new national initiative offering free unlimited martial arts training to all veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, for all of 2008, with no strings attached. "It occurred to me that we could do something powerful, useful, relevant, and therapeutic," he wrote to his sizable network of dojos and teachers across the country. "We could give soldiers a place to vent physical stress, to center themselves, to blend back into civilian life with the aid of our physical, mental, and emotional training. . . . Will you join me?" So far, the response has been enthusiastic, and here's hoping it really catches fire this spring.





Kudos to **RICHARD DAWKINS** for standing up and crying foul last September when the makers of Expelled, a new film about Intelligent Design starring **Ben Stein**, apparently interviewed him under false pretenses in order to fool him into appearing in the movie. "At no time was I given the slightest clue that these people were a creationist front," Dawkins said. Perhaps the filmmakers felt they'd never get an outspoken neo-Darwinist like Dawkins to willingly lend his voice to their anti-evolution propaganda piece. But we'd like to point out that Dawkins should be able to sympathize with their tactics. Which is why . . . ahem . . . we also offer our kudos to RUPERT SHELDRAKE for standing up and crying foul in January when Dawkins did the exact same thing to him in order to get Sheldrake to appear in Enemies of Reason, a recent program about alternative health and spirituality that Dawkins put together for the UK's Channel 4. "I had been led to believe," Sheldrake writes, "that this was to be a balanced scientific discussion about the evidence [for unexplained psychic phenomenal," but it seems as if Dawkins was only interested in using Sheldrake as a foil for another one of his antireligious diatribes. Instant karma, anyone?

# **SITES & BLOGS**



### www.BigThink.com

Big Think is an interactive video forum deploying a full arsenal of Web 2.0 technology. Browse, rate, and respond to the opinions of celebrity experts, or present your own creative ideas, in this attempt to create a global conversation about the myriad spiritual and social issues of our time.

1!2(2

How will the emergence of "supercities" change the way we live? In a world where 19 cities will reach a population of at least 20 million in the 21st century, 192021 uses compelling animated maps and data to bring that question to the forefront of our collective awareness.



# www.GlobalOnenessProject.org

Featuring an impressive array of captivating, highquality videos, this site is documenting inspirational stories and insights from people around the world who are striving to apply the perspective of oneness—in all its many definitions—to their lives, work, and consciousness.



### v.SpaceCollective.org

This fascinating "creation exchange platform" or online think tank—brings together college students, futurists, artists, and assorted transhumanists to work on collaborative design and multimedia projects as part of an ambitious quest to envision the "Future of Everything."



# ON OUR BOOKSHELF

# The Inconscient

Out of a seeming void and dark-winged sleep Of dim inconscient infinity A Power arose from the insentient deep, A flame-whirl of magician Energy.

Some huge somnambulist Intelligence Devising without thought process and plan Arrayed the burning stars' magnificence, The living bodies of beasts and the brain of man.

What stark Necessity or ordered Chance Became alive to know the cosmic whole? What magic of numbers, what mechanic dance Developed consciousness, assumed a soul?

The darkness was the Omnipotent's abode, Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God.

-Sri Aurobindo, Collected Poems



ollowing last summer's provocative issue on women, we've decided to risk life and limb to explore the topic of gender and sexuality once again. The men of WIE have been cooking up our forthcoming Men's Issue in regular sessions in our on-site sauna, sweating over our research into the wide-open question of what it means to be a twenty-first-century man in a world where traditional roles and role models have been left behind. We have no doubt it's going to be a compelling—and contentious—issue.



Speaking of contentious issues, senior editor **Elizabeth Debold** has continued shaking

things up in a number of North American cities, bringing the urgent need for a new women's liberation movement to the forefront of women's consciousness. Her recent talks included a weekend intensive in Victoria, BC, where she and Spiral Dynamics wizard Marilyn Hamilton took attendees on a multimedia tour of the history and evolution of the female psyche. To see Debold's schedule for 2008, including her upcoming trip to Europe, visit wie.org/debold. Also in Europe, the



editor of WIE's German edition,
Tom Steininger, helped lead
the fifth annual World Spirit

**Forum**, which convened in the Swiss Alps, one mountain away from the World Economic Forum in Davos. The goal of the WSF was to examine the increasing challenges of our globalizing world through a spiritual lens and then to bring the insights gleaned from their inquiry to the powerful leaders in Davos next door. Finally, you don't have to leave the comfort of your home to remain up to speed with the creators of WIE: You can check out our latest interviews at WIE Unbound (wieunbound.org); stay tuned to WIE.org for information on



upcoming teleconferences; visit editor **Tom Huston**'s blog at kosmictom.com to

catch sneak previews of upcoming articles; and visit editor in chief

Andrew Cohen's blog [andrewcohen.org/blog] to dive into the heart of his own spiritual inquiry, which has been the force fueling WIE from the start.

For more about the activities of EnlightenNext and WIE, see page 4.



# **NUTRITION CORNER**



# **Jesus Was a Juicer**

There's a new diet in town that even your Sunday school teacher will love. The Hallelujah Diet consists of vegan and mostly raw foods and is based on twenty-five years of nutritional research by its founder, the **Reverend George Malkmus**. But it has something else going for it that other raw food diets don't—it was inspired by the original human diet created by God in the Garden of Eden.

According to Malkmus, "God originally created man to live forever, and on this raw vegetarian diet, man lived an average of 912 years, prior to the flood, without a single recorded instance of sickness." But just like we fell from grace after Adam and Eve took a bite of that forbidden (organic) fruit, Malkmus says, our diet has also fallen from its pure original form. In fact, he thinks the reason that God gave man permission to eat meat after the great flood (Genesis 9:2-3) was to shorten his life span as punishment for his sins.

If the wrath of God isn't enough to compel you to change your eating habits, Malkmus's impressive history of results might be. The Hallelujah Diet has helped thousands of Christians to overcome everything from obesity to osteoporosis, including Malkmus himself, who used the diet to cure his colon cancer.



# The Lake Wobegon Effect

"Welcome to Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men are goodlooking, and all the children are above average."

Garrison Keillor

Whether you know it or not, you may suffer from the Lake Wobegon effect—a term referring to the common human tendency to overestimate one's achievements and capabilities in relation to others. The expression was coined in 1987 by John J. Cannell, a West Virginia physician who discovered that every state in the country had reported standardized test scores above the national average—a statistical impossibility. As a magazine with a long tradition of doing battle against narcissism and self-importance wherever we find it, we decided to look for other examples of the Lake Wobegon effect to share with our readers.



94%

of university professors believe that they are better at their jobs than their colleagues.



1%

of online daters, in a recent survey, admitted to having "less than average" looks.

# A poll taken from Facebook

(August 2007)

"Do you have good taste in music?"

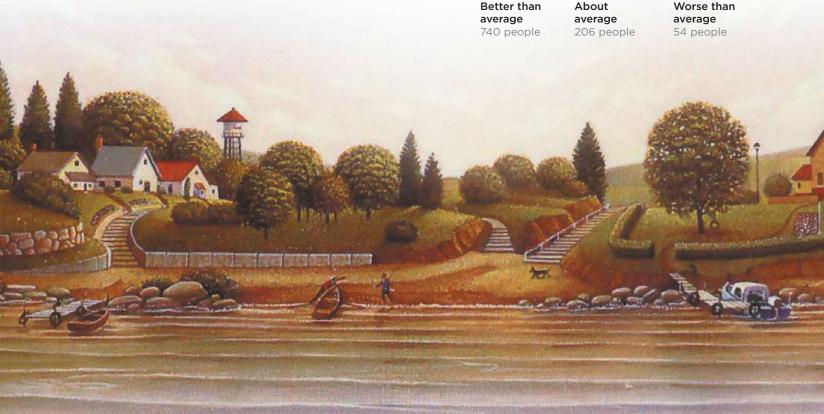
74%



21%

About average

Worse than average



# Evolution is something you do.

A life changing intensive with the founder of What Is Enlightenment?

# Andrew Cohen

# Join spiritual leader and cultural visionary Andrew Cohen

for a pioneering training in the evolution of consciousness. In a spirit of creative investigation with people from many walks of life, you will discover that the experience of enlightened consciousness beyond ego can do a lot more than bring you in touch with the perfect fullness of who you already are. It is the ground for an entirely new life and an entirely new culture based on the *authentic self*—the creative impulse behind the whole evolving universe surging forward inside you and transforming the bedrock of your relationships with others.

# **Evolutionary Enlightenment Intensives**

give you the actual experience of evolving consciousness, the tools to translate this experience into significant change, and most importantly, a revolutionary perspective on our untapped potential to develop and uplift consciousness and culture on a scale that can help to shape the future of our world.

# What people are saying:

If you are interested in going from 0 to 90 in thirty seconds, so that you can be a vehicle for the force of evolution to work through, this intensive will start your engine and keep it running.

Alison E.

There is nothing theoretical about this. Andrew brings participants with him on a fearless exploration of the leading edge of conscious evolution.

George M.

Going on an intensive has been an ongoing, expanding, inspiring, confronting, revolutionizing encounter with the nature of the human condition and a powerful connection to the awesome potential of human life.

Bill M.

I have never met anyone who even comes near Andrew s abilities as a teacher, nor have I ever encountered a subject or purpose of greater significance for the time we are living in.

Peter R.

"An extraordinary latent potential for unbridled creative engagement and egoless compassion lies deep within us, waiting to be released into this world. But most of us don't see this. or if we do, we don't realize that it is not going to happen by itself. At this juncture in human history, the evolution of our species requires one thing and one thing only our conscious, wholehearted participation. We bear a profound responsibility to be evolutionary pioneers."

Andrew Cohen

Tuscany, Italy Aug. 1 10

**Creating the Culture of the Future:** 

The Six Principles of Evolutionary Enlightenment

Lenox, MA, USA Oct. 2 5 Women's Intensive

Information and registration:

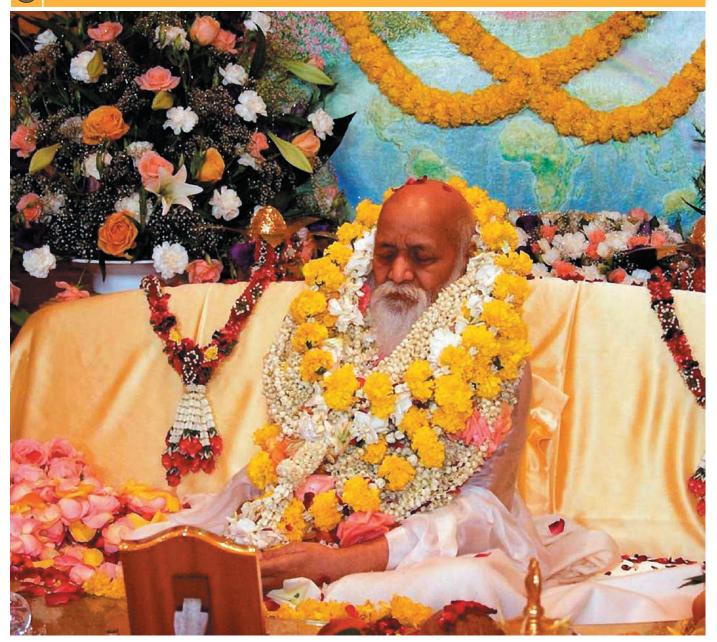
Call: 413.637.6000 or 800.376.3210 (US) 020 7288 7000 (UK)

www.andrewcohen.org/intensives



# pulse

# **SOULS IN TRANSITION**



MAHARISHI MEDITATING AT HIS 85<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, JANUARY 12, 2002

# Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

January 12, 1917 - February 5, 2008

"Invincibility is irreversibly established in the world.

My work is done. My designated duty to Guru Dev is fulfilled."

The Maharishi, upon retiring from teaching in January 2008

# skytostreet



# **Let's Cradle**

The Dutch are Revving up their Economy and Shifing into Eco High-Gear

by Carol Ann Raphael

ne could say that the Dutch have always been environmentally sober. No romantic ideal of nature for them. With much of their landmass reclaimed from the sea and subject to periodic, unpredictable flooding, they've known for centuries the vigilance it takes to protect themselves from natural disaster. In recent times, they have been at the vanguard of environmental planning and boast one of today's smallest ecological footprints of the Western European nations. Their habitual attentiveness to the natural world may explain why they have responded so enthusiastically to one of the most promising developments in the environmental movement today—the revolutionary ecological design philosophy known as Cradle to Cradle.

Cradle to Cradle (C2C) is based on a simple premise—waste equals food. Which is to say, instead of producing waste that pollutes and chokes landfills, our discards can be the source, or food, for future generations of products, raw materials, and living organisms. It is an approach to design "with the life cycle in mind," according to American architect William McDonough who, in collaboration with German chemist Michael Braungart, developed the Cradle to Cradle concept. Rather than make things that are "less bad" or revert to a lifestyle in which we consume less, they advocate that we create products, buildings, and even entire cities that actively contribute to the life

process and provide the resources for future generations of goods and living systems. Their "cradle to cradle" thinking, as opposed to our current "cradle to grave" way of making things, places as much value on sustainability, safety, and economics as it does on function. If we design intelligently, they contend, both the economy and the ecology will flourish—which perhaps contributes to C2C's appeal for the enterprising Dutch.

C2C design principles have been applied to projects small and large around the world, from a baby diaper bag that decomposes when Junior grows up to the rehabilitation of one of the most toxic rivers in America and the highly polluting Ford manufacturing facility adjacent to it. C2C has proven itself, both environmentally and financially. But what effect it can have on the scale of an entire country

Cradle to Cradle continues to take hold in the Netherlands at the pace that it has in the past year and a half, then the world may soon find out how a national economy can thrive while maintaining a sustainable relationship with nature.

has only been conjecture

until now. If the interest in

Events began simply enough in this small progressive country that once ruled a vast colonial empire. On October 2, 2006, Dutch public television aired a documentary entitled Waste = Food. The fifty-minute film introduces Cradle to Cradle ideas and presents a number

of its international successes, none of them Dutch but all of them impressive. It struck a chord with many of the nation's sixteen million residents.

Within months of the film's airing, a number of initiatives had been launched. Roger Cox, a lawyer and a father of two young children from the city of Maastricht, was responsible for one of the first and for stimulating a wider conversation among the Dutch about the world's ecological crisis. Cox hadn't been "in the sustainability business," he says. "At least, I wasn't until that point." But the documentary "moved me and I started to discuss it with my law firm." He asked, "What

# Cradle to Cradle is based on a simple premise waste equals food.

can we, as a law firm, do to make a difference in our own regional society?" The answer was to offer, for an entire month, a free showing of Al Gore's Academy Award-winning film about global warming, An Inconvenient Truth, to the residents of their hometown. Soon the media were writing and talking about climate change. Cox figured, "If it's that easy to get people to talk about climate change, then why not start a foundation so we can do this in other cities?"

# skytostreet





These artist's impressions represent some of the innovative C2C design concepts that will be unveiled at the next World Horticulture Fair, Floriade 2012, to be held in the Netherlands.



# Cradle to Cradle design has been applied to projects around the world, but what effect could it have on an entire country?

By January 2007, Cox had established the Planet Prosperity Foundation, whose first undertaking was to make *An Inconvenient Truth* available for free in twenty other Dutch towns. Even more media attention and discussion ensued. From then on things moved quickly—and the noun "cradle" transformed into a verb.

"Let's Cradle" is the name of a series of conferences taking place across the Netherlands, the first of which was held in Maastricht in November 2007. Jacqueline Cramer, National Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment, gave the keynote address to an audience of 650 participants from business, government, and academia and announced the Dutch government's commitment to implementing Cradle to Cradle practices throughout the country. Future conferences are in the works, with the next one geared primarily to students, who have responded by the hundreds to the promise of sustainability and positive change that C2C offers.

And there's been more than just talk. Almere, a suburb of Amsterdam,

will build sixty thousand new C2C housing units; McDonough's architectural firm is creating a master plan for an ambitious multi-use business complex known as Park 20/20; a group of enterprising young art students has produced a line of one hundred percent biodegradable furniture; and most significantly, a regionwide initiative in the province of Limburg has brought together local, provincial, and national interests to create partnerships that will spearhead a "new industrial revolution" in the area. The goal is to showcase the results of the collaborative effort at the upcoming World Horticulture Fair, Floriade 2012, where thousands of international tourists will be able to see firsthand the fruits of Cradle to Cradle planning and construction.

"To transform a society to a sustainable society will take decades," says Cox. But given the industriousness of the Dutch, their well-honed talent for trade and commerce, and the swiftness with which the C2C movement is gathering support in the country, Cox may see his dream of Holland "becom-

ing a leading country once again" come true sooner rather than later. He explains, "We are a small country, densely populated, and with a good knowledge-based infrastructure. People know each other here. It's easy to get things done." Clearly, he's right to say that there is "something happening in Holland right now that is not happening anywhere else." Though it's easy to appreciate the urgency that living for hundreds of years on land mostly under sea level creates, the momentum sweeping through the Netherlands for adopting the stringent C2C strategies is nonetheless very inspiring. It may be just the kind of sensible example that the world needs to overcome resistance to tackling our massive environmental problems. Like a child's finger in a dike, a small-yetdetermined effort by a few people can make a big difference.



Listen to an interview about Cradle to Cradle design with Michael Braungart at wie.org/braungart

# voices from the edge



# Mrs. Satan

Hillary-bashing may seem harsh this campaign season, but America's first female candidate for President had it much worse.

By Gary Lachman

MOST POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS HAVE a fair amount of mudslinging, but of recent years, the bid for the 2008 U.S. presidential seat has seen some of the fiercest on record. Not surprisingly, much of this has been aimed at Hillary Clinton. On the low end, her opponents on the right have tagged her as ultra-liberal and ultra-left wing—a calculating and deceitful politician who knows what the voting public wants to hear and also exactly how to say it. Mid-range we find Robert Novak of CNN's Crossfire likening Hillary to Madame Defarge, an evil figure from Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities—an ominous allusion for the right, given the novel is about the French Revolution.

And supporters of Barack Obama, her challenger for the Democratic nomination, have even presented her as an Orwellian "Big Sister," in a 1984-style YouTube clip. But the most extreme, perhaps, is the rather bizarre suspicion that Hillary, like her ex-President husband, is really the envoy of the occult secret society the Illuminati, a powerful, hidden

cabal that for centuries has been trying to take over the world or, depending on your sources, has already been in the driver's seat for some time.

More than a century ago, another woman had the honor of being the first of her gender to run for President, and to receive a bashing for it. As irony would have it, she, too, had some claim to occult fame. Her name was Victoria Claflin Woodhull, and as one of the nineteenth century's most fascinating women's rights advocates, it's surprising she is not better known. Among her many distinctions, she was the second woman ever to address Congress (on women's right to vote), the first to address the House Judiciary Committee, and in 1872, as mentioned, the first woman to run for U.S. President. Her opponents were the incumbent, Ulysses S. Grant, and the newspaper giant Horace Greeley. Her running mate was the first black vice-presidential candidate, the ex-slave Frederick Douglass.

Victoria Woodhull was born in Homer, Ohio, in 1838. According to her biographer, her father was a con man and thief; her mother, an illegitimate, illiterate religious fanatic. Her early years were full of poverty, filth, and squalor. Victoria displayed mediumistic and paranormal powers early on, and

her father put her to work in his traveling sideshow, where she appeared as a clairvoyant and fortune teller. She made successful predictions, could find missing objects, received messages from "beyond," and possessed "magnetic" healing powers. She also claimed that she was sometimes allowed to visit an idyllic spiritual world, a kind of celestial utopia reminiscent of Emanuel Swedenborg's accounts of heaven, which must have contrasted sharply with her earthly lot. Her "spirit guides" also informed her that she was destined to become a "ruler of the nation," an early indication of her brave, but ultimately unsuccessful, political ambitions.

A woman telling the truth was a greater threat than a preacher telling a lie.

As some feminists have argued, spiritualism itself was a means for women to have a voice in a male-dominated nineteenth-century America, their "messages from beyond" taken more seriously than their more mundane pronouncements. True or not, being a medium was something Victoria made good use of. She and her sister, "Tennie C" (Tennessee) Claffin,

jointly "cured" the prominent millionaire Cornelius Vanderbilt, who had just lost his wife, and this led to his setting them up with their own highly successful brokerage firm (the first on Wall Street run by women) and magazine, Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly. (It may have helped that Tennie became the seventy-six-year-old Vanderbilt's lover.) In the magazine, according to one account, Victoria "preached her doctrines of free love, attacked the rich (though not, of course, Vanderbilt), and espoused Marxism." In fact, along with its advocacy of short skirts, spiritualism, women's suffrage, free love, vegetarianism, homeopathy, licensed prostitution, and birth control, the newspaper printed the first English translation of The Communist Manifesto.

The success of the brokerage firm and the newspaper made Victoria famous. In April 1870, she announced her plans to run for President, as candidate for the Equal Rights Party, whose membership included an unusual coalition of feminists, workers, spiritualists, Communists, and "free lovers." Yet not all advocates of women's rights were taken with Victoria. Susan B. Anthony, in particular, had her reservations. And while many were willing to talk about free love in salons, fewer were willing to put theory into practice—a double standard that another free

love advocate, Mary Wollstonecraft, had encountered almost a century earlier. What was worse, "Mrs. Satan," as Victoria's detractors began to call her (it hasn't quite gotten to that level for Hillary yet), not only advocated free love, she also preached an unholy belief in spirits.

Ironically, it was free love itself that linked Victoria with a scandal that, as the cliché goes, rocked the nation, generating as much publicity at the time as the Monica Lewinsky affair did in the 1990s. It involved the hugely successful preacher and "deafening foghorn of virtue," Henry Ward Beecher (brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin), and was known as the Beecher-Tilton Affair.

Beecher had been caught in an adulterous affair with the wife of Theodore Tilton, one of his closest disciples. Like Tilton himself, his young wife, Elizabeth (Libby), adored and admired Beecher. The charismatic preacher apparently was able to elicit absolute confidence and love from his followers, but in Libby's case, this took a more-than-platonic form. At first transported by their liaison, Libby soon had misgivings, and eventually, she confessed to her husband. Although naturally furious, Tilton agreed to Libby's demand not to denounce Beecher. But he couldn't contain himself and eventually mentioned the affair to the feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton then told Victoria, who became as furious as Tilton. Beecher had repeatedly denounced free love from the pulpit and had attacked Victoria personally. Victoria broke the story in her magazine, announcing that America's most famous preacher privately engaged in the free love he publicly castigated. Beecher was eventually exonerated, though for her sins, Elizabeth Tilton was excommunicated from the church. And Victoria, who did nothing but print the story, was arrested for sending "obscene material" through the mail. She spent Election Day 1872 in jail, a fate many a Hillary-basher would no doubt enjoy seeing repeated.

Most people were happy that Mrs. Satan was getting her comeuppance for slandering one of the nation's celebrities; apparently a woman telling the truth was a greater threat than a preacher telling a lie. But after a time, many did also realize that defending free speech was more important than denouncing free love, and they came to Victoria's defense. She was eventually acquitted, but the battle ruined her. She lost the brokerage firm and the magazine and received death threats. There was no legal ground for Victoria's arrest, and in hindsight it seems clear that the government did what it could to teach Mrs. Satan a lesson, one that future female presidential candidates did well to note. Given the rising rhetoric as Election Day looms closer, it's a wonder the spirit of Victoria isn't raised more often.

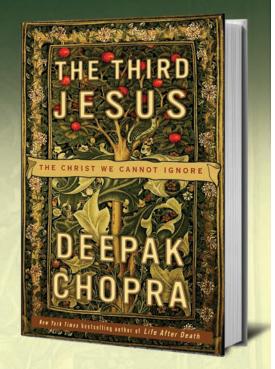
GARY LACHMAN is the author of several books on consciousness and culture, most recently Rudolf Steiner: An Introduction to his Life and Work (2007). A founding member of the rock group Blondie, he was inducted in 2006 into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

# Instant New York Times bestseller from DEEPAK CHOPRAthe Jesus who speaks to each of us.

Deepak Chopra reaches beyond the historical Jesus and the Son of God-to touch upon a "third Jesus," the spiritual guide whose teaching embraces all humanity.

"Thoughtfully presents a Jesus who is paradoxically both closer to the original and more available to postmodern people than the stained-glass version." -Harvey Cox, author of When Jesus Came to Harvard

"Deepak Chopra is a stunning man . . . As a Christian, I welcome his insights into my Jesus and his provocative call to me to enter the 'Christ consciousness' and thus to become more deeply and completely human." - John Shelby Spong, retired bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark



# What have you changed your mind about?

Every year, New York literary agent and science writer John Brockman poses one question to hundreds of the world's leading scientists, writers, and futurists and publishes their answers on his website, www.edge.org. In 2008, he asked, "What have you changed your mind about and why?" Of the 165 responses to his question, two in particular, by Stewart Brand and Rupert Sheldrake, stood out in our minds so much that we wanted to share them with our readers.



# Good Old Stuff Sucks by Stewart Brand

**IN THE '90s I WAS PRAISING** the remarkable grassroots success of the building preservation movement. Keep the fabric and continuity of the old buildings and neighborhoods alive! Revive those sash windows.

As a landlocked youth in Illinois I mooned over the yacht sales pictures in the back of sailboat books. I knew what I wanted—a gaff-rigged ketch! Wood, of course.

The Christmas mail order catalog people know what my age group wants (I'm 69). We want to give a child wooden blocks, Monopoly or Clue, a Lionel train. We want to give ourselves a bomber jacket, a fancy leather belt, a fine cotton shirt. We study the Restoration Hardware catalog. My own Whole Earth Catalog, back when, pushed no end of retro stuff in a back-to-basics agenda.

Well, I bought a sequence of wooden sailboats. Their gaff rigs couldn't sail to windward. Their leaky wood hulls and decks were a maintenance nightmare. I learned that the fiberglass hulls we'd all sneered at were superior in every way to wood.

Remodeling an old farmhouse two years ago and replacing its sash windows, I discovered the current state of window technology. A standard Andersen window, factory-made exactly to the dimensions you want, has superb insulation qualities; superb hinges, crank, and lock; a flick-in, flick-out screen; and it looks great. The same goes for the new kinds of doors, kitchen cabinetry, and even furniture feet that are available—all drastically improved.

The message finally got through. Good old stuff sucks. Sticking with the fine old whatevers is like wearing 100% cotton in the mountains; it's just stupid.

Give me 100% not-cotton clothing, genetically modified food (from a farmers' market, preferably), this-year's laptop, cutting-edge dentistry, and drugs.

The Precautionary Principle tells me I should worry about everything new because it might have hidden dangers. The handwringers should worry more about the old stuff. It's mostly crap.

(New stuff is mostly crap too, of course. But the best new stuff is invariably better than the best old stuff.)

**STEWART BRAND**, Sixties counterculture pioneer and founder of the Whole Earth Catalog, is also cofounder of the website The Well, the Global Business Network, and the Long Now Foundation. He has authored several books, including *How Buildings Learn* (1994) and *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility* (1999).



# The Skepticism of Believers by Rupert Sheldrake

I USED TO THINK OF SKEPTICISM as a primary intellectual virtue, whose goal was truth. I have changed my mind. I now see it as a weapon.

Creationists opened my eyes. They use the techniques of critical thinking to expose weaknesses in the evidence for natural selection, gaps in the fossil record, and problems with evolutionary theory. Is this because they are seeking truth? No. They believe they already know the truth. Skepticism is a weapon to defend their beliefs by attacking their opponents.

Skepticism is also an important weapon in the defense of commercial self-interest. According to David Michaels, who was assistant secretary for environment, safety, and health in the U.S. Department of Energy in the 1990s, the strategy used by the tobacco industry to create doubt about inconvenient evidence has now been adopted by corporations making toxic products such as lead, mercury, vinyl chloride, and benzene.

When confronted with evidence that their activities are causing harm, the standard response is to hire researchers to muddy the waters, branding findings that go against the industry's interests as "junk science." As Michaels noted, "Their conclusions are almost always the same: the evidence is ambiguous, so regulatory action is unwarranted." Climate change skeptics use similar techniques.

In a penetrating essay called "The Skepticism of Believers," Sir Leslie Stephen, a pioneering agnostic (and the father of Virginia Woolf), argued that skepticism is inevitably partial. "In regard to the great bulk of ordinary beliefs, the so-called skeptics are just as much believers as their opponents." Then as now, those who proclaim themselves skeptics had strong beliefs of their own. As Stephen put it in 1893, "The thinkers generally charged with skepticism are equally charged with an excessive belief in the constancy and certainty of the so-called 'laws of nature.' They assign a natural cause to certain phenomena as confidently as their opponents assign a supernatural cause."

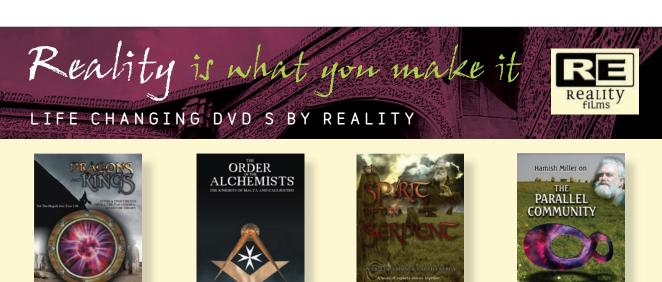
Skepticism has even deeper roots in religion than in science. The Old Testament prophets were withering in their scorn for the rival religions of the Holy Land. Psalm 115 mocks those who make idols of silver and gold: "They have mouths, and speak not: eyes have they, and see not." At the Reformation, the Protestants deployed the full force of biblical scholarship and critical thinking against the veneration of relics, cults of saints, and other "superstitions" of the Catholic Church. Atheists take religious skepticism to its ultimate limits; but they are defending another faith, a faith in science.

In practice, the goal of skepticism is not the discovery of truth, but the exposure of other people's errors. It plays a useful role in science, religion, scholarship, and common sense. But we need to remember that it is a weapon serving belief or self-interest; we need to be skeptical of skeptics. The more militant the skeptic, the stronger the belief.

RUPERT SHELDRAKE, a London biologist, is the author of more than seventyfive technical papers and nine books, including The Sense of Being Stared At: And Other Aspects of the Extended Mind (2003) and The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature (1988).



Explore the work of Rupert Sheldrake at wie.org/Sheldrake



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A brief guide to the new tatheism.

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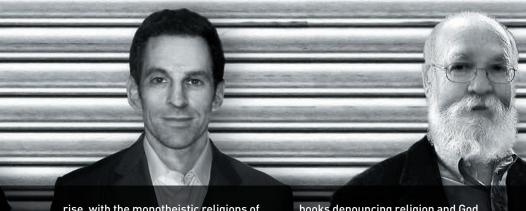
# ATTIUD

by Carter Phipps & Joel Pitney

# INTRODUCTION

"TO YOU, I'M AN ATHEIST," Woody Allen once said. "To God, I'm the loyal opposition." By most standards, it would seem that the loyal opposition has had a pretty good century, at least in the West. Indeed, doubt, disbelief, and outright atheism have in the last hundred years made inroads into our lives and our society that were simply never considered possible before the seventeenth century. Today we live in a secular atmosphere that would be shocking to a visitor from a previous age. In the last decades, some astute observers of Western culture even prophesied that atheism and secularism were the future of the species, and that eventually all notions of God would retire from public life, following the path of previously significant deities such as Thor, Zeus, and Apollo into decline and irrelevance.

Well, so much for the hubris of futurists. Despite the growing secularism of our contemporary world and the continuing decline of traditional religious forms, God, in all of his or her various forms, is far from vanquished. If anything, recent years have seen a growing interest in nontraditional spirituality and even a resurgence of interest in more traditional forms of religion itself. And that's just in the West. In other parts of the world, God is on the



rise, with the monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity growing quite rapidly in much of the developing world.

For some dyed-in-the-wool secularists, it must all seem a little too much, a nightmare revisited, a brief emergence from the fog of superstition into the light of truth, science, and reason, followed by a cultural backslide into a demon-haunted world. Indeed, in the midst of this resurgence of faith, what are the faithless supposed to do?

Apparently, write books. And, in fact, they have. Bestsellers. Lots of them. As it turns out, in our post-9/11 age of iPhones and IHOPs, godlessness has some real marketing appeal. Tapping the antireligious vein, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, have all authored highly praised and popular

books denouncing religion and God as dangerous notions every reasonable person should reject. These "new atheists," as they have been dubbed, are not necessarily new in their ideas (one possible exception being Dennett's proposal that science should study religion) but in their vehemence. And they have sparked a public debate over the relationship between religion, God, modernity, reason, and science.

"Faith is believing what you know ain't so," wrote Mark Twain, one of history's more astute, and humorous, religious skeptics. But is all faith really the same? The new atheists are unequivocal and unrelenting, and they tend to see all expressions of spirituality and godliness as water from the same poisoned well. But there is a great deal more to the complex phenomenon of

religion and spirituality than mere belief, or faith in a mythical God, and it remains to be seen if the cultural debate will be able to embrace the more subtle and ultimately more profound aspects of this perennial issue.

As for the editors of WIE, we remain curious observers of the new atheism, encouraged by its articulate defense of modernity, science, and reason, but disturbed by its tendency to demonize all things spiritual and to associate rationality exclusively with a materialistic view of the universe. Surely there is a place for a deeply rational spirituality to thrive in the cultural environs of future civilizations. In the meantime, we offer here a brief six-point guide to these new "atheists with attitude" and the current cultural tempest they are stirring up.

# **PART**

# TIMELINE:

# THE EVOLUTION OF ATHEISM

In the delicate balance of natural ecosystems, a predator cannot exist without its prey. Similarly, in the world of human theology, an atheist cannot exist without a God to deny. And just as predators have co-evolved with the creatures they've hunted for thousands of years—an adaptation in one leading to a further adaptation in the other—atheism, and the God (or gods) it denies, has also been evolving. From the first Christians who were labeled atheists for rejecting the pagan gods of Rome to the Enlightenment philosophers who denied the God of the Church, each new stage of atheism has been a criticism of the ruling ideology that made way for humanity's next understanding of the ultimate nature of reality.

The first recorded incidence of atheism came during the Axial Age, when many of the world's great traditions were born. From Buddha to Jesus and the early Christians, these spiritual pioneers were labeled atheists and often persecuted for their rejection of the pagan gods worshipped by the religious orthodoxy of their day.



# **AXIAL AGE & EARLY CHRISTIANITY**

9TH CENTURY BCE - 3RD CENTURY CE



### **Buddha** (c. 563-483 BCE)

Was Buddha an atheist? In one sense, he certainly was. His outrageous example as an individual who found liberation through his own contemplation of emptiness rather than by worshipping the reigning Hindu devas made him quite unpopular among the Brahmanic priests of ancient India.

# The War Of Words

# The New Atheists



# **Richard Dawkins**

Evolutionary Biologist, Popular Science Writer

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, blood-

thirsty ethnic-cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

The God Delusion



# **Christopher Hitchens**

Author, Journalist, Literary Critic

"We are not immune to the lure of wonder and mystery and awe: we have music and art and literature, and find that the serious ethical dilemmas are better handled by

Shakespeare and Tolstoy and Schiller and Dostoyevsky and George Eliot than in the mythical morality tales of the holy books. Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and—since there is no other metaphor—also the soul. . . . We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true—that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic cleanser raise an eyebrow.

God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything



# Sam Harris

Author of The End of Faith

"We must begin speaking freely about what is really in these holy books of ours, beyond the timid heterodoxies of modernity—the gay and lesbian ministers, the Muslim clerics

who have lost their taste for public executions, or the Sunday churchgoers who have never read their Bibles quite through. A close study of these books, and of history, demonstrates that there is no act of cruelty so appalling that it cannot be justified, or even mandated, by recourse to their pages. It is only by the most acrobatic avoidance of passages whose canonicity has never been in doubt that we can escape murdering one another outright for the glory of God."

The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason



### **Daniel Dennett**

Professor of Philosophy

"The spell that I say must be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many. But [there is a] fear that if

that spell is broken—if religion is put under the bright lights and the microscope—there is a serious risk of breaking a different and much more important spell: the life-enriching enchantment of religion itself. . . . You can only lose your virginity once, and some are afraid that imposing too much knowledge on some topics could rob people of their innocence, crippling their hearts in the guise of expanding their minds. . . . Like the revivalist preacher, I say unto you, O religious folks who fear to break the taboo: Let go! Let go!

Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon

# TIMELINE: THE EVOLUTION OF ATHEISM continued

As Christianity flowered throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, denying the existence of God was an unthinkable position. The atheists of this period were those "heretical" scientists, philosophers, and rogue theologians whose "alternative" beliefs about God were considered threatening to the dogma of the Church.



### THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE REFORMATION

2ND CENTURY - 17TH CENTURY



# **Socrates** (c. 470-399 BCE)

Socrates chose to follow his own revelation of spirit—an inner "daemonic" voice—rather than the Greek gods of the state and for this heresy won the title "atheos" among the statesmen of ancient Greece.



### **Baruch Spinoza** (1632-1677)

Seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza was considered an atheist by both the Christian and Jewish establishments for suggesting that God was not an anthropomorphic being interfering in the affairs of humanity and responding to personal prayers from a distance but an infinite substance encompassing all aspects of reality, including spirit, nature, matter, and mind.

# ... And Their Critics



# **Terry Eagelton**

Literary Critic, Author of The Meaning of Life

"Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the *Book of British Birds*, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on

theology. Card-carrying rationalists like Dawkins . . . are in one sense the least well-equipped to understand what they castigate, since they don't believe there is anything there to be understood, or at least anything worth understanding. This is why they invariably come up with vulgar caricatures of religious faith that would make a first-year theology student wince."

"Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching," a review of The God Delusion in the London Review of Books



# **Alister McGrath**

Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford

"Atheism is a superb example of a modern metanarrative—a totalising view of things, locked into the world view of the Enlightenment. So what happens... when a new interest in spirituality

surges through Western culture? When the cultural pressures that once made atheism seem attractive are displaced by others that make it seem intolerant, unimaginative and disconnected from spiritual realities? . . . The Enlightenment is over, the world has changed, and atheism must change as well. . . . Atheism has, quite simply, lost much of its moral and intellectual cutting edge in recent decades. And unless it sorts itself out, it is not going to regain it."

The Times Online



# **Gregg Easterbrook**

Journalist, Author of The Progress Paradox

"Millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims do not believe God is an angry Absolute, do not believe tsunamis and wars are 'God's will,' do not wish ill to other faiths, do not have any

problem with natural selection theory—but still look up in wonder at the night sky and dream there may be so much more to existence than just scurrying about the streets of our little world. *God Delusion* ignores believers who think this way, because they cannot be used as straw men."

"Does God Believe in Richard Dawkins?" Beliefnet.com



## **Michael Ruse**

Philosopher of Science, Author of *Darwinism* and its *Discontents* 

"The Dawkins-Dennett school allows no compromise. Religion is false. Religion is dangerous. Religion must be fought in every way. There can be no working with the enemy. Those like

me who work with religious people are like the appeasers before the Nazis. . . . The creationists and the ID [Intelligent Design] supporters simply love Dawkins and his ilk. . . . Every time the atheists open their mouths they win converts to the literalist cause. The creationists have been saying all along that Darwinism equals atheism, and now the Darwinians apparently agree! Americans in the middle—meaning, generally, religious Americans in the middle—get the message that science, and Darwinism particularly, threatens their faith."

"Fighting the Fundamentalists," Skeptical Inquirer Magazine

In the late eighteenth century, as the Enlightenment principles of rationality and freedom of thought were birthed in the salons of Paris, atheism was no longer a derogatory term assigned to the impious but an active statement reflecting a whole new worldview in which humanity, not the Christian God, could determine its own fate through the individual capacity for reason and creativity.

# THE ENLIGHTENMENT

18TH - 19TH CENTURY



### Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789)

Baron d'Holbach, whose salon in eighteenthcentury Paris was host to many of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment, made the first public denial of the existence of God in *The System of Nature*, considered to be the "bible of atheism." Existentialist philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Albert Camus (1913-1960), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), took atheism to a whole new level. Building on the insights of the Enlightenment, they bravely wrestled with the philosophical implications of a world in which, as Nietzsche put it, "God is dead."



# **EXISTENTIALISM & COMMUNISM**

19TH - 20TH CENTURY



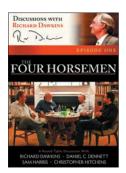
### Communism

With the rise of communism in the twentieth century, atheism became the official state "religion" in many countries. In 1954, reacting to the Godlessness of the "Red Tide," the United States, which 175 years earlier had become the first nation to officially separate church and state, added the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance.





# Four White Men Who Aren't Living in the Clouds



The new documentary *The Four Horsemen* features Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris sitting around a table talking. It doesn't sound like much, but this support group for the religiously challenged is an intellectual feast.

Along with all of the praise and success that the new atheism has

reaped in the last year has come much scorn as well. And last fall, perhaps seeking a little solace in the company of their ideological brethren, this quartet of thinkers sat down together to record a conversation on the trials and tribulations of today's unbeliever. The format was simple: a couple of cameras, a few hours of film, a table, a martini for Dawkins, a pack of cigarettes for Hitchens, and presto!—instant documentary. In fact, *The Four Horsemen* is a fascinating journey through the mind of the modern atheist. It is truly a must-see feature for anyone interested in the relationship between religion and modern society. All four of these distinguished scholars are articulate and passionate in their denunciations of religion and mythic belief systems. But even as they discuss these weighty and significant matters, they all also share a strange, breezy, isn't-it-obvious tone that betrays a certain lack of real

familiarity with that which they are denouncing. It's sort of like watching British sports commentators talk about American football: They don't like it, they don't understand it, they don't understand why anyone would like it, and they don't have any real interest in learning more about it. It is simply a bizarre custom practiced by foreigners.

Harris is arguably the most interesting of the four horsemen, as he pursues the most compelling avenues of discussion— asking, for example, if any of the many criticisms leveled at their work have caused moments of doubt or hesitation. He also brings up the important matter of the contemplative and mystical practices of the great religious traditions, wondering what role these experiences might have in a post-religious context. Harris even manages to draw out some important points of disagreement among them, provoking some of the best parts of the dialogue.

But the primary contribution of *The Four Horsemen* is its capacity to stimulate the mind, to provoke one to reconsider the impact of the religious traditions and rethink one's own beliefs and attitudes toward these powerful cultural behemoths that continue to have such influence on human life. Will you agree with the new atheists? Maybe not—we didn't—but we appreciated their efforts to make us all think more clearly about what we actually believe about life, and about what God, gods, or nondeities we have faith in, and why.

# TIMELINE: THE EVOLUTION OF ATHEISM continued

Led by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, the new atheists are on a mission to protect modernity and scientific rationality against the rising influence of religious extremism. But how new is their atheism? The God they're attacking seems to bear a striking resemblance to the one laid to rest over two hundred years ago in the Enlightenment salons of Paris.

### THE NEW ATHEISTS

21ST CENTURY







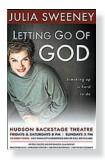


# Into the future . . .

According to most contemporary definitions, atheism is the outright denial of God and the spiritual dimension altogether. But what it means to be an atheist has not always been so godless. In fact, atheists throughout history have often rejected not God in general, but the particular interpretation of God or spirit that was predominant in their time and culture. The ancient pagan gods gave way to the traditional monotheistic God, which gave way to modernity's God of reason and rationality. As a new antireligious wave sweeps through contemporary culture, and as scientific materialism becomes for many a metaphysical belief system, it raises a question: What will be the "atheism" of the future?

PART





# **Letting Go of God**

Comedian Julia Sweeney and Her Heavenly Breakup

theism isn't just limited to philosophers and scientists. Comedian Julia Sweeney, formerly of Saturday Night Live (remember Pat, the androgynous office worker?), is touring the country with her hilarious stand-up routine, "Letting Go of God," spreading the anti-gospel to all who will listen. Available in both CD and book form, Sweeney tells the

listen. Available in both CD and book form, Sweeney tells the story of her lifelong search for God, tracking her evolution from devout Catholic schoolgirl with a crush on Jesus, through Deepak Chopra and quantum consciousness, to a final reckoning with the God that she's spent her entire life struggling with.

In the end, she's left with no choice but to call it quits with her Father in the sky. "It's not you God, it's me," she says. "It's because I take you so seriously that I can't believe in you." As thoughtful as she is funny, Sweeney conveys a genuine spiritual curiosity in her story and, unlike many of the new atheists, puts God on trial in a context of "innocent before proven guilty." In the end, Sweeney lets go of the Christian God of her childhood (who reminds her of "an old hippie who still smokes"), but unfortunately gives little credence to her own spiritual passion, which has compelled her along the way.







# The Metaphysics of Lasagna

A Parable by Robert Godwin

aterialists believe that, unlike theists, they start from "zero," without any dogma or metaphysics at all. The Catholic philosopher, Stanley Jaki, compares it to baseball. Secular philosophers always begin at first base but offer nothing in their philosophy that can justify how they have arrived there. But we all know that you cannot steal first base. Rather, you must earn your way there. The materialist, or empiricist, begins at first base with the gratuitous dogma that nothing exists except our perceptions filtered through our preconceptual logical categories. But from where did this premise arrive? It is not a sensory perception filtered through a logical category. Rather, it is metaphysical dogma.

I had this very conversation with an eminent historian a few years back. In order to communicate at all, we spoke across a truly cavernous metaphysical divide. I actually enjoyed it, although he seemed to quickly become exasperated. He insisted that there is no such thing as metaphysics, and that

knowledge (he would never deign to say "truth") is merely a property of sentences. Either a sentence can be justified or it cannot. I insisted that it was impossible to make even a trivial statement about the world without an implicit metaphysic, usually a bad one. He impatiently blurted, "Okay," pointing to the remnants of our dinner. "The lasagna was good. Where's the metaphysics in that?"

"So let me get this straight," I said. "Are you dividing the world into a realm of intelligible objects and immaterial subjects, and affirming that the latter can know the truth of the former?"

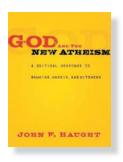
That was the first time someone ever called me "vulgar" without my having uttered a profanity. But what could he say? The heavenly lasagna *existed*. And it was *good*. Far be it from me to try to talk someone out of their religious beliefs.

**Robert Godwin** is a clinical psychologist, independent scholar, and author of *One Cosmos under God*.



# Friedrich Nietzsche,

Hard-Core Atheists, and the Fate of a Godless World



What happens when you introduce one of the world's foremost theologians to

the new atheists? That's the premise of a new book by esteemed scholar of science and religion John Haught, of Georgetown University. In *God and* the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens, Haught takes up the theological banner, turns it into a spear, and directs it right at the heart of the new atheists' critique of religion. Haught is erudite and theologically well traveled, and he spares little sympathy for his atheist adversaries, none of whom have much respect for the ins and outs of theology. Perhaps they will want to reconsider after they read this multilayered response to their work. Despite his clear frustration with the popularity of these purveyors of unbelief, Haught fights above the belt, keeping his polemic from straying outside of the philosophical and theological, while still landing some heavy blows. And he has some fun along the way. In one of the most interesting passages, he takes the new atheists to task for being "soft," distinguishing their polemics from "hard-core" atheists like Nietzsche and Camus and Sartre who. according to Haught, had the courage and intellectual honesty to face up to the real implications of "deicide," or killing God.

In the following excerpt, Haught draws on the work of these hard-core atheists as he criticizes the superficiality of their more contemporary brethren:

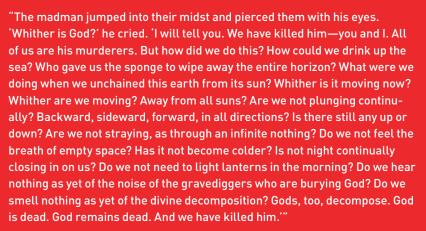
"The new atheism is very much like the old secular humanism rebuked by the hard-core atheists for its mousiness in facing up to what the absence of God should really mean. If you're going to be an atheist, the most rugged version of godlessness demands complete consistency. Go all the way and think the business of atheism through to the bitter end; before you get too comfortable with the godless world you long for, you will be required by the logic of any consistent skepticism to pass through the disorienting wilderness of nihilism. Do you have the courage to do that? You will have to adopt the tragic heroism of a Sisyphus, or realize that true freedom in



the absence of God means that you are the creator of the values you live by, an intolerable burden from which most people would seek an escape. Are you ready to allow simple logic to lead you to the real truth about the death of God? Before settling in to a truly atheistic worldview, you would have to experience a Nietzschean madman's sensation of straying through an 'infinite nothingness.' You would be required to summon up an unprecedented degree of courage if you plan to wipe away the whole horizon of transcendence. Are you willing to risk madness? If not, then you are not really an atheist."

John Haught God and the New Atheism

# THE PARABLE OF THE MADMAN



Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (1882)

The Guru & the Pandit with Andrew Cohen & Ken Wilber Dialogue XIX

# A Kosmic Roller-





hat is the purpose of the universe? Is the evolutionary process God's merry-go-round, repeating in infinite cycles, or is it a deadly serious endeavor charting evernew ground? Metaphysical sparks fly between the Guru and the Pandit as they tackle some of the biggest questions that philosophers have wrestled with for millennia.







### **ANDREW COHEN: GURU**

[n., Sanskrit]: one who teaches spiritual liberation from his or her own direct experience or realization.

Self-described "idealist with revolutionary inclinations" and widely recognized as a defining voice in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality, Cohen has developed an original teaching for the twenty-first century which he calls Evolutionary Enlightenment. He is also the founder and editor in chief of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine.



### **KEN WILBER: PANDIT**

[n., Sanskrit]: a scholar, one who is deeply proficient and immersed in spiritual wisdom.

Self-described "defender of the dharma, an intellectual samurai," Wilber is one of the most highly regarded philosophers alive today, and his work offers a comprehensive and original synthesis of the world's great psychological, philosophical, and spiritual traditions. His books include A Brief History of Everything and Integral Spirituality.

▶ become conscious of itself." And, in a sense, that's certainly true, given our perspective that evolution is in part Spirit's own Self-unfolding and Self-developing and Self-growth.

**COHEN:** It's amazing how, when we really begin to let this in, it gives us a completely different perspective on who we are, who or what God is, and what our role is in the creative process. Often when I speak about this, I like to take people on a theological and philosophical fantasy ride back to before the beginning of time, just to invoke the enormity of the creative process and go beyond all our conditioned ways of thinking about this. Shall we take the plunge?

### WILBER: Sure!

COHEN: Okay. Now this is, of course, purely theological speculation and fun. But if we dare to let ourselves think in rather audacious terms for a moment, we could say that at the very beginning, at the moment when the evolutionary process began, when the initial leap from formlessness to form took place, you and I must have been there. All matter, time, and space were a great singularity—compressed into one fine point. Think about it for a moment. Is there anywhere else that we could have been at the moment when the universe was born? That one point was the only place to be, and in fact, we were all there. We were there, but we were there as I. Before the universe was born, there was only One, and that One had not yet become the Many. So there was only You, and You were alone. So then, if we follow this inquiry to the next step, just for the fun of it, the question is: Why did the One become the Many? Why did something come from nothing? There must have been some form of an intention in that One without a second to take that leap. And since you were the only one, the only reasonable conclusion is that you made that choice to do this. To do what? To create the universe. As the creative principle, which is one way of defining God, you/ we/I chose to take form as this whole unfolding process. And from a certain point of view, what else could there have been for us to do?

**WILBER:** Well, yes, if you want to get metaphysical about it, you can see that it is all part of the whole Kosmic game. If you were absolutely perfect Spirit, resting in formless emptiness, delighting in your own eternal bliss and omniscience, what would you do next? And the answer is—

**COHEN:** —exactly what I'm doing now: becoming the entire universe!

### **WILBER:** That's exactly right.

**COHEN:** But of course, it's only possible for us to say this now that we've come this far in the process, and we're able to have

this evolutionarily enlightened cognition that leads us to be able to say that this intention—whatever an intention in the mind of God would look like, before form and life were created—must have been there from the very beginning. And we realize that the spiritual impulse that begins to awaken, that compels us to seek enlightenment, to consciously evolve, is that same original intention that must have been there from the very beginning but that somehow we have lost touch with for billions of years.

**WILBER:** Yes, because you can't go through that whole process of evolution knowing that you are God. That's just not going to work. So you would have to forget who you were; you'd have to get lost—convincingly get lost—or it's not a game and it's no fun at all! So you get lost, and then slowly you reawaken. That's the way this particular game is going. And at some point, evolution is going to become self-conscious, and then it's going to become superconscious. But it's taken fourteen billion years to get to this point.

**COHEN:** In the mind of God, fourteen billion years probably isn't that long anyway. It might seem like a long, deep sleep for us, but from God's point of view, I think he, she, it, or we are just getting started anyway. If the universe is just beginning to awaken to itself, and we have no idea how big the universe really is or how many universes there are, then in a sense, the awakening is just barely beginning. So in the mind of God, maybe fourteen billion years was just a nap!

**WILBER:** Yes, absolutely. You know, this may all seem like metaphysical speculation, but this Kosmic game is actually,

At some point, evolution is going to become self-conscious, and then it's going to become superconscious. But it's taken fourteen billion years to get to this point.

Ken Wilber

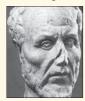
fundamentally, the single major philosophical topic right up through Hegel. It really only came to a crashing end with flatland scientific materialism. What Hegel and the German idealists, for example, were trying to ask was, starting from absolute Being, how do you get to wars and revolutions? Why on earth would that happen?

**COHEN:** Right.

### WHY DID SOMETHING COME FROM NOTHING?

History's great philosophers contemplate life's most fundamental question.

It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it.... Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new: this product has



turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator. . . ."

Plotinus (c. 205-270) Fifth Ennead, Second Tractate

\* \* \*

"The power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition....

"This sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit as Time outside of it, and equally its Being as Space. This last becoming of Spirit, *Nature*, is its living immediate Becoming. . . . But the other side of its



Becoming, *History*, is a *conscious*, self-*mediating* process...."

Georg Hegel (1770-1831) Phenomenology of Spirit

\* \* \*

as creation a final goal? And if so, why was it not reached at once? Why was the consummation not realized from the beginning? To these questions there is but one answer: Because God is *Life*, and not merely Being. All life has a *destiny*, and is subject to suffering and to becoming. To this, then, God has of his own free will subjected

himself.... Being is *sensible* only in becoming."

Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom When whole series of evolution, beginning with the lowest manifestation of life and reaching up to the highest . . . must have been the involution of something else. The question is: The involution of what? What was involved? God. . . . This cosmic intelligence gets involved, and it manifests, evolves itself, until it becomes the perfect man, the



'Christ-man,' the 'Buddhaman.' Then it goes back to its own source."

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) "The Cosmos: The Macrocosm"



If our analysis is correct, it is consciousness, or rather supra-consciousness, that is at the origin of life. Consciousness, or supra-consciousness, is the name for the rocket whose extinguished fragments fall back as matter; consciousness, again, is the name for that which subsists of the rocket itself, passing through the fragments and lighting them up into organisms. But this consciousness, which is a need of creation, is made manifest to itself only where creation is possible. It lies dormant when life is con-



demned to automatism; it wakens as soon as the possibility of a choice is restored."

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) Creative Evolution



od is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity. The World is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfected unity. Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of



the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance."

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) Process and Reality **WILBER:** Why is there something rather than nothing? What happened? How did Spirit lose itself? A lot of philosophers have played out this question in very intricate ways. Plotinus, for example, held that the One goes out of itself into the nous [thought or the Divine Mind]. From nous proceeds the world soul, and then that goes out of itself into psyche or individual mind, and finally, matter, at the lowest level of being. He called that whole process "efflux." And then, he believed, the One returns to itself in what he called a "reflux." I kind of like those terms: efflux and reflux. Others, like Sri Aurobindo, have used the terms "involution" and "evolution" for the same thing—the process by which Spirit first throws itself outward and gets lost in matter and then begins to slowly return to itself, finally awakening as Itself. Hegel, in eight hundred pages of detailed, dialectical reasoning, tried to show that Being goes out of itself into nothing, and then Being plus nothing together create Becoming, and then Becoming goes out of itself, and on and on and on through a process of involution. Then he has a little phrase, "and the jump to nature occurs," which actually is the big bang. And evolution begins.

Now, the one difference I have with all these thinkers, whether it's Aurobindo or Hegel or Plotinus or Plato, is that for almost all of them, evolution is seen as pretty precisely a rewinding of the videotape of involution, that everything is—

**COHEN:** —already there. It's all already laid down. As I understand the notion of involution, it's almost as if Spirit lays down a kind of Kosmic blueprint and then evolution just unfolds according to that already drawn-out map.

WILBER: Exactly. And that just won't work.

**COHEN:** Yes. It's the fact that these structures are *not* already laid down that makes the game a lot more exciting.

**WILBER:** It makes it much more exciting when you understand that there really is an authentic *creativity* in evolution.

**COHEN:** Right. And that's what ups the stakes for you and me and anyone who realizes it. When we awaken to that fact and simultaneously recognize that we are that One who decided to do this from the beginning of everything, we begin to feel a tremendous sense of urgency and responsibility for the next step.

**WILBER:** That's what makes it very, very interesting. And of course, if it happened once, it's happened billions of times.

**COHEN:** Well, that's an interesting statement—you mean that in terms of this cycle of involution and evolution, of expansion and contraction?

**WILBER:** Yes. I don't think there's any doubt about that. It doesn't really make sense that it would only happen once.

COHEN: Why do you say that?

**WILBER:** I mean, for Spirit, it's just an infinite cycle of hide and seek. If you do it just once, you would eventually get to a point where now you're awake and everybody's awake, and everything goes up in *bhava samadhi* and white light, and then what? Well, sooner or later, you're going to play the game again. So it's just sort of a continual efflux and reflux, involution and evolution.

**COHEN:** But doesn't that cancel out the whole notion of development? If we say it's an infinite cycle, then surely we've been here before.

WILBER: Not in the same way.

**COHEN:** Well, let's say it's true that there is an infinite cycle of expansion and contraction that goes on forever. If we're going to really accept that development is part and parcel of the manifest process at all levels, wherever and whenever

# In the mind of God, fourteen billion years probably isn't all that long. It might seem that way to us, but from God's point of view, we're just getting started.

Andrew Cohen

it appears and exists, then wouldn't there have to be development in the expansion and contraction? I mean, wouldn't even that Kosmic process have to be developmental?

**WILBER:** Well, that's very likely true. It could just go on and on, with more development occurring each time. But the idea that it would just occur once and stop doesn't make any sense. There would be no reason for it to start in the first place. So it's an infinite game of hide-and-seek that Spirit is playing with itself manifold ways.

**COHEN:** But when you say that, I start feeling a kind of Buddhist angst! I feel like I want out of here if it's just going to go on forever!

**WILBER:** Well, yes, but don't forget that on the other hand, from the perspective of Being, nothing's happening at all. It doesn't go on forever.

"TY Te have started with the assertion of all existence as one Being whose essential nature is Consciousness, one Consciousness whose active nature is Force or Will; and this Being is Delight, this Consciousness is Delight, this Force or Will is Delight. Eternal and inalienable Bliss of Existence, Bliss of Consciousness, Bliss of Force or Will whether concentrated in itself and at rest or active and creative, this is God and this is ourselves. . . . Concentrated in itself, it possesses or rather is the essential, eternal, inalienable Bliss; active and creative, it possesses or rather becomes the delight of the play of existence, the play of consciousness, the play of force and will. That play is the universe and that delight is the sole

> cause, cosmi

cause, motive, and object of cosmic existence."

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) The Life Divine

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**66** Tor invincible reasons of homogeneity and coherence, the fibers of cosmogenesis require to be prolonged in ourselves far more deeply than flesh and bone. We are not being tossed about and drawn along in the vital current merely by the material surface of our being. But like a subtle fluid, space-time, having drowned our bodies, penetrates our soul. It fills it and impregnates it. It mingles with its powers, until the soul soon no longer knows how to distinguish space-time from its own thoughts. Nothing can escape this flux any longer, for those who know how to see. . . . The human discovers that, in the striking words of Julian Huxley, we are nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself. . . . Not only do we read the secret of its movements in our slightest acts, but to a funda-



mental extent we hold it in our own hands: responsible for its past and its future."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) The Human Phenomenon **COHEN:** Yes, of course. But don't you think that from the perspective of evolution, saying this has all happened an infinite number of times before takes part of the absolute intensity out of it?

WILBER: Takes the fun out of it?

COHEN: Well, that would be a more mundane way to put it.

WILBER: I don't know. When I was a kid, I rode the roller coaster on Long Island probably eighty times and didn't feel the slightest desire to stop. Not once did I feel that this time was less fun because I had done it before. Once you find something that's fun, you do it again and again. And I don't think it's that hard for human beings to see why the game would get started. I use an example that most people can connect with: When you are a kid and you're first learning how to play games, sooner or later you find some game you really like. Maybe it's a card game like go fish or a more sophisticated one like twenty-one or poker. You play it with your friends, and it's a gas. Then your friends are gone, and

you decide you want to play go fish or poker by yourself. So you deal the cards out and take your hand, and then you go to the other side of the table and try to play the other hand. But it's no fun. The game is no fun because you always know what the "other person" is doing.

COHEN: Right.

WILBER: There's only one way you can actually have a game with yourself—any game, whether it be checkers, chess, poker, dice. You play the other person, and you forget you are the other person. That amnesia, that ignorance, that avidya is the primary ingredient of playing the game. So the Kosmic game, on the one hand, is a spontaneous lila or sport or play, a desire to throw yourself out into myriad forms. And right next to that, co-emerging with it, is this ignorance, this forgetting. That's why Plato would say that all knowledge is just remembering. It's a reconnecting with something that has profoundly been known at the deepest levels. And I think that's certainly an important ingredient. But I agree with you



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in that I don't think that the entirety of the involutionary arc is laid down in all of its essentials.

COHEN: Yes. The only problem I have with what you've said is that often when you use the word "game," I feel like it can take away from the seriousness of awakening to this Kosmic process and recognizing one's own part in it from the very beginning, which really puts maximum pressure on the ego. When we call it a game, the self can relax a little bit, which may be not a good idea! Part of what is so thrilling about being on the edge is knowing that you're responsible for actually participating in the creation of something that has never existed before.

WILBER: Right. And doing so in a way that's never been done before, even in previous games.

COHEN: The experience of this kind of ecstatic creative edge is the thrill of radical innovation in partnership with the creative principle itself. It's the ultimate ride at Coney Island, I guess!

### WILBER: Yes!

**COHEN:** But that thrill, at least in my own experience, is not "I've always known this." It's more like "Oh, my God, I can't believe this!" I think that sense that "I've always known this" relates more to the Ground of Being, to the deepest part of the self that never entered into the stream of time in the first place. Whenever we experience that no-place, that nothing out of which everything emerged, the experience is, "I've always known this, and actually, this is the place I've never left." And of course, we never do leave once we awaken to it.

WILBER: Well, that's certainly Nietzsche's "eternal return." I wouldn't disagree with what you are saying—the recognition part is Ground, not path, and not really fruition either. We're humans with form and the capacity to think, and we also have access to Ground in an intersection of supreme identity, although neither one of us alone is the One. Each and every one of us is One without a second, in the deepest part.

### Touching Enlightenment

WITH DR. REGGIE RAY

hat does it mean to meditate with the body? Until you answer this question, explains Reggie Ray, meditation may be no more than a mental gymnastic something you can practice for years without fruitful results. In Touching Enlightenment, the esteemed author of five books about Buddhism guides you back to the original practice of the Buddha: a systematic process that results in a profound awareness in your body rather than in your head. Combining the scholarship that has earned him international renown with original insights from nearly four decades practicing and teaching meditation, Reggie Ray invites you to explore your own body as the ultimate place of spiritual pilgrimage.

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brings us 38 years of study and

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COHEN: Right, it's paradoxical. You realize I am the creator in the midst of the fact that there are six or seven billion other creators. But the ultimate truth is I'm really the only one.

So what does it mean to be the only one, within the understanding of the fact that there are six or seven billion other "only ones" who may or may not know who they really are? The individual who awakens to this fact is inspired to take absolute responsibility for what it means to be the only one, in the midst of six or seven billion others. It means within my own means, I'm going to take absolute responsibility for creating the future. It means I know it's completely up to me. It means we're no longer deferring responsibility, no longer making excuses.

This kind of realization puts a different kind of evolutionary stress or evolutionary tension on the individual to take responsibility in a very practical, very immediate,

The spiritual impulse that compels us to seek enlightenment is the same original intention that has been driving the evolutionary process from the very beginning of the universe.

Andrew Cohen

and very personal way for what it actually means for me to evolve. You realize I'm the only one who can consciously evolve because I'm the one who created all this. That may seem like an audacious statement, but what's interesting is that when you experience that One and recognize it to be your own Self, at the deepest level, you can begin to intuit an answer to that perennial question, "Why did something come from nothing?"—and not as an abstract philosophical speculation, but from the inside out, so to speak. In that experience, you can almost imagine what it would be like to be God, abiding for billions of eons of no-time, before the universe was created. It becomes apparent that you have only two choices: you could either continue to do what you have been doing (which is nothing) forever, or you could do the only possible thing that you could do, which would be to endeavor to create a material universe in your own image. I mean, I know this sounds crazy, but**WILBER:** No, no, it's true. In a sense, that's exactly right. As I said before, this was probably the most common philosophical question from the time of Plato and Aristotle all the way up to Hegel. Why did something come from nothing? Aristotle argues that the Absolute, because it's perfect, does not create anything, because if it did, that would show some sort of lack. Plato says just the opposite. He says, "An Absolute that can't create is inferior to an Absolute that can. My God creates."

**COHEN:** Right—but it's not out of lack.

**WILBER:** No, it's out of superabundance. As you said, if you just sort of feel into that Ground, that abundance, the issue doesn't even come up.

**COHEN:** In my retreats and talks, I always say—and I know you agree with this—that the emerging postmodern self must have the guts to let in that as we evolve, God evolves. That the evolution of God is our evolution, nondually, which is really the end of our traditional religious orientations in the most thrilling way and which empowers the self and spiritualizes postmodern life in the most complete way possible.

WILBER: Whitehead had a couple of really good terms that relate to this. I don't think he really understood nonduality, but as limited as his thinking was in some ways, he made a pretty good start. He had what he called the primordial nature of God and the consequent nature of God. The primordial nature is the aspect of God that is unchanging or timeless. For him, it included things that were, in a sense, archetypes, which he called eternal objects—things like color. You and I would probably say that the primordial ground is just a formless, radical absolute, prior to manifestation, that cannot even be conceived. But either way, it means an ever-present primordial nature of God. Then Whitehead had what he called the consequent nature of God, and that's basically the world as it evolves. I think that's a good way to think about it: the consequent nature of God is consequent on us. Our intentionality plays a huge part in it. It's not the only thing, but it's the only thing that is the locus of Spirit's original creativity, still expressing itself as the freedom that we have to choose.

COHEN: Exactly.

WILBER: When we choose, we are Spirit in action.

**COHEN:** Well, assuming that there is a significant degree of enlightenment.

**WILBER:** The more enlightenment, the more Spirit, but even the intentionality of a worm, small as it is, is Spirit. What we want to do is get the ego and the lesser forms of intentionality

out of the way, so that the higher self, or what you call the Authentic Self, which is a deeper, truer form of Spirit's freedom, can act. That's the important thing.

**COHEN:** Yes, because obviously, a worm can't consciously engage in the developmental process as that One without a second. Only we can.

**WILBER:** Yes, but we go up and down the scale ourselves every now and then. I've had days where I was not much higher than a weasel!

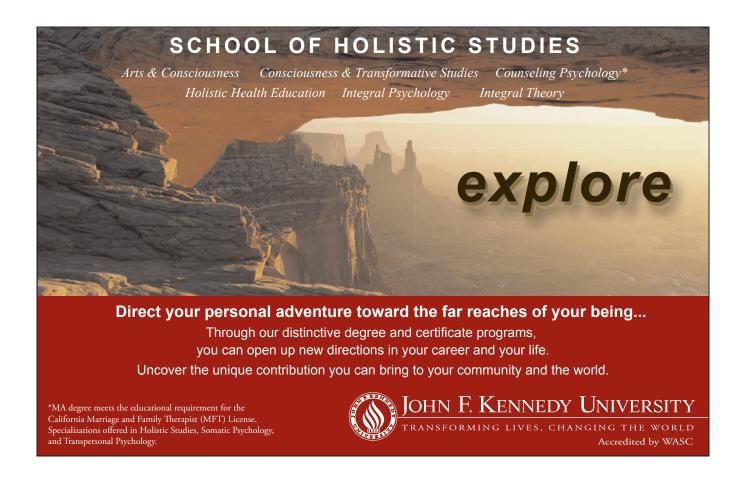
COHEN: Well, at least that's higher than a worm!

**WILBER:** It's funny, but it's an important thing to remember actually—that there is this whole scale of Spirit becoming more and more awake, more and more free. And the only thing that rides the very edge of freedom is the Authentic Self awakening in human beings.

**COHEN:** And the individual who is deeply awake to this Authentic Self, which is the evolutionary impulse, feels an

ecstatic compulsion to create the future. He or she becomes aware of being not separate from God himself, herself, or itself, at the leading edge, endeavoring to create the next moment. Such an individual realizes that the only one in the driver's seat is me, because I am the one who decided to start this roller coaster in the first place. When we embrace or awaken to the Authentic Self, we realize that I'm not really here to live my own life, and I'm not even really here for my own liberation. I'm here to create the future, because there's nothing else for me to do. I am God in manifest form, and it's really up to me and me alone, because I'm the only one there is to do this. So I find my own liberation as a manifest, incarnate, sentient being through committing myself to creating the future.





### The View from the

# Center of the Universe

An Interview with Joel R. Primack & Nancy Ellen Abrams

By Elizabeth Debold

n the last few decades, the cultural conversation about science and religion has become less a scholarly debate and increasingly like a barroom brawl. Atheists and theists are wrangling on the radio, in print, and on every possible bandwidth. The prize is a big one: Who *are* we? Where do we come from? Our core identity as humans is at stake. Are we God's children, or are we random accidents in an indifferent universe? In other words, does our existence matter to something larger than ourselves?

In the midst of this polemical slugfest, something quite remarkable is emerging from a growing chorus of scientists whose love for and appreciation of our creative cosmos may eventually lead beyond this polarization. The Hubble and other space probes have brought us stunningly gorgeous



pictures that inspire wonder at what we are a part of: incandescent nebulae that are the cradles of stars and glowing supernovae that forge the elements from which we are formed. The universe is far more vast, explosively creative, eerily beautiful, and mysterious than anyone could ever have imagined. The scale of what we are in the midst of—the vast dark expanses of space, the infinitesimally small distances traced by subatomic particles, and the stretch of spacetime that extends back for billions of light-years—is nothing less than awesome. As astronomer Carl Sagan once said: "A religion that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by traditional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge."

But for such a religion to bind itself to the human heart, it has to tell us how to relate to this overwhelming picture that science shows us. Where do we fit in? Are we merely passive witnesses to the unfolding drama of the distant stars? Most materialist scientists demur at this point, believing, as Sagan did, that although the universe can be central to us, we are not central to it.

That's why we were more than a little intrigued when Joel Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams' tour de force of contemporary cosmology, *The View from the Center of the Universe*, landed in our office some time ago. These authors are saying that human beings actually *are* central to the cosmos—

and that the latest research in science can show us how. They don't mean that we are at the *geographical* center of the cosmos but that we are central along a variety of fascinating dimensions that we are only just beginning to be aware of.

This dynamic husband-and-wife team is uniquely qualified to awaken us to a new view of the cosmos. Primack, a noted physicist, was one of the principal originators of Cold Dark Matter theory, which is part of the accepted understanding about how structures form in the universe. Dark matter is invisible stuff that. according to the theory, fills most of the cosmos and exerts a gravitational pull on the matter we do see. In 1988, Primack was made a Fellow of the American Physical Society and has recently served on a National Academy of Science committee to define the next phase of research that NASA should undertake. Abrams is a philosopher, historian of science, lawyer, policy analyst, and songwriter. She has consulted globally on how nations can make intelligent policy decisions in areas where scientific research is crucial but controversial. But it is her interest in the boundary between myth and science that has led to such a fruitful partnership with Primack. For the last decade, the two have co-taught a popular course at the University of California at Santa

Cruz called "Cosmology and Culture," which was the basis for their book.

Primack and Abrams aspire to change culture through this new cosmology. They are on a heroic quest to create a new, scientifically accurate creation story that will inspire us to leap beyond the conflict and division that threatens this planet. "If we intend to navigate Earth's coming transition . . . with sanity and justice, we will need to inspire high creativity, intense commitment, and immense stores of enthusiasm and raw hope," they write. "To perform what look like miracles, humans need big and inspiring ideas."

Abrams and Primack assert that their work can give rise to a new spirituality. According to their definition, to be spiritual means experiencing our connection to the cosmos through scientific understanding. Yet the sheer awe at the miracle of existence that these two committed materialists tap into and convey breaks the boundaries of science and leads us beyond. While they would never use the word "God" themselves, the majesty of their vision brings us in touch with the kind of wonder that humans throughout history have always associated with the timeless realm of the transcendent.

### A NEW THEORY OF THE COSMOS

**WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT:** In your work, you explain that, for the first time in history, we are developing a picture of the universe that might actually be true. What are we learning about the cosmos?

NANCY ELLEN ABRAMS: Let me first step back a little to say what we're trying to do. Every culture we know of has always assumed that they're at the center of the universe. What does that mean? It means they understood something very deep about themselves, but they never understood anything very deep about the universe. They just looked out, saw the stars, and interpreted them in accordance with what worked for their culture. They didn't have any knowledge of what was beyond the visible stars. They put themselves at the center of the universe because that's what works for human beings. In every culture, this is the basis for understanding how reality is put together, how we fit in.

Now for the last four hundred years, since the time of Newton and Galileo, people have not been able to do that. In the Newtonian view, Earth is just a random planet of a random star in a place that is nothing special. So we couldn't see ourselves as central to the universe anymore. Though we still have religions that go back to much earlier pictures of the universe, they have been, to a great extent, in conflict with Newtonian science.

For several centuries, we've had this conflict between what science has told us about our place in the universe and the need of human beings to explain our world in a way that makes us central and, therefore, makes us matter.

**JOEL PRIMACK:** But now we're beginning to have a theory that makes sense of what science has observed about the cosmos, so we can ask the question that people are really interested in: What does this all mean for us?

WIE: What is this new theory? How did it come about?

PRIMACK: Cosmology was for centuries the laughingstock of science. It was the field in which the ratio of fact to theory was practically zero. There were lots and lots of theories and hardly any information that would enable us to validate those theories. This has been true throughout almost all of the twentieth century, up until the mid-1990s. Then a huge amount of new data started to come in through our wonderful new instruments—not just the famous Hubble Space Telescope but, for example, the Hipparcos satellite. It isn't as well known, but it allowed us to reliably age date the oldest stars. As the data came in, we realized that many of our assumptions had been wrong. For one thing, the distance of the oldest stars and therefore their age

had been overestimated; it turns out that they are about twelve billion years old, not sixteen billion years as we had thought. And in 1997 and 1998, two independent teams unexpectedly discovered that the universe has been expanding faster and faster for about the last five billion years. This led us to theorize that there must be something we cannot see that is making the universe expand so quickly. We call this "dark energy," which is a property of space itself, a repulsion of space by space that speeds up the expansion of the universe. We have inferred from this and lots of other evidence that the universe is composed mostly of invisible stuff: dark energy and dark matter.

The universe is more vast, explosively creative, eerily beautiful, and mysterious than anyone could ever have imagined.

**WIE:** If dark matter is invisible, how do we know that most of the universe is made of it?

**PRIMACK:** People realized as early as the 1930s that the visible matter could not possibly be all there is. The galaxies rotate much too fast to be held together by the gravitational attraction of the matter that we are able to see. Many discoveries, by Fritz Zwicky, Vera Rubin, Mort Roberts, and others, have convinced us that most of the matter in galaxies and clusters of galaxies is invisible. That's the stuff we call dark matter.

I've been working on dark matter for quite some time. I'm a coauthor of the basic paper, published in 1984, that proposed the Cold Dark Matter theory. We had very little data to support it until the 1990s. Now as the data comes in, the detailed predictions of the Cold Dark Matter theory are being confirmed again and again. There's no data that's inconsistent with this theory on the large scale of the universe.\* All the data confirm what the theory predicted about things like the big bang radiation, the distribution of galaxies, galaxy formation, and so on. The predictions of the theory were usually made well in advance of observation, and the observations as they're coming in keep confirming the predictions in tremendous detail.

<sup>\*</sup>Not all cosmologists would agree with Primack's statement. For a variety of views on dark matter and dark energy, see page 80.

This is the first time that cosmology has been in this kind of situation. It's normal for a fairly advanced science, where it can make predictions and the predictions usually come true. But in cosmology this is absolutely revolutionary. Every few months we get major new observations, and these observations keep confirming the predictions. This is what gives us scientists confidence that we just might be on the right track.

**WIE:** What is dark matter? And how does it work?

PRIMACK: First of all, there's nothing very mysterious about how dark matter works—it works just like ordinary gravity. The mysterious thing is that most of the mass in the universe is this invisible stuff. Dark matter is our friend. Dark matter starts in the very early universe with very slight differences in density from one spot to another spot. They're so slight that they're like the difference between the surface of a soccer ball and a bacterium on that soccer ball. It's a very, very slight difference. We think that those differences were

### Dark matter is our friend. It's what holds all of the galaxies in the universe together.

caused by phenomena that occurred on a quantum scale in the very earliest stages of the big bang, the period that we call "cosmic inflation."

But anyway, gravity has the effect that it tremendously amplifies small differences in density. A region that's slightly denser than its surroundings expands more slowly. A region that's slightly less dense than its surroundings expands slightly faster. While the dark matter in those regions that are a little denser than average does expand with the expansion of the universe, it happens more slowly so that it eventually gets significantly denser than its surroundings. And the part that becomes denser than its surroundings collapses a little bit and becomes a lump of dark matter that stops expanding. The universe continues to expand around it, but that dark matter lump stops. Within that region, ordinary matter can fall to the center of the dark matter. As it falls in, it can rotate faster and faster, like an ice skater pulling in her arms. Physicists call this "conservation of angular momentum." It makes the galaxies rotate. That's how we get these beautiful spiral galaxies that are obviously rotating. Since the universe has been expanding for billions of years, those regions that start out slightly denser become galaxies—or clusters of galaxies on a bigger scale. Those regions that start out slightly less dense than average become voids, regions where the universe doesn't seem to have any galaxies.

Dark energy is causing the expansion to go faster and faster on a large scale. And dark matter is preventing galaxies from expanding. It's protecting the galaxies against the tremendously destructive force of the dark energy that pulls things apart. That's why I like to say that dark matter is our friend. Dark matter keeps our galaxy and all the other galaxies together.

**WIE:** Is there a correlation between what you're calling dark energy and the original creative impulse that initiated the big bang?

PRIMACK: We think so. But that's one of the big mysteries, because we don't really know what dark energy is. We are pretty sure that in the very earliest stages of the big bang, the universe was expanding extremely rapidly—this is cosmic inflation, which I mentioned earlier. It's not like ordinary expansion but is an exponential expansion where in a given amount of time the size of a given region doubles, and then, in the same amount of time, it doubles over and over. Now the universe is starting to do this again under the influence of dark energy. So we think that there may very well be a connection between the tremendously strong dark energy that may have been driving cosmic inflation at the very beginning of the universe and the dark energy that's operating today.

**WIE:** So while the dark energy is causing the universe to expand, the dark matter pulls the star dust in the universe together to create the stars and the galaxies. Is that right?

PRIMACK: That's right. The dark matter lumps are holding everything together. The special thing about ordinary atoms, as opposed to dark matter, is that when they bang into each other, which naturally happens once in a while, they radiate away some of their energy and thus fall into the center of a dark matter lump. The very first stars were created this way out of hydrogen and helium, which came from the big bang. Clouds of atoms fall together, get very dense, and thus become stars. At the end of their lives, a tiny fraction of their mass becomes star dust—particles of carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and other heavier elements. Then in the next generation, the heavier elements can form into planets that circle the stars.

We actually see this process going on now. Thousands of planetary systems are actually forming. We can see this with our space telescopes. So we're quite sure that this is in fact what happens. This is probably how our own planetary system formed around a late-generation star. This only happens

### The Invisible Texture of the Universe

300 million light-years

This extraordinary image shows the projected distribution of dark matter in a 3-billion-light-year cross-section of the universe. Each level of magnification gives us a closer look at the "cosmic web" of dark matter filaments (blue), which string together billions of small and large galaxy clusters (yellow).

15 million light-years

This cosmic cluster is made up of more than a thousand galaxies, each of which contains hundreds of millions of stars.

75 million light-years

in the middle of giant dark matter halos, which are spherical blobs of dark matter. When you think about a galaxy, you see these beautiful spirals, but you should imagine that on a scale ten times bigger than the galaxies that we see, there are these giant dark matter lumps that are actually holding the galaxies together against the destructive force of the dark energy that's pulling things apart on bigger scale. Nancy has a beautiful way of describing this with a nautical analogy.

**ABRAMS:** Sometimes in my talks I explain it in this way because it brings it all a little closer to home: Imagine that the entire

# All of the heavier elements represent only one-hundredth of one percent of what exists. We're made of the rarest stuff in the universe.

universe is an ocean. The ocean is dark energy, which fills the entire universe. On that ocean, there sail billions of ghostly ships made of dark matter. At the tops of the tallest masts of only the largest ships are tiny little beacons of light. Those beacons of light are what we see when we look out at the stars and galaxies in the universe. We can't see the ships and we can't see the ocean. But we know they're there through theory, through Joel's theory specifically, the theory of cold dark matter.

Because we have this theory and this new picture of the universe, we can know that those invisible things are there and that those little bits of light are not just hanging there. They are the beacons on the ships, which represent the galaxies that we actually see.

### AT THE CENTER OF THE COSMOS

**WIE:** In this new scientific picture that you are presenting—what you sometimes call the Double Dark theory, which includes dark energy and dark matter—you say that we are cosmically central and that we're living at a pivotal time. This cosmic centrality is what you mean by "the view from the center of the universe." Can you explain some of the key ways that we human beings are central to the cosmos?

**PRIMACK:** Let me give you a brief list. First, we're made of the rarest stuff in the universe. Atoms only make up less than five percent of the stuff of the universe. Dark matter has at least five times more mass than all the ordinary matter that we know. The rest is dark energy. At least seventy percent of the mass-energy of the universe is this dark energy stuff, which is really mysterious.

So it turns out that atoms are relatively rare. And almost all of the mass of atoms consists of hydrogen and helium. All the heavy elements—carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, sulfur, iron, and all the way up to uranium—these are made in stars and in supernovae, when stars explode at the end of their lives. As I said before, these heavier elements are spewed out as star dust.

We are made of these heavy elements. People like to call it CHON, which stands for carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen—the most common elements in living organisms. Of course, you can't make living creatures without a fair amount of the other heavier elements too. All of those were made in stars and have been collected together into very special places, like our planet Earth. That's what we are made of. All of the heavier elements put together represent only one-hundredth of one percent of what's in the universe. We're the rarest stuff in the universe.

ABRAMS: To show how important our place is in the universe, we have created what we call the Cosmic Density Pyramid. It's based on the pyramid on the back of the dollar bill. The base of it is thirteen rows of bricks, and then there's a floating capstone with an eye in the middle of it. Everyone knows this symbol. It was put on the back of the dollar bill to represent something completely different—the thirteen original colonies with the Eye of Providence looking favorably on this venture of a new country. But the pyramid was an even older symbol when the U.S. government started using it. We have taken this symbol and reinterpreted it. The age of the symbol reflects the fact that symbols like this really work for human beings. People like them; they resonate with them. But our interpretation makes them realistic and accurate.

We've reinterpreted the pyramid to represent all of the visible matter in the universe. The heavy base of the pyramid is just hydrogen and helium, which is what the stars are made of. That's almost *all* the atoms in the universe. Even though they're very, very light, they still weigh far more than all the star dust, which is what that tiny floating capstone is made of. The eye in the capstone represents intelligent life—the portion of the star dust that is able to see this whole thing, reflect on it, to find some meaning in it. That eye is far out of proportion to the



amount of star dust that exists. If we did represent intelligent life in scale with everything else, it would be almost invisible, a little tiny point at the top. But that eye is really the most important part of the pyramid. It's us.

Then we've expanded this picture from the back of the dollar bill to be much, much bigger. Below ground, there's an *immense* hidden dark pyramid, which represents the invisible atoms, dark matter, and dark energy.

So even though we are tiny, tiny, tiny—we're up at the very topmost point of the pyramid—we are supported by everything below us. We could not exist without the huge amount of dark matter that's below the surface or without the dark energy that is responsible for keeping this whole universe growing.

## Human beings are central to the cosmos—and the latest research in science can show us how.

**PRIMACK:** We're also in the middle of all possible size scales. The human size scale is almost exactly in the middle between the smallest possible size, something physicists call a Planck length, and the entire visible universe, the largest thing we can see. This must be true of all intelligent life.

**WIE:** Why do you say that?

**PRIMACK:** Well, all atoms are about the same size, and you need to have an awful lot of atoms to have the complexity of the human mind, which is the most complicated thing we've ever discovered in the universe. You can't have that kind of complexity if you're as small as, let's say, an ant. You have to be pretty big; you have to have a lot of atoms.

You might think that bigger is better—that if humans are smart, then a creature the size of a mountain would be even smarter. But large creatures like dinosaurs or whales are so big that there's a noticeable delay from when information is sent out from their brains and when it gets to their tails. It's crucial that information be transmitted quickly. You can't think faster than information can be transmitted. The way thinking is done, both in brains and also in supercomputers, is that the really intense processing is done in small regions where the data can be transferred back and forth very rapidly. If you want to build a big supercomputer, you hook together a lot of chips. But all the hard work is being done in the chips. What that

means is that if there's a large thinking organism, it's going to be basically a community of smaller minds. The thinking will be done by the smaller minds. The speed of communication—ultimately the speed of light, which is the fastest that data can be transmitted—limits the size to about that of a human.

To summarize, we're made of the rarest stuff in the universe. We're on the midsize scale where things are really interesting. We're a lot smaller than galaxies and the universe. We're a lot bigger than the really small size scale of atoms and the interiors of atoms.

**ABRAMS:** We decided to give a name to this middle range of size scales that humans are a part of. We chose the name Midgard. We wanted to give it a name because it is so special. It's the range of size scales that we have intuitive understanding of—from about the size of an ant up to about the size of the sun. For most people, that range is reality, even though it actually is not reality; it's only a tiny patch of it. We picked the name Midgard because in Norse mythology it is the realm of civilization and stability—the human world in the middle of the world sea. Off to one side is the realm of the giants, and off to the other is the realm of the gods.

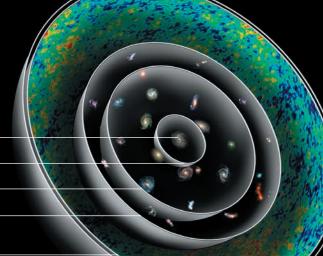
Now this is, of course, metaphorical. Nobody should ever imagine that we're trying to take this literally, but metaphorically, it's really quite a good description of the size scales in the universe. Outside this midrange of size scales, there really is the land of the giants—giants of galaxies and superclusters of galaxies on the cosmic horizon. These are things that we can really only think about; we can't ever experience them directly. The same is true in the small realm. We are totally dependent on the very small realm of individual living cells and the much smaller realm of atomic particles and so forth. Those were here first. They are what we are made of. In that sense they are, as we like to call them in our book, the "wee gods." We really are sandwiched in between these two other realms.

For most of human history, no one knew about these two realms. They *only* knew about Midgard. It's only with the advent of great scientific instruments and theories, like quantum theory, that we have actually been able to say, "This is really what the universe is like on these other size scales." This has only happened in the last century. We now know about the realm of the wee gods and the realm of the giants. We know about this through science.

**PRIMACK:** Let me continue with the ways humans are central by jumping to time. It turns out that we live at the midpoint of cosmic time. We live very close to the time when the universe is switching over from slowing down its expansion to speeding up its expansion. This is the best time for observation of the distant universe. As the universe's expansion speeds up, the distant galaxies are disappearing from our sight. We scientists

### A spherical representation of cosmic time

This diagram shows us how, from the perspective of time, we're at the center of the universe. As Abrams reminds us, "When we look up at the night sky, we are not just looking out into space—we're looking back in time." The image of a distant galaxy that we see through a telescope is actually the light that this cosmic form emitted billions of years ago. In the figure, each concentric sphere, moving outward from today, represents an earlier epoch in the evolution of the universe. The farther away from us a sphere is, the farther back in time are the galaxies and other objects that we observe in that sphere, until we reach the outermost layer, which represents the background radiation generated by the big bang itself.



- 1. YOU ARE HERE! (Today)
- 2. Our Sun Forms (4.5 Billion years ago)
- 3. Big Galaxies Form
- 4. Bright Galaxies Form.
- 6. Cosmic Background radiation (400,000 years after the big bang)
- Cosmic Horizon (big bang)

like to say that this is the best possible time to observe the distant universe, so fund us quick!

Actually, of course, this will remain true for millions of years, but it's something that we're just beginning to appreciate. We live at the midpoint of our solar system's life. It began about four and a half billion years ago; it will end in five or six billion years when the sun turns into a red giant star and then ultimately a white dwarf.

We're also living in the middle of the best time for Earth. Earth only got an oxygen-rich atmosphere about half a billion years ago—thanks to microorganisms. The sun is steadily heating up, which is what midsize stars like the sun always do as they age. In about half a billion years, the sun will become so hot that, quite apart from global warming due to greenhouse gasses, it will evaporate all the oceans, and Earth will lose its water. The hydrogen will be separated from the oxygen at the top of the atmosphere, the hydrogen will be lost, and Earth will become a dune planet.

Incidentally, this fate could be averted, or at least postponed, if our distant descendants figure out how to move Earth farther away from the sun. My astronomical colleagues just figured out how to do this in principle. It involves reorienting the orbits of some large comets. This isn't something that we need to worry

about right away, because we're talking about many hundreds of millions of years in the future. But this shows that we're in the middle of the best period of our planet.

We're also at the end of the exponential expansion of humans on Earth. During the last century, humanity increased its numbers by a factor of four. The size of the human population doubled not once, but twice, over the last hundred years, which is the first time in the history of humanity that ever happened. It can never happen again. In fact, there are strong doubts that Earth could handle a doubling of the current human population. So we've reached the end of this rapid increase of our population—and we're obviously reaching the end of the even more rapid increase of our impact on the planet.

Thus, we're living at a very special moment from *all* of these different perspectives: from cosmic to the solar system to Earth to human. This brings us to a total of six different ways that we're in a central position in the universe, starting with being made of the rarest stuff, plus the fact that we're in the middle of all size scales, and then the four different ways that we're living in a central moment in time.

Let me just mention one more: We're at the center of the observable universe. Now that's nothing special, because any

observer is at the center of their observable universe. We all see a spherical universe around us, and in that sense, the old medieval cosmology with Earth at the center of a set of crystalline spheres was right. But the way we understand this now is that we're at the center of spheres of time. We don't just look out in space; we look back in time. Looking out, we see the galaxies as they were longer and longer ago. The same would likely be true of other intelligent creatures in other places in the universe—they would see themselves at the center of the observable universe too. But we're realizing these things for the first time.

**WIE:** In your book, you call this perspective the "cosmic spheres of time." Nancy, you've said that we are in a special place in the universe in relation to these cosmic spheres of time. Our special place arises from the relationship between space, time, light, and consciousness. You also note that without consciousness, there is no visible universe. Could you say more about what you meant by this and how it relates to our centrality?

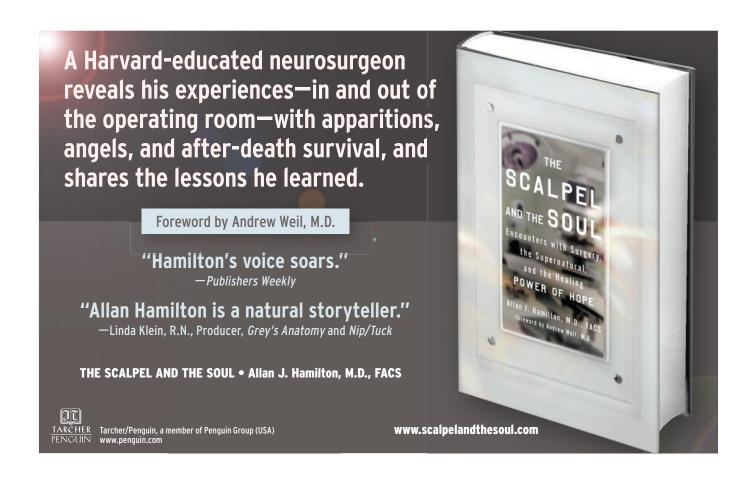
**ABRAMS:** The visible universe is what we see. It's what we're conscious of. There's something out there, and we humans have to *interpret* what it is. Now that we actually have a serious scientific theory and a lot of data to support it, we're in a posi-

tion to tie our *need* to give a meaning to the universe to what we actually *know* about the universe. This is what's really so extraordinary about this point in time for us.

Astonishingly, in this new picture, in all the ways Joel mentioned, we actually *are* central. We're just not central in the way people assumed, which was a geographic centrality. That is obviously not true. There is no geographic center to an expanding universe. But nevertheless, we're central in all these really interesting, subtle, and very meaningful ways that, of course, no one could even conceptualize before we had modern cosmology.

So we're in an extraordinary position from the point of view of human meaning because we're now at a place where we can satisfy this deep need to understand ourselves as central to the universe. We can make it scientifically rigorous and accurate at the same time. *That's* what has never been possible before. That's what we really need to develop now.

It's not obvious how to do this. We've given an interpretation in our book of one way to look at it, but this is really going to require the whole culture—artists and writers and so forth—to collaborate with it. We need to interpret this new picture of the universe in ways that are meaningful to us, that inspire us, and that really light our fire.



### CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE COSMOS

**WIE:** As you have been explaining, the cold dark matter theory tells us that most of the universe is invisible. You've said that without consciousness, we couldn't see anything. What is the role of consciousness in the universe?

**ABRAMS:** The first thing that I think people don't realize is that everything we say about the universe is really about our *understanding* of the universe. We don't really have any way of knowing *anything* out there, except through our own minds.

**PRIMACK:** All we see is light. We make the interpretation that there are stars out there rather than tiny holes in the dome of the sky through which the light of heaven shines. The idea that those are distant stars was a discovery, as was the realization that those stars themselves have a life and a death and that the really distant things are galaxies and quasars. All of these are discoveries. They're not the least bit obvious. We basically construct the universe as we discover more things to interpret. Now we have the ability with our satellites above the atmosphere to see parts of the spectrum of radiation that could never be seen by our senses: gamma rays, x-rays, ultraviolet, infrared, and even radio waves.

We depend on a combination of fancy technology and theoretical interpretation to make sense of this universe. If that isn't human consciousness, I don't know what is.

**ABRAMS:** Consciousness is what makes all this real for us. Everything that we are doing is for *us*. Everything we say about the universe, even the word "universe," is a human construct. We couldn't possibly know anything without using our own abilities to metaphorically create meaning.

**WIE:** I believe you have said that human beings are the perfect size in the cosmos. Does this relate to our capacity for consciousness?

ABRAMS: I don't know that we said we're perfect—but we are the right size to have complex thoughts. Whether you consider that perfect or not is really a matter of taste. There are actually a lot of people out there today, environmentalists particularly, who think that Earth would be better off without human beings. The animals would survive, and the planet would be greener. All of the bad things that we're doing wouldn't be happening. I personally think that that's a terrible misunderstanding of our entire species and what our potential is. We're not perfect by a long shot, and we make terrible mistakes. But we are able to do something that nothing out there that we have ever encountered anywhere in the whole universe can do. We may be the first. It may just be that Earth is the planet that is going to have to support this astonishing experiment, for better or for worse.

The experiment of intelligent life is giving the universe its own way of looking at itself. All of us together—we and any intelligent aliens that might be out there—we are the consciousness of the universe. We are the way the universe reflects on itself, and without us, the universe is utterly meaningless and will forever be meaningless. A beautiful planet could be here with animals and plants, but the whole thing would be meaningless. Those environmentalists who imagine this planet from their point of view as a pristine beautiful Eden are giving the planet meaning. Without us, no one's going to be imagining that.

**PRIMACK:** On the other hand, we also have the ability to think through the implications of our actions. One of the things that we learn from cosmology is the enormous time scale before us and into the future. We are the product of 13.7 billion years of

### We are the way the universe reflects on itself. Without us, the universe is utterly meaningless.

cosmic evolution. Our planet has billions of years to go before the solar system is destroyed by the sun turning into a red giant star and then a white dwarf. There will be many thousands of billions of years of evolution in the future of the galaxies. In fact, our own galaxy will get brighter and brighter for approximately six trillion years. The future before us and our descendants, if we're smart enough to have any, is immense. What we do in this brief period at the end of the human inflationary expansion on Earth can make a tremendous difference in the long run. We've just begun to appreciate this, but it's not too late to have the results come out in good ways rather than bad.

**WIE:** So this is another way that we are living at a pivotal time on this planet?

**ABRAMS:** We're living at a pivotal time only if you understand how big time actually is. We're always living at a pivotal time from some sort of political point of view: Is it going to be the Democrats or Republicans? Is the Iraq War going to end or is it going to go on another ten years? Those are pivotal events on some size scale. But the size scale we're talking about is far, far larger. In the very distant future, the Milky Way is going

to merge with the Andromeda galaxy. In fact, our local group of thirty-some galaxies is going to come together and merge. During that period of time, the rest of the universe is going to be expanding so fast that we are hardly going to be able to see any other galaxies at all. Thus in the very distant future, our visible universe may really consist of only one huge galaxy, which Joel and I like to call "Milky Andromeda."

If the human race has gone on to solve these little shortterm problems that we are facing now, and has continued to evolve in order to colonize the Milky Way, then we will, in effect, have colonized the entire visible universe. That's future number one.

Now let's assume, because we don't know about them, that there aren't any intelligent aliens. Let's assume that the fate of the universe is up to us. So future number two is that the Republican Party continues to debate whether Jesus and the devil were brothers or not and people are completely distracted from seeing what's happening as Earth warms up. We don't cut back on our use of resources because of greed and short-term views. We have huge wars, plagues, and so forth, and the human race is reduced again to where it was thousands of years ago. We have to start all over again, or maybe we are totally wiped out.

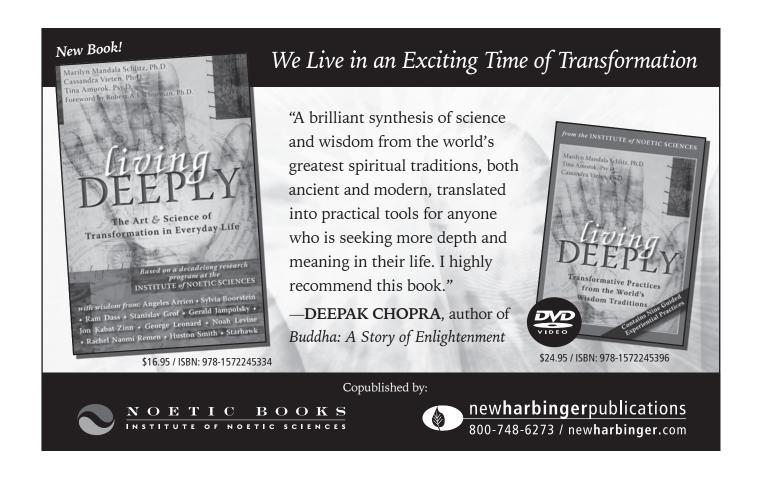
In that case, future number one is completely wiped off the possibility charts. This is what we mean by a pivotal moment, because we, right now, are the people who are going to be determining which of those two immensely different futures could actually come about. Unless you can see cosmic time, unless you can see a really long time into the future and realize how important our existence may be, you can't possibly appreciate future number one as a possibility.

**WIE:** I've heard you say very eloquently that our time seems ordinary to us but it's going to be mythic to future generations if we act responsibly.

ABRAMS: Either way it's going to be mythic. Either way.

**PRIMACK:** Our descendants will never forgive us if we mess up Earth.

**ABRAMS:** If we don't save it—because we're already messing it up. We have a huge responsibility. We're acting as though Earth is just here—as if we found it and it belongs to us. But we are here because of billions of years of other animals fighting and struggling so that their children could grow up and



reproduce. All of life is a struggle. We are benefiting from the struggles of our ancestors going all the way back to that first cell. We were not handed this Earth. That's why some of these religious myths are so terribly destructive. "Oh, God handed it to us and said to us, 'Okay, it's up to you now, take care of it." No, it wasn't handed to us. We have arisen out of it. We're part of this enormous flow, and we have every obligation to pass it on to our children and to our very, very distant descendants who can take over the whole galaxy.

### A COSMOCENTRIC VIEW ON BEING HUMAN

WIE: Part of what you're alluding to is a point that you make in your book about how our moral and ethical frameworks are not appropriate to the scale of time and the consequences that we're actually working within.

ABRAMS: That's right. We have to realize that all human beings are essentially the same, if you look at it from a cosmic point of view. We are completely preoccupied today with very, very trivial differences. The Shiites versus the Sunnis. The Mormons versus the Evangelicals. Blacks versus whites. These are silly, trivial differences. Yet our entire culture is completely preoccupied with these trivial differences between human beings and is not seeing that, as human beings, we have this immense potential. But we really need to see ourselves as one.

Another thing that we say in the book is that there is an "us versus them," but it's not my civilization versus your civilization or my race versus your race. Us versus them is intelligent life versus the laws of physics. That's what we really have to deal with.

WIE: What do you mean by that?

ABRAMS: It's not between us; it's between all of us humans and nature. That's what we really have to negotiate with; that's what we really have to take seriously. We need to identify ourselves with a much larger group. We need to identify ourselves with intelligent life and not with some tiny little ethnic group. As long as we identify ourselves with tiny little ethnic groups, we cannot see how precious this incredible experiment is on planet Earth. All we see are the little differences. When you appreciate your place in the real universe, these little things really subside in importance, and we can find the unifying elements that could really save our planet.

**WIE:** It gives a lot of dignity to being human.



**ABRAMS:** Yes, we have to see the dignity in it. All of us humans are bunched up on one planet, so we look extremely common to ourselves. Humans are incredibly precious. There are so few intelligent beings in this immense universe. Just because we happen to be bunched up on Earth, doesn't make us any less precious.

**WIE:** When you say that it's between human beings and nature, are you saying that human beings are separate from nature?

**ABRAMS:** No, we're talking about human beings realizing that we have to live in harmony with nature. We have to pay attention to nature. We have to learn to understand her ways. That's science.

WIE: Earlier you spoke about Midgard, the midsize realm of cre-

# You never find meaning without looking at the big picture. And cosmology is the biggest picture we have.

ation that is between the infinitely small and the unimaginably large. In a talk that you gave to NASA, you said that the only way we can know these larger cosmic realms and the subatomic realms is through science, and the only way we can experience them is spiritually. What do you mean when you say that we have the capacity to experience these realms spiritually?

ABRAMS: Basically, what we're saying is that you cannot experience these things directly. You can learn about them and know about them intellectually. Scientists do this. We are trying to find what our place is in this universe—how do we understand our place in the expanding, double dark universe? Throughout all of history, people have needed to experience their place in the universe because it gave them grounding, made them feel that their lives were real and that they mattered. It was the basis of their various religions. We still are the same kind of people. We really do need meaning. And we need meaning that is grounded in the best picture of reality available to us in our time. Now, for the first time, we have a new picture of reality, and our meaning has to be grounded in that.

We can experience the entire universe spiritually if we realize that, by Joel's and my definition, what spiritual means is experiencing our connection to the cosmos. That is all it means; it has nothing to do with anything supernatural. The universe

itself is so much grander than anyone imagined. If we even attempt to feel that we're part of it, that is a spiritual action.

**WIE**: Because the enormity of it utterly shatters any notion of self that would merely be personal, ethnic, or cultural?

**ABRAMS:** I don't think it shatters it. I think it greatly expands it. We can now realize that we are cosmic beings in a very definable sense. We have a place in this cosmos, and we could have a huge effect on the cosmos, if we play our cards right.

**WIE:** How do we make meaning from this new view of the cosmos? As you say in your book, we have the choice to find meaning in our extraordinary place in the cosmos or to continue with the modernist, Newtonian, existential view that we're insignificant specks in the middle of this vast, meaningless universe.

PRIMACK: We give a number of examples in our book of applying ideas from modern physics and cosmology to human affairs. Take the concept of emergence. We love to teach our students what we call "phase transitions." That's what happens when, for example, ice melts and turns into water or water evaporates and turns into water vapor. These are complete changes of basic physical phenomena, and they simply don't make any sense on the scale of an individual atom or molecule. You can't talk about a molecule of water being frozen, liquid, or vapor. It only makes sense when you talk about large numbers of molecules interacting with one another.

**ABRAMS:** There is a very simple way of putting this in human terms. Something similar to a "phase transition" happens when human beings are in groups. For instance, individuals who may be very nice on their own, when they are with too many other people who all think one way, can become fanatics. There's this strange thing called "group think" that happens to us, and there are some evolutionary explanations for why this happens. People in these groups are extremely different than they would be as individuals.

**PRIMACK:** Of course, an example of emergence that we humans are particularly interested in is the phenomenon of human consciousness. It's a deep mystery how this wet organ in our skulls, our brain, somehow creates the experience of being conscious beings. This is a deep question of neuropsychology that great progress is being made on, but it's such a tough question that it's going to take a lot of further understanding before we get there. Clearly, something like emergence must be happening. Consciousness is not just individual interactions between neurons or the individual things that happen in neurons. It's some kind of very complicated collective phenomenon that happens through the interaction of billions of neurons, just as phase transition describes what happens

through the interaction of billions of atoms or molecules.

We're trying to illustrate the idea that physics and cosmology can be an important new source of metaphors. Once you have the idea of metaphorical thinking, you can apply that to very different realms, including human experience and human interaction. That's a way that we can find meaning.

Basically, the bottom line is that you never find meaning without looking at the big picture. You can't understand what a little piece of a picture means until you see the big picture; you see how the little piece fits in. Cosmology is the biggest picture we have. It can help us find meaning by letting us see ourselves as part of a grand story.

**ABRAMS:** I'd like to say one more thing about the question of meaning. Every culture has had some kind of meaningful story, a story that meant something for them. But what is

Far too many people are looking for meaning in stories that were useful to their ancestors, but which can't create a coherent picture of reality today.

meaningful changes with the times and with changes in the political and economic and social situations. Today we have far too many people looking for meaning in stories that were useful to their ancestors in earlier times, which cannot create a coherent picture of reality today. The big challenge today is to find the kind of meaning that our ancestors may have found in their stories in a way that is coherent with what we actually know now.

Science has to be the bottom line. We need to take the best science of our day and build our meaning on that. Because what we're looking for is not just meaning to make us feel good so we can stay home. It's meaning so that we can have an accurate map of reality to save this planet.

We have to build on the best picture of our time and then give that adequate meaning so it motivates us and brings us together, so that when we *do* work together, we are working in harmony with nature.

We have not changed as human beings. We need meaning today just as much as we ever needed it. We also desperately

need science because we aren't going to succeed without it. The huge challenge is to pull those two things together so that we have meaning and it is accurate.

**WIE:** In the last chapter of your book, you write: "If we take on the cosmic responsibility, we get the cosmic opportunity—that rarest of opportunities for the kind of transcendent cultural leap possible only at the dawn of a new picture of the universe."

Could you say some final words on that?

**PRIMACK:** There have been only a few real changes to our cosmic picture. First, the flat Earth was the standard picture of the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and the Old Testament Hebrews. This changed to the picture of a spherical Earth in the middle of a spherical universe. That's the Greek view, which was standard throughout the Middle Ages. Then there was the transformation from that to the Newtonian picture, which led to this curious situation where, for the last three or four hundred years, most people in the West never even thought about the universe without a certain discomfort.

Now we have the transition to the double dark universe that's based on dark matter and dark energy, where quantum mechanics and relativity are also important. This is a strikingly different picture from any of the earlier ones. Evolution is also key. The universe changes fundamentally in time and on different size scales. These are characteristic features of our latest picture of the universe. Now that we're beginning to understand how this picture fits together, this challenges us to reconceptualize everything. That's a fantastic opportunity for our particular moment in time, and people have not had such an opportunity for many centuries.

Part of the point of our book is to give people the background to start thinking about it and creating new art and literature, and so forth. We've attempted to show some of the ways that this can be done. If we're successful, people will go far beyond what we propose.

ABRAMS: The amazing thing is we have this opportunity right when the world is falling apart. There are a lot of people who are scared of these ideas. They're scared partly because they feel they can't understand the science. We have to understand how the universe works and make our spirituality as real as possible. The whole idea of trying to spend your life understanding your spiritual connection to the universe but not having any interest in how the universe actually works seems to me absolutely bizarre. We need to be coherent beings. That's how it's going to matter.



# Living in the bark

BY TOM HUSTON



### LEADING PHYSICISTS EXPLORE THE BIGGEST MYSTERY OF MODERN COSMOLOGY

Featuring: Neil deGrasse Tyson • Paul Davies • Janna Levin Deno Kazanis • Bernard Haisch

**Q**: Most cosmologists believe that the vast majority of the universe's mass-something on the order of ninety-six percent of all the material of which the universe is made-is actually *invisible*, consisting of two mysterious quantities they call "dark matter" and "dark energy." The question is: What could they possibly be?



eil de Grasse Tyson: Consider all we've learned about the size, age, and contents of the universe—from its fiery birth in the big bang through fourteen billion years of expansion that has followed. Even better, consider the powerful laws of physics

we've discovered that account for it all.

Kind of makes you stand with pride for being human. But before you stand too tall, consider that, at the moment, we can account for only fifteen percent of all the gravity we've ever measured in the universe. We're simply clueless about what's

causing the rest. Not only that, if you add up all the matter and energy in the universe, it comes to just four percent of all that drives cosmic expansion. So we're clueless about that one, too, with no idea about what occupies the remaining ninety-six percent of the universe.

We call these invisible entities "dark matter" and "dark energy."

What are they? Maybe they're exotic, never-before-seen forms of matter and energy. Or maybe they reveal a hidden flaw in our understanding of how the universe works. But really, the two terms are placeholders for our abject ignorance. We could just as easily have labeled them "Bert" and "Ernie" or "Withouta-Clue A" and "Without-a-Clue B."

So we are left in a curious situation. What we know of the universe, we know well. Yet a larger cosmic truth lies undiscovered before us—a humbling, yet thrilling, prospect for the scientist—driven not only by the search for answers but by the love of questions themselves.

Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist, is director of New York City's Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History and the author of The Sky Is Not the Limit (2000), Origins (2004), and Death by Black Hole (2007).

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aul Davies: When it comes to dark matter, it's been known for quite a long time that there is a lot of invisible substance tugging on the visible stuff in the universe. What you see is not what you get. The stars move in such a way that if there wasn't a lot

of invisible gravitational material, then galaxies like the Milky Way would unravel like an exploding flywheel. The question is, what is this stuff? But it's never been hard to think up possible objects or particles that it could be.

People have tended to divide these possibilities into two categories, which have been whimsically called "MACHOs" and "WIMPs." MACHO stands for *massive compact halo objects*. These could be anything from black holes to dim stars to objects like asteroids and so on. The idea is that any galaxy that we see is embedded in a much larger, roughly spherical halo of such nonluminous objects, and that a lot of a galaxy's mass is distributed there. Yet people have looked for MACHOs, and they found things, but nowhere near enough of them to account for the gravitational mass of dark matter.

The other category, WIMP, stands for weakly interacting massive particles. Now, we know plenty of weakly interacting particles, such as neutrinos, which interact so weakly with ordinary matter that billions of neutrinos from the sun, for example, are passing straight through you all the time without you noticing. Neutrinos are filling the whole universe, but they just don't have enough mass to account for dark matter. So the WIMP would mean a particle like a neutrino but massive.

There is some hope that one of these particles will be produced in a few months when the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, the European particle accelerator lab, gets switched on. For my money, I think that's probably what we're dealing with. We will find one or a collection of these WIMPs, and that will satisfactorily account for this dark matter.

WIE: So what do you think dark energy is?

DAVIES: Well, here I'm a little bit out of fashion with some cosmologists who love to say, "It's a great mystery what this dark energy is. It's a crisis in physics." We have a perfectly good explanation for what it is, and we've had it for decades and decades. The original idea for what we now call dark energy was dreamt up in 1917 by none other than Albert Einstein. In those days nobody knew that the universe was expanding, and Einstein assumed it was static. So he introduced what he called a cosmological repulsion term in his equations to counteract the force of gravity—to explain why, in a static universe, all the stars and galaxies can just hang out there in space when there is this universal force of attraction wanting to pull them together. But in 1930 we learned that the universe isn't static—it's actually expanding. The galaxies are flying apart. When Einstein learned

this, he abandoned his cosmological repulsion term—which he'd put in purely by hand just to fix up his model of a static universe—and said it was his greatest mistake.

But about ten years ago astronomers discovered that there does indeed seem to be something like Einstein's cosmological repulsion force at work in the universe, which got dubbed "dark energy." In my view, it is none other than what Einstein introduced in 1917. So his greatest mistake might actually turn out to be one of his greatest triumphs.

Paul Davies, a cosmologist, is director of BEYOND, a research institute at Arizona State University dedicated to cutting-edge fields of science. His many books include The Mind of God (1992) and Cosmic Jackpot (2007, reprinted in paperback as The Goldilocks Enigma, 2008).

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anna Levin: It's really hard to conjecture what dark matter and dark energy might be. I've worked on some crazy ideas; other people have worked on

some crazy ideas.

One of the things I've been interested

in personally is whether or not the dark energy could come from extra spatial dimensions, dimensions that are so small and curled up that we don't notice them, where a kind of vibration in those multidimensional spaces creates this energy that's felt everywhere in the universe. That could be responsible for the dark energy. And there's been several other ideas totally unrelated to that.

Now with dark matter it would be nice if it connected to dark energy in some way, and it wasn't just a completely separate, random piece of information about the universe. It would be nice if it were somehow a different side of the same coin as dark energy, perhaps related to vibrations in extra dimensions, just like dark energy might be. But until we have more data and more information, that's really all we're going to be doing—exploring possibilities and comparing them to the few observations we do have.

**WIE:** Some physicists are highly critical of dark matter and dark energy, claiming they're merely theoretical concepts that are so inextricably tied to Einstein's particular model of the universe that if that model were somehow disproved, they'd be disproved along with it. Would you agree with that?

**LEVIN:** Well, I should state that these are new observations, and so it only *seems* to be the case that there is dark energy and dark matter. It is becoming very convincing, but these are still early days. There are many cosmological observations that seem much more absolute and concrete than these.

So I would agree that there is another possibility, which is

"Mystics have tended to see the universe as being composed of different layers of matter, most of which were said to be invisible to our usual narrow vision. But in mystical states of consciousness, these other forms of matter would become visible."

-Deno Kazanis



that in terms of Einstein's theory, it's not that the whole paradigm is wrong, but that the theory might need to mutate into a slightly modified theory of gravity that's a little bit different from his original one. As we look at vaster scales of the cosmos or higher energy scales, it's possible that an unexpected distortion of gravity begins to appear, which we're misinterpreting to be the existence of dark energy and dark matter, when all that it really is is a modification of gravity on large scales and high energies. And we cannot yet disentangle which one of those things is right.

Janna Levin, a theoretical cosmologist, is professor of physics and astronomy at Barnard College of Columbia University. She is the author of How the Universe Got Its Spots (2002) and the historical novel, A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines (2006).

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eno Kazanis: When I first heard about dark matter I was impressed by the quantity of it, making up most of the universe. Although I never really took the mystical view of the physical universe very seriously when they talked about dif-

ferent "planes" of matter, when I read about dark matter, I began to realize that it fit in pretty well with what the mystics have been talking about. Mystics in all parts of the world have tended to see the universe as actually being composed of different layers of matter, different types of matter, most of which were said to be invisible to our usual narrow vision. But in mystical states of consciousness, these other forms of matter would become visible to them.

Now when the mystics talk about the "subtle bodies" of man, such as the etheric, astral, mental, soul, and spirit bodies, they describe how they interpenetrate each other and interpenetrate with our visible body as well. A hundred years ago, interpenetration would have been something of a taboo, but thanks to quantum mechanics, we now know that matter isn't solid. Atoms aren't solid things. Our ability to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear the world is really only due to atoms' electric charge. And because objects on the atomic level interact through electric forces, if there's no such force present, then objects can literally pass right through each other. The reason we can hold an apple in our hand and it doesn't fall through is because the apple is made of charged atoms and our hand is made of charged atoms, so they can't interpenetrate. But if an object were actually made of uncharged atoms held together by some other unknown force, it could literally pass right through you.

What intrigued me was that dark matter, being as invisible as they say it is and not able to produce light or any type of electromagnetic waves, meant that this was a substance that was not composed of any electric charge. That's what the invisibility tells you about it—it has no charge whatsoever. Its presence is determined by its gravity, which is an enormous amount, yet the material itself is totally invisible. So it occurred to me that when the mystics were talking about subtle bodies interpenetrating with our visible body, the only way that could be possible would be if these bodies were made up of something other than charged matter. And dark matter would fit that category quite well.

**WIE:** So you're envisioning dark matter as a subtler form of matter, but which somehow coexists in the same space as regular matter, in layers stacked atop one another?

**KAZANIS:** Yes, you could picture these different types of atoms on a three-dimensional periodic table. Our ordinary periodic table is a chart of charged atoms. Then layered above that would be a periodic table of atoms that are made up of, say, pranic, or etheric, matter—which in India would correspond to what they call the *pranamaya kosha*. Above that might be a layer of atoms that have a *manomaya kosha* type of matter, or mental matter, and above that would be a layer of *vijnanamaya* matter, or soul matter, and *anandamaya* matter, or spirit matter, depending on how you wanted to look at it. You can break the gradations up into many different levels, as different cultures have.

Deno Kazanis, a biophysicist, was formerly head of the Orlando Branch Laboratory. He has been a research associate at Duke University, has studied both Tibetan Buddhism and Taoism, and is the author of The Reintegration of Science and Spirituality (2002).

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ernard Haisch: The concept of dark matter is needed to provide an additional gravitational force to explain some of the things that we see in the cosmos, such as the rotation curves of galaxies. Dark energy,

however, might as well be called antigravity, because it's something we invoke in order to explain the accelerating expansion of the cosmos or why things are being

pushed farther apart. So they're exact opposites. But as to what these things are, I don't know.

**WIE:** In your work, you've attempted to create a synthesis of physics, cosmology, and consciousness. How do dark matter and dark energy fit into that? Are they related to consciousness?

HAISCH: Well, I wouldn't necessarily assume that because nine-ty-six percent of the universe is unknown stuff, there's something profoundly spiritual lurking there. It may not be. It may have nothing at all to do with spiritual stuff. What I propose in my book is that consciousness plays a central role in the *origin* of the universe, that the universe is the product of consciousness, the product of a conscious intelligence. You'll find some startling evidence for this if you look at quantum physics today, because a lot of research—such as the University of Vienna's experiment last year expanding on the Bell Inequality—is really pointing to the idea that consciousness is necessary to resolve quantum events, that consciousness acts at a fundamental level to basically create reality.

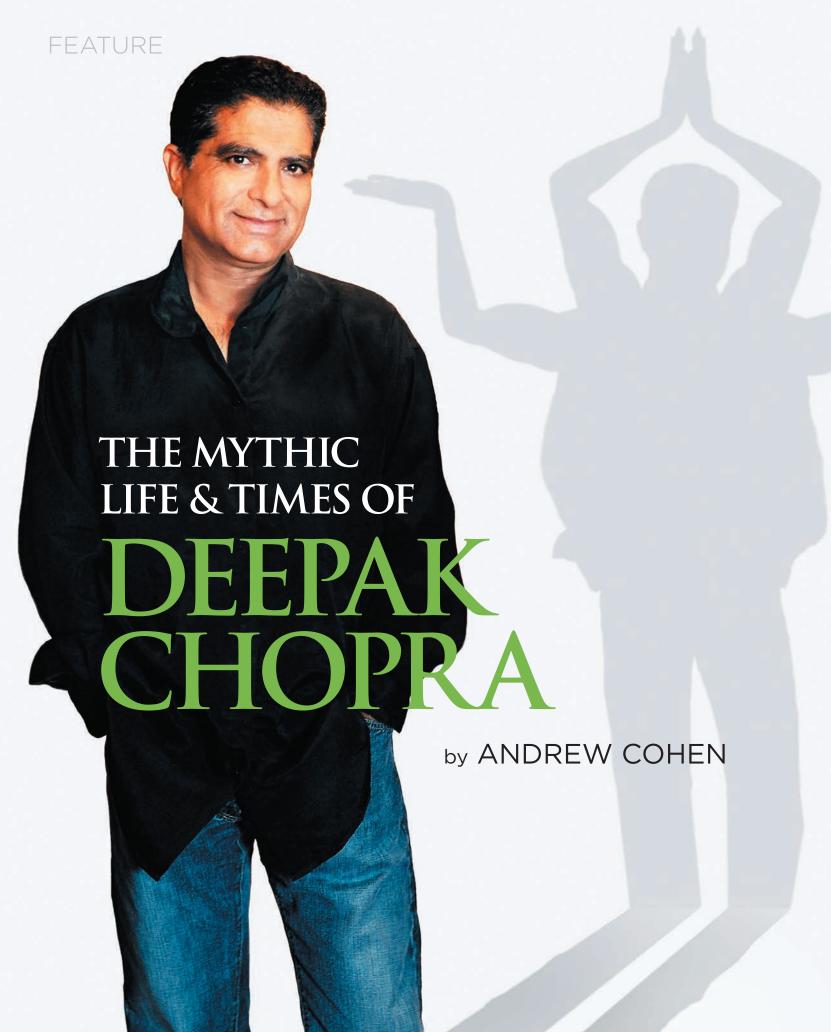
**WIE:** Is this the idea that the universe somehow didn't fully exist until humans came on the scene to observe it, to collapse quantum probabilities into concrete reality with our consciousness?

HAISCH: No, I wouldn't say that because I attribute the origin of the universe, not to human beings, but to a preexisting intelligence. I think this intelligence is both beyond space and time and beyond the universe, but also lives deeply in it, entering into all the life forms in that universe such as you and me, such as the plants and animals on this planet, such as the alien civilizations that probably exist elsewhere. It's the entering of consciousness into all of these forms that, I think, is the purpose behind the universe—for God to experience reality, to experience physicality, to experience some of its infinite potential—and that ultimately the consciousness in all of us will return to the fountain of intelligence that made the universe in the first place. We are simply sparks of a huge bonfire of consciousness, and ultimately we return to the source.

Bernard Haisch, an astrophysicist, was formerly editor in chief of the Journal of Scientific Exploration. He has worked at the Lockheed Martin Solar and Astrophysics Laboratory, among other research institutions, and is the author of The God Theory (2006).



To hear the interviews in their entirety, go to wie.org/darkmatter



ike millions of people around the world, I'm a fan of Deepak Chopra. But for me it wasn't reading his books or hearing him speak or seeing him on *Oprah* that did it—it was getting to know the man himself. Over the last couple of years I've developed considerable respect for Deepak's sheer creative capacity and seemingly boundless energy. I'm a bit awestruck by

the amazing pace with which he lives his relentless globe-trotting life while writing bestseller after bestseller, giving lectures, teaching workshops, leading retreats, making movies, coordinating conferences, and, like a many-armed God from an Indian myth, keeping a hand in more projects than could be contained in most mortal minds at one time. If you get to know him, you'll find him always on fire and full of passion, enthusiasm, and goodwill.

I must admit, however, that I didn't always see Deepak in this light. Indeed, my original—and erroneous impression from his public persona (and I hope he will forgive me for saying this!) was that he was kind of a lightweight salesman whose ambition superseded his spiritual depth. Ten years ago, we even did a mildly disparaging interview with him for WIE entitled "The Man with the Golden Tongue." But after getting to know him over the past few years, spending some intimate time together, and even teaching together, I realized how wrong I had been. So the idea for this interview came up partly because I wanted to make up for my error in judgment, and partly because I hoped to be able to portray a side of him that most people never get to see.

On the day of our interview, Deepak

was in the midst of taping his weekly three-hour show on Sirius Radio, so he invited me to come on as a quest before having lunch and then heading over to the Chopra Center in midtown Manhattan to conduct the interview. Only two days before, Deepak told me, he had flown to and from Bahrain, where he participated in a prestigious leadership conference. On his way back, he stopped in Boston, where he gave his annual talk at the Harvard Medical School. And the next day, back in New York, he addressed a packed house of delegates at the United Nations. As we walked together through the crowded streets, he was approached more than once by enthusiastic and grateful strangers thanking him effusively for changing their lives. As always, he remained gracious and took it all in stride.

As someone who at one time didn't take Deepak very seriously, I have grown to appreciate what a significant figure he has become on the world stage as an advocate for consciousness and social transformation. He is passionate in his commitment to overturning the materialist worldview rampant in Western thinking, not only as it relates to medicine, his original profession, but as it affects our fundamental relationship to the universe we live in. His sheer omnipresence,

whether—it be on Larry King, your local PBS channel, or the cover of Newsweek—represents a growing acceptance of his authority as a spokesperson for nondenominational East-meets-West spirituality able to comment on every subject under the sun. One doesn't have to be in complete philosophical alignment with Deepak to appreciate and respect the positive significance of his influence on mainstream culture all over the world.

As we sat down for this interview in his tiny office at the Chopra Center, my personal curiosity was to find out how he does it all and what his inner life is really like. And while I can't say I found the answers to all my questions, I did discover that the life that Deepak Chopra lives has always been of mythic proportions.



Deepak Chopra & Andrew Cohen



Deepak as a baby with his parents, 1949

**ANDREW COHEN:** Who are the people who have most influenced your spiritual evolution, and what effect did they have on you?

**DEEPAK CHOPRA:** In order of importance: my mother, my father, and my grandmother on my father's side, and later on, J. Krishnamurti and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

**COHEN:** Could you describe the influence that your mother, your father, and your grandmother had on you?

**CHOPRA:** My grandmother used to tell my brother and me mythical stories. And then she used to explain the mythical stories. This was when I was only four or five years old, but I still remember every story that she told us. My mother would then later sing those stories in the original Sanskrit from the Vedas. They were very powerful stories, and she would tell us that we have to be like this god or this goddess—be like Ram, or be like Lakshmi. Anytime we had a dilemma she would say, "How would Saraswati or Lakshmi or Ram behave in this situation?"

When I was only about six or seven years of age, my father got a scholarship to go to England to train in advanced cardiology. And for a short while, my mother joined him, so my brother and I were left with our grandparents in Bombay. One day we got a telegram from England that my father had passed his exams; he was in the Royal College of Physicians. There was lots of celebration. My grandfather was thrilled his son had become a consultant to the royal family, and so he took out his rifle and shot it into the sky. We went to see a movie called *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and then we came home. That night my grandfather died.

We were woken up in the middle of the night, my brother and I, and the servants took us to a neighbor's house. But we could hear the wailing of women. The next day they took him for cremation. They came back with a jar of ashes, and my grandmother said, "That's your grandfather." I went into a huge existential crisis at the age of seven. And my brother's skin started to peel. He went to all kinds of doctors, and nobody could understand what was going on, until one doctor said, "He's feeling vulnerable and this is a sign of his

vulnerability. If his parents come back, he'll be fine." A short while later my parents returned—in those days it took three weeks by boat—and literally within a week, my brother's condition went away. Now, in hindsight, I think that was my first insight into the relationship between what we call biology and what's happening in consciousness.

My father was totally trained in the Western model, a cardiologist. He was very well known and respected, and he was very much into the materialistic reductionist model of medicine. But then in his later years he suddenly became extremely spiritual. He was, for me, a role model—I never saw him angry; I never saw him upset. He used to come home and tell my mother about all his patients, and they would pray for the patients. He was very successful, but on Saturdays and Sundays he would see patients free of charge. We lived in a small town, Jamalpur, and patients used to come from all over the country to see him, and he would not charge them. My mother would even cook food for the patients, and when they left he would buy the train or bus ticket if they didn't have money. So this was extraordinary to see. When I was about ten years old, we left this town, because he was an army doctor and had been re-posted to Shilong, in the Himalayas. And ten thousand people came to the railway station to see him off!

**COHEN:** That's extraordinary.

**CHOPRA:** He was so loved. And then when we left the next town, three years later, the same thing happened: Ten thousand people came to see him off. But he didn't take it too seriously. He just said, "This is my yoga."

**COHEN:** He sounds like a very spiritual man. But didn't you say he was a materialist?



Deepak (right) with childhood friends, 1959

**CHOPRA**: He was a materialist in the beginning, in a huge way.

**COHEN:** So his selfless compassion was inspired, I guess, by a love for humanity, not necessarily a love for God in the traditional sense?

**CHOPRA:** Yes, not a love for God in the traditional sense, a love for humanity. But he used to talk about karma yoga. He used to quote the Gita. And he lived an amazing life. He lived to eighty-five or eighty-six and saw patients till the last day of his life. He died, incidentally, on the day that Bush came to the White House, the first time around. He watched the news on CNN in India and said to my mother, "I think this is a bad sign. I'm leaving." Literally. And he said, "Say good-bye to the kids," and then he closed his eyes and left. But till the day he died, he was working, seeing patients, teaching medical students. And toward the end of his life, he was lecturing at the Vedanta Society in India about health and well-being from a holistic perspective. So he had become very spiritual.

**COHEN:** That's quite a role model. It sounds like your father was a saintly man.

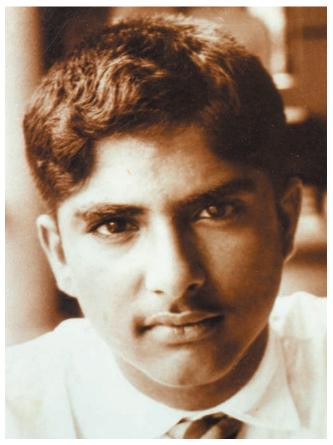
**CHOPRA:** He was. In fact, I used to ask my mother, "Is he always like this?" because he was like that with us. We would be playing cricket, and he'd notice that the bat was worn out, and he had just come home from work, and he would go the store and buy a new bat and leave it at our door. He noticed these things. So I used to ask my mother, "Is he always like that?" And she would say, "Your father is a saint."

**COHEN:** Your grandmother was very devout. What influence did that have on you?

**CHOPRA:** She was very devout, religious in the traditional sense, yes. But that just influenced me via osmosis. My mother was like that too. My father was not overtly religious—he didn't go to temples or pray. He prayed for his patients, but he wouldn't talk about God. We went to the rituals and the ceremonies with my mother and my grandmother.

**COHEN:** But you weren't brought up as a religious person?

**CHOPRA:** No, religion was not something we talked about. You know, I went to an Irish Christian missionary school. The reason we went to Irish Christian schools, even when we were traveling, was just because they were the best schools. But it was very strictly Catholic, so I attended every catechism class. I knew the whole New Testament, all the four gospels. I could recite them, and I was totally into the whole Catholic thing in school. When I was twelve, some of my classmates were joining the seminary to become priests. I found that



Self-portrait, 1961

very enticing. I would come home and talk about it, and my parents would say, "We're sending you to that school not because the Christians are going to convert you but because you're getting a good education."

We also had Muslim friends. In fact, my best friend was a Muslim; his father was a prince from Afghanistan. There had been a revolution in Afghanistan, so the royal family was in India, and the young prince was my best friend. And I had Sikh friends, Zoroastrians, Hindus. We even had some Jewish friends. We used to celebrate Christmas with our Christian friends. So religion, in my mind, meant festivals. It was always associated with festivity and celebration. It didn't mean God. It meant going to my best friend's house to have some sumptuous Afghani banquet.

**COHEN:** You describe in your early autobiographical book, Return of the Rishi, that your nanny had a boyfriend who was an atheist and a communist. You write that he was very confident in his atheism and that had a powerful effect on you as a young teenager.

**CHOPRA:** Yes, "Uncle." He was flamboyant. He was confident. He was Anglo-Indian, and he came from a totally different background. He was an avowed communist and atheist. He used to paint great pictures and smoke cigarettes, and in the evening

he would have a glass of Scotch and talk endlessly about why there is no God. We were very impressed with him.

**COHEN:** You describe an experience when he told you he didn't believe in God, and you admit that "his logic held a guilty appeal" that left you feeling "strangely free."

**CHOPRA:** Yes, because my idea about God, as a child, was from Catholic school—

**COHEN:** The mythic God.



Deepak and his college debating team receiving an award

**CHOPRA:** The God who punishes, rewards, judges, watches your every move. So that was a relief, yes.

**COHEN:** So after that conversation, were you less religiously inclined than you had been up until that point?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. And by the time I got out of high school, I was not at all religiously inclined. My friends who had joined the seminary would talk to us sometimes, and all those things that you hear about the Catholic Church—the scandals of pedophilia, etc.—I heard all that and was totally disgusted. So I didn't want anything to do with God or religion or anything like that. I wanted to be a journalist, a writer. When I finished high school, which I did early, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, my father wanted me to become a physician, but I said, no, I'm going to be a writer. So I went to college at the age of fifteen or sixteen to study English literature.

**COHEN:** That must have been young to go to college.

**CHOPRA:** Yes, but we were precocious, my brother and I, and we were pushed. We were very good academically, and it was just expected in our family.

So when I entered college, I went in with the idea of doing English literature. But on my sixteenth birthday, my father gave me some books as a present. The books were Of Human Bondage and The Razor's Edge by William Somerset Maugham, and then a couple of others—Arrowsmith by Sinclair Lewis and Magnificent Obsession by Lloyd C. Douglas. Of Human Bondage was about a young doctor who sees human suffering and redeems himself by becoming a truly compassionate healer. Magnificent Obsession was about a neurosurgeon who accidentally kills somebody in an automobile accident and then becomes obsessed with helping people anonymously. Arrowsmith was also about a doctor or a healer. The Razor's Edge, of course, was a classic, and on the very first page, it says: "The path to enlightenment is not easy. It's like treading the razor's edge." I didn't know what that meant, but the story captivated me.

So then I started to experience a lot of struggle within myself. I was studying English literature, but now I wanted to be a doctor. The problem was, I had not taken biology in high school. So I went back to my father.

**COHEN:** Obviously, giving you those books was his way of trying to convince you.

**CHOPRA:** Yes, totally. He was very good at that. So I came back to him, and I said, "I've changed my mind; I want to be a doctor."

**COHEN:** He must have been very happy.

**CHOPRA:** He was happy, but then he said, "You didn't do biology." I said, "I want to do it now." So he got me a private tutor, and while I went through college learning English literature, every day I had private tuition in biology. At the end of college I passed my exams in English literature. You could appear for an exam in pre-med without having done the course, so I did that one, too, and I passed. Then I applied to the best medical school in India, which used to take only thirty-five students out of five thousand people who applied. It was all based on exams—no recommendations, nothing else. So I got into medical school. I really wanted to be a doctor now, at any cost.

**COHEN:** So you were studying very hard then?

**CHOPRA:** Very hard. The school was called the All Indian Institute of Medical Sciences. It was competitive; it was American, founded by the Rockefellers, who had financed it partially.

**COHEN:** And how old were you then?

**CHOPRA:** By the time I got into medical school I was seventeen and a half. I spent five years in medical school, from 1964 to 1969.

**COHEN:** Were you very inspired?

**CHOPRA:** I was inspired, but by now, I had kind of fallen into interesting habits: smoking, drinking—sometimes a lot of drinking. We tried LSD, etc.

**COHEN:** That was the time for LSD!

**CHOPRA:** We had lots of American students, hippies, in our school, and even professors who were hippies. I used to get some money from my parents, but it wasn't enough for the lifestyle I was leading, so I used to debate as a professional debater. It was a tradition in colleges and in professional schools. You would just show up for the debate, they would announce a topic, and you would have to speak about it.

**COHEN:** Any topic?

**CHOPRA:** Any topic, ridiculous topics. "In the opinion of the house, Christopher Columbus went too far . . ."

**COHEN:** So this was in elite intellectual circles?

**CHOPRA:** Totally. What happened was I started winning the debates, and the judges of these debates were very accomplished, well-known personalities on Indian radio. Once I started winning the debates, they called me and said, "We could use somebody to substitute for us at night, reading the news on All India Radio." So they would leave at eleven, and All India Radio used to broadcast news every hour throughout the night. So from eleven to seven, I would go and read the news. Soon I had a fan base all over East Africa and Mozambique! I was eighteen.

I loved the lifestyle. I was one of the few people who could afford a Lambretta scooter. I used to ride that, and I used to read the news, and I used to have a good time. I was not interested at all in spirituality throughout medical school.

**COHEN:** When did you study if you were up all night on the radio?

**CHOPRA:** I just *knew* how to do this. I could study and be on the radio. I was a workaholic. I still am, in many ways, but now because I don't have those toxic habits I can go even longer.

**COHEN:** So when did you sleep?

**CHOPRA:** I got used to sleeping only two or three hours. Even after I came to the United States, the working conditions of interns and residents were terrible. The Vietnam War had just

ended, and there were no doctors. So I got used to barely two or three hours of sleep.

During my residency, I arranged my work in such a way that I could go to all these different hospitals for training. But we weren't paid. You got a basic stipend, and everything extra you did for training was on your own.

I had this great vision of being a neuroendocrinologist and getting a Nobel Prize. So I used to train at these places and not get paid for it, just to work as an apprentice to someone famous. But my stipend was only \$202 and my rent was \$120. By then I was married and I had one child. There's no way you can live on \$82. So I used to work throughout the day, and then there was a little hospital outside of Boston where I would go in the night and work as an emergency

I didn't want to have anything to do with God or religion or anything like that. I just wanted to be a journalist or a writer.

room doctor. I used to work twenty-four hours—and in between, get some sleep!

**COHEN:** That's impressive.

**CHOPRA:** There's one incident I should tell you about, which was the pivotal incident. I was interested in neuroendocrinology, because the field was all about the "molecules of emotion." I didn't know back then that I was going to get interested in spirituality, but I was fascinated by the idea that there were molecules that represented emotions. So I got a hard-to-get fellowship with the president of the Endocrine Society. He was very ambitious, and the organization used to publish hundreds of papers in the field. He was ready to be nominated for the Nobel Prize in medicine and physiology, so for me, it was the best thing that could have happened.

But soon after I entered the fellowship, I realized that these guys were not about science in the true sense of the word. They were about who could publish faster. We would sit around every morning, and he would go through all the journals and see who had published papers in our field. Every time some-body else had published a paper in our field of research, the professor, who I idolized, used to throw the journals around and go into tantrums. So within a month or two, I was feeling quite disheartened. I had come here to do research in this amazing new field with the team that was going to win the Nobel Prize one day, but then I realized that it was all about one-upmanship.

About six weeks into my training, it all came to a head. He berated me in front of the entire research department for not remembering the exact amount of iodine that had been fed to some rats in a 1959 research paper. "I'm so disgusted," he shouted. "You should have that information in your head by now!"

So very impulsively I picked up my bag and dumped it on his head and said, "Now you have it on your head, and I'm

The Maharishi said to me, "Drop everything and work with me. I'll teach you about consciousness, and you can talk to the whole world about it."

done. I'm leaving." He looked at me in amazement and said, "Do you know what you are doing?" And I said, "I'm walking out on an asshole." He said, "You know that I'm the most important endocrinologist in the country, that people from all over the world want to work with me?" I said, "I don't want to work with you." And I walked out. He followed me into the parking lot, screaming at me: "You ruined your career. You're finished. You're history." I got into my little beat-up old Volkswagen beetle and just drove away. I didn't go home. I went to a bar and got drunk.

My wife was pregnant with our second child at that time, and she was dismayed, upset, fearful. The next day we didn't have any salary or job or stipend, and nobody in academia would talk to me. That's when I took a day job in the emergency room, and that's where I met somebody who said, "You know, Deepak, you should learn meditation." So that's how it all started. If I hadn't walked out on that professor, I'd still be in some lab putting iodine in rat thyroids and maybe hoping for a Nobel Prize.

**COHEN:** You said that your biggest spiritual influences were J. Krishnamurti and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Did you get interested in Krishnamurti before or after you started meditating?

**CHOPRA:** Krishnamurti was before I started meditating. I didn't have a job; I didn't have a fellowship. I'd gone through this whole crisis, questioning what I was doing in the lab. So I was reading a lot, because then I didn't have much to do. I was in the emergency room, only working one shift, and for me an eight-hour shift was nothing!

**COHEN:** So you were questioning what you were doing because in this great doctor who you had looked up to and idolized, you just saw pure ambition and you felt disillusioned?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. I saw pure ambition, and also I saw that in academic medicine, it was not about patients. So I was totally disillusioned.

**COHEN:** And that's what inspired you to start inquiring spiritually?

**CHOPRA:** Inquiring and reading. I was reading mostly Krishnamurti at that time. And then he gave a lecture here in New York City at Madison Square Garden, at the Felt Forum. It was January 8, 1977.

**COHEN:** I might have been there! I saw Krishnamurti at the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden about that time—it was in the late seventies.

**CHOPRA:** I remember, he ran up the stairs, and people started to clap. He looked at the audience and said, "Why are you clapping? If you want entertainment go to Broadway." He was really harsh at times. But I was fascinated by him. So then I started going to his lectures, and I started reading even more. I also didn't fully understand him. Then there was an inner voice that started to speak to me. "He is speaking the truth; he doesn't know how to explain it. You have to do that one day," the voice said. "He's speaking the truth. He's not explaining it well, but that's your job."

**COHEN:** Can you describe your first spiritual experience?

**CHOPRA:** In hindsight, I'd had spiritual experiences all my life. As a child, I had experiences playing. I used to do theater, Shakespeare, and now I realize that during the play itself, I'd be

# "I WANT TO TELL YOU ONE MORE STORY..."



With George Harrison, 1998

I WAS WITH GEORGE HARRISON when he went to apologize to Maharishi for what happened in 1969. [The Beatles left Rishikesh abruptly in 1969, after John accused the Maharishi of sexual misconduct.] George wanted to say to Maharishi that everything John Lennon said about him was not true, that maybe it was because of the drugs, or whatever. And so we went to see Maharishi. The custom was to give him a flower, a red rose, and when we left, he would give the rose back, having blessed it. So we went and gave him the rose, and then we sat and meditated for about fifteen minutes. It was just George, me and Maharishi. And then George said, "I'm sorry Maharishi." And Maharishi asked, "For what?" "For what happened in '69," George replied. And Maharishi asked, "What happened?" George said, "You know, what John said . . ." "Yes, I heard vaguely something John said," Maharishi replied. "But you know, we love John, all of us." And

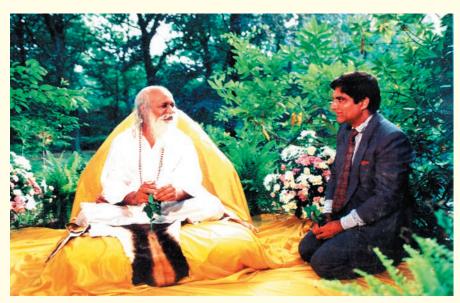
George said, "You know, of course, that he was assassinated."

This was twenty years after the fact. And Maharishi said, "Yes, I was very grieved to hear about that. But that's not the important story.

Tell Deepak the really important story, about when you went to America." And so George told me (and I don't know if this is really true but it is part of Beatles mythology) that when the Beatles came to the US and they were on the Ed Sullivan Show, according to FBI statistics, for that hour there was no crime in the country.

Maharishi smiled: "When I heard that these four boys could stop America and free it of crime for one hour with their music,

I knew that they were angels on Earth. So I don't mind what John said. He was an angel on Earth." And George started to cry. As we left, we took the flowers back, and George looked at Maharishi and he said, "I love you Maharishi." And the Maharishi looked up to him, and said, "Me too." It was very touching, very beautiful. And not so long after that George got sick and died. So he concluded the karmic debt very gracefully.



With the Maharishi, 1990

playing Julius Caesar, and my body was lying there, and I was watching it from the outside, right in the middle of a play. So in hindsight, I had these experiences all my life.

**COHEN:** Out-of-body experiences?

**CHOPRA:** Yes, totally nonlocal, to use today's language. I had tried LSD in medical school twice. One experience was with these American hippie medical students. We'd all taken LSD, and we were on a train from Delhi to Madras. We were looking at this poster of Mother Teresa, and we all started to cry. For that entire trip we wanted to be with Mother Teresa. So these were all very interesting experiences, but I never put them in the context of spirituality. But then when I started meditation, suddenly it clicked.

I was always ambitious. I guess I still am. But the personal stake is not there any more. It's a very freeing position to be in.

**COHEN:** What was the original reason you started to meditate?

CHOPRA: I was reading a lot about meditation itself, reading Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness*. I had always loved the theories of consciousness. I could tell you everything from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Schopenhauer to the Upanishads—I'd read it all by now. I just kept reading and reading voraciously. Then I started to read Vedanta and realized, "Oh, I've had these experiences." So when I finally took up transcendental meditation (TM), I *really* woke up. It was an amazing thing. I *completely* lost my desire for alcohol, for cigarettes, for meat, etc. It was transformative, absolutely. So when later I had the opportunity to meet Maharishi, or actually to see him in a lecture, I jumped at it. I was like a new convert. I started telling everybody why they should meditate.

**COHEN:** You wrote in your book Return of the Rishi that right after you started meditating, you were experiencing a kind of joy that was so profound that you were almost embarrassed.

**CHOPRA:** Right. I was experiencing joy and ease, not thinking about the future at all.

**COHEN:** How did that compare with your experience before that?

**CHOPRA:** It was a huge contrast. I had been on a treadmill—like everybody else in residency, training, and fellowship. You worked hard, you played hard, you were always trying to be better than the other guy. It was just the way it was—even the professors were doing the same thing.

**COHEN:** So this shift happened almost instantaneously when you started meditating?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. The contrast was instantaneous. But it did remind me of previous spiritual experiences I'd had.

**COHEN:** Can you describe a little bit about what started happening inside you?

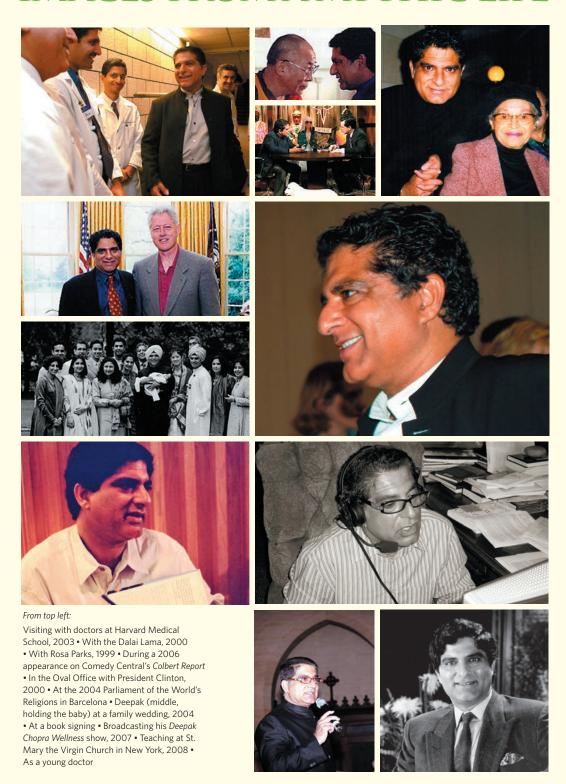
**CHOPRA:** I started feeling light. Started feeling bright. Started feeling joyful. Started feeling ecstatic. Started feeling that I loved everybody. Started feeling that I wanted to help everybody. I also started feeling that everybody in the world should meditate! That was instantaneous.

**COHEN:** In the book, when you describe your first meeting with Maharishi, you explain that sitting in his presence your mind became totally quiet. You write: "I felt completely unselfconscious. It didn't usually cross my mind that I carried the weight of my own self-consciousness until that moment, when it dropped off." I thought that was very compelling.

**CHOPRA:** Yes, because the silence was very profound. It was, as they say, deafening. And even though I'd experienced it before, it wasn't this sustained silence.

That first meeting was, to me, seemingly accidental. My wife and I had flown from Boston to Washington to hear him speak. After the lecture, I had just come out of the men's room, and suddenly there he was, coming round the corner. He walked right up to us and said, "Come up to my room." We followed him upstairs, and after asking me a few questions about myself, he started telling me I should do Ayurveda, and I should talk about consciousness to the world. My wife was not so influenced by him as I was, and I could see just by her body language that she wanted to get the hell out of there. We had left the kids in Boston with babysitters, and she wanted to get home. At one point he said to me, "You should drop everything and you should work with me and I'll teach you about consciousness, and you can talk to the whole world about it." She looked at him and asked sarcastically, "So who's going to pay the mortgage? Where is the money going to come from?"

# **IMAGES FROM A MYTHIC LIFE**



And he bent forward and said, "The money will come from wherever it is at the moment." I had never heard a statement like that! But she brushed it off and said, "Let's go home." So we left.

We went to the airport and there, by chance, I met an old colleague from Australia who had gone to medical school with me. He told me he was interested in meditation, and he gave me a book. It was Vasant Lad's *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing*.

**COHEN:** Now I know why you're so enthusiastic about synchronicity!

**CHOPRA:** Synchronicity, yes! So I read the book on the flight from Washington to Boston. When we got to Boston, I said to my wife, "Rita, you go home and take care of the kids. I'm going back." She said, "Are you crazy?" "Yes, I'm crazy," I said. So I took the next flight back. By now Maharishi was busy with other people, and they said, "He's not making new appointments." I said, "You tell him that I'm outside this room, and

I've started to have an ever-present witnessing awareness. I might be doing anything, but the witness doesn't leave me; it's who I really am.

I'm not leaving till he sees me." I waited for three days. Finally I got in, and I said to him, "Okay, I'm ready. Show me what to do." That's when he took me under his wing. I started going back and forth to India to be with him. Soon I was spending half my time in India, going to Ayurvedic doctors and sitting in Maharishi's presence while they talked to each other about Vedanta. And he would send me to give lectures here and there.

**COHEN:** So was that when you decided to become a disciple, to give your life to the study of consciousness and also to Ayurveda?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. Then I spent all my time with Maharishi. By then, I had written a little book called *Creating Health:* 

How to Wake Up the Body's Intelligence, but no publisher would accept that book. So I self-published it—I got five hundred copies printed. A couple of my friends in Cambridge took the books on their bicycles, and we convinced the Harvard Coop manager to put it in the window for three days. And an agent picked it up, and she called me and said, "You should get this published." "We tried," I told her. "It didn't work." So she said, "I'll get you a publisher," and she got me a \$5,000 advance. The book was published by Houghton Mifflin. It was a simple book with lots of examples of my patients' mind-body effects, mostly questions, but I don't think there had been a book at that time, popular or otherwise, that said, your mind can create the difference between health and sickness. So that book became a national bestseller.

The next thing I know, I'm lecturing in Paris with Maharishi, and I'm getting calls from people like Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis at Doubleday: "We want you as an author." I'm getting calls from Peter Guzzardi, editor of Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time: "We want you." Some of them even started to fly over to where I was to recruit me. I signed up with the New York publisher Bantam Books, which used to publish a lot of this kind of stuff. And of course, every book did better than the previous one. Suddenly it was huge. It was totally unexpected.

**COHEN:** And that was in the early eighties?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. It was 1984. The next book I wrote was *Return of the Rishi*, which nobody noticed except the *New York Times*, which gave it a good review. But then the third book, *Quantum Healing*, was big. It was on the cover of many magazines. And then there was *Oprah*, in 1992, which was huge. After *Oprah*, in twenty-four hours there were 130,000 books sold. In the first week, 800,000 books sold. In the first month, one million books sold. It just didn't stop—it hit the roof. And in my mind, I gave all the credit to Maharishi at that time, because he had said, "The money will come from wherever it is at the moment." I told my wife, "See what he said?" So I gave him all the credit for everything.

**COHEN:** At that time, when you were teaching and lecturing, it was under his auspices?

**CHOPRA:** Yes. I was teaching and lecturing under his auspices throughout the world—Japan, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe. The first time we went to Moscow, I gave a lecture to a thousand people about meditation. The next day, six hundred people learned to meditate! It was an amazing time. People all over the world were learning meditation. It was fabulous. It was thrilling. It was easy. There's no English word for this, but

it was *sattvic*. It was beautiful. And soon I became Maharishi's substitute.

**COHEN:** His number one representative?

**CHOPRA:** Number one representative. He had stopped traveling by then.

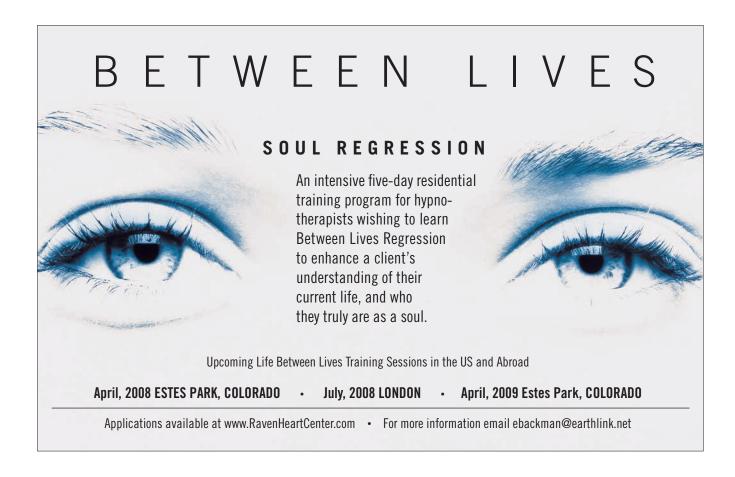
**COHEN:** So why did you eventually leave him and go off on your own, and what changed in you as a result?

**CHOPRA:** Well, first of all, he got sick, in India. We don't know what the cause of it was, but it was rumored that it was poisoning. My father was his physician, and he said, "He's not going to survive unless he gets dialysis." They had no dialysis in India at the time, so I flew to England and registered him in a hospital. This is not public knowledge, but I don't care anymore; sometimes the history has to be told. I registered him under a false name, a Muslim Arab name. Then my father and two other doctors flew to England with him. He had a cardiac arrest, he was put on a pacemaker, and he was given up for dead. We were trying to contact the next of kin, which was a slow process because

he was a sannyasi, and there were lots of Indian rules and regulations about this, spiritually. So while that was all being done, he suddenly started to recover. It was quite inexplicable. His kidney functions came back. His heart function came back. His pacemaker was no longer required, and he just sat up in bed. We said, "Maharishi, what happened?" He said, "I must have hurt my ribs or something." He was very casual about it.

So I started to nurse him. Rita and I moved to England for a while. First we had him in a hotel in London, and we would take walks in Hyde Park every day. Occasionally, we would meet somebody who would say, "Hey, that's the guru of the Beatles." And my wife would say, "No, no, that's my father-in-law." Then he got even better, and we moved him into a place outside of London, in the country. He was convalescing. There was no one there except for a couple of servants. Rita used to shuttle back and forth between Boston and England; I stayed, and for twelve, fourteen hours a day we would talk about Vedanta, about consciousness.

**COHEN:** Just you and him?



CHOPRA: Just me and him. And I would challenge him; I would ask him questions. He would laugh; he was very happy. And so was I. Twelve hours, fourteen hours, doing nothing-talking only about consciousness. He would go into great detail about how consciousness is silent, then the first impulse arises, and how that impulse comes from the unmanifest, and what is the edge of the manifest and the unmanifest. He could go on for hours like that-the impulse of consciousness hovering on the edge of the manifest and the unmanifest. I could see the extreme joy in him as he would explain that, and I could feel the extreme joy. I was just with him, and the world was luminous. So this went on for a whole year—just me and him.

One very interesting thing happened during this time. We were in the southwest of England, near Devon. He used to sleep in the afternoons, so I would take a bike and visit the ruins around there. I started to buy little postcards of Arthurian legends-Lancelot, Arthur, this, that, and the other. I knew nothing about King Arthur or anything like that, but during this phase, I suddenly had a whole book come through me, The

Return of Merlin, which made it to the New York Times fiction bestseller list. It was about a period that I knew nothing about personally! It just came to me during this time. Just by picking up these little postcards, I wrote that book.

**COHEN:** So this book was not the result of any kind of study?

**CHOPRA:** Not other than the postcards.

**COHEN:** So it had some kind of fantastic, miraculous dimension to it?

**CHOPRA:** Absolutely, yes. That was the feeling. And then many things like that started to happen to me—lots of what you call cognition—sudden experiences, like suddenly understanding what Maharishi was saying about the Rig Veda, very transformative shifts inside, seeing the world completely differently.

A year later, we moved him from England to Vlodrop, which is outside of Amsterdam. And then, since he had completely stopped traveling, I became the traveler. I went everywhere.



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That was when I started to notice that people were giving me homage in a traditional Indian guru sense. I would step out of an airplane, and people would place garlands round my neck. They were treating me like Maharishi. I didn't feel comfortable with this. I didn't even feel up to it; I didn't feel that I was at that level. I'd say ninety-five percent of the people in the movement were treating me in that manner. And then there was another five percent who were very angry. I had just joined the movement a few years earlier; they had devoted their whole lives to it. Suddenly I was the heir apparent, the prince being groomed for the throne. So the majority of the people literally loved me, and we're talking about three million people! And then there were the few in the hierarchy who were very angry.

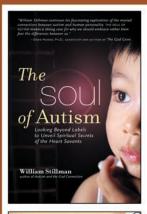
Something else was also happening, in that I started to feel that there was not much tolerance within the structure of the movement for anything that was outside.

**COHEN:** It was too insular?

**CHOPRA:** Very insular. So that was bothering me. I felt constricted by the vocabulary and the structure of the movement,

and also by having to stay within the philosophical framework, which is purely Vedantic—which is great, but you know, it's not everything.

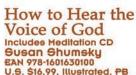
It was Guru Purnima day\* in 1993. The whole day was a celebration, and everybody used to get some private time with Maharishi. Around midnight on Guru Purnima, Rita and I went to his room. I don't know what was happening inside me; I was feeling very restless. He said, "Deepak, people are saying that you are competing with me." It came as a shock, but also not as a shock, because that was what people were saying. And I said, "Maharishi, first of all, I would not have even the imagination to compete with you. Secondly, I don't have the desire to compete with you. Thirdly, I'm feeling very constricted." He said, "Why don't you stop lecturing for a while, stop writing, come and be with me for a while and think about what you want to do." I said, "Maharishi, I don't need to think about it. I want to leave now." He was very shocked. He said, "No,



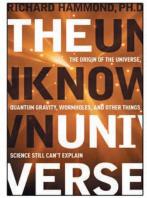
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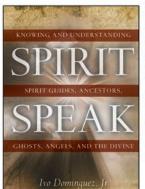
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<sup>\*</sup>The traditional Hindu day for celebrating the guru, held on the first full moon in July.

no, think for a little while." But for whatever reason, I found myself saying, "I don't want to think for a while." I took Rita's hand, and I touched his feet, and I said, "We are leaving." And he kept looking at me, not believing that I was going.

It was the middle of the night when we left the ashram. I rented a car, and we drove to Amsterdam and then flew to Boston. As soon as we came to the house, the phone was ringing. It was Maharishi, and he said, "You're like my son. I said something to upset you." I answered, "No. You didn't say anything to upset me. But I needed an excuse to leave." Then he said, "You don't realize"—he used this word—"we have an empire and it's yours." "Maharishi," I told him, "you don't understand. I don't want that empire. I want freedom. I want to think the way I think. I want to write the way I write. I want to speak the way I speak. I don't find that I can do that here." "You will be able to," he insisted. I replied, "No, I won't. It's a system, now, and it's a system that has created something that makes it impossible to work outside the system." He asked, "So what do you want to do?" And I told him, "I want to leave." These were his last words: "Then go. I will love you, but I will be indifferent to you, and you'll never hear from me again." And I said, "Okay. God bless." That was the last time I spoke to him.

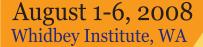
But I'm happy, because after that I suddenly found the freedom to be creative in a way I never could be before. It's now been fifty books or more, and at that time it was only four or five. Most of my productivity came after I left. But he, of course, groomed me for it. They say that the fruit takes a long time to ripen, and then it falls. At that moment it fell. And I felt, "Now I don't have to report to anyone. I can do what I want." Then everything happened by itself. There was no strategy at all.

**COHEN:** So it sounds like the main catalyst for your leaving was the fact that your own creative inspiration was transcending, pushing beyond the sphere of the TM movement. What did you do after you left?

CHOPRA: I went to California to give a lecture, and I met David Simon, a very remarkable doctor who actually knows as much about consciousness as I do, if not more. We've been working



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together now for about fifteen years; we're a perfect team. If I have to go on CNN or something, I now get called at the drop of a hat. "President Clinton announces the genome project. Dr. Chopra will be commenting on *Larry King*." And what do I know about the genome project or stem cells? So I call David. There's nothing in the world of mind-body medicine that I need to know that David can't give to me within a few hours—not only the information, but he also hashes it out in terms of consciousness.

So we're partners now in everything we do. There are a few books we've written together, and he's an influence in everything I do. But he stays behind the scenes. He has a lot of self-esteem, in that he's grounded in this knowledge of consciousness in a way that he's not competing for attention or anything like that. That's a partnership for life.

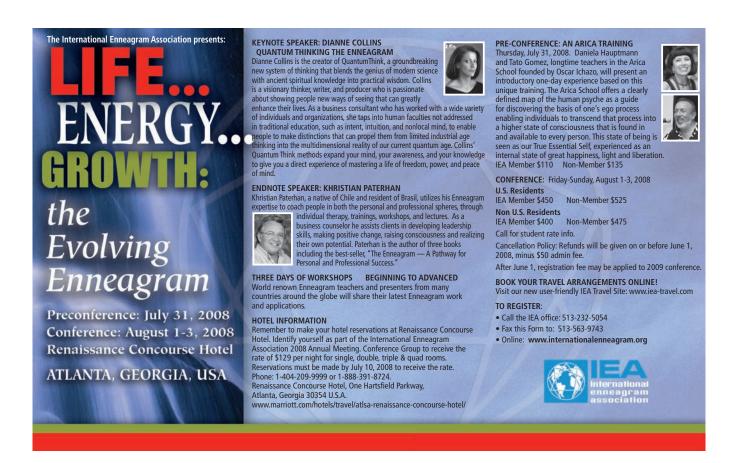
**COHEN:** Since the initial awakening you had, after you started meditating, have you had any other significant spiritual experiences?

**CHOPRA:** You know, I don't even tell this to people who come to our courses, because we never share anything personal. But what has happened is that for the last ten or twelve years,

at night when I go to sleep, I meditate for half an hour, then sleep for half an hour, meditate for half an hour, sleep for half an hour. When I'm sleeping it's a totally witnessing sleep. My wife knows this, because she sees me sitting up in bed. And I've started to have a very sober, nondramatic but distinct, ever-present witnessing awareness, whether I'm sleeping or dreaming or in a waking state. The witness is always there; it's there now, for example. It's not dramatic, but it's very much part of who I am at the moment. And I don't prepare anymore. I used to prepare lectures, like speaking at Harvard Medical School, where my brother is a dean, which I do once a year. But now I find that I give my lectures very naturally. It comes spontaneously, and there is a witnessing quality as I am speaking.

**COHEN:** When you say "witnessing quality," can you describe what that experience is?

**CHOPRA:** My body is asleep, but I'm observing my body in deep sleep. My body is dreaming, and I'm observing my body in the dream state. My body is speaking to you; I'm observing my body as it sits with these two people in this room. I might



be doing anything, but that witness doesn't leave me; it's here. And it's who I really am, I think.

**COHEN:** So that is the part of the self that never moves?

CHOPRA: It never moves. And it's great, because I can go from here to Bahrain, where I was a few days ago, but that part is always watching. It's one of the reasons that I don't get tired. I really do not get fatigued. I mean, it's not like I have the best habits in the world; I still have one or two cups of coffee a day. I exercise every day, of course. But my life is all over the place with doing different things. I just did this "Iconoclasts" show with Mike Myers. We did improv theater off-Broadway. Whatever people tell me to do, I do it. I just go and join them in their thing. Mike Myers made this silly but very funny movie called The Love Guru, which is coming out in June. It's about this guy who wants to be Deepak Chopra. Mike wanted me to make a five-minute cameo appearance, so I went to do that. But then suddenly when I was doing that, I realized, he's doing a parody of me, so I should do a parody of him.

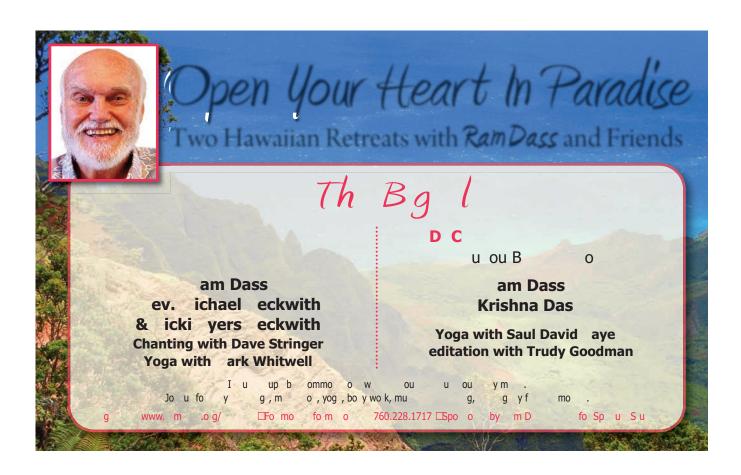
So I just finished a book called Why Is God Laughing? It's

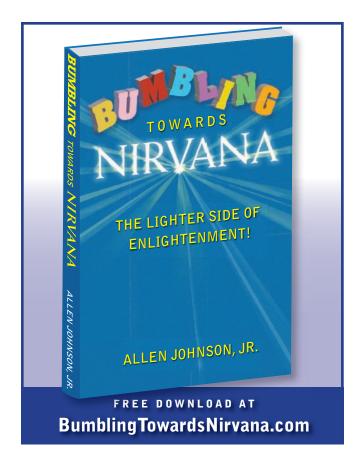
about a comedian who has existential dilemmas but covers them up with his jokes. These things just happen to me. And there's a part of me that is totally not involved. It's been like that now for ten, twelve years.

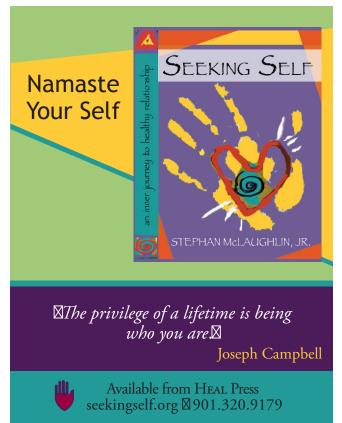
**COHEN:** So this started about ten or twelve years ago. Was there anything that catalyzed it?

CHOPRA: Leaving Maharishi. I'm positive it was leaving Maharishi. You know, when I was with him, that silence would permeate everything. But then when I'd leave the room, or he'd leave the room, it would be like I was hit by a truck. The contrast was so much—with him, total bliss, and then as he leaves, boom. You'd be hit by a truck, and you can't even get up because as soon as you get up, it hits you again. I used to feel that contrast.

I remember one day a Brazilian reporter said to him, "Don't you ever sleep?" And Maharishi looked at him very lovingly and said, "My waking state is more restful than your deepest sleep." He wasn't showing off; he was just saying what he felt. I didn't understand it then. But I now understand it, because I feel like that. I don't get tired. I don't get fatigued. During the







night I sleep and meditate, sleep and meditate, throughout the night. I get up at four or four-thirty and meditate for two hours and then go to the gym, and then, honestly speaking, I don't know what the day is going to hold. I call my assistant and I say, "Tell me, what am I doing?" This morning she said, "You have a radio show, and then you're meeting Andrew. You're going to walk with him somewhere and have a little lunch, and then you're going to do this interview." So that's how my days go now. Tomorrow I happen to know that I'm doing the Virtual Pledge Drive for PBS, but there's lots of other stuff I'm doing tomorrow that I don't know. It's on my schedule; it's probably on the website, but I pick up my voicemail and I listen in the morning to what I'm doing, and then I go with it. It's very spontaneous. For me it's effortless now.

**COHEN:** Because you travel so much, your schedule must be completely erratic, in terms of sleeping.

**CHOPRA:** If I'm on the plane, either I'm writing or meditating or I'm sleeping. But when I get to some place, no matter where it is, I'm *there*, fully with it. I don't experience jet lag, or anything—that's just the way it is now.

**COHEN:** When you're sleeping and meditating throughout the night, is it spontaneous now?

CHOPRA: Yes. Totally. It's happening.

**COHEN:** Did you decide at any point that you wanted to do that, or did it just start happening?

**CHOPRA:** I think I started to do it about twelve years ago. Maybe I wasn't sleeping, so I thought I'd meditate. And so I started to do it like that. But then it became a habit, and then I started to notice this witnessing.

In the old days with Maharishi, some people used to say to him, "I'm not sleeping well." And Maharishi would ask, "Are you tired when you wake up in the morning?" And they would reply, "No." He would tell them, "Then you're fine, because if you're not tired, you must be getting the same rest." I remember him also saying that when you start witnessing, your body might be sleeping, but you are not. So now I know, very clearly, that my body is sleeping during those periods but I'm not. It's a good experience. And by the way, it's never been as good as it is now. I used to think it was going to plateau, but it's always increasing a little bit.

**COHEN:** In terms of the energy and the witnessing awareness?

CHOPRA: Yes.

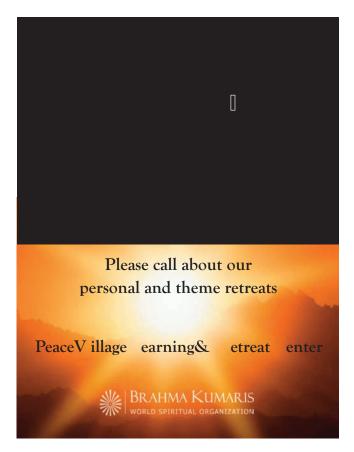
**COHEN:** What do you think the relationship is between the boundless energy that you're experiencing now and the unusual confidence you had in yourself as a young man? From the very

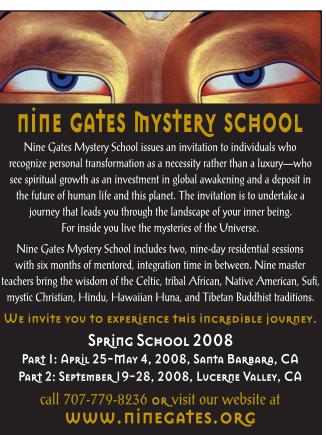
beginning, it seems that you were destined for some kind of greatness. You even said at one point you wanted to win a Nobel Prize in medicine. One way or the other, you have been driven, in a positive sense, and inspired to achieve great things and to really make a mark—long before your spiritual interests awakened. What is the relationship between your early ambition and the energy that is driving you now? Obviously, there is a difference, but there also has to be a connection. I'm interested in what the connection is.

**CHOPRA:** I'll tell you what the difference is. The difference is that now I don't have a personal stake in what I do. I really can say that with conviction—that I don't have a personal stake in anything that I do. I do it because it's fun. I do it because it gives me energy, and I love doing something that's different, creative, and that has something to do with consciousness. It's almost as if I'm driven by it, rather than I'm driving it. And there is no personal stake in terms of money, recognition, fame, or fortune.

It was difficult for me to translate that into my relationships, with my wife and with my children, because you always have a personal stake in your family. But funnily enough, I'm realizing that I actually don't have the personal stake in my family that I used to have. I mean, I want my children to do well; I want my wife to be happy; I really want us to be together, to have the best convivial time. But I am not now rooting for my son's success, or my daughter's success—they do what they do. And I can say I don't have a personal stake. Then my daughter has these babies, and my son has a child, and suddenly I start to have a personal stake in my grandchildren, which is a very interesting thing! If you were to ask me if I have a personal stake emotionally with anything in the world, I would say it is with those kids. But even there, I can see that as the years pass, it's going to go. It's not that I don't love them. I love them perhaps even more, but there's not that emotional attachment. That has given me an immense ability to do things that I would not have done in the past.

What's that expression—"You can do anything you want when you have nothing to lose"? Well, I am in that position right now, where I can do anything I want, and I have nothing to lose. There was a point in my life when I used to be really hurt by criticism, by attacks, by stories made up by the media. I would react to it. But three days ago there was an eight hundred—page comment on my blog, calling me all kinds of names, and I found myself totally not reacting to it. In fact, I was trying to see how one could have a compassionate view of the guy who posted this. At least I was asking myself that question. So I asked myself, why is that? Partly it's that I'm sixty-one years old. When you enter the autumn of your life, and you have maybe another twenty years or so, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? Is it going to be all about yourself, as it has been up to this point? Or is it going to be about other things?





I was always ambitious, I realize in hindsight—wanting to do this, wanting to do that. I guess I still am. But the personal stake is not there any more. That's the only way to describe it. It's a very freeing position to be in.

**COHEN:** Thinking about your life, it seems to me that you were almost born with a very powerful intention. Obviously, that's not an ordinary thing. There are not many people who have that kind of confidence in themselves and their capacity to accomplish great things from such an early age.

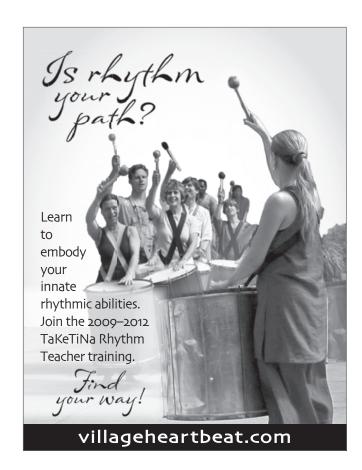
**CHOPRA:** That's partly because of my mother. When we were very little, she would drum this into us: "You'll change the world. You're bound to create extraordinary difference. You should rule. Saraswati and Lakshmi will follow you." All these little stories: "You're a prince," etc. Mothers like to say these things to their children. And at some level, those muffled tapes keep repeating themselves in the back of my mind.

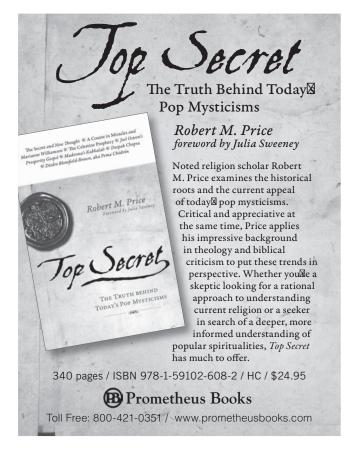
**COHEN:** So at this particular point in your life, beyond the incredible amount you are already doing, is there anything specific that you want to accomplish?

CHOPRA: Yes. It sounds kind of lofty and idealistic, but I think that if I can somehow draw the world's attention to all the people who are actually contributing in their way, perhaps we can create a new conversation. The world is a collective conversation at any time, and the media controls that. In the old times, in the village square, the guy who had the megaphone was the guy in charge. At this moment, the guys who have the microphone are telling a very sad story. We see that story being acted out every day. So now I've reached a certain kind of credibility where the mainstream is willing to invite me to speak, whether it's CNN or Harvard Medical School or Bill Clinton for Save the Children. So I want to take advantage of this mainstream exposure. I ask myself, "What am I achieving with this?" Well, if we can suddenly have that microphone in the village square for people like you and myself, people who are exploring the field of consciousness, there are a lot of people in the square who want to listen.



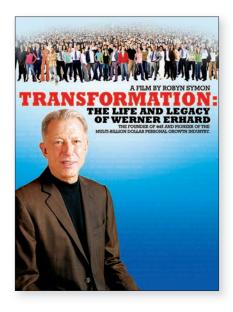
Listen to the interview with Deepak Chopra at wie.org/Chopra





# natural selection

### BOOKS » FILM » OTHER MEDIA



#### **TRANSFORMATION**

The Life and Legacy of Werner Erhard
Written and directed by Robyn Symon
(Eagle Island Films, 2006, on DVD in May 2008, www.transformationfilm.com)

At the age of twenty-five, Jack Rosenberg made a momentous decision. As a young married man living in Philadelphia with two children, Jack felt suffocated by his life and resolved to make a wholesale change. Without telling friends or family, he boarded a plane for the West Coast and left his life completely behind, determined to start anew. The year was 1960, and within one decade, this young high school-educated Philadelphia transplant would become a star—not the kind that ends up on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, but one that becomes a revered figure at the forefront of a mass movement. Rosenberg would eventually start one of the fastest-growing selfactualization movements of the twentieth century, impacting millions of individual lives, reshaping institutions all over the country, and, some would say, transforming the face of American culture. Then, in 1991, he left it all behind again. He resigned from the organization he had founded, boarded another plane, and left the country, disappearing from the eyes of the American media and receding from the public's consciousness.

If the tale of Jack Rosenberg doesn't ring any bells in your memory bank, it is probably because on that original flight across the country in 1960, Jack decided that a new life should include a new name. And so, while reading a magazine with articles on Werner Heisenberg and Amelia Erhard, he chose a name that was a combination of the two—Werner Erhard. In 1971, Erhard founded what was arguably the biggest self-help movement in history: EST, short for Erhard Seminars Training. Today, thirty-seven years later, he has long since disappeared from public view.

So what ever happened to Werner Erhard? It is a question that has long been more than a curiosity to the many thousands of people he directly influenced, and one that Emmy Award—winning documentary filmmaker Robyn Symon attempts to answer in her new film *Transformation: The Life and Legacy of Werner Erhard.* As a graduate of EST, or rather its successor, The Forum, I was also quite interested to see what Symon's film would reveal about the life and recent activities of this unique (and uniquely American) figure who has had such an impact on our culture and the direction of the human potential movement.

Erhard himself was certainly no stranger to mystery. Called everything from a twentieth-century genius to a snake oil charlatan, there was a time when it seemed that everyone had a strong opinion about just what kind of an angel or devil he was. But amid the considerable controversy his movement provoked, one thing was clear: his work made a big imprint on the hearts and minds of participants. Millions of people took the EST training in the 1970s and 1980s, and hundreds of thousands participated in his other projects, including Youth at Risk, a program for inner-city young people, and the Hunger Project, an organization attempting to create a mass consensus to end world hunger. Even today, EST survives in modified form, going by the name of The Forum. And EST as an organization has continued to be successful under the new name of Landmark Education.

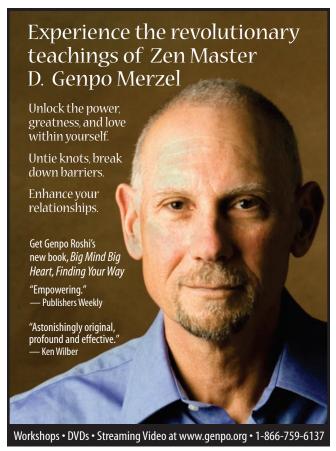
Despite the endurance of the movement he began, Erhard is no longer at the helm. After two decades of building the organization and steering it through a period of remarkable success, he encountered a firestorm of negative publicity in the early 1990s, a storm that included allegations of tax evasion and even sexual abuse. He decided the organization would be better off without him and disappeared from the public eye, his only significant public appearance in the last fifteen years being an interview with Larry King in 1993.

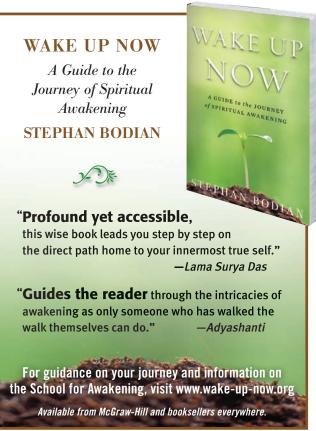
Symon's film presents a detailed and largely sympathetic portrait of Erhard and his work, but it is in no way a hagiography. Symon includes critics of Erhard and doesn't shy away from addressing the issues that led him to leave behind the organization he founded and inspired. Most important, the film includes a great deal of face time with the man himself. Symon interviewed Erhard extensively—this is his first major media appearance in over a decade—and long-time Erhard watchers, who have not seen any pictures or video of him in years, will be glad to know that the footage is generously used in the documentary.

The first half of *Transformation* is the best part of the film, a fascinating journey into the history of EST. Taking the viewer through the origins of the training, as remembered by Erhard, it includes interviews with a number of graduates, several of whom have since achieved success in their own right, including author Lynne Twist, human potential pioneer George Leonard, and integral theorist Michael Zimmerman. While the methods used in EST were a unique blend of the new spiritual, philosophical, and psychological systems of thoughts that were proliferating in the counterculture, the fundamental inspiration came from Erhard's own transformation, which can be traced to an enlightenment experience in 1968, several years after his flight from the East Coast. This powerful experience occurred, famously, while he was driving on the Golden Gate Bridge. In the film he recounts the event:

The way EST happened was very simple. I had this transformational experience. I had a transformation. Whoever I had been up until that point, I no longer was. It was on the way to work, and I happened to be . . . on the Golden Gate Bridge . . . and that's when I had the realization that what my life was about was really meaningless. It was empty. And this realization that the things that I thought were so significant, like looking good and winning—just the normal things that most people think are important—really had no importance. They were empty and meaningless. And when I broke through the sadness, when I broke through the despair at having wasted my life, I realized, my God, I'm free. What does that mean to be free? Free to choose, free to create a life that was worth living.

In some respects, it was this freedom that Erhard has spent the rest of his life trying to communicate in one form





or another. And he drew from everything—Zen, Esalen, Alan Watts, existentialism, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Indian philosophy, not to mention his experience as a successful salesman, in order to develop the basic methodology of his work.

The film shows a number of clips of Erhard as a younger man leading the training himself. These are the most compelling scenes in the film, and perhaps the most revealing, as we get a glimpse of why Erhard's approach to individual transformation captured the attention of so many. Charismatic, uncompromising, and incredibly confident, Erhard took risks with his "tough love" approach that would shock today's kindler, gentler, politically correct culture. He absolutely would not accept any psychological "game" or identity that allowed one to wallow in unhappiness, dissatisfaction, or victimization. In one scene, he strides across the seminar room and confronts an elderly woman, declaring, "I don't have any respect for old ladies." The camera shifts to the woman's distressed face as Erhard addresses her. "I've got respect for people," he explains, "but not old ladies."

# Called everything from a twentieth-century genius to a snake oil charlatan, everyone had a strong opinion about just what kind of an angel or devil Werner Erhard was.

The film also makes it clear just how much the legacy of EST has seeped into our cultural lexicon, pointing out words and phrases that seem commonplace today but actually originated in the creative fires of this movement. "Making a difference," "empowerment," "transformation," and "coaching," are just a few of the terms now in popular usage that were generated by or at least came of age in Erhard's work.

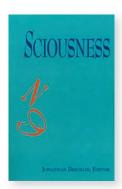
Unfortunately, the second half of the documentary fails to live up to the tone set by the first. Whereas the film initially focuses on the creation and success of EST, it then moves on to chronicle the difficulties in Erhard's personal life, including the ups and downs of his relationship with the family he had left behind and the allegations of sexual

abuse leveled by his daughter in the early nineties—which, along with a highly negative profile aired on 60 Minutes, forced him to leave the organization. Symon does an adequate job of covering the basic details of these events, but there is less narrative to this section, significantly less use of third-party interviews, and little attempt by the filmmaker to place these controversial events in some kind of context. The result is a less compelling story and a film that starts to feel more like a laundry list of Erhard's many accomplishments and controversies and less like a dynamic narrative that captures the essence of who he was and is. It also becomes more subjective—more Erhard on Erhard than Symon on Erhard.

When all is said and done, the viewer will likely be convinced that Erhard was grossly mistreated by the media and powers that be. (His daughter, for example, later admitted to making up the allegations of sexual abuse and is now on good terms with her father, and the tax abuse allegations were found to be baseless.) But I, for one, felt none the wiser about Erhard himself. Much of this is simply a result of Erhard's demeanor in the film. On one hand, he is frank and straightforward about the past and offers clear explanations. Moreover, he refuses to express any victimization over the slings and arrows of his life circumstances, an impressive position in this age of the tell-all bestseller. But there is also an intense and disturbing stoicism about him that hints at a deeper and still unresolved story.

Erhard currently lives in London and still travels the globe leading seminars and working for individual and collective transformation, his focus more in Europe and Asia now than the United States. His care and commitment are impressive, even if the scenes from his current seminars feel less cutting-edge and his teaching style lacks some of the energy and fire of his younger days. Indeed, the profound difference between the almost heroic commitment to individual transformation he expressed in his early work and the dignified but somewhat diminished figure presented in the film begs for deeper analysis. Such analysis is not forthcoming from Symon. And so the guestion "What ever happened to Werner Erhard?" is answered, but only partially. Symon should certainly be commended for taking on this difficult project and convincing Erhard to participate, but the deeper layers of the Werner Erhard mystery are untouched by this fascinating but ultimately unsatisfying film.

Carter Phipps



#### **SCIOUSNESS**

Edited by Jonathan Bricklin (Eirini Press, 2007, paperback \$13.45)

The last couple of years have seen a resurgence of interest in William James, one of modern psychology's most widely respected pioneers. In addition to new reprints of some of his classic texts, an exhaustive biography detailed the ins and outs of his remarkable life as a scientist and philosopher, while a book by a Pulitzerwinning journalist told the story of his avant-garde investigations into paranormal phenomena. But nothing has quite highlighted the depth of his thought like Jonathan Bricklin's Sciousness.

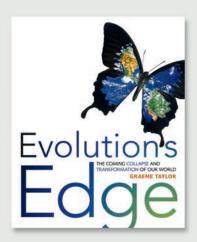
What is "sciousness"? Bricklin explains in his introduction to the book that "James labeled consciousness-without-self 'sciousness,' and consciousness-with-self 'con-sciousness." For those up to speed on their Buddhist philosophy, "consciousnesswithout-self" (sciousness) is, of course, precisely how the Buddha defined nirvana, the traditional goal of spiritual seeking. Bricklin defines it as a nondual state of enlightened immediacy and wholeness in which the usual distinction between self and other, knower and known, is dissolved. Ordinary "con-sciousness," on the contrary, would be considered dualistic, erroneously split down the middle between a perceiving subject and the world of objects being perceived.

"Experience, I believe, has no such inner duplicity," writes James in one of his many essays reprinted in Bricklin's book. "The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the 'pure' experience. It is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet. For the time being, it is plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple that."

While James never claimed to be enlightened—in fact, he claimed the opposite, believing that his own "constitution" precluded him from such an exalted mystical realization—he did taste a variety of religious experiences through the use of nitrous oxide, ether, peyote, and other drugs. Describing one of his trips on ether, James said that he experienced "a vague, limitless, infinite feeling—a sense of existence in general without the least trace of distinction between the me and the not-me." To Bricklin, such personal glimpses of nonduality provided James with a solid foundation for his theoretical talks and writings on sciousness—writings that did not go unnoticed by one of Zen Buddhism's early ambassadors to the West, D.T. Suzuki. One of Suzuki's teachers, Kitaro Nishida, allegedly even appropriated James's explanation of sciousness to help convey the Zen concept of tathata, the primary "suchness" of existence, to the Japanese themselves. "For Zen's 'suchness' or 'this-as-it-is-ness,'" Bricklin notes, "is James's pure experience sciousness."

Structured as a collection of academic essays, Sciousness begins with the famous seventh-century Zen treatise "On Believing in Mind," followed by a lengthy introduction to James's notion of sciousness by Bricklin, which explores the idea's parallels in Zen, Advaita Vedanta, and other mystical teachings. The rest of the book consists of James's classic essays from 1904: "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" "A Rustle of Wind," "A World of Pure Experience," and others, reprinted in their entirety and rounded off by an excellent summary of James's philosophy by one of his close colleagues, Theodore Flournoy. Although James's

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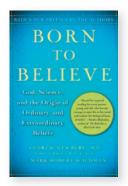




essays are often rather dense, one does eventually sink into the rhythm of his early-twentieth-century style, tuning in to the unique wavelength of his thinking despite some hard-to-grasp concepts and arcane turns of phrase.

According to Bricklin, James's philosophy of sciousness was attacked by many of his contemporaries, with the notable exceptions of like-minded supporters such as Henri Bergson, John Dewey, and Alfred North Whitehead. "Western philosophers," writes Bricklin, "could not accept the reality, let alone the prime reality, of nondual experience." But revolutionary ideas always seem ahead of their time. And today, in the age of evolutionary psychology and biopsychology—which take a decidedly dualistic (and materialistic) approach to probing the mystery of human consciousness—it's striking to consider that, at least in some ways, the "father of American psychology" may still be ahead of the curve.

Tom Huston



### **BORN TO BELIEVE**

God, Science and the Origin of Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs

by Andrew Newberg, MD, and Mark Robert Waldman (Free Press, 2007, paperback \$15.00)

In his 1962 utopian novel, Island, visionary author Aldous Huxley coined the term "neurotheology" to describe the mysterious relationship between the cold, wet matter of the human

brain and the transcendent experience of the divine. Since that time, with the development of our technological capacity to explore the structure and function of the brain, neurotheology has become a distinct field of scientific study dedicated to discovering the biological and evolutionary basis for subjective spiritual experiences and beliefs. Having written three books fincluding the bestseller Why God Won't Go Away) and more than seventy-five articles, essays, and book chapters on the relationship between the brain and spirituality, Dr. Andrew Newberg is considered one of the world's leading neurotheologians. In his latest book, Born to Believe: God, Science, and the Origin of Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs, Newberg teamed up with University of Pennsylvania colleague Mark Robert Waldman to explore the enigmatic connection between the brain and our deeply human "propensity to believe." They make the case that the reason why we believe anything, from scientific truths to the existence of a higher power, can be found in the synapses of our brains.

The book is split into three sections, first walking the reader through the various ways in which beliefs act as the brain's "filters" for reality, then discussing the process by which these beliefs develop as we age, and finally exploring how our beliefs color the way we interpret spiritual experiences.

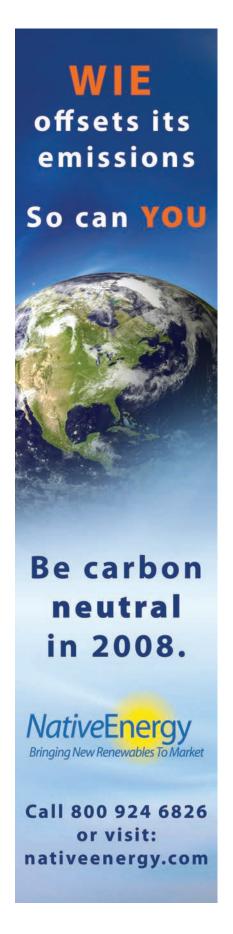
Newberg and Waldman argue that it is through our brains that we determine what is real and true. In order for us to believe anything that is presented to us, it has to appear accurate, feel right, make sense, and jibe with what our culture tells us. This sense of realness, they suggest, is created by a complex combination of neurological functions in the brain. For example, the thalamus, amygdala, and hippocampus are responsible for regulating emotion, which is the primary way that we assign value and importance to any belief. According to the authors' research, our interpretation of the realness of any event, from a childhood memory to a spiritual experience, depends largely on how much emotion is attached to it.

Emotional value is not. of course. our only litmus test for reality. In the process of building a belief, our emotional reactions are compared against a broader set of cognitive and social criteria. Newberg and Waldman call our cognitive functions the "real magicians of the brain" for their ability to weave together and interpret our experience at both a conscious and preconscious level. Without them we couldn't count, read, make distinctions, or "see the forest for the trees." Even when we find something to be emotionally and cognitively real, it needs to be socially accepted for us to finally decide that it is true. To highlight the power of culture to shape belief, the authors cite several psychological studies in which individuals, in the face of peer pressure, consistently acted against what they knew to be obviously true. Newberg and Waldman discuss how at different stages in our development, different factors have a greater impact on our beliefs. As we mature from infancy through adolescence and into adulthood, the roles that emotion and culture play in determining our beliefs become less influential as our cognitive capacities become more developed.

In the final section of the book. Newberg and Waldman use their own original research to investigate the relationship between beliefs and spiritual experiences. They conducted brain scans on meditating Buddhist monks, praying Franciscan nuns, Pentecostal Christians speaking in tongues, and an atheist meditating on an image of God from the Sistine Chapel. Even though all of the subiects described being connected with a dimension that was "more real" than their everyday state of consciousness, all of them interpreted the meaning and significance of their experience through the lens of their previously held beliefs. The nuns were in the presence of God. The monks experienced pure awareness. The Pentecostals had been touched by the Holy Spirit. And the atheist was in a pleasurable altered state. Newberg and Waldman attributed this result to the fact that during prayer, meditation, or speaking in tongues, the parts of the brain responsible for providing subjective experiences with a sense of realness were highly activated. They drew the conclusion that through prayer and meditation, "the brain was providing a sense of reality for the contents of specific beliefs, thereby validating them."

On one hand, Born to Believe left me with a much deeper understanding of the ways that I draw conclusions about what is real. Newberg and Waldman shed light on just how conditioned and often biologically driven are many of the conscious and unconscious views we hold about the world. On the other hand, I found their neurotheological perspective to be somewhat reductionistic in its bias toward a purely biological basis for belief. I was left wondering whether they think there is anything more to belief than just what's happening in the brain. The authors do state consistently throughout the book that they are open to the possibility that the spiritual dimensions "the brain determines as real" might actually exist. And this conciliation makes them unique—even revolutionary—among their neuroscientific contemporaries. But as scientists, their area of inquiry remains limited to what can be measured in the physical world. Neurological research may be an important part of the quest to understand the nature of reality, but how much a deeper understanding of the brain's function can tell us about the subjective dimensions of the self is a guestion that neurotheology has yet to answer. Whether or not you think it ever will, Born to Believe will challenge you to take another look at why you believe what you do.

Joel Pitney



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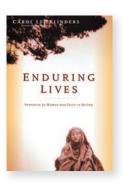
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### **ENDURING LIVES**

Living Portraits of Women and Faith in Action
By Carol Lee Flinders

(Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penquin, 2006, hardcover, \$24.95)

#### **ENDURING GRACE**

Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics
By Carol Lee Flinders
(HarperOne, 1993, paperback, \$16.00)

When I heard that Carol Lee Flinders had written a sequel to Enduring Grace, her classic book about female Christian mystics, I was intrigued. I had read Enduring Grace many years ago—it was published in 1993—and still remembered the unique way in which Flinders was able to bring to life several extraordinary, but often underappreciated, women mystics, all of whom lived between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Her new book, Enduring Lives, promised to apply her unique literary talents to women of our own age, and I was eager to find out what this congenial writer might have to say about women's spirituality in a more contemporary context. Indeed, I was hopeful that Enduring Lives would be every bit as inspiring as Enduring Grace was when I first read it years ago.

Thinking back to when I originally read *Enduring Grace*, I remember having been impressed by how courageous, even radical, the seven mys-

# RADICAL EVIL AND THE SCARCITY OF HOPE

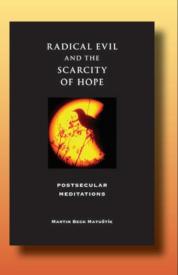
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tics were in their day. These women cast aside the narrowly prescribed roles for women in order to pursue their deepest longings, risking everything in order to know God, deeply, intimately, and on their own terms. Yet their fearlessness was not simply about facing physical hardship. They were resolute in facing the inner trials that often arise when one makes an absolute commitment, whether it's to the religious life or to any higher purpose.

Take Mechthild of Magdeburg, for example. She lived in thirteenthcentury Germany at a time when a wave of religious fervor was sweeping through northern Europe. Not unlike a flower child of the sixties, she abandoned the comfort of her family home to join a revolutionary lay religious movement known as the Beguines. This loose collection of individuals followed their own ideas about how to live a committed religious life, independent of rules or a saint at the helm or the approval of church authority. Mechthild's mystical writings, which Flinders likens to "the free-form spontaneity of a journal," reflect this independent streak and express an unusually feminine voice that is "authentic and idiosyncratic, incomparably passionate and lyrical."

And then there's the astonishing story of Saint Catherine of Siena. After three years of solitude during which she eventually surmounted her internal demons, she stepped into a life of nonstop activity, literally. "She slept, usually, about half an hour out of the twenty-four," Flinders reports, and subsisted without eating for the last nine years of her life, we are told. After tending to victims of the plague that decimated Siena, Catherine journeyed to Avignon in the south of France to urge the Pope to return the



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papacy to Rome. And, toward the end of her life, she wrote, or more accurately dictated, her magnum opus, Dialogue. Composed while she was "in an ecstatic state: three people worked in tandem, writing as fast as they could, to get it all down." It is a complex treatise of profound and subtle mystical insights written in language that is "earthy and concrete."

Flipping back though the dogeared pages of my copy of Enduring Grace, I am still struck by how these gutsy women spoke to me across the generations and emboldened me to pursue my own deepest desires for a life free from limitations. Their lives, so convincingly portrayed by Flinders, showed me that spiritual liberation was a very real attainment, whatever one's gender. I would still highly recommend the book to anyone interested in women's spirituality.

So what about Flinders' new book, Enduring Lives? Would it join its predecessor on the bookshelf of my favorites? The two books in many ways are connected, in structure and in content. Both chronicle the lives of exceptional women who had the strength of conviction to follow their yearnings for a life of meaning and purpose. In the first book, those convictions played out against the backdrop of a Christian-dominated world far different from our own. In her new book, her subjects inhabit our more secular, multicultural world, and except for the Dutch Jew Etty Hillesum, who died at Auschwitz, they are still alive today. The other three women profiled in *Enduring* Lives are world-famous primatologist and environmentalist Jane Goodall: Tibetan Buddhist nun Tenzin Palmo. who is the subject of the popular biographical book, Cave in the Snow; and Roman Catholic nun and deathrow-inmate counselor Sister Helen Prejean, subject of the movie Dead

Man Walking. Flinders chose these four women—she refers to them as "mystics-in-the-making"—precisely because they were "not religiously iconic figures . . . about whom it could be said unequivocally that they are mystics." Instead, she wanted to show through the life stories of these contemporary women "a profound transformative process even as it is still taking place," and reveal how their lives echoed those of the Enduring Grace women. Indeed, she often alludes to one or another of the earlier mystics as she describes the lives of Palmo, Goodall, Hillesum, and Prejean, finding similarities and resonances among them.

The profiles in *Enduring Lives* are every bit as informative and intriguing as those in Flinders' original book. Flinders' skill at interweaving facts with her own sensitive interpretations of events is undiminished, and she gives the reader a full picture of the context in which each woman is working, explaining, for example, the more arcane aspects of Tenzin Palmo's Buddhist practice and Goodall's observations of the chimpanzees. Or, when relating Sister Prejean's journey that took her deep inside a maximum security prison, Flinders does not hesitate to make diversions along the way to amplify the story. It's that kind of narrative generosity that makes Flinders' biographies satisfying.

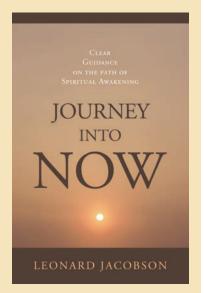
Yet for all the richness of the life stories in Enduring Lives, the book isn't entirely a sequel to Enduring Grace. The kind of radical, vertical relationship with God that infused all of the mystics in Flinders' original book and that gave that work such spiritual depth and power is missing in the profiles of the contemporary women. This is not to diminish their pioneering lives or extraordinary contributions. Rather, the two sets of women, and the worldviews they

inhabited, are perhaps less comparable than Flinders implies. Yes, it is true that all of the women in both books, medieval and modern, share strong spiritual and religious convictions, but Goodall, Palmo, and Prejean are courageous activists more than they are mystics or even proto-mystics. (Hillesum, on the other hand, with her brief but profound "unity consciousness" that took hold of her in the concentration camps, is probably best described as a mystic.) Their lives are filled with a deep concern for equality and social justice, or in Goodall's case, preservation of species—values characteristic of our postmodern world. In this sense, they are expressions of their own time and context in the same way that the Enduring Grace women were expressions of theirs. Imagine for a moment that Flinders had profiled the medieval mystics in light of these postmodern values. Such a context would have diminished the extraordinary religious accomplishments of those great women. Likewise, setting these contemporary women up as mysticsin-the-making, comparable to the great women saints of Christianity, seems to diminish somewhat the nature and significance of their real achievements, which in the end, are as much social as they are spiritual.

Despite these issues, Flinders' passion for bringing to life the stories of extraordinary women is an achievement in and of itself. Her vivid portraits enlarge the contours of what a woman's life can be and provide persuasive examples of women who have overcome any sense of limitation, whether internal or external. And most important, they encourage us to pursue our own aspirations for a life of deeper meaning, higher purpose, and greater freedom.

Carol Ann Raphael

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#### **NINE PARTS OF DESIRE**

Written and performed by Heather Raffo Directed by Joanna Settle (www.heatherraffo.com, available on DVD for \$18 on the site, first performed in 2003)

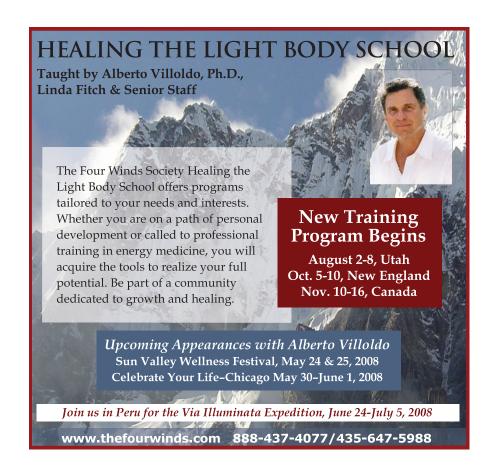
In the *Hadith*, the texts that guide Muslims in how to live, there is a certain saying that intrigued me from the moment I heard it: "God created sexual desire in ten parts; then he gave nine parts to women and one to men."

It's attributed to the seventh-century Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, one of the most esteemed spiritual leaders after Mohammad. This belief in women's insatiable desire is part of the reason that Islamic women wear the burka or the veil. Nine Parts of Desire. Heather Raffo's highly acclaimed one-woman play, is not about veiling women's bodies; it is about revealing the shape of women's souls—women who happen to be Iraqi. Raffo's triumph, as a performer and playwright, is that by using actual interviews with women to create nine composite portraits, she simultaneously reveals the extremity of the Iragi situation and the universal drive toward life and love.

I count myself fortunate to have seen Raffo herself perform at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) this past winter. With a flick and turn of an abaya—the long dark cloth worn

by many Arab women—and an impeccable ear for the nuances of accent and voice, Raffo transforms in barely more than an instant from Amal. a fat Bedouin longing for love, to Layal, a glamorous artist, to Hooda, a whiskeyswilling expatriate, until each of her nine women come alive within their remarkably different circumstances. A teenager, locked up for protection in her home since the beginning of the war, longs to meet American soldiers because they look like members of her favorite pop group, 'N Sync. A doctor who has delivered another two-headed baby—one of a horrible variety of genetic defects and cancers possibly caused by depleted uranium in bullets—has just learned that she herself is pregnant. "Rada's mother," who no longer uses her own name, haunts the ruins of a bomb shelter where several thousand people, including all of her children, were mistakenly incinerated by a special American bunker-busting double bomb. Weaving through these powerful individual monologues are the continuing stories of Hooda, the intellectual living in London, and Layal, the gorgeous artist living in a wealthy section of Baghdad.

In the rapid pace and intensity of the seventy-five-minute show, Raffo manages to do the impossible convey an overwhelming onslaught of devastation and still transmit the ultimate positivity of the human spirit. Like some kind of smart bomb, the images she evokes relentlessly burrow into your psyche: children wearing bullets on a string like a necklace or the shadowy outline of a woman who was vaporized in a bombing. And I am not mentioning the most graphic events, because outside of the context of the women's lives, they become almost lurid. To Raffo's credit, within the show they are not. While she spares nothing and no one, the play and her performance are sobering and stark but not overwrought or heavy. From the mouths of



the women, the often-gruesome facts of their lives are the hard flint against which their spirit sparks into flame.

Raffo's ability to walk into such dark terrain and emerge with a human victory very likely has to do with her intent in writing the play. As an Iragi-American, her goal was not political, even though you learn a great deal about the complicated politics that leave all sides with unclean hands. Her website explains that she was hoping to create a "dialogue between east and west," in which "the audience [would] see these women not as the 'other' but much more like themselves than they would have initially thought." Her characters speak directly to you, as though you were a trusted friend. In an after-play discussion, Raffo told how one of the women whose story appears in the play came to see it in London. Experiencing the audience's wholehearted response, the woman said, "I have always thought of myself as an Arab woman, but now I realize that I am a woman." As a woman watching the play, I had a similar experience of recognition. It struck a chord at a fundamental level in my own consciousness. Within a context of brutality that may be the ostensible responsibility of men—Saddam Hussein, his sociopathic son Uday, George W. Bush—the female response to that brutality is to survive at all costs. As Raffo says, this is the "feminine strength [that is] a necessary part of any culture's endurance."

In the time since I have seen Nine Parts of Desire, I found myself turning aspects of the play over and over in my mind. I know that I cannot say what I would do under such horrific circumstances, and yet I found myself uneasy. It began to dawn on me how often the female characters compromise themselves in order to survive. This is particularly true of the two women whose stories are the core of the play. Hooda, the ex-patriate intellectual, calls herself a revolutionary

and knows that her country is falling apart. She is tormented by the fact that she cannot bring herself to leave the safety of London and try to make a difference in Iraq. Layal, a prolific and subtly subversive artist, cannot stand Saddam's sadistic regime—particularly the way that they have sexually abused and humiliated women. Yet to ensure her own safety, she not only compromises her art by agreeing to create propaganda for the regime but also has sex with high officials from the very regime that she detests. This fierce tenacity to survive, regardless of the soul-level cost, does seem to be a deep groove in the female psyche. It very likely has enabled this precarious adventure called civilization to last for thousands of years. But I was left wondering how different the world might be—even the situation in Iraq—if women were to direct their tremendous life force toward something more than survival.

Winner of the 2005 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Special Commendation and a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Solo Show, Nine Parts of Desire is an important play with relevance beyond the tragedy of Iraq. It deserves a wide audience, which is why Raffo and director Joanna Settle were artists-in-residence at Mass MoCA this past winter. They were redesigning the production to make it easy for schools and community groups to stage the play. Then, like Eve Ensler's play The Vagina Monologues, which has been a focal point for political action among women on college campuses, Nine Parts of Desire could become a new rallying point for young women. This, at least, is Raffo's hope. And mine is that the play will stimulate more than political discussion and spur new conversations on the necessity for women's desire to be directed toward more than sex, safety, and survival.

Elizabeth Debold



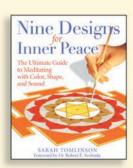
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# Letters

continued from page 14

creating the "shared intersubjective space" that Andrew Cohen proposes, and transform that space into an integrated humanity as it grows and expands amongst us. I can't imagine anything more exciting, inspiring, and motivating to focus on at this time in humanity's evolution.

Janet Brown
Rockville, MD

#### **PEACE RULES**

Discovering your publication has been a beacon of light in dim surroundings and provided a wealth of mental fodder to chew. That said, I must take exception to Andrew Cohen's conclusion that "Peace Is Not the Answer." While clearly the universe's method of initiating evolution along lines of ever greater orders of magnitude has been great and violent cataclysm, do we not find it seeking an ever more peaceful balance? As our consciousness ascends from instinct to emotion to thought to spirit, with each higher level holding its subordinate hostage, does it not develop ever greater dimensions of peace from one level to the next?

While God may use violence as a tool in the evolutionary process, I believe we will find more evidence that Divine Purpose tends more toward peace over time, and that those who wish to fight on the side of Purpose will do so with ideas and strategies born of the peaceful minds and spirits of evolved consciousness.

Joshua S.

via email



Issue 38 Oct-Dec 2007

### IN DEFENSE OF MCINTOSH

I was troubled to see two highly critical letters of the WIE interview with Steve McIntosh ("Integral Politics Comes of Age," Issue 38) in Issue 39. In my view, these criticisms misread McIntosh and reflected their own worldview biases.

Billy Konrad's letter's third paragraph is a spirited critique of U.S. actions in Iraq, none of which were approved of in the interview. True, these were actions taken by the allegedly "more advanced" U.S. governmental structure, but McIntosh never asserted that this more advanced structure somehow guaranteed against grave error. If it did, he wouldn't need to advocate for a new, integral structure.

Colin Donoghue's letter charges McIntosh with advocating for the concentration of power in an elite group of "superior" people, and compares this concept with historical and present abuses of such power. As I understand it, however, part of his vision is to give individual societies expanded self-rule, except on matters of grave concern to the rest of the world. It is only at the level

of designing the governing structure and founding documents that power might be concentrated. Even there, it should be understood that the integral philosophy specifically values broad systemic understanding and the general good.

I suppose any system that begins with a philosophical imperative that sees itself as "more advanced" holds some danger of the kind of elitism these writers mention. However, the problems our world now has are not being treated very effectively by existing governance structures. I find McIntosh's insights to be a breath of fresh air in a very troubled sphere.

Ken Lebensold Mountain City, TN

### **POEM FROM A READER**

Submitted in response to Maura O'Connor's article, "Freedom and Choice in Pornutopia: Why Girls Are Going Wild."

### WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

Anyone home?

Mom is at yoga seeking enlightenment.

She looks great in her clothes.

Dad is putting in long hours at work.

He finds release on porn sites.

 ${\tt Gramma~\&~Gramps~are~in~Las~Vegas~taking~in~the~shows}.$ 

Maybe they will get lucky?

Big brother has retreated to his bedroom

Downloading music on his ipod and flipping through magazines.

Little sis knows the whole world is her oyster and crashes her website when posting her first orgasm for all to see from the loneliness of her room.

### Arloene Burak

Cobble Hill, BC

Send your letters to letters@wie.org or PO Box 2360, Lenox, MA 01240 USA

Correction: In Issue 39 (Feb-Apr '08), p.16, we stated that SuperConsciousness magazine was produced by the team behind the film What the Bleep Do We Know?! While both of these groups draw inspiration from J.Z. Knight and Ramtha, they are unaffiliated.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS: pp.11, 87-90, 93, 95; photos of Deepak Chopra, courtesy of Deepak Chopra; p.86, photo of Deepak Chopra, courtesy of Chopra Center; pp. 12, 28, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, courtesy of Maharishi University of Management; p. 22, Sri Aurobindo, courtesy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram; p. 32, illustrative impressions of "Cradle to Cradle" designs, Floriade 2012 BV; p.67, The Invisible Texture of the Universe, Millennium Run, Volker Springel, et al., Max-Planck Institute for Astrophysics, 2004; p. 71, Spherical Representation, courtesy of Nancy Abrams and Joel Primack.

## The Exercise Elixir

America was said to be the melting pot of the whole world, with so many different nationalities and cultures arriving at the same time. Many brought their love of physical culture, exercise, and feats of strength here, and my family was no exception. I can remember my grandfather lifting dumbbells on the roof of our apartment building between clotheslines adorned with drying clothes. Some immigrants even became famous for their fitness and strength. So you see, I got an early taste of the exercise elixir from some pretty powerful examples.

I didn't know it at the time, but Joseph Greenstein lived on East 96th Street in Brooklyn. I lived on West 41st Street. New York in the 1940s seemed to be the center of the golden age of strongmen, and Greenstein seemed to be the best of them all. Better known as the Mighty Atom, he was billed as the world's strongest man. Can you imagine that as the years passed, the Mighty Atom's strength stayed? He was still performing feats of strength into his mid-eighties. Was exercise some type of elixir? Could exercise promote mind power that could turn ordinary humans into supernatural phenomena?

My grandfather worked on a construction project at Coney Island, so I got to visit the boardwalk a lot. There you'd find Warren Lincoln Travis, who was also billed as the strongest man

**PETER RAGNAR** is a natural life scientist, modern-day Taoist wizard, and self-master par excellence. A martial arts practitioner for over fifty years, he is renowned for his teachings on optimal health and longevity. He is the author of twenty books, including *The Art and Science of Physical Invincibility*.

in the world, as was Charles Atlas. I don't know if you're old enough to remember those advertisements where a scrawny ninety-eight-pound weakling gets sand kicked in his face at the beach. I'm assuming the advertiser had Coney Island in mind. That was where the Mighty Atom and others competed with one another for titles and recognition.

Greenstein was called the Mighty Atom because he was only 5 feet 4½ inches and never weighed more than 145 pounds. Yet just imagine any of the other hulking strongmen of his time (or of today) curling and then pressing a barbell weighing 163 pounds with one hand, but—get this—by just gripping the weight with only the middle finger! Or how about this: holding back a 150-horsepower, single-engine airplane with his hair! He could also bite chains in half, bend horseshoes, roll bars of steel around his arm as if they were copper wire, and so much more.

Well, I was fascinated with how to mold my body from the proverbial



ninety-eight-pound weakling into a fit, strong, healthy, and enduring fleshly entity. Didn't I say enduring? Superman isn't supposed to get old and die, yet even strongmen do. However, it certainly gives you a lot of confidence to think that a person can become this strong and maintain it into their eighties. Being a pre-baby boomer myself, I've followed the Mighty Atom's example and performed various feats of strength. I can still bend horseshoes and steel spikes and roll a bar of steel around my arm into a bracelet, and I recently pinch gripped seven barbell plates on the smooth side that weighed a total of 160 pounds. I also did 2,000 parallel bar dips in eighty minutes. It sort of gives you the feeling that nothing is impossible for a person if only they put their mind to it. As you've probably guessed, I'm also an advocate of radical life extension. I believe we have yet to tap the limits of our life span. Is exercise an elixir that can add years to your life and life to your years?

A massive study was conducted at Harvard University to answer just such a question. Dr. Ralph Paffenbarger and his colleagues studied 17,000 male Harvard alumni to find out. Here are their conclusions: Those who burned only 500 calories a week on exercise had the highest death rate. Those who burned 1,000 calories per week—that's like walking five to ten miles a week had a twenty-two percent lower mortality risk. However, if you engaged in intense exercise, working out from five to ten hours a week and burning up to 3,500 calories, the research concluded that you had a whopping fifty-four percent improvement in longevity!

Perhaps, in part, this startling statistic is due to the fact that exercise burns up free fatty acids for eighty percent of the calories used in a workout. Exercise also increases your metabolic rate, so you don't have to worry as much about your caloric intake. Exercise feels good because it releases stress and tension. In today's concrete jungles, it's socially unacceptable to physically attack your business adversaries, coworkers, or boss. However, there is nothing stopping you from attacking the weights in the gym or hitting the pavement and grinding out some miles. Exercise is the greatest alternative when the bells and whistles of your body signal fightor-flight reactions to stressful stimuli.

This is because exercise normalizes brain chemistry and calms your nerves by releasing endorphins. And that means you don't have to crack the cap on those medications so many people take to combat anxiety and depression. Do you want to sleep more soundly? Then exercise. Do you want to remove toxins and heavy metals from your body? Then exercise.

Did you know that the lactic acid that builds up with hard workouts actually binds to toxins and heavy metals, flushing them out of your body? It's estimated that there are more than forty million adults in the United States who are otherwise healthy but are sitting around on their butts, thinking they don't need a regular exercise program. However, health care statistics are increasingly showing this to be a falsity. It's believed that over a quarter of a million people die each year because they lack a regular exercise program. If you don't exercise, you are twice as likely to experience myocardial infarction or die from coronary heart disease as those who work out.

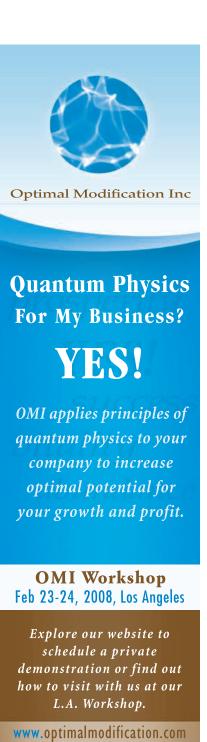
Some folks think that because their blood pressure is within normal range, they don't need to exercise, but they're mistaken. People who have high blood pressure yet are on a regular exercise program have a statistically higher life expectancy than those in the normal range who don't exercise regularly. Both their systolic (that's the high number) and diastolic pressures will drop with exercise—without taking any drugs for hypertension.

Either way, you'll probably want to know that this isn't just puffery or a sales job to get you into the gym. Exercise produces real, lasting biological benefits. The systolic blood pressure of yours truly hasn't been over one hundred in years, and my resting pulse is forty-two. But I've got an advantage: I've got more than half a century of workouts under my belt, and I just now feel I'm hitting my stride. I plan on being in better shape than Jack Lalanne when I blow through ninety-two. How about you?

You see, it isn't the hot dogs at Nathan's I remember at Coney Island (haven't had one—well, maybe one or two-since I was a kid), and it isn't so much the beach. It is the amazing human potential displayed on the boardwalk in the golden age of strongmen that planted the seed in my young mind, a seed that sprouted and grew and inspired me to seek excellence in all areas of life. And if Superman for some ridiculous reason doesn't live forever, at least I hope an indelible mark of one improved human unit will be left as a reminder. So, then, let us toast life with the exercise elixir and seek to steal the fire of the gods.



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### Enlightenment for the 21st Century

# Raising the Bar

There should be a direct

correlation between our

highest experiences of

revelation and the reality

of the lives that we live.

by Andrew Cohen

FOR A LONG TIME NOW in the postmodern spiritual marketplace, something very strange has been going on. In this postconventional, post-traditional arena, where spirituality is, more often than not, made to order for the individual, where it's every man or woman on the path for him- or herself, many of us find ourselves exploring the innermost reaches of our own consciousness in the midst of some truly dubious assumptions.

One really weird assumption that most folks seem to have is that it is reasonable for there to be an *enormous* gap between, on the one hand, what we experience when Spirit speaks to us as soul-stirring revelation, overwhelming bliss, penetrating clarity, ineffable peace, and beatitude and, on the other, the way we live our so-called personal lives. Like I said, really weird!

The problem is that we're living in a time and a cultural context in which, for the most educated among us, what higher spiritual development is actually supposed to mean and what post-conventional ethical behavior should look like remain vague and undefined. Too often, the notion of being expected to hold oneself to higher standards or spiritual "laws" is held suspect. Some actually consider it to be an inhibitor of spiritual freedom rather than a clear

indicator of genuine attainment. And this is understandable because most of us at the leading edge who are pursuing higher development outside of a traditional context are doing so without any maps indicating what it's supposed to look like.

Even before I became a spiritual teacher, it seemed obvious to me that there should be a direct correlation between our deepest philosophical convictions, our highest experiences of insight and revelation, and the reality of the lives that we live in public and in private—"in the world," as they say. As long as this is not the case, then whatever we think we are doing in our spiritual endeavors couldn't really be adding up to anything of enduring significance.

Any serious Christian is expected to *act* like a Christian, to demonstrate generosity of spirit, a high moral standard, humility, and submission to a power higher than one's own ego. If one is a "good" Jew, it's expected that one's life and the way it is lived will be an expression of God's law, a manifestation of the Torah in *action*. What that's supposed to look like has been defined in exacting detail by countless learned rabbis for thousands of years. If one is a devout

Hindu, it is assumed that one's faith would be demonstrated in and through the very life one is living. Just because one may not be living as a renunciate *sannyasin*, it doesn't mean that one is not expected to be a full-bodied expression of faith or even have the capacity to become a deeply realized God-man or God-woman. And if one is a committed Buddhist (at least in the East), even if one is not a monk, it is expected that one's faith in one's chosen spiritual path be manifested through generosity, kindness, compassion, and nonattachment. In other words, a religious or spiritually committed individual is supposed to look like something *specific!* 

For those of us who have taken that leap from a traditional religious context to a post-traditional spiritual orientation, why should it

make sense for that same expectation not to apply? I might even add that in our own cultural climate of hyper-individualism and autonomy at all costs, it may be more important than ever to make the effort to define what authentic spiritual practice and attainment are supposed to look like.

Maybe the spiritual path is less about personal experience and more about *change*. Indeed, it might be an appropriate time to

expect more results and higher dividends from our own spiritual practice and experience than most of us currently do. Maybe we need to consider what the effect would be if as many of us as possible dramatically lessened the enormous gap that exists between the inner and the outer.

I don't believe that the clarity and liberation of mystical insight is a free ride. I am convinced that the awakening of the spiritual impulse in our own hearts and minds is actually an evolutionary trigger—an urgent whisper from the Self to Itself, God's quiet voice imploring us to relinquish our attachment to our culturally conditioned ignorance, our materialism, and our pathological narcissism. Why are we being called? So we will take responsibility for the evolution of our own consciousness and culture, publicly, in such a way that raises the bar for all of us at the leading edge.



Explore all of Andrew Cohen's WIE articles, audios, and videos online at wie.org/cohen

Andrew Cohen, founder and editor in chief of *What Is Enlightenment?*, has been a spiritual teacher since 1986 and is the author of numerous books, including *Living Enlightenment* and *Embracing Heaven & Earth*. He is currently at work on a new book, *Evolutionary Enlightenment*. For more information, visit **andrewcohen.org**