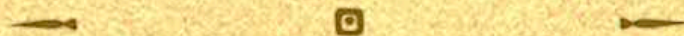


How To Know Whatever Created Life



InnerPeaceFellowship.org

WHAT READERS SAY ABOUT THIS BOOK

“The ideas in this book have transformed my life. Letting go of certainty is such an amazing experience, especially for intellectuals trapped in their minds. I could never thank you enough for writing this book!” Robert, Business Consultant

“I enjoyed this book immensely. I think its ideas and expressions are original, memorable, perfect. I like its brevity. It clearly has the constructive, useful purpose of lessening the intensity of the holy war and helping people to get past that. It is thorough and praiseworthy. Well done!” Mike, Sadhu

“A very provocative and insightful book.” Keith, University President

“I found this book enlightening.” Aaron, Pastor

“This is a short and interesting book designed to help individuals see through the barriers to their connection with a/the 'higher power.' I enjoyed it.” Jeffery, Meditation Researcher

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FORWARD

“Altogether, the results of the neuroscience of religion thus far suggest strongly that a religious instinct does indeed exist ¹ ... [but] ... surely there exist ways to find spiritual fulfillment without surrender and enslavement.” ²

Edward O. Wilson

“Western civilization, it seems to me, stands by two great heritages. One is the scientific spirit of adventure – the adventure into the unknown, an unknown which must be recognized as being unknown in order to be explored; the demand that the unanswerable mysteries of the universe remain unanswered; the attitude that all is uncertain; to summarize it – the humility of the intellect. The other great heritage is Christian ethics – the basis of action on love, the brotherhood of all men, the value of the individual – the humility of the spirit.”

“These two heritages are logically, thoroughly consistent. But logic is not all; one needs one's heart to follow an idea. If people are going back to religion, what are they going back to? Is the modern church a

place to give comfort to a man who doubts God – more, one who disbelieves in God? Is the modern church a place to give comfort and encouragement to the value of such doubts? So far, have we not drawn strength and comfort to maintain the one or the other of these consistent heritages in a way which attacks the values of the other? Is this unavoidable? How can we draw inspiration to support these two pillars of Western civilization so that they may stand together in full vigor, mutually unafraid? Is this not the central problem of our time?”³

Richard Feynman

THE TERRAIN

In what follows the term *higher power* means whatever created life. If you prefer another term use it instead. For example you may prefer to use the term God, Allah, universal spirit, nature, love, science, consciousness, Brahmin, true Self, Zen, no self, Tao or Whatever.



The Pew Foundation found in a 2008 study that almost everyone in the United States (92%) believes in God or a universal spirit. ⁴ *(Click on or tap any footnote number to view that footnote.)*

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that universities are dominated by those who think that God can safely be excluded from all serious questions. ⁵

The above statements appear to contradict each other, but they do not. Rather they point to the shift in recent decades in how people relate to and describe higher power. Many who believe in higher power no longer describe their views with traditional expressions from religions. Further, many now describe themselves as being spiritual but not religious.

This ongoing shift has now resulted in deep tensions and divisions in the U.S. and elsewhere over whose faith is true.

The view in this book is that no one knows how life came to be present on Earth – that that is a mystery. Some people respond to this mystery humbly with an attitude of acceptance of the uncertainty involved while others respond arrogantly with an attitude that their beliefs about higher power are *the truth*.

How you respond to this mystery has nothing to do with whether you view yourself as spiritual or religious, or with your political leanings. How you respond to this mystery has to do with who you are – with how your particular psychology works.

This book is about how individual psychologies respond to this mystery and about affecting those responses.



Today's conflicts over who possesses the true beliefs about higher power are not new, they simply repeat human history – they are the same old holy wars that have been raging for centuries.

In the United States this comparatively polite holy war is part of what are called the *culture wars*. In countries where it is being fought less politely it is simply called hell.

For the first time in history it appears to be within our grasp to create and manage our future on Earth for the prosperity and well-being of all. That future is possible because our activities have now become so advanced and far

reaching. However those same activities are also altering how civilization will be on Earth far into the future.

A future of prosperity and well-being for all is possible only if we properly manage our activities. If we do not properly manage our activities their effects are now so large and far reaching that their impact can be devastating.

Today's holy wars are a threat to properly managing our activities. Political attention and resources are limited and much of those are now spent feuding over whose beliefs are *true*, which leaves less attention and resources for managing the serious business that affects everyone.

In U.S. politics the tensions and divisions that have resulted from this holy war can now be felt at almost every turn. People of every political view are reporting deep frustration at best, and often hopelessness, fear and hatred.

Horror lies in the fact that holy wars have successfully defied us for centuries and are proving fully capable of defying us still today.

What can we do to affect that defiance? How does that defiance work? How do you cut off what feeds it? What is it about the craving to be *right* about your beliefs and your need to please your group that can be so overpowering that you will NOT do what's best for yourself and your family?

This book attempts to describe what upholds that defiance both in individual psychology and in society, and ways to work with or around that defiance while building a

relationship with higher power that increases happiness, well-being and inner peace.



You might think the defiance that upholds holy war lives in and arises from dogma and institutions but it does not. That defiance first arises and lives in our psychology where it feeds on fear and our craving for certainty. Only after we have fed it well do we then turn to groups and their dogma and institutions to further nurture and feed it.

How to affect that defiance then is a question of how to affect our psychology. It's a question of how to best manage our fears and our need for certainty.

An appeal of faith is the promise of salvation from fear and suffering, and often the promise of eternal life.

Life comes in a package that includes fears and insecurities and so we all look for ways to deal with those. We wonder, how can I improve my luck and avoid fear and suffering? How can I gain salvation and eternal life?

To deal with those questions many adopt faith, and their faith usually includes descriptions – beliefs – of how higher power works.

The problems start when your beliefs about how higher power works conflict with the beliefs of others. Our mind loves logic and certainty, and the mind insists there can only be one right description of anything. So when the mind has

to deal with conflicting descriptions of faith that each claim to be right, you feel threatened since what's at stake here appears to be your safety from fear, suffering, and death.

Mix the fear of suffering and death in with the mind's need for certainty about your beliefs, pour those into a like-minded group, add a political agenda or two, whip that all together, and you've got the ingredients of holy war.



In holy war, one group fights another group. Certainly individuals are involved, but it is the influence that groups have over individuals that leads to holy war.

When someone adopts a faith usually they become a member of a like-minded group. Once that happens a person's fulfillment starts to come more from pleasing their new group and less from pleasing themselves and their family. Thus pleasing your like-minded group becomes the dominant influence in your relationship with higher power.

The truth is there is but one group on this small patch of dirt out here in endless space and hopefully we will soon come to see ourselves foremost as members of that one group. In the mean time however the trick is to properly manage our activities to make sure there are sufficient resources for everyone. If we do not manage our activities properly and there are not sufficient resources for everyone, then there will probably be global war.

By 2021 there are expected to be 5 billion people connected to the internet,⁶ which will help with mustering us into a single tribe. Having to focus on global warming may also help unite us as a single group. Thus we are cautiously optimistic.

Cautiously because humans go for each other's throat when resources get tight, and holy war has every reason to be strutting its stuff defiantly today given its unrelenting successes both recently and throughout history.



Why is it that adopting beliefs about higher power increases happiness and inner peace for some but not for others? How do beliefs go so off the rails here?

To lessen fear and increase safety the mind demands that faith be *right* and *true*, and the only way to satisfy that demand of the mind is through adopting the belief that your faith is *right* and *true*. However if you adopt that belief, the mind's logic then further demands that the different, conflicting faiths of others must be *wrong* because that's how the mind's logic works – only one description of something can be right.

So for your faith to be *right* means that the different beliefs of others must be wrong or inferior, which in turn closes your heart to love and brotherhood with them and separates you from them.



Establishing that you are better than others is a strong motivator in life and we learn early that happiness does come through being better than others. We learn how to compete with one another and we learn that sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. We also learn that people will accept and even admire our success at winning.

There's one catch, however. People do not like it when you are arrogant about your success. People admire success when it is accompanied by humility. For example people like the successful athlete who then helps young people, or the successful business person who then helps in their community.

What happens when you are arrogant about your success – when you are too proud and parade it – is that people shun you, which separates you from them.

It works the same with faith. The meaningful measures of success with faith are more happiness, well-being and inner peace. That success comes of holding your beliefs humbly and quietly, which serves to keep your heart open to others, whereas holding your beliefs loudly and arrogantly puts others off and separates you from them.

Insisting to yourself and others that the beliefs you just happened to have chosen out of the multitude of different

beliefs available just happen to be THE *right* ones and thus better than everyone else's beliefs is the villain of this book.

Such arrogance says to your higher power, “Yo Higher Power! Over here! It's ME! This is how I've chosen to describe you, now fall in line behind my description and behave accordingly.”

Such arrogance – such a complete lack of humility – is disrespectful of other people and it is disrespectful of your higher power, and it will separate and isolate you from everyone but those in your like-minded group.

Of course no one wants to be separate and isolated. So if you do choose arrogance and certainty, then your friends end up being mostly the other arrogant ones in your like-minded group. You team up with them and now you're all primed and ready for holy war.

You alone build your relationship with your higher power, no one does this to you or for you. You alone are responsible for it.

Where you end up here is entirely your choice.



Traditionally churches have fulfilled many needs in society. (The term *church* is used here to mean a gathering for the purpose of communing with higher power.) In church is where people gather to express to their higher power awe, wonder, and gratitude for being alive. Church is where

people share fellowship, celebrate their greatest joys, and express their deepest grief. In church people inspire one another to live lives of integrity and to help others.

However the role of churches in fulfilling those needs has been diminishing in recent decades. While 92% of everyone in the U.S. in 2008 believed in God or a universal spirit, only 20% in 2012 attended church on a given weekend, which is half the number that attended church in 1991. ⁷

The Pew Foundation study also found that:

- 28% have left the church in which they were raised in favor of another religion or no religion at all, which increased to 44% when shifts between denominations were included;
- 16% said they were unaffiliated with any particular church today, which is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular church as children; and of this 16%, only one in ten described themselves as atheists;
- 25% of those 18-29 years old said they were not currently affiliated with any religion;
- Traditional religions have been losing a significant number of followers among younger people. ⁸

In short, 250 million people in the United States – 80% of the population – do not go to church on a given weekend and almost all of them believe in a higher power. This raises the question, Are their needs that were traditionally fulfilled in church getting fulfilled?

Our need for fellowship, for inspiration to live lives of integrity, and to help others can be fulfilled elsewhere in society; churches never had a monopoly over fulfilling those needs.

Churches however are the only places where people gather with others to commune with higher power and express their gratitude and awe at the wonder of being alive. For many non-church-going believers who desire to gather with others to commune it appears those needs are going largely unfulfilled. It appears they are communing with higher power mostly alone.

Perhaps flying solo here works for some people. Others however prefer gathering with others to sing and commune with one another and with their higher power.

This then raises the question of why non-church-going believers who like gathering with others to commune haven't been doing so more? ⁹

These are some best guesses about answers to that question:

Only in the past few decades have people gained the freedom to choose how they relate to their higher power, before that they usually adopted their parent's religion. That

freedom to choose is still very new and still very untried, so people are still very unsure how to exercise and express that freedom.

Higher power is – well – higher power. We are very reluctant to screw around here. This is powerful yet tender stuff that could land us in trouble. BIG trouble. Lightning bolt in the back of the head sort of trouble.

That is why we always entrusted churches with our forms of communion. Churches were supposed to know how higher power works, so we relied on them to tell us what to do. Yet when your church goes missing your physical place to meet goes missing as does your congregation and your forms of communion. That leaves a huge hole that's not easy to fill.

Also, how do you replace the *special person* with the special connection to higher power to whom many have always looked for guidance and inspiration? Individuals probably do not feel their personal relationship with higher power is sufficient to fill that *special person* spot. Is it not arrogant to even assume your mere personal relationship with higher power is sufficient to fill that spot?

Perhaps most non-church-going believers will continue to commune alone from hereon. However our sense is that we are in a long period of transition in which some are feeling for the next right steps – for the right words and expressions to use to find others with whom they can again gather and commune.

Until that happens however it appears that traditional churches will continue to provide our default setting for funerals, weddings, etc.

What will be critical in driving the outcome of this situation in the long term is that traditional churches cannot change their basic messages because doing so would nullify their core purpose, yet apparently most believers will continue to avoid traditional churches.

To us this points at seismic tensions that have been building for millennia – to a slow but definite shift in which one of the largest, oldest cultural/business enterprises on Earth is in the process of coming apart and, probably, being reinvented.

It is our experience that many non-church-going believers do yearn to come home – to come together once again with others for fellowship and to commune, and our sense is that that desire at some point will result in the creation of new, innovative churches. Our hope is that those new churches will be more democratic, more pragmatic and will deliver on the promise of more joy and inner peace.



What's important is not whether you are drawn to your parent's church, to some other church, or to some newly created church, that is simply a question of what suits you.

What's important is how your relationship with higher power ends up affecting your life. Your relationship with your higher power can become a cornerstone of your happiness and inner peace, or it can disempower and enslave you as it saps your resources, separates you from others, makes you unhappy, and divides your nation.

What will largely determine the outcome for you here is how well you manage your personal power and authority.

You alone form your relationship with your higher power, and so you alone control the outcome here. You start out having all the power and authority in this situation but soon you encounter hazards such as your fear of suffering and death, your desire for safety, your need to be better than others, your desire to please your like-minded group, and your need for certainty.

These hazards make you vulnerable to manipulation by others who want your power and your authority for themselves, and who, once they have your power and authority, will then turn around and use those to dictate to you how you must live your life.



Perhaps the traditional beliefs of your family will serve you best.

Perhaps your greatest happiness and inner peace will come through adopting other traditional beliefs.

Perhaps your home church does not yet exist and you will help start your home church from scratch by gathering together with like-minded people – borrowing what works for you from traditional religion and spiritualities while leaving the rest behind, and making the rest up as you go.

Perhaps you will combine one of the above approaches with approaches from medicine and science that retrain your physiology and result in more happiness and inner peace as described later in the chapter “Managing Abstract Thought”.



In this book it is assumed that:

- Life is unfolding and since we appear to be powerless over that unfoldment some other *higher power* exists that is unfolding life.
- How and why that higher power works is a mystery that has not yet been described. Consequently no description or interpretation of how or why higher power works is promoted in this book.
- However, even though how and why higher power works is a mystery that cannot be described, most people are nevertheless compelled to understand

and describe higher power, and how you end up doing that will have important consequences in your life and for harmony in your society.

BACKGROUND

Throughout history your relationship with higher power would likely have been the same as your parent's. There's nothing wrong with that approach, it has worked well for many people. It keeps life simple, which has great value. Often the old and familiar right in front of us works just fine.

If however you are thinking about adopting another approach, first ask yourself if you really want to wander around for years looking for other ways to have your relationship with your higher power? Is what your friends are doing really a better way, or are you just wanting to piss off your elders and show them that you can stand on your own, or perhaps you just want to spend more time with those hot looking items of the opposite sex who are part of that different faith group?

Regardless of whether you adopt the beliefs of your parents or strike out anew however, be careful of one very important thing, which is your craving for certainty (see the chapters "The Mystery", "Uncertainty" and "Faith and

Beliefs”). Your craving for certainty is what leads to arrogance, and arrogance and certainty are what close your heart to love and brotherhood, separate and isolate you from others, and make societies crazy.



Your relationship with your higher power is a serious, long-term relationship that will affect the rest of your life. So regardless of how you proceed, take a moment right now and give some careful consideration to what you’re doing.

Before reading any further stop and ask yourself, Why do I want to have a relationship with higher power? What do I expect to get from it? Then write down your reasons and put those someplace where you can look at them again over the coming years to check on your progress or lack of progress.

Now go to Endnote ¹⁰ and read the expectations others have had about this.



Since the 1960s a major shift has been occurring in how people relate to higher power. It used to be that you simply adopted the faith of your family, but today you have much greater freedom to choose your beliefs.

Often you hear that this shift is a retreat away from God and religion in favor of the advancement of science and atheism, but that is not correct. Today almost everyone believes in higher power (92% in the U.S.), which certainly is not a retreat from higher power but rather points at the shift that has been occurring in how people describe and relate to higher power.

What has been happening is that while many continue to describe their relationship with higher power using the language of traditional religions, more and more people are describing their relationship using the languages of spirituality, nature, non-traditional religions, environmentalism, etc.



This shift started about fifty years ago and for some of our staff it felt like storming heaven. ¹¹

Tom Wolfe has said that history will record the migration of thousands of young men and women to San Francisco in the late 1960s as one of the most extraordinary religious fevers of all time. ¹²

Most who took LSD then reported having brushed against a higher power or ultimate reality, ¹³ and they revised their relationship with higher power accordingly.

Experiences with psychedelics are so intense however that they cannot be repeated for long, so that experimentation

stopped. Also, the absence of trained professionals to provide guidance during those experiences resulted in some people becoming psychologically damaged for life. It became obvious that much more responsible research and testing were needed before society could safely utilize the benefits of psychedelics. ¹⁴

In addition, many in our generation were ordered to go kill people in Viet Nam over vague notions about dominoes and communism while our churches that had preached morality and integrity to us during our upbringing then stood silently by and watched that killing happen. This caused many to lose trust and respect for their churches.

Also, our generation was the first to experience the new sexual freedoms and while some openly indulged in those others refrained, sometimes in envy. That has now resulted in deep tensions over what is appropriate sexual behavior, which tensions underlie many of the political divisions of today (2012).

Then, as if those shifts weren't enough to really stir things up, in the early 1970s the need to take better care of the Earth appeared. The approach of many to that responsibility has been open minded, pragmatic problem solving. Others however have addressed those problems with an ideological rigidity that suggests the will and laws of Earth have somehow been divinely revealed to them.

Together these shifts helped create the *culture wars* that today underlie many of the political tensions in the United States and around the world.



Many in our generation swapped our old familiar religions for new, unfamiliar ones, but as it turns out we often just gave religion a paint job. Our new ways of relating to higher power were certainly different and exciting, but many in their enthusiasm never saw – even today after a lifetime of involvement – that we disempowered ourselves with them and separated ourselves from others just as we probably would have had we stuck with the religions of our family.

Our parents' religions were easy to dismiss, but what we could not dismiss so easily was their orientation that was embedded in us, which was our orientation that happiness, inner peace and fulfillment can come through blindly trusting the authority of religious or spiritual forms, institutions and teachers. Our new religions and spiritualities looked so good in their new paint jobs that we just assumed without question that they would deliver the inner peace the old ones had promised, but that assumption was wrong – that assumption was mere hope.

We thought the trick was simply to find and possess the *right* beliefs. We thought that finding and possessing the *right*

descriptions of higher power and how it works would bring us what we were after.

We repeated the same mistake so many before us had made – we gave away our power and authority to those we thought had the authority that was necessary to pull the trick off.

We believed someone else can know better than us what's best for us.

POWER – AUTHORITY – BUSINESS

POWER AND AUTHORITY

When you first start formalizing your relationship with your higher power you have all the power and all the authority in the situation – you alone make all the decisions. You may decide to let someone else make those decisions for you, but in that case you are still the one who decides to let someone else make those decisions for you.



When you make decisions about formalizing your relationship with higher power you will rely on some authority to guide your decision. That authority will be attractive to you, it will resonate with you, it will seem to point you toward the right way to go. It may appear to be *the truth*.

Several examples of what that authority might be are:

Intuition - Your intuition is your inner voice – your gut – telling you that a direction or decision seems or feels right. Since one of your main goals probably is to be happy and fulfilled, and since happiness and

the sense of fulfillment come from inside you, your intuition has authority because it provides a direct, firsthand report from inside you about the state of your happiness and fulfillment. Thus intuition is inner authority, not outer authority.

Tradition - Tradition has authority because people have used it for a long time, which makes it appear tested and true. Its authority also comes from its sacred texts, ceremonies, and how it all looks and feels. Tradition is outer authority.

Embodiment - You are drawn to a group of people or to a person (either living or dead) that seems happy and fulfilled. Since you too want to be happy and fulfilled, their example provides outer authority that sways your decisions in the direction of what they do and say.

Expectations of Others - Your family, friends, spouse, or community expect you to adopt their faith and beliefs. You value, respect, or fear them, so you do what they expect of you. Their expectations are outer authority.

In life, everyone looks outside themselves to see how others are doing things, that's how we learn. How others are

doing things provides us with valuable information. However that information does not have authority for you until you start to base your decisions on it.

People are very different from one another regarding how they make decisions and the authority they base their decisions on. Some people have more self-confidence, and so they trust themselves and their intuition more when making decisions. Others have less confidence in themselves and in their intuition, and thus they are quicker to look outside themselves for the authority on which they base their decisions.

The authority you end up basing your decisions on about higher power will simply reflect who you are.

THE BUSINESS OF SELLING YOU BACK YOUR HIGHER POWER

Long before you make any decisions about how to formalize your relationship with your higher power you already had a relationship with your higher power. Your higher power has been unfolding your life since its inception and continues to replicate your cells, to grow your food, and to keep the Earth revolving around the sun.

You do nothing to deserve or earn that relationship or to keep it happening; it just happens, and it's free.

So when anyone tries to sell back to you your relationship with your higher power, examine their motives very carefully, and if what they are selling interests you, then examine your motives very carefully. Ask yourself, What are they selling that I must have? What are they selling that I do not already have?



It's human nature to want power. Having power makes us feel good. Pyramids, multinational organizations and civilizations get built because a few people organize and manage the power of many others. To seek power is the way we are; that is neither good nor bad, it simply is.

Power comes to people through having money, votes, status, guns, information, territory, etc. Power regarding higher power comes through *appearing* to possess the truth about how higher power works and why. Appearing to possess that truth has power because that truth appears to directly affect luck, suffering, salvation, and eternal life.



Selling you back your relationship with your higher power is one of the largest, oldest, wealthiest business enterprises on Earth.

Since you already have a relationship with higher power, for that business to make a sale they must persuade you that they – not you – know how your higher power works. The way they try to persuade you is by promising to help increase your luck and fortunes, to help protect you from suffering, and perhaps to help negotiate for you to live forever.

That is an appeal to your fear and your desire for safety.

It is also an appeal to your arrogance. If you can be persuaded by these promises you will then come to possess *the truth* about how higher power works, which can make you feel powerful, proud, and better than others.



If the business does persuade you and you decide to buy what they're selling, the price will be that you give the business all or some of your power, your authority, and your self-confidence, and in return the business will promise that you **MAY** get what you are after.

However before the business can actually deliver what they promised you must first *deserve* to get what they promised. It turns out that everyone is broken somehow and needs to be fixed, and it is through getting fixed that you

earn the *deservedness* you need to get what was promised. So you and the business get to work fixing you and earning you deservedness, which always takes no less than the rest of your life.

With some divisions of the business not only is your deservedness never enough but also what you see and experience in life are not really what is happening. There is a barrier between you and what is really happening, and the business promises to help you see past that barrier, after which you will then get what you are after. Here again, learning how to see past the barrier always takes no less than the rest of your life, and no one ever reports seeing what's really happening out there past the barrier except those in the business.



It is said that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. ¹⁵ In politics, law and government the absolute corruption of power is tyranny and dictatorship; in business and economics it is monopoly.

In the business of higher power the absolute corruption of power is division and holy war in society, and disempowerment and separateness in individuals.



To counter abuses of power, citizens in free democracies enact laws so that (ideally) no individual is unfairly abused by power.

The business of higher power however is neither democratic nor free but rather is organized around the will and laws of higher power as interpreted by its divisions and leaders. The business tells you what its laws are, the business is not at all interested in your opinions about how they interpret or enforce their laws.

For the business to work you must first give it your power and authority. Only then can its leaders impose their laws on you. If you do not agree with their interpretations of its laws you can always leave, but leaving becomes very difficult once you have convinced yourself the business holds the keys to you getting whatever it is you are after.

MYSTERY – UNCERTAINTY – BELIEFS

THE MYSTERY

That life is unfolding is obvious, that is not a mystery.
How life was created and why it is unfolding is the mystery.



You may not call this *the mystery*. Instead you may call it God, Allah, higher power, universal spirit, love, science, nature, consciousness, Brahmin, true Self, Zen, no self, Tao, or Whatever.

Or perhaps all such names put you off, yet when you plant seeds and flowers bloom, or when you are alone in nature at first light, what you experience seems miraculous.

These all are the same mystery, and how that mystery works cannot be described for reasons that will soon be discussed.



The reason almost everyone believes in a higher power is because life is unfolding in front of them. They know they

are powerless over that unfoldment, so some *higher* power must control that.



Almost everyone believes in higher power. Where else in society is there such complete consensus?

Such complete consensus has tremendous power to unite people and nations. Such complete consensus has tremendous power to open hearts, dissolve separateness, and bring people closer to one another, which would also serve to increase well-being and inner peace.

That in god's name such tremendous power and hope end up getting trampled in the mud and dividing us is overwhelmingly irresponsible and sad.

Do everything you can do to help stop this madness.

UNCERTAINTY

For thousands of years we have been trying to figure out how higher power works and why. During that time many sincere, capable people have spent their lives trying to understand and describe this.

What we have learned from that exhaustive research is that there is yet no agreed upon description of how and why higher power works. What we have instead are many different, conflicting descriptions.

Given all those different and conflicting descriptions to choose from, the question is, What are your chances of choosing the *right* and *true* description?

Your chances appear to be slim, that is why descriptions of higher power are called *beliefs*, not *truth*.



Slim chances make many people uncomfortable, and so for many the question is, How to ease that discomfort? Here are four approaches for doing that:

Certainty and Arrogance – You convince yourself the description of higher power you just happen to have chosen is *right* – is *the truth*. You convince yourself that higher power will behave according to the description you have chosen.

Tolerance – Tolerance means that you allow others to practice without interference something that you do not necessarily like or agree with. Certainly tolerating the faiths of others is better than bashing them over the head, so an attitude of tolerance is an

improvement over certainty and arrogance. However if basically you do not like or agree with the beliefs of others and you choose to keep your mouth shut, that probably means there is still significant tension in the situation.

Some Bit of Truth – In this approach, every faith is said to contain some bit of *the truth* about how and why higher power works. This approach assumes that there is a *right, true* description of how higher power works but that you must settle for possessing just a small bit of that truth as part of your faith.

Our view is that there is no *right* or *true* description of why and how higher power works, so while this approach may relieve some tensions it is also misleading.

Simply Declare The Holy War Is Over For You – For thousands of years we have been working this question of why and how higher power works yet there is still no description we can agree on. The reasonable conclusion here is that there is no *right* or *true* description of how higher power works and why – that higher power cannot be contained, conveyed or described with the abstractions we call words.

If you agree with that, simply declare that holy war is over for you.

FAITH AND BELIEFS

Faith and beliefs are not the same. Faith arises from the emotional desire for safety, which in the extreme is the desire for safety from death. Beliefs arise in abstract thoughts and serve to support and uphold faith and the emotional desire for safety.



If you agree that higher power cannot be described with words – with beliefs – then what becomes of faith? How does your faith get expressed? How do you express to higher power your awe, wonder, and gratitude for being alive?

If you agree that higher power cannot be described, the sun still comes up, crops still grow, and cells still divide. Higher power does not go anywhere, higher power is still on the job. That aspect of faith remains unchanged.

If you agree that higher power cannot be described, you can still describe and express your faith as you did before.

For example, many of our staff really enjoy getting together with others and singing spiritual songs from different religious traditions. In doing that we sing words that describe higher power differently, but the words we are singing no longer are giving voice to *the correct answer* we have found. Instead our words simply voice our gratitude, our wonder and our joy at being alive.



This book does not pretend to know what will bring you inner peace and happiness. However it appears the terrain each of us must navigate here may have some similarities:

First, being alive seems to take place on the edge between the abstract thoughts of our mind and the emotions of our heart, and the mind and the heart are always competing over how to express and hold faith. The mind wants faith to be *certain* and *true*, which separates us from others, while the heart wants faith to open it more to love and brotherhood, and to bring it closer to others.

Inner peace then appears to be a function (in part) of striking the right balance between our mind and our heart (more on this later).

Second, while others may provide us with some tips about how to best live our life and our faith, what ends up happening in life seems to result mostly from our own doing.

Finally, we seem to be living our lives naked and defenseless in the face of our higher power, yet we forget that much of the time. Then a child is born, someone close to us dies, or our own life is threatened, and we glimpse and remember that in this relationship with higher power we are completely humbled. We glimpse and remember that our fleeting presence on Earth does absolutely nothing to change how higher power works.

At those times we do *know* whatever created and is unfolding life, and it is as true and as complete as knowing can be; it is not knowing that comes as thoughts. We know that something indescribable created our life, and that in awe, wonder and complete humility all we do is watch this incredible experience of being alive unfold in front of us.

Then such knowing is again forgotten usually. So write it down, it helps with remembering it later.

ABSTRACT THOUGHT

ABSTRACT THOUGHT AND THE FEAR THAT ARISES FROM IT

200,000 years ago human brains were 400 - 500 cubic centimeters in size and we ate vegetation. Then we figured out that eating meat was a much more efficient way to obtain the protein that is vital to our survival, and that cooking that meat over fires enabled us to digest it more easily and thus utilize its protein more efficiently.

That steady diet of vital, dense meat protein then caused our brains to increase in size from 400 - 500 cubic centimeters to 1,500 - 1,700 cubic centimeters today. It was this tripling of brain size that provided us with the memory capacity that was essential for developing what was to become our breakout skill as a species - abstract thinking and language.

Our ability to think abstractly started to form about 95,000 years ago. We know that because archeologists have not found any tools that required abstract thinking to make from before that time, nor have they found any remains of burial rituals.

So why do remains from burial rituals indicate that we had developed abstract thinking? Because we started having

burial rituals only after we were able to ask ourself “What becomes of *me* – of my *self* – after *I* die?” And to ask that question we first had to have developed the ability to think about our *self* in the future. We had to have created that abstract world that today exists only in our thoughts – that world we now take so for granted today; that world that can now so overshadow us and diminish our inner peace.

We first started expressing our ability to think abstractly by drawing images of people, animals, plants, etc. on stones. We then developed more complicated pictures and symbols that eventually became our lettering and words. Over the past 70,000 years we continued to develop and refine our abstractions until they became the language, reason, and mathematics that form the incredibly powerful, precise, and instantaneous system of communication we use today.

Once we developed abstract thinking and language no longer did the information that accumulated in our individual brains die with us but for the first time information that accumulated in our brains could be written down and passed on to future generations. Thus abstract thinking and language enabled collective learning and memory in which information outlasts individuals and is accumulated, stored and handed on from generation to generation. Abstract thinking and language enabled each new generation of humanity to start out standing on the informational shoulders of what prior generations had learned.

Our development of abstract thinking and language was arguably the most significant development ever to have occurred on Earth. Abstract thinking and language coupled with our eusocial behaviors are what have allowed humans to dominate Earth and to live in ease, comfort and prosperity compared with other creatures.

But abstract thinking also created a big problem, which is the fear that comes from knowing you will die. ¹⁶



“I may suffer.”

“I’m going to die.”

An appeal of religion and spirituality is minimizing the fear that arises from such abstract thoughts by providing some safety.

Isn’t the threshold question here, Exactly what is that I that may suffer and will die?



At some point in human history our ability to think abstractly was minimal after which it developed into language, reason, logic, math, etc. Western religion describes that point as its founding event:

*“...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”*¹⁷ (Genesis 2:17)

Only humans *know* – abstractly – “you shall die”.

Eating of the tree of (abstract) knowledge and thus *knowing* (abstractly) “you shall die” is exactly the problem that gave rise to religion and spirituality.



Whether humans came with abstract thought fully booted up or whether it developed over time is not what's important. What is important is that intense, debilitating fear can arise from abstract thought, and thus that individuals and societies must devote significant time, energy and resources to managing that fear.

THE I THAT WILL DIE

Sometimes we just do stuff and thinking is absent:

- Something starts to fall and we grab it quickly before thinking.

- We putter in the garden and notice we have not been thinking much.
- Backpack alone and after a few days you will likely be thinking less.
- A bear crosses the trail and fear comes before thinking happens.



The fear that comes of encountering a bear crossing the trail has great value to any creature – it helps keep them alive. Note however that that fear does not arise from abstract thought, it arises solely from what is happening.



“I saw a bear!” someone shouts.

Now two things have happened: a bear crossed the trail happened and those word-sounds happened. Those two things are not the same thing.

Do you agree with that statement? Think about that statement for a moment. Are seeing the bear and saying “I saw a bear!” the same thing?

No, those two things are not the same thing. Seeing the bear was seeing the bear. “I saw a bear” are words – abstractions that stand in place of actually having seen the bear.



You are puttering in your garden on a glorious summer day not thinking. It’s warm yet still a bit cool, fluffy cumulus clouds hang in clear air under a rich, blue sky, and everything seems to be in bloom. There has been a diagnosis of possible terminal illness but thinking is absent so the diagnosis is absent. Puttering in the garden is all that is happening, and being alive is wonderful and miraculous.

Then words go through the mind: “I may be dying.”

Fear comes, fear every bit as intense as the fear that was experienced when the bear was seen.

However once the bear had gone the fear from seeing it soon went away, but the fear that comes from thinking “I may be dying” can arise at any time, it never really goes away; it’s always just there waiting in our mind.

That’s the situation each of us must deal with, whether there has been a diagnosis or not.



The fear from thinking, “I will die” or “I may suffer” can be so intense and lingering that it can be debilitating.

To manage that threat of debilitating fear from abstract thoughts and to increase hope, humans long ago developed other abstractions – *better luck, salvation from suffering* and *eternal life* – and systems for delivering and upholding those abstractions called *religions*.

For thousands of years now we have used that approach as a primary intervention for managing the threats abstract thoughts pose to our mental health, and that approach has served many people well.



What is I in the phrase “ I will die?”

I is a thought – a word – an abstraction that stands for the thing puttering in the garden. That I exists only when thinking is occurring. When thinking is not occurring, that I does not exist.

That I is not the thing puttering in the garden.

THE QUESTIONS

What am I?

What was I before I was born?

What am I after I die?

These questions are at the core of philosophy, religion, and spirituality.



These questions assume I and the thing puttering in the garden are the same thing, but that is not correct; they are not the same thing.

I is a word – a sound – an abstraction.

The thing puttering in the garden is the thing puttering in the garden.



In nature there are many highly developed, remarkable abilities of which language and our ability to think abstractly are but one.

Certainly our ability to think abstractly has enabled humans to adapt very successfully to conditions on Earth. However abstract thought is still just an ability like a

salmon's ability to find its home stream after swimming thousands of miles.

A salmon is not contained entirely by its ability to migrate, there is much more to a salmon than that ability.

Likewise humans are not contained entirely by our ability to think abstractly, there is much more to us than that ability.

However our deeply ingrained habit is to believe that language and our ability to think abstractly can and do entirely contain us – the thing puttering in the garden. Our habit is to believe that the I in the phrase “I will die” and the thing puttering are the same thing.

Out of that mistaken belief then fear arises that is every bit as intense as the fear of seeing a bear, and we seek safety in faith and beliefs.



Certainly the thing puttering in the garden and the abstraction I both exist. Yet we are entirely the thing puttering in the garden of which its ability to think abstractly is an aspect that is used only part of the time.



Our deeply ingrained instinct of believing that our abstract I and the thing puttering are the same thing

structures a paradox that has now been forging in us for tens of thousands of years:

Abstractions in our mind inform us we are threatened at times when, in fact, there is no immediate threat at all.

Traditionally we have managed this paradox through managing abstract thoughts and the way forward here appears to be through learning how to better manage abstract thoughts – through learning how to better work with and around our ability to think abstractly.

MANAGING ABSTRACT THOUGHT

Religion and spirituality provide ways of managing abstract thought. There are other ways we manage abstract thought also:

Of the countless living organisms on Earth only humans have highly developed abstract thought. So when we are walking alone in nature – in an environment that is *not* at all concerned with or driven by abstract thought – we relax and do not think as much as usual, and we like that. That is why travel businesses selling holidays display

beautiful scenes of nature – because our deepest instinct about what makes a successful holiday is being back in nature in its purest, least humanized form. Spending time in nature shifts the balance in us away from abstract thoughts towards what we are mostly – the thing pattering in the garden not thinking. Spending time in nature rebalances us and we become – we remember – that what we really are is the experience of being alive, not just thoughts about being alive.

Another way of managing abstract thought is by keeping busy and occupied during a life crisis rather than sitting around brooding over your thoughts about the crisis. Keeping busy serves to redirect attention away from negative thoughts of the crisis on to more positive thoughts that arise from keeping busy.



The approach of many religious and spiritual traditions to managing abstract thoughts is to replace threatening thoughts such as “I will die” with positive, hopeful thoughts such as eternal life, liberation, reincarnation, and salvation from suffering.

The approach of some traditions is also to do exercises such as meditation that retrain how thoughts, emotions and the physiology interact. InnerPeaceFellowship.org, the publisher of this book, provides [free online instructions](#) for a

secular mantra meditation practice that was developed in part at Harvard Medical School and that was taught there to doctors.

The above two approaches can take the edge off the fear of death. However, when faced with life threatening medical situations, those two approaches do not extinguish the fear of death for some people. In that regard recent research into a third approach of traditional religions and spiritualities is encouraging. In research at New York University and John Hopkins terminally ill cancer patients were given psilocybin (magic mushrooms), which had the ongoing effect for many of greatly diminishing their fear of dying (see video: [A New Understanding - The Science of Psilocybin](#)).¹⁸

THE HEART

THE MIND AND THE HEART COMPETE

You plant seeds in your garden and watch them grow into flowers. The growing of plants is described in many books yet no book – no abstract description – can contain the miraculousness of planting a seed and watching it become a flower.

Yet the mind's arrogance insists it can *know* fully– that it can contain, describe, and convey that miraculousness. So the mind's arrogance starts spinning endless, unsatisfying webs of abstraction in its attempt to capture – to *know* – miraculousness.

Meanwhile the heart just wants the mind to shut up and get out of the way so that it can get closer to and embrace the miraculousness.



With faith we try to satisfy both the mind and heart.

The mind wants faith to be *true*.

The heart wants faith to open it more to love and brotherhood.

Yet faith whose beliefs are *true* excludes others, and thus closes the heart to love and brotherhood with them.



Faith also reflects our fear.

The need to persuade others to believe as we do – to convince them our faith is *right* – is a reflection of fearfulness, not inner peace.

Inner peace does not need to convince others about your beliefs, or to find their beliefs wrong.

AN IDEA THE HEART CAN FOLLOW

This all comes down to one question: What are you really after?

What many people including us want most from our relationship with higher power is for our heart to be open to fill with love for and brotherhood with others.

It appears that for that to occur something else must occur first, which is that we must accept that how and why higher power works cannot be described. Only by accepting that can we hope to get our mind out of the way enough so that our heart can be open.



Uncertainty is *the truth* abstractly.
Humility is *the truth* emotionally.

Good luck.

ENDNOTES

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⁴ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington: Pew, 2008), 162. [< Back To Footnote](#)

⁵ Barton Swaim quoting Brad Gregory from his book *The Unintended Reformation* in the *Wall Street Journal* article “Blame It On Calvin & Luther”; January 14, 2012. [< Back To Footnote](#)

⁶ Marc Andreessen in the *Wall Street Journal* article “Why Software Is Eating the World”; August 20, 2011.

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⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins 2012)

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⁸ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 5 - 7. < [Back To Footnote](#)

⁹ Amy Sullivan, “The Rise of the Nones”, *Time*, March 12, 2012.

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¹⁰ What most people want from their relationship with higher power is to have their heart filled with more love and brotherhood, to increase happiness and inner peace, to improve luck and good fortune, and to keep stuff they’re afraid of away from their life.

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¹³ Stevens and Steadman, 178; references the *Journal of Neuropsychiatry*; Nov-Dec, 1962.

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¹⁴ Michael Pollen, *How to Change Your Mind; What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin 2018)

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¹⁵ John Edward Dalberg (Lord Acton) in an 1887 letter to Mandell Creighton; from "Notable & Quotable" in the *Wall Street Journal*; May 19, 2012.

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¹⁶ Section adapted from: Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth* and David Christian's *BigHistoryProject.com*

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¹⁷ The King James Version of the *Bible*.

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¹⁸ Michael Pollen (see footnote 14 above)

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