

# Seeking my own Truth

Before I was 13, I would lie on the back lawn in the darkness of night, looking up at the great expanse of the sky and its myriad of stars. Mankind's seeming vulnerability hit home to me. "What would happen if Earth collided with something big?"; "Would the Earth suddenly stop one day? – would we all be thrown off?". These questions led to the ultimate question – "What's the reason for it all?".

And when I used to cycle around the leafy lanes of Warwickshire near Birmingham, I came across the place Temple Balsall. The name stuck with me for years until I found out more about the Knights Templar.

It was when I was 15 or 16 years of age that I first became conscious of my 'real' self, and out of utter confusion one day asked at the dinner table what it was inside me that made me an individual – "Why", I asked, "*do I look out of this body, and not another [body]?*". Perhaps my father, a working, practical man brought up on the Great Strike<sup>1</sup> and The Depression<sup>2</sup>, had never experienced such a question before, or thought it not relevant to getting on with life. He did not know how to answer, except with the suggestion that I was speaking foolishly. He believed a lot in commonsense, though, and despite his apparent inability to answer my conundrum, he certainly believed that true intelligence was not found in purely cerebral activity. My father also lived life simply – he had inherited the tenancy of our house with its long gardens from his father, and when he had time my father was always at work in the gardens, and, even, doing much improvement work to the house. He had a love of animals and found great satisfaction in creating things (as his forefathers also did), and was also a no mean artist. How he found time to do all the things he did around the house and garden, I shall never know. But in those days we rarely had a summer holiday away – my father's annual two weeks' holiday was often spent in improving the garden or the house.

But I was left without an answer. I subsequently tried to study the book '*Teach Yourself Philosophy*' - which didn't teach me a lot! - but by the age of 17 I was involved with a Billy Graham-style 'Gospel Tabernacle' after years being brought up as Church of England, with larger doses of Methodism and Socialism! The Tabernacle was a revelation! It was lively and interesting, and the people there were warm and seemed to invite me to 'better' things. I began to think my question about 'self' was on the way to being answered, and the years of repression through childhood ("children should be seen but not heard") seemed to be behind me.

However, my deep interest in the Tabernacle and spending so much time there brought about my father's clamping down on my activities in this. I was thwarted again! But perhaps I was too diffident and/or uncertain at that time. Then, the age of majority was 21 years, so I had four years to go before I could legally make my own way. Of course, by the time I reached 21 I was weak enough to have been distracted elsewhere, and I had decided that the questions of life were too big for me – and, besides were interfering with my social life! Philosophy and spirituality were put on the back shelf, except as theoretical issues!

In particular, I felt that religion (which at that time I assumed to be defined as various flavours of Christianity – other religions then seemed too mysterious for us Anglo-Saxons!) seemed to offer lack of clarity as to the 'how' of living in that day and age, particularly in how to deal with the social changes that were taking place. I was also disturbed by the psychological condition created in many by the wonderful Welfare State; the notion that 'they' would sort out such-and-such a situation! Who were "they"? What had happened to the notions of individual responsibility and help from God?

I tried reading Marx, Sartre and Camus, but I ultimately resolved to try to live experientially – as far from doctrine and theory as possible, as it was all proving to be too much of a headache! But after the experience of working away from home (at Banbury, looked after by a lovely Christian lady named Marion<sup>3</sup> who let rooms in her big house, again in a semi-rural area), and doing much camping in Wales and hitchhiking<sup>4</sup> in France and Italy (including a 2-months' sabbatical), a sense of guilt took

---

<sup>1</sup> 1926

<sup>2</sup> In the 1930s.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that my own mother's name was Marion, and my father's only sister was also named Marion. They, plus this new 'Marion', were all exceedingly warm creatures.

<sup>4</sup> My hitchhiking experiences taught me a lot – particularly about how generous people could be. On one occasion I shared a 200-mile

over and I began to think that I needed a 'real' direction in life. This agitation led me to somewhat fall into marriage at the age of 23. It was not the best way of getting into marriage having only known my wife for five months, but I was idealistic and wanting to 'be', and from a situation of being out of meaningful work following my earlier-mentioned 'sabbatical', and virtually penniless, I again fell into a solution - a job in computing with marvelous opportunities.

The world of professional computing, or Information Technology as we have called it for a number of years now, was then in its embryonic stage in the world of business, yet when I first joined this profession in 1966, many of the hardware and software standards being established went on to provide a basis of design through to the present day, and I was very much part of that creation process. I say that not as a boast, but as an appreciation to Life itself that gave me the opportunity to find myself in such a way.

As there were few people in this profession with much experience at that time, it did not take me long to rise up the promotional tree and by 1970, at the age of 25, I was firmly established in a technical and systems development supervisory post that saw me responsible for developments involving tens of people in that process. Somehow I seemed to 'find myself' in this role, and it became my daily joy in the challenges it had to offer. But it was not only the technical aspects of the role that enthralled me, but the involvement with people. The people that worked for me seemed to become my family; I felt as though I was their representative, not just their supervisor. From the age of 25 until I was 30 I lived this dream (for enjoying my work so much was indeed a privilege), probably with some detriment to my real family, as my time 'at the office' very often involved lengthy working hours.

The greatly increased experiences I was subjected to as I got older, only served to create more questions without ready answers! Marriage, children, the rapidly changing role of fathers and husbands, financial responsibilities and supervising staff at work, and the pressures of work, all seemed to create huge dilemmas ("how do these situations all fit into life's purpose?"-type questions), which I tried to resolve by myself. My father had always seemed to be self-sufficient, and that is what I tried to make myself.

Exploding with need for answers to my questions, but particularly after a series of inexplicable events, circumstances again caused me to look seriously into the subjects of philosophy and spirituality. One of the 'inexplicable events' was that my wife left me (taking our children with her), but not only had she left but the circumstances had been foretold a few years previously! It was that forecast that really bothered me, not having any understanding of the mechanics of the spiritual world, and caused me to seek answers to this and my other accumulating questions.

It was 'coincidental' that during the time of my wife's exit, my car-manufacturing employers were having quite big financial problems, combined with unrest in the manufacturing workforce, and the American-born UK chief executive then went on a tour of the work centres to give a pep talk to management staff. I was one of those on the bottom rung of the management ladder, and duly attended our allocated meeting. I was horrified to find that we were initially 'softened-up' with a richly laden buffet of all kinds of sweetmeats, which was followed by the somewhat false pep talk. I began to feel quite disenchanted with this employer, which still boasted separate canteens and toilets for staff and 'others'.

It was also about this time that an attempt was made by my employer to second me to Iran, to set up a computer system to help control the assembly of imported vehicles there, but I did not want to distance myself from my children (who were far enough away from me anyway!) and also my old socialist instincts were again brought to bear. I rejected the offer, being of the feeling that this was in fact an example of Western technology and capitalism imposing itself on a culture.<sup>5</sup> Not long after, when I had the opportunity to go to Saudi Arabia to earn 'big bucks' in computer systems development there, I also declined that chance.

After a few months re-assessing my life situation, which often involved me tripping over myself in the confusion of the aftermath of separation from my family, I gave in my notice, relinquishing my well-paid supervisory post with company car. I had no job to go to, but had decided on doing some voluntary community work for a while until I could work out what I wanted to do. However, my boss did not accept my resignation without firstly giving me a premeditated psychological mauling, culminating in the suggestion that I needed psychiatric treatment. It was a salutary lesson on how a star performer

---

journey in France with a driver who, in gratitude for my company over that distance, insisted on providing me with money for my dinner!

<sup>5</sup> This was nearly five years before the Iran "revolution" of 1979.

(that I was) could be reduced in his eyes. I learnt a lot from that. At a time when I had effectively lost my family, and my father was seriously ill and shortly to die, I went *deeply* within. I found solace there, and deep concentration and sense of purpose. A Helping Hand was there, I am now sure.

In the next two years I gained some further valuable life experience looking into ecology, self-sufficiency, spiritual teachings, and in various facets of voluntary work, but this latter involvement quickly moved away from full-time working with Birmingham's George Perkins and "Action Force Volunteers", after a month or two living on diminishing funds. There were many interesting 'coincidental' meetings with people, particularly in coming across a number of spirituality development groups, including Scientology and the Gurdjieff movement (see appendix).

But all these meetings were just an early process in what was developing in my life. I came to London at the age of 32, and found peaceful accommodation at Wimbledon – and its magnificent common - where I also found that the YMCA had a newly built hostel and young-people's centre. Much of my time was to be spent at this centre over the next four years, including a period when I 'lived-in', getting involved with what was going on there in various forms of social and youth work. And many very interesting religious debates, both formal and informal! The YMCA membership and residents were composed of many different nationalities and beliefs, and that added to the interest.<sup>6</sup>

All this was supplemented by meetings with wonderful people as I expanded my involvement in spare-time voluntary work with various institutions, culminating in an experiment of working full-time as a paid worker in a new emergency hostel in then troubled Brixton, for nearly a year. As with '*Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*' by Richard Bach, I felt as though I was beginning to fly! But at the same time, I have to admit that I was emotionally troubled by some of my still recent personal experiences, and they took awhile to work through. The sense of peace that I had earlier found by going deep within proved not easy to maintain!

By my early 30s I was intellectually convinced (but hadn't I always been so?!) that formal religion was/is the shell, as it were, in which the spiritual 'fruit' is to be found. Not only that, but that all genuine religions (e.g. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Sikhism – and even various forms of 'paganism') contain the very same 'fruit'! The 'problem' I identified was that it was/is the literalists of religion who refuse to accept their cousinship, although Hindus and Buddhists are noted for their tolerance, and the Qur'an does state that Muslims should respect the *ahl-i-khitab* ("People of the Book"), who include Christians and Jews, and others! A tradition of Islam is that there were 144,000 Messengers of God before Muhammad, who was the last of them all prior to the (second) coming of the Saviour/Mahdi, so surely some of those messengers must have been founders of religions we know to-day? Sri Sathya Sai Baba<sup>7</sup> propounds this idea, and like the Sufi<sup>8</sup> masters, also states that spiritual teachings have been conveyed according to time and place.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba has further stated that a list of the "greatest teachers" would include the names of Rama, Krishna, Mahavira, Socrates, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Muhammad, Nanak and, of course, Jesus (also known as Is(s)a to Muslims and others). At first glance, the teachings of these incarnations might appear to have differences, but when taking into account the concept of 'according to time and place', the essence of the teachings becomes surprisingly similar.<sup>9</sup>

It was Idries Shah's book *The Sufis* that caused me to examine the teachings and ways of the Sufis whilst in my early 30s. Finding out about the Sufis caused me to call into question whether Jesus was the last great spiritual teacher, as I had hitherto been led to believe. I now feel I was then unwittingly looking into the essence of the teachings of Jesus, but in a form conveyed through the most recently revealed religion – that of Islam. In my search to experientially learn those teachings, I formally became a Muslim in 1978. But in retrospect, I sometimes think I made a major error in deciding this route. It was not the decision to enter Islam that I refer to as an error, but that I became imbued with

---

<sup>6</sup> The YMCA logo consists of an upturned triangle – suggesting the poise that is achievable when there is balance and harmony between body, mind and spirit.

<sup>7</sup> See later chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Islamic seekers of Gnostic Truth.

<sup>9</sup> the Baha' faith (founded by Baha' u' llah) similarly believes that there is one God Who progressively reveals His will to humanity. Each of the great religions brought by the Messengers of God - Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad - represents a successive stage in the spiritual development of civilization. In the words of Bahá' u' lláh "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

the idea that Islam was *the* correct religion, simply as I was convinced that it was the last revealed religion.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, being the last such religion, it must be the most relevant in to-day's world. That's how I then saw it.

It took me a number of years to change my outlook, but, thankfully, I had always managed to retain considerable objectivity and refused to submit to highly extremist views about the righteousness of Islam over other religions. In my objectivity, I was able to move across the barrier from Sunni to Shia (see chapter on Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam), and thus became to understand the intricacies of both viewpoints. A bit like appreciating the differences between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant movement in Christianity – but different!

In one of my earliest journeys as an exploring Muslim, whilst 'learning the ropes' as it were, I travelled to visit a British Sufi community in Norfolk. There I happened to meet other visitors from other parts of the world, including a Cree Indian from North America, who said that he had become a Muslim after reading his tribe's scriptures and discovering that therein was described the person of Muhammad! My life was then full of meetings of this wondrous kind, and even included a visit to a mosque in the heart of London's pornographic area of Soho!

In mid-1979, I experienced *Ramadhan* – the Islamic month of fasting between daybreak and sunset. In the UK that year, this meant performing the fast between 4 a.m. and 8 p.m. The Islamic calendar is lunar, so *Ramadhan* moves through the solar year, year-on-year, and in 1979 it just happened to fall during the period of the longest day of the solar year! Nevertheless, even though I worked as normal and during a hot summer month, the whole experience was a wonderful education – and breaking the fast at the end of each day at a mosque and in the company of other Muslims was a wonderfully satisfying, unifying and brotherly, experience.

It was also in mid-1979 that I was poised on making a commitment to becoming a Muslim missionary, which meant travel in the Indian sub-continent. But there were aspects of the proposal that bothered me a little – and these doubts were clarified more than 20 years later, following the well-known terrorist attacks by "Muslim extremists". The precursors and seeds to this were being laid partly by the organisation that I may have joined. What caused me not to go on that journey is quite interesting, as I had been praying about this very issue. Literally out-of-the-blue, and just when I had to give – or not give – my commitment to that venture, I had a phone call from a then unknown person who shortly after offered me the opportunity to become an associate in a development involving (what was then) the new world of micro-computers. A couple of weeks later I became self-employed and embarked on this venture instead!

But for me, it was not the objective to make 'big bucks' from this enterprise. I saw it mainly as being another opportunity in life to learn and create. For more than the next twenty years I remained in self-employed mode and learnt much from the buffetings of the business world, particularly in learning how easy it was to make mistakes (or *were* they mistakes?!), and in learning how to cope with extreme challenges! There were so many learning opportunities that were not quite available to me as an employee.

I had 'moved' my Islamic allegiance from Sunni to the Isma'ili Shia branch when I married an Isma'ili in 1980, and then I remained a formal Muslim until I passed the age of 40, leaving the formality of its embracing arms after finally realising that I could not sincerely live a 'religious' life as was being imposed, particularly when I separated from my Isma'ili wife; a period I am not proud of. I had not really found the appropriate Sufic 'Way' that I had sought. It was, however, as though the foray into Islam had a meaning that was leading onto something else and I learned a great deal from the various Muslim communities I entered, whether Sunni<sup>11</sup> or Shia. The warmth of the people and their living culture will always be with me. I love them still.

Today, also following my spiritual travels with Anasuya, my 'now' wife, and my visits to Malaysia, I can meet any Asian (Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist) and feel one with them without any feeling of strangeness. I once had the honour to share a death and the subsequent open cremation with an Indian family in Malaysia, the experience of which was profound – such was the depth of concern and love expressed.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> a teaching conveyed to an apostle through God or God's angels.

<sup>11</sup> See later chapter about Muhammad.

<sup>12</sup> However, since leaving Islam and entering into a life with Anasuya, our material life started to go downhill ('coincidentally' of course!),

However, the Sufi teachings earlier referred to appeared to me to be essentially the exact equivalent to those taught to the early Gnostic Christians, and which were suppressed by formalist Roman Catholicism 300 years later, and again in the cruel Albigensian Crusades against the Cathars in the Middle Ages. In the Kabbalah of the Jews, and adopted by Christians (Roman Catholics in particular), we find a parallel teaching.

Gnosticism, despite all the repression of its adherents over many years, is alive and well - and is the practical philosophy for those of mankind that wish to hear! Particularly in the Nag Hammadi Library<sup>13</sup> can be discovered some of the Gnostic truths that were hidden away by the Essenes<sup>14</sup> and others for mankind to find again at some future opportune time. But the transmission has in fact survived through other channels to the present day.<sup>15</sup>

---

ostensibly due to promises not kept by business associates. And other reasons too perhaps, but life was still full of miracles. There was a time when we had so little money that we were seriously wondering how to find the money to buy a pair of shoes for our young son, but within days Anasuya found a fifty pounds note on the pathway, which soon sorted out that problem! That was only one occasion when she 'found' money, and there was one desperate situation when a very much bigger sum saved the day! Even many years later, Anasuya's ability to 'find' money when badly in need has rescued more than one situation!

<sup>13</sup> The documents were discovered at Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt. It soon became clear they were Coptic translations, made about 1,500 years ago, of still more ancient manuscripts. As Doresse, Puech, and Quispel recognized, part of one of them had been discovered by archaeologists about fifty years earlier, when they found a few fragments of the original Greek version of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

<sup>14</sup> A mystical Jewish sect of the time of Jesus, who were inheritors of ancient Gnostic teachings.

<sup>15</sup> An extensive account of the early Christian Gnostics is provided by Elaine Pagels in *The Gnostic Gospels*.