

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

by

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Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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To Peter, to whom dawned the Unity of Existence.
To Anasuya, whose companionship and cheerfulness through almost perpetual ailments has influenced me greatly.

Also to the memory of my mother (a gentlewoman),
and to Anasuya's father (a healer),
who were both born in August,
the month of the completion of the first major draft of this book.

A Kind Warning

Some of the content of this humble work may well be challenging to those who have already formed a firm notion of what is their own Truth. If any of the text angers you, please put this book down and only come back to it (if at all) if you are in a peaceful mind. There is no intention by the writer/compiler to imply that this work is without fault, nor to cause any distress to the reader.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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On that fateful day, it just so happened I was on contract to do some computer installation work at our local hospital.

It was when I went about my task in the Maternity Ward on *that* day in 2001, that I saw the most incongruous sight of so many heavily pregnant ladies watching those very events unfold on the lounge television screen.

They were in a state of shock. And their unborn babies...?

How could this happen?

How could God cause this to happen?...

Did God cause this to happen?!

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

**Dedicated to the One and Only God,
The Creator and Maintainer of the Universe**

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	6
<i>To-day's World</i>	10
<i>Has God a Future?</i>	20
<i>Philosophy</i>	26
<i>Atheists and Free Thinkers</i>	29
<i>Seeking my own Truth</i>	34
<i>The World's View of the Truth</i>	44
Science and Secular Education in General	44
The Scientific View of the Nature of the Universe	45
Man: Created or Evolved?.....	46
An Alternative Perspective on Who We Are	48
Where Spirituality Comes into It	49
<i>The Main Religious/Spiritual Paths of To-day</i>	52
<i>Unity – All is One</i>	56
<i>Gnosticism, Mysticism and Unity</i>	58
<i>The Source and the Light</i>	63
<i>Jesus – the Greatest Spiritual Teacher?</i>	64
<i>The Legacy of Abu al-Qasim Muhammed</i>	71
<i>Sri Sathya Sai Baba</i>	80
<i>Some Spiritual Essays</i>	84
<i>What Next?</i>	91
<i>Postscript</i>	97
Appendix: A Selected Bibliography	103

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Foreword

***There are those who see the world as it is,
and ask, "Why?".
And there are those that who see the world as it could be,
and ask, "Why not?!".***

- attributed to George Bernard Shaw.

The condition of the world concerns me, in common with many others. But I am not despondent; I am convinced there is intelligence behind everything we can see and experience, but we cannot just look on and let the rape of our environment and peoples go on unchecked. Action is required to reverse the direction in which the developed (and developing) world seems to be moving: a direction of want, want, want more, and competition. And yet most of us want peace.

A wise man has said, "When you take away the 'I' and 'want' in 'I want peace', all that is left is 'peace'". What, therefore is the difficulty in this world?

Perhaps a very brief look at recent history may help to decipher that difficulty. The 1914-1918 War – the so-called Great War – greatly helped to generate dissatisfaction with the previous Order in the West. That Order, consisting of Imperialism and Colonialism, and largely state-enforced Religion, was put aside in favour of new political 'isms'. These developed as Communism, Socialism, Nationalism, Materialism and – once these systems were seen to have failed or failing – Environmentalism, followed by Globalism.

Miraculously, none of the new 'isms' came near to finding a solution to man's problems, and it is probably accepted that they have only left man swirling even more in his own effluent. Civilisation can scarcely be said to have moved forward. Man's ego remains prominent no matter what 'ism' is in vogue. There are no 'isms' left to try.

As I see it, we need to re-examine ourselves and what we're here for; to find just what our lives are supposed to contain. Once we've re-discovered ourselves, *then* we should act and use our democratic facilities to cause change to the structures and systems by which politics operate. The world situation is such that we cannot afford to put off that re-appraisal. And with that re-appraisal must come ego-less focus on co-operation between communities and nations.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Our re-appraisal should utilise every vestige of wisdom we possess – surely by now we know what doesn't work? If we can agree with that proposition, then there is hope, for surely we must see that by going down our current route there stands little chance of ought else but disaster.

But what tools can we utilise? We do not seem to have time to assess, write down and apply a new philosophy, so can we look to ancient wisdoms? In ancient civilisations and ways of life, “God” was a central theme in successful communities, and I suggest that it is only because the spiritual way has been debased that we are now inclined to throw “God” on one side, in the mistaken belief that science – and intellect – has all the answers.

A new word – *unithosophy* – came to me one Sunday as I was struggling to find a word that would adequately describe a world of a united Practical Philosophy with one essential ingredient: that it must be theocratically-sound. A world where all truth-seeking people would come to see what – in truth – is the essential teaching of their own religion, and see that we are all, despite appearances, instructed to do the same in respect of our duty and as a result of our love towards our teacher, whether he be the Prophet Muhammed, the Lord Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, the Lord Krishna, Zoroaster, Lao Tzu or Guru Nanak, and the many other spiritual teachers that have blessed humanity with their presence.¹

All religions are supposed to lead to Peace, and the words Salaam, Shalom and Shanti are oft-used in their respective religions. All religions contain plentiful injunctions to help those in need; to respect our natural environment; to remember God in whatever we do; to thank God for what we receive; and not to lust after what we do not have. Application of these fundamentals can only bring social harmony – and a new socialism.

Are not adherents to Islam, Christianity and other faiths *all* united – in fact – in the matter of the lurch towards secularism, science and technology in the West, and the attitude of liberalism without responsibility that sees society reeling with the affects of alcohol and drugs abuse, and other unpleasant aspects of Western life?

Why, therefore, in this day and age – and with the notion of ‘unithosophy’ in place in our minds and hearts – do we continue to believe that our religion or way of life is better than our neighbour's? Peace often seems as far away as ever. Some may believe that the major problem we face is between *nations*. Where there has been world conflict before, that has been the way of describing the situation. But is it just that?

¹ ‘*Theosophy*’ has a similar definition, and is discussed later.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

There are not only as many wars going on, possibly, as there ever have been – with the re-newed threat of nuclear war – but parts of the world has been facing severe poverty, slaughter, climate and environmental issues for a long time now, and we are now at crisis point with regard to those – as much at crisis with the environment as the problem between "West" and "East". Further, our current lifestyle has brought on obesity and a generation of heart problem sufferers, and the older generation, which in many countries will not long hence be greater in numbers than the younger generations, are easily pushed out of their jobs. Their valuable experience and training is invariably lost.

So, I propose that the problem (as, really, it always has been) is about ourselves; not 'him' or 'her' or 'them', but it lies with me, and you, and all of us. We should take greater responsibility, for ourselves and our communities; to provide a sustainable future for our offspring – and the world and all its creatures. We should, I suggest, take a closer look at ourselves – and ask; *Who am I?, Aren't we really – inside of ourselves – all the same?*, and *Are we not all one?* Especially, I suggest, when it comes to the matter of human values.

The current 'ism' – Globalism – can be made to work smoothly and in harmony if we would address our situation through 'unithosophy' and human values. We do not have any more slack available; we do not have any more time to play our ego-centric games; the world needs *YOU!*

YOU and I are all one – there is no separation.

Pointing towards their common purpose and practicality, I endeavour to bring some clarity and unity of view about the main spiritual paths and our relationship to them, often through quotations from spiritual authorities and other writers. I write as both an observer and as a kind of traveller; I hope that my 'travelogue' is of some interest!

It is left to the reader to make up his or her own mind on this subject matter, and then to delve further if needed. I hope this book will be interesting at least. Better, I hope it will be thought provoking. Even better, I hope it helps to inspire. In the near future, the challenges created by global warming and schisms between nations and factions will eventually require all people to move towards cooperation. That cooperation will not occur without leadership from those inspired, and will not occur without each one of us being prepared to change the way we look at the world – and ourselves.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

With love: John Lerwill
London, 2007

Coincidental with writing the first draft of this book, a UK national newspaper contained a small editorial² headed, '*Greed will Cost Us the Earth*'. And then –

One in three deaths among children in Europe is due to environmental hazards, says a report in medical journal The Lancet. Meanwhile, the non-executive chairman of oil giant Shell says the climate change makes him really worried for the planet.

Warnings about what we are doing to the Earth are coming thick and fast. Too few of us are listening. The developed countries are using up a disproportionate amount of the world's resources while the emerging nations are hell bent on playing catch-up. Who can blame them?

We must change the way we live or the price we will pay for our lifestyles will become too great.

² In the Daily Express (p.12), 18th June, 2004.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

To-day's World

***Everyone thinks of changing the world,
but no one thinks of changing himself.***

Leo Tolstoy.

There was a time – particularly in the mid-1970s – when I thought, “Enough! I don’t want to undergo further change” – life was becoming so hectic. But reasonable change is inevitable, and this book is partly about change; and also the need to evolve and to build bridges of peace between all of us on this planet.

But can anyone born in the last 20 or 30 years imagine a time of very little or no television (unless you were wealthy), and certainly no computers and computer games; when travel by aircraft and ship were definitely the preserve of the wealthy, and jet planes had not long been in service and only as military devices? When many houses in Britain still had outdoor toilets, often shared with neighbours! It was a time, also, when getting into debt was something you did not do, and credit cards were still two decades away.

Please allow me some lines to provide a background to how the last 50 or 60 years have led to the world and situation we now know, in order to construct a better picture of where we have been travelling to over that time, and the need to change tack.

EEEEEEEEEE

I now realize that when I was growing up, I was a member of that band of people that were being born into the Brave New World of television, jet aircraft and computers – and not least into the Nuclear Age. There was the identification of the DNA structure and other scientific breakthroughs. In the U.K. it was the last days of Empire, and the first days of the Welfare State. At school, writing was still done with pen and ink (the ink coming from an inkwell!), until I reached the age of 14, and I was then among the first to use the new cheap, disposable, ***Bic***TM ball-point pens. And they even came with a choice of ink-colour - amazing! All at once it seemed that the old world was disappearing in front of our eyes, but we still used slide-rules and log tables. Hand-held calculators and computers were still

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

10 or more years away, but rapid social change was shortly to become the norm.

My family did not have a TV until 1955, and the Queen's Coronation in 1953, televised in 'natural' black and white (!), could only be seen at my aunt's house across the road, in company with many other members of the extended family. For most, TV was then quite a luxury – something that's hard to imagine now. My aunt excelled in her supply of sandwiches, cakes and tea that day. I also remember the news that same month, of Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tensing reaching Everest's summit. Although the news was relayed to most of us by radio and newspaper, relative to how news is now transmitted, it almost seems that the news had come via bush telegraph! My great-grandfather's highly extreme pre-WW2 dictum that "*the civilized world ends at Dover*" seemed to be still something like the pervading attitude in Britain in those days. Black and Asian people were hardly to be seen, and it seemed the Church of England was still the essential mouthpiece of spiritual wisdom. Although the point did not occur to me in my earliest years, I later contemplated that the Church seemed to convey the impression that Christianity was somewhat divorced from other religions – that Jesus was, somehow, 'western'.³ And was religion just for Sundays?

That period seemed much more innocent in character – perhaps more so as I was still a child! But, as already intimated, there was something of a sinister air in respect of what opinions were held towards 'foreigners' and other religions, and children were still "to be seen but not heard". As a child, however, the world then also consisted of a great deal of wonderment, and in respect of the locality I was brought up in, there was full opportunity to explore what then amounted to a mini-countryside within suburbia – bricks and cement were still far from covering up the acres of grassland and trees that existed nearby. Later in life I was to discover that the author J. R. Tolkien lived part of his childhood close to the nearby Sarehole Mill (Sarehole is now a suburb of Birmingham), and I understand that his childhood playings there later contributed to his highly imaginative writings, such as *The Hobbit*. Small wonder, therefore, that I was also imbued with wonderment at what I found, although by then that suburbia was not what it was in Tolkien's day when the River Cole and its locality supported otters and other wild-life. A local newspaper – in its cycling column – described some of the scene in Tolkien's childhood days (in 1903), and shortly after my grandfather also moved into the area:

³ Many years later, when meeting a *Christian* Arab and hearing his pronouncement of "*Allahu akbar!*" ("God is great(est)") – an expression mostly associated with Islam) did it finally sink into me how closely related all religions are.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

We have only to reach Moseley Village, turn left, and go straight past the well-known gardens ere we arrive in the country and enjoying an old-world picture. For, as we dip down a sudden descent, we notice the gable ends of an ancient timbered home, and Sarehole Mill by its placid pool, and reach the Cole with its water splashes and rustic footbridges.

A pretty spot is this, and in the 'bits' to be found after we have crossed at the second water-splash form many a subject for brush and camera. At this second footbridge we can, if we like, to tramp through the fields and climb the styles, go further along, but it is best to cross here. And then we rise until we reach a blacksmith's shop on the left, and a half-timbered house in front of us, when we bear to the right. Travelling rapidly downhill we rise again to skirt Yardley Pool [I think this is really Trittiford Pool], and in half a mile or so we see on our right-hand, overlooking a shaded pool thickly fringed with willows, the remains of a storm-beaten windmill...

Though still leafy, the area is not now at all as it was in those early 20th-century days. I have read how otters were seen in the above-mentioned River Cole; but they have been long gone.

But I should not suggest that I only knew about the 'good' side of Birmingham. Many was the time we travelled to the north side to visit relations on my mother's side, and passed-by the likes of Saltley Gasworks to get there (an experience that was repeated when I later went to a technical school near Saltley).

*To secondary school, and Bordesley Green Tech.,
to get there in time, I'd have to nearly break my neck!
At lunch-time we'd play football on the clinker tip -
and on Saltley Gas Works' air we'd sip!*

My father was employed as a humble bread-salesman, and in time arranged for me to come and 'help' him on his delivery rounds during school holiday times, and that experience became my one way of keeping close to my father until he changed jobs when I was eleven years of age. Yes, my father used an electric van in those day, but the horse was still in use, though not for long.

As with most fathers of that time, working hours were long and family life was an irregular aspect of our lives. On Sundays I was sent off to Sunday School, firstly C. of E., my father's church, and later on to the Methodist, my mother's church; and then Boy's Brigade. A one-week holiday was

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

enjoyed possibly every couple of years or so – and, largely for financial reasons, was always at an English seaside resort. Not until after my father died did my mother get chance to travel beyond England's shores.

My parents did not share church life with me, as socialism was my father's (and his brothers') practical religion. Although from a keen church-going family, my mother had suspended her religious practice, but was an open-hearted person with whom no-one could find fault. I was not, therefore, oppressed at home according to my parents' perception of Biblical right and wrong, and the notion of 'guilt' was not as strong as with those brought up religiously, though it was present.

Even as a young teenager, and having read an encyclopaedic history of the Great War at my aunt's house across the road, I wondered why my life was unlikely to require sacrifice to warfare in the way of those who fought and died in that War. Why should my life be clear of such commitment, and their's not? How was I supposed to 'make up' for this situation? Did I need to justify my existence? *Was* I supposed to fear God? What *was* this Jesus crucifixion thing all about?

These were *BIG* questions for a teenager! But having been brought into the world of 2-channel TV a bit late (at the age of 11), and with no computers to take up my time, reading, playing and thinking were my main activities. It was about that time I seriously considered becoming a priest, inspired by the Sermon on the Mount. Though I somehow talked myself out of that approach, my subsequent life was for many years a process of trying to sort out how to balance the business of living according to 'normal' values and Christian values. I did discern – in that very different age – that there was something vaguely different between what Jesus taught and what our supposed Christian country expected. I became aware that many people thought that there were intrinsic Christian values transmitted from their forefathers to enable them to live out their daily lives, but I felt that those incomplete values were pointing to something else. For a long time, I could not figure out what it was all about.

The class-based society, together with much hypocrisy, seemed headed for its last days, but what was going to replace it? Everything was questioned in the 60s, and there was no harm in that in principle, especially, perhaps, because there was always the fear of a nuclear holocaust, which had brought about the CND movement. From thus came the protest songs via the pen and voice of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez *et al*, but above all it seemed that this was the decade of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

For the first time in perhaps 2,000 years (or even for the first time in recorded history), many people in the Western world had found the freedom and inclination to experiment – thereby testing their own sense of conscience and balance. This situation was encouraged by the appearance in 1963 of the book *Honest to God*, by the Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, who seemed to suggest that the atheist might be right! That book did really seem to put the cat amongst the pigeons. The issue of atheism against religious routines in schools also came to a head in the USA through a legal action in 1963, and this matter is referred to in the body of this book.

The intellectual swing against religion developed further in the '60s with the appearance of books such as *The Naked Ape* (Desmond Morris) – an anthropological perspective viewing man purely as an animal with a large brain – and the first of the many books by van Daniken, called *Chariots of the Gods*, a then new view on ancient archaeological monuments. Both books seemed set on trying to get our minds away from the old Judaeo-Christian teachings about the origin and nature of man. The theories of Darwin seemed to be solidifying, but even now they are still theories.

Yes, together with the advent of rock music, they were changing times. It took until the 1960s before we saw a more full expression of the changes, many of which were positive, and the greater influx of peoples from overseas, bringing with them their very different culture, religions and spirituality. And in that period was the start of popular air travel as we know it today. But it was not until the 1970s that the subject of ecology and 'green' thinking seriously manifested itself.

Just when it looked as though the environment and other world issues of import might just be taken seriously by all, in came the revolution in home-computers and I.T., and that began to take over the popular imagination of the younger generation. The 1980s gave way to the 1990s, and the home-computer hype was supplemented by the popular ownership of mobile phones. The last twenty years have seen a massive swing towards young people being glued to computer screens or ear-pieces, in addition to the other attractions of pop-music and fashion. And with the collapse of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold War, and with China following suit, there was a new dawn which appears to have given rise to false hope, for in the last decade the increased lurch towards materialism has been fuelled by the desire to infiltrate the Russian and Chinese economies, and those of their former dependencies. So too in the developing countries such as in South America, India and Malaysia, 'progress' was the key word in preference over environment, with the result that ancient rain forests – that provide sustenance to the world –

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

were severely cut back. Much of that materialistic expansion has been achieved with relatively little regard to life values and the environment, and in the process has seen significant increases in global warming.

The years just after World War 2 – before popular television – were the last years of the old world and its faults, and those years were perhaps the last time when young people were free of the pollution of *excessive* television and other electronic deviations, and had time to reflect, experiment and take chances – if they were so-inclined. Those were the days before such opportunities were reduced by social pressures and legal restriction.

The decade following the late 1950s – possibly the time of optimum happiness in Britain, except for the really poorly-off – was possibly the ideal time for the development of a conscientious and responsible world society, and though we saw glimpses of the possibilities, the opportunity was lost. We succumbed to the attractions of tinsel-town, and even now, when serious world issues face us, the British government instead talks of super casinos as a major way forward for community re-generation, and only recently has talked of implementing climate change lessons in our schools.

In February, 2007, we were informed – via a UNICEF report – on a matter that most of us in the West already intuitively knew; that the life of high technology, fast pace and competitiveness in the West's richest countries is leading to a state of unhappiness amongst our children – our leaders and co-workers in future decades. And that Britain was rated as the worst environment in which children are being brought up.

The UNICEF investigation into 21 Western countries (19 European countries plus the USA and Canada) found that Britain stood last with the highest average assessment, with the USA last-but-one. Britain's position in 6 categories were as follows (the USA's standing is shown alongside):

Family & Friendships	21 st (Last)	(USA 20 th)
Sex, drink and drugs	21 st (Last)	(USA 20 th)
Happiness	20 th	-
Poverty & Inequality	18 th	(USA 17 th)

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Education	17 th	(USA 12 th)
Health & Safety	12 th	(USA 21 st (Last))

It has been suggested that the data used as a basis for this report goes back to the year 2000 and before, so that changes since then have not been taken into account. Nevertheless, the report does refer to a trend that we still have to consider very carefully.

The countries that do not figure so prominently in economic terms, such as Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, had a very low (beneficial) average assessment in several categories. Larger countries France and Germany were low mid-table in the report. The inference appears to be that there is a balance that can be achieved between economic development and social considerations. *And from this we should – I suggest – heed the lesson and change our perspective. But I suggest our perspective will only be significantly changed if we re-evaluate our values.*

The re-evaluation can only begin when we ask ourselves what our true rôle is in the world as individuals and as a community, *especially* in the light of deleterious climate and environmental changes. I propose that such a valuation can only be properly achieved by utilising wisdom as found in the deep spiritual philosophy of ancient religions. Not just in one of them, but in all of them, according to our persuasion – together there is Unity in Diversity. In the philosophy and wisdom teaching of all ancient civilisations, human beings and the Universe were seen as being interconnected and inseparable. All we need is to find the ‘key’, and that must include the wisdom to realise that science and technology are merely tools in our hands – they are not truths that resolve the meaning of our existence.

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Disregarding the more hedonistic approaches that some took in the new atmosphere of the later 1960s (especially during the ‘flower power’ time), further forms of ‘new’ or revived philosophical and spiritual thought suddenly sprang to the surface to be available to the ordinary person. Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialists became popular, and if The Beatles were to find some sense in their Maharishi, and with the then relatively recent achievements of Mahatma Gandhi in mind, the implied question posed to the young was that shouldn’t everyone look eastwards – at least

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

on a trial basis? There was then a trend towards finding peace and meaning in our lives in an effort to find happiness.

For my part, I had in the meantime succumbed to pressure to conform to society's norms – particularly in the view that our lives would somehow be safer under the protection of the developments in science and technology. Religion by then seemed to be taking on an 'old fashioned' hue, and seemed to be on the way out, or, at the very least, appeared to have little practical significance and was very much a background issue. I didn't quite have the nerve to presume that I had the right to challenge what seemed to me to be an improving society at the time, and to take on board the latest 'revolutionary' trends. After all, who was *I* to do so?

That I was a few years late in 'looking eastwards' was perhaps valid, as it had given me chance to focus my life at a practical and responsible level for a reasonable time, acquiring substantial experience of life and perhaps no little maturity to go with it. It had also taken me into my thirties. By the mid-1970s, there was a plethora of writings emerging on western man's 'alternative views'. A new way of looking at things was emerging, including the developing subjects of ecology and self-sufficiency. There were also the strangely fascinating books by the likes of Jon Michel, who wrote on Gematria, Stonehenge and The Gaza Pyramids etc., and Dr. Lyall Watson's '*Supernature*'. After arriving in London I found many opportunities to attend meetings where prominent persons led public discussions on subjects of this kind, and also the alternative perspectives on scaled-down technology and the democratization of workforces, as suggested in '*Small is Beautiful*' by E. Schumacher.

The 'solid' world of manufacturing and engineering was being transformed in the philosophies then emanating, but was still far from being able to transform the lives of the masses.

The following few years saw the appearance of much more spiritually reflective material such as L. Persig's '*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*', and with changes in technology, society and in thinking progressing at an exponential rate, Alvin Toffler's '*Future Shock*' (1970) was a warning against pressing on the accelerator too hard (so to speak), and reflected on the need to manage swift changes in living patterns and the rapid change in technologies, a situation that to-day is even more profound. It has been suggested that this age, in all its chaos, confusion and darkness, is so because man's technology has far out-surpassed his humanity.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Despite the materialistic ‘fog’ of the period since ca. 1980, there has been a continuation of spiritually reflective material with the appearance, by the 1990s, of the ‘*Celestine Prophecy*’ series by James Redfield. The ‘*Celestine Prophecy*’ series is indeed insightful, in my opinion, into key aspects of a truly spiritual life, and some of my own life experiences relate to the content of the ‘*Celestine Prophecy*’. In his later work, ‘*The Tenth Insight*’, Redfield states, through the words of his heroes:

When we remember what we’re really supposed to do in life, it can restore our health. When we remember what all of humanity is supposed to do... we can heal the world.

Our guiding intuitions become most clear when we approach business from an evolutionary perspective... Instead of asking what product or service I can develop to make the most money, we’re beginning to ask “What can I produce that liberates and informs and makes the world a better place, yet also preserves a delicate environmental balance?”.

James Redfield, Walter Starcke, Deepak Chopra and Peter Russell are just a few of the more recent spiritual philosophers that are helping to create, by their efforts, a higher realm of thought. Their theme is about *spiritual* evolution. They have been joined by others, including Neale Donald Walsch and his fascinating ‘*Conversations with God*’ series.

I am now certain in my own mind that life has, despite seemingly opposing indicators, been witness to increasing developments that have been part of a progressive elevation of consciousness in the West in the last 100 to 150 years. In the West, two personages (amongst others) who were influential early suppliers of help in this regard, were Blavatsky and Gurdjieff. They brought matters of Eastern spiritual knowledge to the fore in the West in a manner virtually unheard of previously, and also with the input of *The Rosicrucians*, laid the ground for many further incursions into spirituality over the years since the 19th century.

In retrospect, what Blavatsky and Gurdjieff taught can now be seen to have real worth, but at the time there were many who were all too ready to deride their efforts and claim that they were frauds. *Perfecti* they may not have been, but in sincerity and conviction they lacked little. Blavatsky’s work was carried on by personages such as Annie Besant, and the school of Theosophy brought thinking people into contact with the great wisdom of Eastern philosophies. Since the 1920s, the work of Maharishis, Buddhists and Sufi teachers has become almost a normality in the West, and fully open to the general public.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

However, discussion about the subject of spirituality inevitably brings us in the West back to trying to understand the words of Jesus. It is through also examining the teachings of other – related – wisdoms we may come closer to a better understanding, for if we could begin to believe that all spiritual paths have equal validity, then we might be able to understand and love ourselves from a universal standpoint, without prejudice. The world, for sure, needs love to be expressed by each individual to another, each community to another and each nation to another, regardless of creed or background. With the Biblical Abraham and Jesus being also the common link, how much more so should it be possible for successful, loving, communication to take place between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Has God a Future?

***God is dead; but considering the state the species Man is in
there will perhaps be caves, for ages yet,
in which His shadow will be shown.***

Friedrich Nietzsche

I have previously discussed how religion seemed to be ‘quaint’ or irrelevant to many in the West, by the 1960s. By then, many felt that religion was being put across as purely a way of beseeching to a higher being that is disconnected from us mortals; and there was also felt to be much hypocrisy in those who maintained the Western Church. The late 1960s was notable for the degree to which young people started to look further afield for inspiration, and there was much examination of alternative philosophies.

Karen Armstrong has in the last couple of decades written a good deal on religion, and as she was a former Catholic nun, she is well-qualified, and has a great talent for writing. The title for this chapter comes from Karen Armstrong’s last chapter in her book ‘*A History of God*’ (1993). In some small way this book carries on from where ‘*A History of God*’ leaves off. The following is some of the initial text in that chapter of her book:

... it seems likely that the world that we know is passing away. For decades we have lived with the knowledge that we have created weapons that could wipe out human life on the planet. The Cold War may have ended but the new world order seems no less frightening than the old. We are facing the possibility of ecological disaster. The AIDS virus threatens to become a plague of unmanageable proportions. Within two or three generations, the population will become too great for the planet to support. Thousands are dying of famine and drought. Generations before our own have felt that the end of the world is nigh, yet it does seem that we are facing a future that is unimaginable. How will the idea of God survive in the years to come?

... In Europe,⁴ the churches are emptying; atheism is no longer the

⁴ Interestingly, however, *The Independent* (Andreas Whittam Smith leader on 27th September, 2004) stated that a French magazine commissioned a poll into attitudes in the Church. 48% said that the Church raises important questions and that 40% thought that the answers are interesting. Only 15% thought that the Church had too much influence in French society and that 33% thought it should have a greater say while 32% were content with its present standing. There were also other interesting questions and responses in the poll. The writer thought it unlikely that the Church of England would illicit such interest if a similar survey were conducted in England! (*The writer’s article was about the*

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

painfully acquired ideology of a few intellectual pioneers but a prevailing mood. In the past it was always produced by a particular idea of God but now it seems to have lost its inbuilt relationship to theism and become an automatic response to the experience of living in a secularised society. ... Those of us who have had a difficult time with religion in the past find it liberating to be rid of the God who terrorised our childhood. It is wonderful not to have to cower before a vengeful deity, who threatens us with eternal damnation if we do not abide by his rules. We have a new intellectual freedom and can boldly follow up our own ideas without pussy-footing gingerly round difficult articles of faith, feeling all the while a sinking loss of integrity. We imagine that the hideous deity we have experienced is the authentic God of Jews, Christians and Muslims and do not always realise that it is merely an unfortunate aberration...

And...

We have seen, however, that not all religious people have looked to 'God' to provide them with an explanation for the universe. Many have seen the proofs as a red herring. Science has been felt to be threatening only by those Western Christians who got into the habit of reading the scriptures literally and interpreting doctrines as though they were matters of objective fact. Scientists and philosophers who find no room for God in their systems are usually referring to the idea of God as First Cause, a notion eventually abandoned by Jews, Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians during the Middle Ages. The more subjective 'God' that they were looking for could not be proven as though it were an objective fact that was the same for everybody. It could not be located within a physical system of the universe, any more than the Buddhist nirvana.

More dramatic than the linguistic philosophers were the radical theologians of the 1960s who enthusiastically followed Nietzsche and proclaimed the death of God. In *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966), Thomas J. Altizer claimed that the 'good news' of God's death had freed us from slavery to a tyrannical transcendent deity: 'Only by accepting and even willing the death of God in our experience can we be liberated from a transcendent beyond, an alien beyond which has been emptied and darkened by God's self-alienation in Christ. Altizer spoke in mystical terms of the dark

role of politics in religion and the differences in this respect between French Catholicism and the C. of E.).

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

night of the soul and the pain of abandonment. *The death of God represented the silence that was necessary before God could become meaningful again. All our old conceptions of divinity had to die, before theology could be reborn. We were waiting for a language and a style in which God could once more become a possibility.*

I have quoted the last three sentences in italics, for that specific text seems to me a reasonable way of looking at the matter of God or no-God in today's world. Firstly, perhaps we need to take on board the spirit of the 1960s to sweep clean our old preconceptions and training to 'believe' in a specific way; to unshackle the fetters that previously led us on a course close to disaster via two World Wars and the subsequent threat of nuclear holocaust. We are not yet clear of all the dangers, but perhaps we are slowly on the way, despite the different kinds of threat that have emerged in the past twenty or thirty years.

Having thus cleared our heads, hearts and minds, perhaps we would then turn to looking at how that leaves us. We might be worried as to whether we have enough 'equipment' left to face life and deal with its various 'problems'. Perhaps we should then do a little self-analysis before trying to pose too many further questions, particularly those based on survival and fear.

Perhaps encouraged by our peers, and through our education systems and upbringing, many of us become so engrossed in this so-called 'Rat Race' that we lose our self-respect; we often feel little love for our fellow sentient beings. We become selfish, greedy, violent, and some of us end up losing complete sanity. Partly stemming from all this, there is also much injustice in the world that has created much misunderstanding between continents and religions.

Let us question a few things.

What is the real difference between you and me? Think about that in putting aside the physical aspects. There should be no difference, in fact, up to the point of physical comparison. In practise, we are basically very egotistic animals. Yes, "animals" would be an apt description of many of us, considering the way we compete (and sometimes fight) amongst ourselves in this Earth to attain all those worthless material wants. Many of us participate in a senseless fight for social recognition and material acquirement, pushing and tossing all moral values aside, forgetting that we are sentient beings and not knowing (or forgetting) why we are here on

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Earth, or where we go from here. Many live in fear of behaving differently.

And those without the means or opportunities to compete are often left to eke an existence. In Britain, house prices have escalated to such a pitch that the new generation cannot afford to purchase a house. Unless they are working for high-flying finance houses or other money-making machines.

A number would say that if it can be helped, they would not want to be part of this mad world. They claim that they cannot resist being drawn into the whirlpool of insane material desires. We claim that we live in a materialistic world, and once in the mainstream of life's constant struggles, we have to do what the others do or be crushed. In the wake of this struggle, who emerges the victor? In reality no-one is the victor. Win or lose in this struggle, everyone is the loser. Why are we fighting for all these then? Are we fighting to be in this place called Earth, and to continue to suffer? Is *that* the meaning of life?

We have aspirations, but each aspiration is invariably a worldly aim that is laced with hopes and inevitably decorated with worldly success. *But whatever knowledge and material gains we acquire, they are superficial, for we came into this world empty handed and we will depart in the same way.*

Who am I? Who are You? Where do we come from and where do we go when we die? If there is so much suffering here on Earth, then this must be Hell and any place other than this must be Heaven. How often do we ever contemplate on these questions?

Attempting to find answers for these conundrums may convince some of us of the need to follow a specific religion. Others may reject formal religion and seek a more practical route or knowledge. Perhaps all these are valid options.

It is noteworthy that many of those who have made their money in 'the city' look to spending their money in the country – sometimes seeking alternative lifestyles – in their bid to escape the madness of competition.

But, 'time and tide wait for no man'. All too soon we shall be on the threshold of our twilight years, and we shall then realise how short a life is, here in this world. And to-day we have a number of crises that require resolution through peaceful and loving means. Through their period of physical existence, how many pause and ponder on what our true aim in life is? Surely there is a beneficial form of life that provides for greater

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

benefit to ourselves, our community, the nation and the world than merely the needs of this physical life and this lifetime?

The above questions about life reveal a natural philosophy. So first – a moment to reflect on what *practical* philosophy is about.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The Blind Men and the Elephant

Not far from Ghur once stood a city tall
Whose denizens were sightless one and all.
A certain Sultan once, when passing nigh,
Had pitched his camp upon the plain hard by,
Wherein, to prove his splendour, rank, and state,
Was kept an elephant most huge and great.
Then in the townsmen's minds arose desire
To know the nature of this creature dire.
Blind delegates by blind electorate
Were therefore chosen to investigate
The beast, and each, by feeling trunk or limb,
Strove to acquire an image clear of him.
Thus each conceived a visionary whole,
And to the phantom clung with heart and soul.

When to the city they were come again,
The eager townsmen flocked to them amain.
Each one of them—wrong and misguided all—
Was eager his impressions to recall.
Asked to describe the creature's size and shape,
They spoke, while round about them, all agape,
Stamping impatiently, their comrades swarm
To hear about the monster's shape and form.
Now, for his knowledge each inquiring wight
Must trust to touch, being devoid of sight,
So he who'd only felt the creature's ear,
On being asked: 'How doth its heart appear?'
'Mighty and terrible,' at once replied,
'Like to a carpet, hard and flat and wide!'
Then he who on its trunk had laid his hand
Broke in 'Nay, nay! I better understand!

'Tis like a water-pipe, I tell you true,
Hollow, yet deadly and destructive too';
While he who'd had but leisure to explore
The sturdy limbs which the great beast upbore,
Exclaimed: 'No, no! To all men be it known
'Tis like a column tapered to a cone!'
Each had but known one part, and no man all;
Hence into deadly error each did fall.
No way to know the All man's heart can find:
Can knowledge e'er accompany the blind?

by SANA'I, trans. by E. G. Browne.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Philosophy

***Religion without Philosophy is superstition;
Philosophy without Religion is atheism.***

Ralph Waldo Emerson

At every birth what appears to be a new life comes among us. We see the little form, as it lives and grows, becoming a factor in our lives for days, months or years. At last there comes a day when the form dies and goes to decay. The life that came, whence we know not, has passed to the invisible beyond, and in sorrow we ask ourselves further: Whence came it? What was it here? and Whither has it gone?

To put it in another way: we borrow a car (our body) to take upon a journey (life) with a few companions (attachments) that will, one day, dismount to choose their own path (separation). Along the way – if we're so endowed – we may enjoy the beauty (worldly riches). But within the first mile of that journey, what happens? We make ourselves the owner of that car, the caretaker of the companions, the creator of the beauty and the collector of hopeless desires. We make ourselves suffer from a deliberate amnesia and blankly stare when the true owner comes to repossess the car and to remind you that the journey must end. We have tried, once again, to cheat the purpose of our existence. But we cannot – no matter how hard we try – hide from reality.

It has unfortunately come to be the popularly accepted opinion that nothing can be definitely known about these matters of deepest interest to humanity. My belief and feeling is that nothing could be more erroneous than such an idea. Further, that all spiritual paths have a common purpose towards solving the questions raised, utilising different techniques. And underlying each spiritual path can be found the spirit of enquiry.

'Philosophy' as a word is said to have been first coined by Pythagoras, and relates to the love of wisdom (Sophia), *not* the possession of it. Philosophy (in the Pythagorean sense) is the striving to attain to the state in which the *energy* of truth, or real ideas,⁵ penetrates into the whole of one's being, not just the mind.

Jacob Needleman said (in his *The Heart of Philosophy* (1983), Introduction):

Man cannot live without philosophy. This is not a figure of speech, but a literal fact... There is a yearning in the human heart

⁵ Real ideas as distinct from conceptualised ideas.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

that is nourished only by real philosophy and without this nourishment man dies as surely as if he were deprived of food or air. But this part of the human psyche is not known or honoured in our culture. When it does break through to our awareness, it is either ignored or treated as though it were something else. It is given wrong names; it is not cared for; it is crushed. And eventually, it may withdraw altogether, never again to appear...

The function of philosophy in human life is to help man remember. *It has no other task.* And anything that calls itself philosophy which does not serve this function is simply not philosophy.

But modern man has strayed so far from philosophy that he no longer even knows what this sort of remembering is. We think of memory only as mental recall because the experience of deep memory has vanished from our lives.

Mr. Needleman points to a key matter – the need to *remember* – a matter that we will come to again in this book.

However, he goes on to say:

Philosophy is not an answer to anything. Nor, on the other hand, is it merely the technique of asking questions and criticizing assumptions. Philosophy is not clever. It is not cold. It is not angry. Yet it is disturbing, troubling. Moreover, the trouble it brings will never disappear, will never end. Why? Because no sooner does a man remember than he immediately forgets. Therefore, over and over again he must be reminded – and such reminders are not always pleasant.

But:

The authentic formulation of great ideas has the effect of bringing a man to silence; of stopping the mind. ... Only when thoughts are stopped can real thinking begin.

These definitions make philosophy *alive*, not *abstract*. The above comments do not relate to the practise of philosophical thought of purely the cerebral kind. The truth is that the function of the brain is as our personal calculator – our ‘PC’ – but our values system emanates from the heart, and inspires us to thoughts that require use of the brain to put them into order. Aspects of philosophy will indeed creep into the psyche of all

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

those who begin to remember – those who ask serious questions about life;
those who want to know the truth.

Certainly, without a question there can be no answer!

***Practical wisdom is something we radiate through our life.
Everyone can acquire it. Great souls are anxious to give wisdom, but the
one to whom they impart it must have aptitude to receive. We cannot
reach God unless we seek Him with childlike faith and devotion.
We must have that higher wisdom which comes from surrender.***

Swami Paramananda

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Atheists and Free Thinkers

We cannot pretend that philosophy is only the preserve of God-centred people. There are many who prefer not to bring 'God' into the scheme of things and believe that man can stand on his own. This way of thinking now permeates western science, though there are still scientists who would also subscribe to a view that a creator power exists – a power that is the originator and maintainer of the universe.

The following account of a legal case is taken from the website "American Atheists" (it can be found on the Internet at <http://www.atheists.org/courthouse/petitioners.html>), with thanks:

In 1959, the Murray family started a legal case which was destined to reach the United States Supreme Court to be decided there on June 17, 1963. The name of the case was Murray v. Curlett and decision of that august body was that bible reading and unison prayer recitation in the public schools of the land were both unconstitutional exercises vis-a-vis the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

The road from 1959 to 1963 was hard and long. Scores of attorneys were contacted to handle the case and each and all were afraid of it. Indeed the attorney who drafted the original complaint which was filed with the court quit the case a week thereafter. The Murray family insisted from the beginning that it should be known that they were opposed to the exercise of bible reading and prayer recitation because they were atheist, and no attorney wanted to mention that in the case. But, Madalyn Murray insisted, and finally one attorney asked her to draw up a short statement (about 250 words) on what an Atheist was that would be put into their petition for relief. That statement was written - and became famous as the media across the land reproduced it everywhere.

Madalyn Murray's statement of what an atheist is in her view, is reproduced below. However, when I saw this statement, I thought it quite a reasonable humanitarian-orientated view that is not far away from a person whose view is objectively-orientated towards God. But I also thought her interpretation of what Jesus' teachings were was incorrect. According to the New Testament, it is taught that the two commandments to live by are: (1) to love the lord thy God with all thy heart; and (2) to love thy

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

neighbour as thyself. The teaching *does not* say love God alone, as suggested in her statement.

Also in spirituality, it is postulated that “we should wish for our neighbour that that we wish for ourselves.” The concern for others is certainly not confined to those of her view.

Atheist thinkers often regard themselves as having the sole ownership of ‘free thinking’, and to regard our existence as an accidental product of Darwinian evolution, there being (in their philosophy) no creator God.

I suggest that anyone who seeks God’s truth objectively, sincerely and honestly is himself a free thinker. Free Thinkers by my definition have often been castigated and have greatly suffered (e.g., Jesus, Socrates, Mansur al-Hallaj, Arius, Joseph Priestly, Mahatma Gandhi – to name but a few), so to imply that such persons are not included as free thinkers is – in my view – clearly an error. Strangely enough, though, atheists rarely suffer for their beliefs – in this life at least.

To my mind, Madalyn Murray’s statement seems to indicate a reaction to the Church not performing a standard close to the teachings of Jesus, and therefore – alongside – I show my version of her statement as it might apply to one who is a sincere and objective follower of Jesus – effectively a ‘disciple’:

<i>Madalyn Murray’s statement:</i>	<i>My ‘disciple’ alternative:</i>
<p>“An Atheist loves himself and his fellow man instead of a god. An Atheist thinks that heaven is something for which we should work for now - here on earth - for all men together to enjoy. An Atheist accepts that he can get no help through prayer but that he must find in himself the inner conviction and strength to meet life, to grapple with it, subdue and enjoy it. An Atheist thinks that only in knowledge of himself and a knowledge of his fellow man can he find the understanding that</p>	<p>“A disciple loves himself and his fellow man as members of God. A disciple accepts that heaven is something for which we should work for now - here on earth - for all men together to enjoy. A disciple accepts that he needs all help from God through remembrance and prayer, to find in himself the inner conscience and strength to meet life, to grapple with life, to enjoy life, and through harmony and understanding to subdue his base self and recognise his own soul. A disciple accepts that through a knowledge of himself and a knowledge of his fellow man - in</p>

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

<p>will help to a life of fulfilment.</p> <p>"Therefore, he seeks to know himself and his fellow man rather than to 'know' a god. An Atheist knows that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An Atheist knows that a deed must be done instead of a prayer said. An Atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death.</p> <p>"He wants disease conquered, poverty vanquished, war eliminated. He wants man to understand and love man. He wants an ethical way of life. He knows that we cannot rely on a god nor channel action into prayer nor hope for an end of troubles in a hereafter. He knows that we are our brothers' keepers in that we are, first, keepers of our lives; that we are responsible persons, that the job is here and the time is now."</p>	<p>harmony with the universe - he can find the understanding that will help to a life of fulfilment.</p> <p>"Therefore, he seeks to know himself and his fellow man in God. A disciple accepts that a hospital should be built instead of a church and that there should be fair distribution of wealth in the world. A disciple accepts that a service should be performed in preference to a prayer said. A disciple strives for involvement in life and not escape into death.</p> <p>"He wants disease conquered, poverty vanquished, war eliminated. He wants man to understand and love man. He wants an ethical way of life in harmony with the rest of Creation. He accepts that we cannot rely on a blind faith in God, nor live without righteous action, nor rely on the hereafter. He accepts that we are our brothers' keepers in that we are, first, keepers of our own lives; that we are responsible persons, that the job is here and the time is now."</p>
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If we were to take Madalyn Murray's statement as the accepted definition of atheism, it can be seen from the above that perhaps there is not a big difference in its view against my suggested definition of a disciple of Jesus. However, there is the view that Atheism can mean belief in nothing at all – and there are probably shades of belief in between the two extremes. Madalyn Murray's statement should probably be construed as a Humanistic statement of belief.

The time of the upsurge of Atheism – and Madalyn Murray's statement – was the time when the only alternative life-view of note in the West was Christianity, and many believers still think that Christianity (as a religion) is superior to other paths. But the main 'other' paths or faiths (that we are

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

now much more aware of) all conceive of a 'Creator God'. In the light of the depth of knowledge that can be found in Vedanta (for example), Atheism seems a poor second in concept. That Communism – possibly the greatest exponent of Atheism – has been virtually eradicated since Madalyn Murray's statement, is another proof of the weakness of the general Atheist argument. However, where they practise Humanitarianism and love of Planet Earth as environmentalists, they show themselves to have active values that often puts them in a better light compared with simple God-believers. This viewpoint applies also to Agnostics – those whose philosophy does not depend on the existence of God, but who do not preclude the existence of God or Universal Creative Power.

As an alternative to a path that is God-centred, it is better to my mind that people practise Humanitarian Atheism/Agnosticism rather than Atheism with no meaning, which normally springs from ignorance and no, or shallow, mental reflection on life, and is the language of the barbarian.

Thinking atheism and agnosticism has given rise to a parallel world of spirituality co-existent with religions, probably because – in the West in particular – religions failed during the industrial era to provide much in the way of answers to the daily troubles that beset people's lives. *Psychiatry* evolved through the work of Sigmund Freud, and many were his disciples, but, remarkably, some of those disciples and later students departed from some main aspects of Freud's thinking and evolved a greater spiritual dimension, called *Humanistic Psychology*. Remarkable people that developed this line of thinking included Carl Gustav Jung and Abraham Maslow, and a psychiatrist and neurologist that survived the holocaust named Viktor Frankl, who developed a theory named *Logotherapy*.

Frankl – having experienced one of the worst concentration camps, Auschwitz – emerged from the experience having lost his wife and parents, and yet developed his theory⁶ based on the core ideas that (i) life has meaning even under the worst imaginable conditions; (ii) our core drive as humans is our search for meaning; and (iii) that we all have the freedom to discover what has meaning for us. If – according to him – we can find some meaning to put at the centre of our lives, even the worst of suffering becomes bearable. But it is us – individually – that has to find that "something" for ourselves; no-one else can find it for us, though they may help in the process of finding it.

He was of the view that Western societies have a type of nihilism at their core; they are unable to provide us with the reason for being alive. It is we

⁶ In 'Man's Search for Meaning' (1945)

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

that have to find the meaning for our existence, and not let ourselves be governed by external forces.

Accepting what is thrown at us – based on the assumption that people want a government to provide them with ‘more’ – tends to lead many individuals into a meaningless existence of alcoholism, drugs, loveless sex, violent entertainment and (assuming credit is available) endless spending.

Frankl challenges us – perhaps more vividly than the ancient spiritual teachers, in view of his relatively recent suffering – to study suffering and treat it as a friend on the way to finding ourselves – and Truth.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Seeking my own Truth

For as long as I can remember – well, not quite back to 3 years of age! – I’ve seen life as being a challenge. Now that outlook has got me in to so many scrapes, but whenever I have just let go to follow a challenge, answers have wafted in of their own accord. One occasion when I became really aware of that was half-way through my first year in computing with IBM back in 1967. I just got this ‘thing’ that then was not the time to settle in to a profession; something else had to be done first. That ‘something’ ended up as an intended trip round the world – have pack will travel. Well, in getting as far as Italy and soon to get a boat to Israel, I was running out of money and up popped the 6-day War. Except I did not know at its onset that it was a six-days’ war until I was halfway back up France, feeling fed up that some Middle-Easterners had dared to spark a war that surely was going to involve the whole world. But, of course, it didn’t! That they didn’t made me even more fed up that I’d made such a reactionary decision to start my way back home.

I went back to England, got a job at Butlin’s Holiday Camp in Cliftonville (Margate) – thinking I would try my trip again when I’d got some money together – where I ‘bumped’ into the lady that became my first wife. Within 5 months, we were married and penniless. Except... that before the marriage I somehow landed a job in the City with a Lloyd’s brokers that fitted us out for life. Except also... that 7 years, 2 children and 2 houses later in jumped an episode that involved a prediction that a psychic medium had told my wife years before, and which I’d put on one side. What turned out was exactly as had been predicted. Marriage over, I found myself with some questions I wanted answered. Another challenge. And I then thought back to questions I’d had earlier in my life, about life – and the soul.

Before I was 13, I would lie on the back lawn in the darkness of night, looking up at the great expanse and depth 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?”. Having decided that the Earth had lived a very long time without these calamities taking place (therefore, why fear now), these questions led to the ultimate question – “What’s the reason for it all?”

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 my parents, "*do I look out of this body, and not another [body]?*". Perhaps my father, a working, practical man brought up on the Great Strike⁷ and The Depression,⁸ 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.⁹

But I was left without an answer to the question I put forward. 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 at least 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, although my Christian friend and I spent 10 hours in argumentation with my father on the matter! But perhaps I was over-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

⁷ 1926

⁸ In the 1930s.

⁹ 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 taking into account the number of his wage-earning hours. 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.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

‘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 communism and existentialism; doses of 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 for me. Then, after the experience of working away from home,¹⁰ and doing much vacation camping in Wales and hitchhiking¹¹ in France and Italy, a sense of guilt took over and I began to think that I needed a ‘real’ direction in life. It was partly this agitation that led me to somewhat fall into marriage at the age of 23, the situation outlined at the beginning of this chapter. 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’ (there is no other word to describe it) into a solution – a job in computing with marvellous opportunities simply manifested itself, and I was chosen (I later found out) from 250 candidates. How I fell onto my feet in such a way still amazes me.

The world of business computing was then in its embryonic stage, 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 – partly through a change of employer – 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

¹⁰ At Banbury, looked after by a lovely Christian lady named Marion, who let rooms in her big house, again in a semi-rural area. 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.

¹¹ My hitchhiking experiences taught me a lot – particularly about how generous people could be. On one occasion I shared a 200-mile journey in France with a driver who, in gratitude for my company over that distance, insisted on providing me with money for my dinner!

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

aspects of the role that fulfilled 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.

It was at this point, exploding with need for answers to my questions and worrying situations at the workplace, that there were a series of inexplicable events. One of the 'inexplicable events' was that that my wife left me (taking our children with her), in the situation explained earlier. It was the prediction of this event that really bothered me (in addition to my deep sense of loss).

"Good-bye, Daddy...", she said. The appealing look in my not-yet 5-year-old daughter's eyes brought tears to my own eyes, and after she (they) left, I was inconsolable.

More than three decades have since passed, and yet that moment is still vividly etched in my memory for instant recall, as though my brain has had a chip component fitted to hold that special memory. It was the experience that launched a flood of ideas and the energy to investigate what (apparently supernatural) event had brought this family to this crisis of separation. It was also a deep insight into the experience of loss, especially as the days and weeks went by – and they didn't come back. I was left with the experience to dwell on, and in due course learnt from it. In addition, on leaving me, my wife had called me "a materialist", and that by itself caused me to look hard at myself – *Was I (a materialist)? Who am I? What do I really represent? Where am I going?*

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

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 managers.

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 exported vehicles, but I did not want to distance myself from my children (who were far enough away from me anyway, in the east of the country) 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.¹² 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 (that I had been) 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.

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. Amongst other people I met – on quite separate occasions – were three men who had left the priesthood; they had, in fact, turned their backs on the church and God. One was then formally studying philosophy. They were well-mannered men and good company, but strong in their arguments against the existence of God. But they did not deter me in my search.

¹² This was nearly five years before the Iran “revolution” of 1979.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 there were 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.¹³ The Zoroastrian, Jain, Hindu, Buddhist, Sunni Islam and Shia Islam faiths and, of course, various sects of Christianity, were all represented there.

It was the time preceding the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and as a number of Iranian students were staying at the YMCA, I developed a friendship with a Shia Muslim from Iran and learnt more of their religion. That same Muslim went back to Iran at the time of their Revolution, inspired with hope at the thought there would be a tolerant Islamic state resulting, but months later came back to the West utterly disillusioned, and disgusted with the murder of the middle classes in the name of Islam.

It was at the YMCA that on one occasion I was invited to a meeting of 'Born Again' Christians, after which I was challenged once again on my broader religious viewpoint. Despite my arguments about the influence of the Essenes during the time of Jesus (and other matters), it was a situation where argumentation would not win, and I left the meeting, asking them to believe in what they believed whilst I believed in what I believed, as I left.

All this was supplemented by meetings with wonderful people as I expanded my involvement in spare-time voluntary work with various institutions (including a psychiatric hospital), 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. But one thing I was already sure of – that suffering and challenge is essential in spiritual development.

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

¹³ 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.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

‘fruit’ is to be found. Not only that, but that all genuine religions (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 Muhammed, so surely some of those messengers must have been founders of religions we know to-day? Sri Sathya Sai Baba¹⁴ propounds this notion, and like the Sufi¹⁵ 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, Muhammed, 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.¹⁶

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 first and 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 (in Sufism), but in a form conveyed through the most recently revealed great religion – that of Islam. In my search to experientially learn those teachings, I formally became a Muslim in 1978. And in that religion I found some satisfaction to my part-Socialist upbringing in that Islam is perhaps the most organised of Socialist perspectives. Islamic banking means that loans may be re-paid without interest; and every Muslim is required to pay a percentage (annually) of what he owns to help the poor.

In retrospect, I have sometimes thought I made an error in deciding this route. It is *not* the decision to enter Islam that I refer to as an error, but that I became imbued with the idea that Islam was *the* correct religion, simply as I was convinced that it was the last revealed religion.¹⁷ Therefore, being

¹⁴ See later chapter.

¹⁵ Islamic seekers of Gnostic Truth.

¹⁶ the Baha’i 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."

¹⁷ a teaching conveyed to an apostle through God or God’s angels.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 seemed 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 Muhammed, 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 quite different!

But what Islam primarily reminded me of was the need for charity, and brotherliness in life – in addition to the rituals of prayer (in which everyone, no matter of worldly status, stands shoulder to shoulder) – being essential requirements to solve the world's problems.

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 Muhammed! 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

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 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 ‘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 Sunni¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

However, the Sufi teachings earlier referred to appeared to me to be essentially the exact equivalent to those taught to the early Gnostic

¹⁸ See later chapter about Muhammed.

¹⁹ However, since leaving Islam and entering into a life with Anasuya, our material life started to go downhill (‘coincidentally’ of course!), 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!

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

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 Library²⁰ can be discovered some of the Gnostic truths that were hidden away by the Essenes²¹ 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.²²

²⁰ 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*.

²¹ A mystical Jewish sect of the time of Jesus, who were inheritors of ancient Gnostic teachings.

²² An extensive account of the early Christian Gnostics is provided by Elaine Pagels in *The Gnostic Gospels*.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The World's View of the Truth

***Why worry about how the Cosmos was born or when it will die?
Worry rather about yourself!
That is the lesson emphasised by the Scriptures; "Know thyself!".
Once you know yourself, everything will be automatically clear.
You are ... a microcosm in the macrocosm.
Just as the knowledge of one single clay pot is enough
to know about all clay pots,
when you know yourself, all else can be known.
Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(in Sathya Sai Vahini)***

There are many in the scientific, philosophical and spiritual 'camps' that have their own perspective about Truth. And, as was written in the *Desiderata*,²³ "Even the dull and ignorant, they too have their story to tell".

Are the views of the scientific and spiritual 'camps' so disparate? Are all scientists atheists? Let us, briefly, consider some issues.

Science and Secular Education in General

Wonderful and impressive though it may seem, Empirical Science tends to be a net of observations that permit the development of a smoggy outlook of the reality. In reality it remains a tiny window to the Universe, always incomplete in this vast endless search for the meaning of existence – as 'knowledge' it is perhaps in only the juvenile stage of its development, though its practitioners frequently 'discover' something that is temporarily regarded as a big leap forward, such as DNA. However, whatever is 'discovered' in reality has always been there.

Empirical Science and Secular Education are blind as to the origins of 'discoveries' without the application of spirituality, ancient heritage and the teachings of past and present spiritual teachers. Empirical Science also lacks a practical value system. In contrast, in the Philosophy and Wisdom Teaching of all ancient civilizations, human beings and the Universe were seen as being interconnected and inseparable. Even in the societies of aboriginal peoples (in North America and Australia for example), their perspectives of life and their environment have been holistic.

²³ For reasons of copyright, I cannot reproduce this verse in full.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The state of the world today requires a spiritual and ecological consciousness entwined with moral and ethical values. There is a great need for putting Wisdom Teaching into practice in every day life in all areas of human thought and action. This is the time in which we have to address the survival of humanity. Wisdom Teaching needs to integrate into world educational networks to connect universal human values and spirituality into the various moral and cultural codes of world societies.

In respect of Western educational systems and their evaluation of Knowledge and the Social Sciences, there remain large gaps in understanding. A recent course provided by Britain's Open University, for example, provided a manual²⁴ that went into the matter of religion and religious knowledge purely from a Judeo-Christian perspective – the great Asian sources were completely omitted from consideration and yet, arguably, those sources are able to make the greatest contribution to universal wisdom from a holistic point of view. That Britain has a multi-cultural society makes the content of that manual even more of a puzzle.

In due course, the Sciences, in the same way as medicine in Britain, will need to bend to the truths of Asian knowledge, but progress in that direction is perilously slow.

The Scientific View of the Nature of the Universe

Until comparatively recently, there had long been a seemingly successful consensus in the science of physics that seemed to get their way with the idea that the universe always existed. This notion, very much championed by the late Sir Fred Hoyle, was expressed as 'steady-state' theory, and by its very idea appeared to have dismissed the creationist 'fact' of the Old Testament and other scriptures.

It is only within the last 35 years of the 20th century that the remarkable Stephen Hawking challenged the 'steady-state' theory and, aided particularly by the work of Albert Einstein and Roger Penrose, evolved the notion of the 'Big-Bang' – a 'creationist' theory. It is, after all, just a theory, scientifically-speaking, except that 'sound' from the Big Bang appears to have been picked up by an observatory, and the analysers of this phenomenon awarded a Nobel Prize for its detection. Notwithstanding this, Hawking's re-description of the physical universe does now allow room for the scriptural Creationist idea to re-gain respectability, though maybe not in the terms of the actual text of Genesis, but in its allegory.

²⁴ Knowledge and the Social Sciences, *David Goldblatt, OU, 2000 and 2004.*

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Peter Russell, who has stated that he once worked with Stephen Hawking, has said in his *'From Science to God'*:

Unlike the God I rejected as a youth, God as the light of consciousness neither conflicts with my scientific leanings, nor does it run counter to my intuition and reason. Indeed, it points toward an ultimate convergence of science and religion. By convergence I mean more than just a reconciliation between two different worldviews. Various people have traced parallels and areas of similarity between science and spirituality – the way that quantum theory, for example, is like some Buddhist, Hindu or Taoist teachings on the nature of reality. Or in the way that Old Testament teachings seem to predict recent scientific discoveries. These resemblances are certainly intriguing, but I believe we are heading toward a far more profound convergence – a true synthesis of the two in a single, all-embracing worldview.

Hawking himself said, “If we find why it is that we and the universe exist, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God.”

This situation naturally leads us to consider man himself. Let us delve into the Creation and Evolution paradigms for a brief moment.

Man: Created or Evolved?

We are here talking, of course, as “man” being what is anthropologically named ‘Homo Sapiens’ (wise man). It is probably safe to say that until the second half of the 19th century, and due to religious instruction, much of the world thought that mankind had been created (by God). And then along came Charles Darwin.²⁵ He put forward a hypothesis many have accepted as fact. Although the evolution case for man was and is still unclear, it nevertheless left a question concerning the accuracy of the Bible, the Qur’an, etc. In the public’s eye, religion’s reputation started to take a nose-dive in respect of its account of the origin of man; society started to put more reliance on science as the source of truth. Biblical accounts suddenly seemed quaint! But more dangerously, the whole edifice of religion – and its moral influence on the fabric of society – became in danger of being rejected.

Then, to make matters worse for the religionists, in the 1960s along came a number of ‘alternative historians’, but perhaps most famously Eric von Daniken with his book *'Chariots of the Gods'* in 1969, followed in a

²⁵ With Alfred R. Wallace, his partner. Wallace, interestingly enough, had reservations about a number of Darwin’s theories, and Wallace himself thought there were oddities in the evolution of mankind.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

stream by a series of further revelations concerning his version of ancient history!

By the 1990s, von Daniken's works had been suppressed in many countries, probably as a result of pressure by the religious and scientific communities on publishers and publishing outlets. But even before the 1990s von Daniken had been followed by other writers who produced even more interesting alternative accounts concerning man's origin – books such as Zechariah Sitchin's *'The Twelfth Planet'* (1976), and subsequent books, and Alan E. Alford's *'Gods of the New Millennium'* (1996). In the 1970s, Jon Michel brought very interesting aspects of esotericism to light linking Stonehenge, the Great Pyramid, and the Bible, and then the names of Graham Hancock, Robert Bauval, Adrian G. Gilbert and others also arrived onto the bookshelves by the 1990s with more ancient history hypotheses resulting from their investigations. I shall call the period since 1965 as the 'von Daniken era'.

As we have since been 'flooded' with this material, perhaps now is the time to ask, "What has this von Daniken era brought about?" and "How does it link up to the various creation/evolution paradigms, and to 'spirituality', if at all?". To summarise the position without going into much detail as to the content of this new era of publications, they describe structures in various parts of the world whose origin is yet to be explained, together with reference to ancient cultures whose amazing knowledge of the universe, medicine, architecture, technology and mathematics²⁶ seems to confound the investigations of many conventional historians.

The 'von Daniken era' has also introduced the idea of visits to this planet from space travellers, who apparently were the "gods" of ancient mythology. Fascinatingly von Daniken postulated that the book of Ezekiel in the Bible contains the description of a spaceship, in the language of a person who did not have the technical vocabulary to properly describe what was seen. Subsequently, a NASA engineer by the name of Blumrich set out to discredit von Daniken, but this sceptic soon became a believer, and in 1973 wrote his own book, which not only supported von Daniken's idea, but contained considerable detail on what he believed to be the appearance of the spaceship, and its specification.

²⁶ As just a couple of examples, the knowledge of both the Sumerians and the Mayans (of Mesoamerica) with regard to the idea of the precession of the Earth's axis, and the accuracy of their calendars, was remarkable. But what was also remarkable of the early civilisations was the degree of justice present in their societies. In respect of the Sumerian period (from c. 3800 BC), laws existed to protect the unemployed, weak and vulnerable, and a judge and jury system similar to our own.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

An Alternative Perspective on Our Origins

Sitchin and Alford have both taken the space traveller idea one step further. This is the result of the dramatic translation and examination of the Sumerian tablets dating from ca. 3800 BC, which seem to imply that perhaps 200,000 years ago, visitors of superior intelligence were able to create a new genus of creature on Earth through the modification of the DNA of existing hominids; a genetic engineering twist to the Adam and Eve story.

Incredible though this hypothesis may sound, it could account for a recent amazing scientific find. Instead of the anticipated human genome of 130-140,000 genes, the total was found to be only 30,000+, and represents a 99+% similarity to the chimpanzee! And, far more significantly, that 223 *human genes do not have the required predecessors of the genomic evolutionary tree* – and that Darwinian scientists have yet no possible explanation for this scenario, except that perhaps mankind somehow ingested the DNA material from bacteria – a sideways idea!²⁷

Furthermore, from evolutionary studies that have taken place since Darwin, the consensus appears to be that mankind seemed to leapfrog his development - and the how of that has been puzzling science ever since. The origin of Homo Sapiens is scientifically still unproven, and scientifically, does not seem to be traceable beyond some 200,000 years ago. Some coincidence.

So, proceeding from Darwin's and then Sitchin and Alford's assertions, and also the Bible, we are presented with three potential sources for Homo Sapiens:

1. From evolution;
2. From creation by God – the Biblical account;
3. From creation by space travelling “gods” – the implied Sumerian account.

But – dare I suggest it? – perhaps a combination of *all three* is possible!

The ‘threefold combination’ theory that comes to mind is firstly based on the probable fact of at least some form of evolution; that scientifically we believe that hominids *did* develop through an evolutionary process. Secondly, the Biblical account of the Creation can be read as confirmation of the recognition by all ancient spiritual teachings that God (or Allah or

²⁷ The report of the Public Consortium is in [Nature](#), Feb 15, 2001 and of Celera Genomics in [Science](#) of Feb 16th, 2001.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

other term) is the prime creator, maintainer and destroyer of the entire universe, and that nothing takes place without His behest. Lastly, the space travelling “gods” should perhaps be seen as God’s helpers – another level in God’s spiritual hierarchy. In the Hindu faith for example, many deities are recognised, but there is still the primary recognition of the one all-seeing Godhead.²⁸

Through allowance for the three situations as being all valid, but not so valid in their own right except in their unification into one hypothesis, we have the potential solution to an enigma, and one that has the potential to satisfy, I feel, all open-minded believers in God.

But – does it matter?!

Where Spirituality Comes into It

The ‘von Daniken era’ books do little to bring spirituality into the equation. Their accounts are fascinating and probably point to at least a partly valid history that many conventional academics are wary of looking into. However, the attention of these books – in common with much of the work output by science – is focused on “where do we come from?” rather than “where are we going to?” Indeed, we have the additional factor that personages such as David Icke have propounded the notion that religion is there to keep man in non-questioning mode; for them religion is but a brace on free-thinking; the “opium of the people”, as the communist would say.

Uncontrolled free-thinking is perhaps itself a danger, but I agree that religion can have a suppressing effect if it is allowed to be – if it is practised ‘wrongly’. But the truths *within* religion are still to be found – I feel there *is* a Middle Way, and in my view religion should thus not be tossed aside lightly. I feel certain that the Buddha and Jesus, to name but two, had meanings in their lives that we should try to understand more closely. There is ‘a Way’²⁹ in God’s Plan that is contained within every valid spiritual religion that, if followed with understanding and love, enlivens both the religion and humankind towards their true potential.

It *is* probably helpful to know from where we came (and how) and we should not ignore our history, but it appears to be not really possible to go back 200,000 years or more to see what happened in this matter with any great degree of accuracy, using current scientific methods. Understanding

²⁸ It is interesting also that the Hindu *Vedas* are said to contain references to aircraft in ancient times.

²⁹ Note that I subsequently refer to ‘the Way’, but I mean this in a generic sense as there are many ‘ways’ that all lead to God.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

more about ancient ‘mythologies’ may help, and perhaps we should take the Old Testament more as a series of allegories of real happenings, but intellectual mind-games will not help much in understanding ourselves, nor our neighbours. Conversely, the inner (spiritual) way *will* help, in particular to guide our personal lives along a truly meaningful track, but also to help throw light on our environment and the nature of things.

For many years, people in the West have been experiencing the emptiness of a materialistic, consumer-focused, high-stressed lifestyle, and the so-called ‘developing countries’ are lurching into the same condition. They are finding that a rich and fulfilling life has seldom directly related to material wealth and power. More and more people will begin to deny the current trends toward environmental degradation, lack of respect for fundamental human rights, an increasing gap between rich and poor, etc. More and more interest arises in people for deeper meaning in their lives and work, for greater peace of mind, and for more caring relationships with other human beings.

Universal Human Values – fused into ecological consciousness in all areas of knowledge – will develop a new way to enable the transform the human mind in the direction of ecological, spiritual, and spiritual-scientific consciousness. This has to be a key-aspect of spiritual-scientific-ecological development and purposeful life.

Albert Einstein had the insight to say:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘universe’, limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a prison, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons close to us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from our prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all humanity and the whole of nature in its beauty.

To quote Abba Hillel Silver:³⁰

The conflict between religion and science is more apparent than real. There is no fundamental issue between them. While the conflict has been waged long and furiously, it has been on issues

³⁰ A significant rabbi,. This text is taken from *Religion in a Changing World* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), pp. 29-37 in part

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

utterly unrelated either to religion or to science. The conflict has been largely one of trespassing, and resulted from the attempt of the one to poach on the preserves of the other. As soon as religion and science discover their legitimate spheres, the conflict ceases. The conflict was always between superstition disguised as religion and materialism disguised as science, between pseudo-science and pseudo-religion.

Esoteric and spiritual teachers have known for ages that our body is programmable by language, words and thought.

... the genetic information of each cell can employ comparisons of their actual condition with a specified condition each time and arrange possibly necessary repairs. This can prevent or at least stop diseases such as cancer or aids, [and] in addition, slow down the age process.³¹

Where enlightened intelligence has been found to exist has also revealed a love of philosophy and spiritual knowledge. Man will tend to remain in relative lethargy, beyond a knowledge of survival, unless prompted by some force to seek knowledge. That the Great Pyramid of Egypt and Stonehenge in England appear to have been designed using the same mystical use of numbers³² points to some commonality in both thought and the origin of spiritual knowledge, and which has been transmitted to the present day as part of the inner teaching of all major religions. Not only that, but that the mystical system used appears to point to far more ancient origins, and is part of a bigger 'spiritual whole'.

³¹ From *The Biological Chip in our Cells* (revolutionary results of modern genetics) by Grazyna Fosar and Franz Bludorf, as published on their website.

³² Jon Michel,

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The Main Religious/Spiritual Paths of To-day

We now look into a brief description of the main spiritual paths (religions or faiths) – which in their deepest form embody philosophy as previously described.

The Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions each have many sects emphasising different aspects of their religion, although these three main traditions all stem from the Prophet Abraham. This book will substantially concern itself with the essential teachings of Jesus and Muhammed, whose teachings created the bases of the original spiritual paths of Christianity and Islam. And it is in these two religions that we find the greater numbers of followers in the world, and the most conflict. The Jewish faith (Judaism) is not discussed here as it has much linkage with the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

Perhaps the oldest surviving organised faith in the world is that that we today call Hinduism, and is based on the ancient writings called the Vedas, mainly supported by the Upanishads and the Sashtras. Vedanta is the application of the knowledge of the Vedas. The Bhagavadgita (“Song of the Lord”) is regarded by many Vedantists as the scripture containing the essential embodiment of the Vedas.

The development of what has now become called Hinduism has taken place entirely within the sub-continent of India, although it did spread to other nations including those we now call Malaysia and Indonesia, before the advent of Islam. Despite appearances, it is monotheistic in its view, and does not lay down one specific set of practises or rules for all to follow – it has many depths, to suit emotional and intellectual personalities, and its scriptures discuss many scientific perspectives that have only quite recently been confirmed in western science. It was from the Hindus that the Arabs obtained the number zero.

All the main spiritual paths contain a philosophical capability using the definition of philosophy as presented by Jacob Needleman in a preceding chapter. Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato were of a similar school of thinking.

The other main spiritual forms surviving to-day include:

Buddhism began about 2,500 years ago in India. Its founder was Siddharta Gautama, who later became revered as The Buddha – “the awakened, or enlightened, one”. Siddharta was born a prince, but he eventually escaped

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

the shackles of his over-protected life to live a solitary life in an effort to find the meaning of suffering and to seek The Truth. Having found what he had sought, Siddhartha established his Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path. His teachings became established all over India, but eventually the Hindu traditions (amongst which Siddhartha had grown up) were re-established in India, leaving his traditions to be preserved to this day in other Asian countries including Japan and (famously) Tibet. Variations of The Buddha's teachings are established all over the world, but not now in India. The main streams of Buddhism are Theravada (the strict doctrine of the elders) and Mahayana (the 'large vehicle', accommodating many different beliefs).

Jainism also began about 2,500 years ago in India. Its founder is said to be Nataputta Vardhamana, known as Mahavira, "the great hero." Its major scriptures are the Jain Agamas and Siddhantas. There are about six million adherents, almost exclusively in central and South India, especially in Bombay. Jainism strives for the realization of the highest perfection of the human state, for in our original purity we were free from all pain and the bondage of birth and death. The term Jain is derived from the Sanskrit word jina, meaning "conqueror." Jainists believe there is sacredness of all life, that one must not injure any sentient creature, that each person's soul is eternal, and each must conquer himself by his own efforts. Their ultimate goal is eternal release from the wheel of birth and death, and the concomitant attainment of Supreme knowledge and becoming a perfected soul.

Zoroastrianism began about 2,600 years ago in ancient Persia. Its founder was Spenta Zarathustra and its major scriptures include portions of the Zend Avesta (Persian). To-day there are about 125,000 believers, mostly near Bombay, where they are called Parsis. They believe there are two great Beings in the universe. One, Ahura Mazda, created man/woman and all that is good, beautiful and true, while the other, Angra Mainya, vivifies all that is evil, ugly and destructive. They believe that we have free will to align ourselves with good or evil, that the soul is immortal and upon death passes over hell by a narrow bridge-the good crossing safely to Heaven and the evil falling into hell. They believe that purity is the first virtue, truth the second, and charity the third, and that we must discipline ourselves by good thoughts, words and deeds. Their goal is to be rewarded with a place in heaven where the soul will be with God, sharing His blessed existence forever.

Sikhism began about 500 years ago in Northern India, now known as Pakistan. Its founder was Guru Nanak, a Hindu who was much influenced by Sufi teachings and methods, and its major scripture is The Adi Granth.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

There are about nine million followers, mostly in India's state of Punjab. They believe in God as the Sovereign One, the omnipotent, immortal and personal Creator, a Being beyond time who is called Sat Nam. They believe that salvation lies in understanding the Divine Truth and that man/woman's surest path lies in faith, love, purity and devotion. Their goal is to be freed of all limitation in order to become co-creators and co-present with God.

Baha'i: This is a more recent development, having been founded in the 19th century by Mirza Ali Muhammed in Persia. To-day, the movement is based mainly in south-west Asia, but is an international movement with about 70,000 different centres. The fundamental teaching of the Baha'i is that all religions are valid – All is One; a theme that has become increasingly popular.

In addition, there are various generic forms of spirituality of great antiquity:

Shamanism: This broad term includes thousands of tribal indigenous faiths which have existed on every continent since long recorded history. Beliefs include a deep sense of the sacredness of life and of the Earth, communion with Spirit guides and in the ability of man to live in harmony with and influence nature.

Spiritualism holds that there is another, perhaps deeper, reality on 'the other side' which can be contacted by mediums who have sufficient sensitivity. It is one of the oldest forms of communion.

Why Do Multiple Religious Paths Exist?

Each genuine religion or spiritual path has been revealed according to 'time and place', by a particular teacher. This partly accounts for the difference in religious form and practise, as the culture, language and thinking in any one place and at any one time will doubtless be different. Further, as time marches on, the adherents of the religion will alter matters according to their revised, usually short-sighted perspective.

H. T. Edge³³ said:

... after the withdrawal of the teacher, the movement which he has started undergoes changes and degeneration. It falls under the influence of worldly motives and forces; it becomes formalized; it breaks up into schools and sects; it acquires various organic forms

³³ In his 'Theosophy and Christianity'.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

with churches, priesthood, and creeds. The process can be traced in the history of religions in general; it can be traced in Christianity, so that the Christianity of today is not in any of its forms the original gospel as given by the founder.

Thus, once religious practise and justice begin to break down, along may come a new religion to revive man to live according to the true path. If not a new religion, then, as Hindus (Bharatiyas) believe, the appearance of an avatar³⁴ to revive the religion.

The fact that each religion *appears* to be different has a particular benefit. The Christian, for example, can reflect on aspects of the wisdom of *Mahayana Buddhism*, and wonder on the similarity of the essential teachings of both religions. One religion can act as a mirror for another, in the same way that we cannot clearly know 'right' without knowing 'wrong', nor 'bad' without there being 'good'.

Although the Christian may believe for example, that Islam might appear on the surface to be more barbaric in its treatment of criminal offenders, reflection of the matter might persuade the onlooker to note the humanity that exists in Islam in offering the choice to a murdered person's family as to whether the killer should be executed. This Islamic law goes back to the earliest time of Islam, when Europe was often far more barbaric in its legal code. Not only that, but it is said that in those ancient days in Islam, a suspected murderer might even be trusted, just on his oath, to return for trial after travelling afar, alone and unfettered, to collect evidence that might clear his name.

H. T. Edge also said:

All religions have an esoteric basis beneath their exoteric form, and it is this which has so largely disappeared. Religions as they are do not satisfy the needs of human aspiration, for they leave out so large a part of what vitally concerns man. They are confined chiefly to ethical principles, but tell us nothing about the nature of the universe or the nature of man. Falling thus behind the age, they have allowed to grow up competing influences, such as natural science and abstract philosophy; and so we find the field of knowledge, which should be one, divided into compartments, either independent of each other or else conflicting.

³⁴ An incarnation of God.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Unity – All is One

In the adoration and benedictions of righteous men the praises of all the Prophets are kneaded together. All their praises are mingled into one stream; All the vessels are emptied into one ewer.

Because He that is praised is, in fact, Only One. In this respect all religions are only one religion. Because all religions are directed towards God's Light; These various forms and figures are borrowed from it.

Jalalu'ddin Rumi

Khalifa Nargis³⁵ states:

No religion is an end in itself. All are preparatory or elementary systems and necessary means of instruction, which men need before they are able to understand the higher teaching enabling them to find the Kingdom of Heaven within. Not all religions teach in the same way, but all are designed to prepare man for the knowledge of Truth, and as there is only One Truth, it is not important how, nor in what way, the lessons are learnt so long as they are learnt. It is, of course, possible for Truth to be found without going through the preparatory courses, but this is very rare; some form of religion is still necessary for the majority and should be established in every country, for where people are gathered together for worship, help and comfort can be found.

- AND -

***I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.
No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.***

JESUS, when He was on Earth, did not say to men: ask someone to show you how to find God. He said: "Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you;" and "say not Lo here, and Lo there, for the Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

There is only One God: and although many roads lead to Him, there is only One Gate which man must himself unlatch if he would find the God within.

The Gate or Door through which all must go, is the Christ. By whatever name He may be called in different lands by different peoples, He is the same giver of Life. The name is not important

³⁵ In 'The Way of Return' (1952). Khalifa Nargis was a disciple of the Sufi Inayat Khan.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

because the name is that given to the form in which the Universal Cosmic Christ chooses to manifest God's all-pervading Love to all men.

A Cautionary Tale

Though the temptation may be to look deeply into various religious/spiritual paths knowing that their ultimate purpose is the same, there can be dangers in doing so without a guide. The following story illustrates part of this matter.

There was once a woman who abandoned the religion in which she had been brought up. She left the ranks of the atheists, too, and joined another faith. Then she became convinced of the truth of yet another.

Each time she changed her beliefs, she imagined that she had gained something, but not quite enough. Each time she entered a new fold, she was welcomed, and her recruitment was regarded as a good thing and a sign of her sanity and enlightenment.

Her inward state, however, was one of confusion. At length she heard of a certain celebrated teacher,³⁶ and she went to see him. After he had listened to her protestations and ideas, he said, "Return to your home. I shall send you my decision in a message."

Soon afterwards the woman found a disciple of the sheikh at the door. In his hand was a packet from his Master. She opened it, and saw that it contained a glass bottle, half-full with three layers of packed sand — black, red and white — held down by a wad of cotton. On the outside was written: 'Remove the cotton and shake the bottle to see what you are like.'

She took the wadding out, and shook the sand in the bottle. The different coloured grains of sand mixed together, and all that she was left with was — a mass of greyish sand.

From '*Thinkers of the East*' (*Streaky Sand*), by Idries Shah.

³⁶ Traditionally thought to be Imam Jaffer-as-Saddiq - see later chapter on Islam re: Imam Ali and his progeny

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Gnosticism, Mysticism and Unity

So, what is Gnosticism? What did the earliest Christians believe? There are some indications that re-incarnation and vegetarianism were elements of their belief and perhaps there are many Christians today who would be very happy to know that was the case! But Gnosticism is not just that – it propounds the idea that it is possible to achieve Unity with God in *this* life, and thereby cease the round of re-incarnation that the soul otherwise and, usually unwittingly, experiences.

While some Christians may try to discredit Gnosticism by suggesting that it is teaching that Salvation is found by acquiring certain esoteric knowledge of the intellectual kind, this is far from the truth. The Greeks distinguished clearly between different kinds of knowledge, between the rational and the intuitive, between learning about something and learning by experience of something. Gnosis involves immersing the self experientially in the subject so that the knowledge gained becomes part of one's being. By gaining knowledge in the Gnostic sense, the individual knower is transformed. To know God in the Gnostic sense is to have a direct and living experience of God. It is not all an intellectual process, bypassing as it does, mere opinions, beliefs and the acquisition of information.

Gnosis is closely related in meaning to the Sanskrit word *Jnana* and is probably derived from it. The term was used by Greek Hermetic mystics to describe interior, illuminative insight.

Peter Phipps, '*Greater Than You Know*', 1997

The "Greek Hermetic mystics" are mentioned here. It is reasonable to believe that at least Pythagoras had substantial contact with the Hindus (Brahmins) as well as the Egyptians – other parties that knew of the Gnostic way. The 'Hermetic' appellation relates to teachings encapsulated in the *Hermetica* – writings perhaps extracted from original sources attributable to Hermes, he being the same person as Enoch in the Old Testament, and Thoth of the Egyptians. Traces of the *Hermetica* can be found in the teachings of the Essenes and in Zoroastrian writings, and were certainly known of by Muslim Sufis such as al-Kindi and Suhrawardi.

Gnosticism is not bound by any one religion. Elaine Pagels, in her book '*The Gnostic Gospels*', suggests:

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Does not such teaching - the identity of the divine and human, the concern with illusion and enlightenment, the founder who is presented not as Lord, but as spiritual guide sound more Eastern than Western? Some scholars have suggested that if the names were changed, the "living Buddha" appropriately could say what the *Gospel of Thomas* attributes to the living Jesus. Could Hindu or Buddhist tradition have influenced gnosticism?

The British scholar of Buddhism, Edward Conze, suggests that it had. He points out that "Buddhists were in contact with the Thomas Christians (that is, Christians who knew and used such writings as the *Gospel of Thomas*) in South India." Trade routes between the Greco-Roman world and the Far East were opening up at the time when gnosticism flourished (A.D. 80-200); for generations, Buddhist missionaries had been proselytizing in Alexandria. We note, too, that Hippolytus, who was a Greek speaking Christian in Rome (c. 225), knows of the Indian Brahmins – and includes their tradition among the sources of heresy:

There is . . . among the Indians a heresy of those who philosophize among the Brahmins, who live a self-sufficient life, abstaining from (eating) living creatures and all cooked food . . . They say that God is light, not like the light one sees, nor like the sun nor fire, but to them God is discourse, not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of knowledge (gnosis) through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise.

Could the title of the *Gospel of Thomas* -- named for the disciple who, tradition tells us, went to India -- suggest the influence of Indian tradition?

EEEEEEEEEE

The Sufi call is to "Awaken!" The wakefulness called for is to detach one's real self from this (material) world – the *maya* (illusion) spoken of by the Hindus! We have to remember what we are really on Earth to do.

What we observe is not reality itself, but reality as conditioned by the human mind and senses and the various instruments which it uses to extend the senses. [That is,] what we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning ... Consciousness and physical reality (or empirical reality) should be considered as complementary aspects of reality.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Bede Griffiths, *'The Marriage of East and West'*, 1982

Traditionally, 'The Way' is for those who are responsible for themselves. In its entirety, it is said it should not be entered into without firstly putting in order all worldly affairs.³⁷ It does not mean (it is not necessary) that one should become a monk or a nun, but 'The Way' involves sincerity, duty, responsibility and depletion of ego. 'Ego' is the element I have the most difficulty with – particularly as an Aries personality! However, if I wish to lose the anger and irritability I often feel, then it is essential for 'ego' to be worked on. Yes, 'work' is called for, but the reward and resulting happiness is said to be great. The application of love and enthusiasm³⁸ helps in this objective. As observed by Freke and Gandy in *'Jesus and The Goddess'*:

Gnosticism is not about avoiding the fact of suffering and retreating into wishful thinking. It is expressing our natural compassion by doing all we can to ameliorate the terrible suffering we encounter ... It is understanding that everything is arising from and returning to the Good. It is trusting that ultimately ... good will come from bad, and choosing to play an active part in that process.

Essentially, the 'active part' relates to choosing kindness and forgiveness rather than enmity towards others; recognising that even one's enemies have a story to tell and a right to live at peace; to try to see all others as One with Ourselves. Also the recognition that the spiritual way is one of adventure. Freke and Gandy continue:

...it is clear that Christianity was not always the safe, pre-packaged, off-the-shelf religion it has become. The Christian Way was once travelled by philosophical adventurers who proclaimed life to be an opportunity for self-discovery, for spiritual creativity, for living our own myths. Christianity ... began as a movement of mystical enthusiasts with a beautiful vision of the meaning and mystery of life.

Here we see a reference to Gnosticism being equated to Mysticism. The two terms are often inter-changed, and, indeed, it is hard to see the difference since both words and practices involve a movement towards direct union with God. Karen Armstrong, in her book *'A History of God'* (1993), says:

³⁷ "Follow God, but first of all tie up your camel!" – Prophet Mohammed.

³⁸ en-'theo'-siasm, meaning to be filled with Godly desire.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

... 'mysticism' is frequently associated with cranks, charlatans or indulgent hippies. Since the West has never been very enthusiastic about mysticism, even during its heyday in other parts of the world, there is little understanding of the intelligence and discipline that is essential to this type of spirituality.

Yet there are signs that the tide may be turning. Since the 1960s, Western people have been discovering the benefits of certain types of Yoga and religions such as Buddhism, which have the advantage of being uncontaminated by an inadequate theism, have enjoyed a great flowering in Europe and the United States. The work of the late American scholar Joseph Campbell on mythology has enjoyed a recent vogue. The current enthusiasm for psychoanalysis in the West can be seen as a desire for some kind of mysticism, for we shall find arresting similarities between the two disciplines. Mythology has often been an attempt to explain the inner world of the psyche and both Freud and Jung turned instinctively to ancient myths, such as the Greek story of Oedipus, to explain their new science. It may be that people in the West are feeling the need for an alternative to a purely scientific view of the world.

Mystical religion is more immediate and tends to be more help in time of trouble than a predominantly cerebral faith. The disciplines of mysticism help the adept to return to the One, the primordial beginning, and to cultivate a constant sense of presence...

It is not only Gnostics (or Mystics) that have found some form of 'spirituality' or 'self-improvement' in their lives. Others will indeed make the point that what may be regarded as 'spiritual' will vary from person to person. I can only agree to this proposition. There is no intention here to force an idea or the notion that any *one* religion or method is right, but a suggestion that life is a kind of adventure and that life could be much improved (perhaps) if lived to the fullest possible limit along an established and fruitful road, whichever route is chosen.

I must make it clear, however, that I do not regard myself as a spiritual teacher. My evaluation of spiritual paths has, I suspect, been over-cerebral over the years. Only spasmodically do I think that I have relaxed my mind sufficiently to see sparks of light. Therefore, being far from perfect, I have done all I can in this book to cause some of the Masters, academic experts and other seekers to speak on the core of the matter!

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

At a time when much of modern science and its material benefits seems to have influenced the moral perspective of the 'Western World', with (apparently) a corresponding reduction in the following of conventional Christianity, I suspect there are many people who are doing their best to cope with life on an experiential basis. I hesitatingly started out on the experiential route at the age of 18 or 19 out of the frustration of not finding answers that were acceptable to me, and which route I decided upon after some soul-searching at an early age. Persons of the like and stature of Sir Isaac Newton and Professor Carl Jung – and other great names – have followed similar paths. They succeeded in their pursuits by objective and experiential discovery of the spiritual kind, in combination with the material.

Many in the West have now become accustomed to living without adherence to a specific religion or a spiritual path, yet still retain a genuine faith in 'goodness' in some form. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has made the following statement of hope and inspiration to us in these days of doubt:

If there is righteousness in the heart there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home there will be order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation there will be peace in the world.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The Source and the Light

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went, and sold all that he had and bought it.

Jesus, as reported in Matthew.

God is the light of the heavens and the Earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light.

al-Qur'an 24:35

Therefore, obey me, my brothers.
Understand what the great light is.
The Father does not need me.
For a father does not need a son,
but it is a son who needs the father.
To him I am going,
for the Father of the Son is not in need of you.

Jesus (Apocryphon of James)

There is a Light that shines beyond all things on Earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the Light that shines in our heart.

From the Upanishads

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Jesus – the Greatest Spiritual Teacher?

A strange thing happened to me just a few years ago, having spent more than 20 years (perhaps most of my life) trying, in my own way, to determine what Truth was/is, and which spiritual teaching was the most appropriate – for me at least.

Throughout that period I was particularly attracted by Sufi and Isma'ili Shia thought, but in 1998 I was on a visit to Malaysia – a Muslim country containing members of all major religions; particularly Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity. I was one night sitting out under the night sky drinking tea with two Hindus and a Christian talking about nothing but everything, when I was suddenly asked the question, “Which do you think is the right religion?”³⁹. To my own astonishment (I had, if anything, been non-Christian for the previous several decades), I said, “The *Way* of Jesus”. The words seem to form despite myself! At that very moment, and in subsequent reflection, I realised that my own true belief was in the statement that Jesus made: “I am The Way” – that is, to follow the teachings and example of Jesus to become what he became; the main purport of Jesus’ statement is not to be taken as an injunction to follow Jesus *the Man*, but to follow – and experience – his teachings.

What was relevant was/is not the Christian Church and what ‘it’ has decreed, but what Jesus himself taught. To focus on Jesus’ *actual* teachings, I would say, is the key to it all, and is essentially no different to the Gnostic teachings that have existed for eons.⁴⁰ It then also dawned on me that Jesus’ statement is embodied in the Sufi and Isma'ili thought that I had been for so long interested in, and which, for a while at least, had deflected me from Christian thought because the Bible teachings did not seem complete. They are not, until properly investigated, and that is why I had been looking elsewhere to make sense of it all, by looking outside Christianity. That route had indeed been fruitful.

³⁹ The same questioner, when he later saw me reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, also asked me whether I “believed that stuff”. I said that I did.

⁴⁰ It is claimed that the teachings can be specifically traced back to the Egyptian Mystery School of Pharaoh Tuthmosis III (c. 1468-1436 BC), but an older link to the Chaldeans must be assumed. The ancient teachings, documented in the *Wisdom of Lamech* and the *Tablet of Hermes* were furthered by Pythagoras and Plato. Later they found their way into Judaea through the ascetic Egyptian Therapeutate, which presided at Qumran in the days before Jesus. Allied to the Therapeutate were the Samaritan Magi of West Manasseh, at whose head was the Gnostic leader Simon (Magus) Zelotes, a lifelong confederate of Mary Magdalene, who was his appointed devotional sister. The Samaritan Magi, whose representatives were prominent at the Nativity, were founded in 44 BC by Menahem, a Diaspora Essene and, it is said, the grandfather of Mary Magdalene.

Gnostic thought was universal. Links with the Druids of Western Europe can be evidenced by the mystical yet scientific methods used in the design of such sites as Stonehenge (see Jon Michel and others).

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

This realisation that I had come to – so simple but so dramatic! – came on the back of another simple but wonderful moment only some nine months earlier, on a visit to north Italy, and particularly the home of St. Francis of Assisi. That visit to Italy was supposed to have been purely for relaxation, but at the town of St. Marie d’Angeli, situated on the plane below Assisi, is a large basilica that within its own walls contains the very simple prayer-house that St. Francis used some 780 years before. The basilica had literally been built around it. On entering the basilica you are soon confronted with this so-humble little building. I was absolutely amazed to see it, and the impact brought tears to my eyes. Immediately the thought came to me, “This whole scenario is like the relationship between the Macrocosm and the Microcosm”.

It is extraordinary that one of the greatest exemplars of peaceful persuasion in near to modern times – Mahatma Gandhi – recalled his indebtedness to the words of Jesus in persuading him to the path of “turning the other cheek”. Gandhi was always a Hindu and grateful for that, but the words of Jesus had the stirring affect on him to seek further into “the Way”, and also to find out more about his own religion, and of how to apply himself to the task that began to unfold before him.

It is also extraordinary that Jesus is accepted and revered not only in all sects of Christianity, but in several other religions too, even in Judaism (as a rabbi). In this, Jesus is unique. His teaching links Judaism and Islam.

In *‘Jesus Prophet of Islam’*, Ahmad Thomson states:

Jesus did not disclose the totality of his teaching to most of his followers. The whole truth was known to very few:

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, but he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” (*John 16:12-14*).

It is interesting to note in passing that this passage is said to be one of the few passages referring to the coming of the Prophet Muhammed ... which has not been removed from the four official Gospels. The ‘Spirit of truth’ to which the above verses refer is identified by John with ‘the Paraclete’. The Greek word for Paraclete is *‘Parakletos’* or *‘Parakleitōs’*, meaning ‘the Comforter’ or ‘the Praised One’. Its equivalent in Arabic is *‘Ahmad’*, meaning ‘the Most Praiseworthy’, ‘the One who Distinguishes between Truth and Falsehood’, and ‘the Comforter’ - and Ahmad is one of the names of the Prophet Muhammed. Dr

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Bucaille (*'The Bible, Qur'an and Science'*), after considering the four references to the Paraclete in the New Testament (who is only mentioned by John, but not by anyone else), and after considering the textual variations in the various versions, as well as the natural meaning of the vocabulary used, concludes:

“According to the rules of logic therefore, one is brought to see in John’s Paraclete a human being like Jesus, possessing the faculties of hearing and speech formally implied in John’s Greek text. Jesus therefore predicts that God will later send a human being to Earth to take up the role defined by John, i.e. to be a Prophet who hears God’s word and repeats his message to man. This is the logical interpretation of John’s texts arrived at if one attributes to the words their proper meaning.”

Each of the other main religions have in most cases their own specific founder that is held in esteem by that religion, but rarely does one great teacher cross over into the lore of other religions. Buddha is highly esteemed in the Hindu faith, and by his own followers of course, but then Buddha is regarded as one of the Hindu faith’s own children, having in their view emphasised specific aspects of ancient Hindu teaching. To Hindus, Buddha did not so much create a new religion but revealed the old one through his trials and tribulations on ‘The Way’. The Hindu faith (properly known as *Sanathana Dharma* – ‘the Eternal Way’) is the oldest known religion on Earth, and appears to contain answers to virtually every spiritual conundrum and question of knowledge. Their doctrine, the Vedas, was finally written down quite a long time before the birth of Buddha.

Jesus’ teaching is also accepted in the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, with whom there is also an apparent historical link. We now move on to one of the greatest mysteries, and one that has not been answered satisfactorily by the established church, concerning what happened to Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30.

An indication of what happened to Jesus in his years of youth and early manhood was brought to light by the discovery of an ancient document in a Tibetan monastery, in the 19th century. The finder, Nicholas Notovitch, was able to translate the ancient *Pali* language to discover the secrets. The document referred to a young man called *Issa*,⁴¹ who travelled through much of India and who seems to have had the characteristics of what might be expected from the young Jesus. This Issa clearly learnt much from the prevailing religions and wise people of India, and, later, Persia. From that lengthy period of learning (and no little conflict with

⁴¹ Note that The Qur’an refers to Jesus as Isa.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

conservative thinkers), it is recorded that Issa returned to Israel at the age of 29. The document goes on to relate how Issa was crucified, but survived – not resurrected in the way the Bible and the Church claim.⁴²

There are allegations that the text found by Notovitch was written a considerable number of years after the supposed time of Jesus. Nevertheless, the text should be taken seriously in my opinion, as in those days people relied much more on memory and verbal transmission – and successfully so. To those that query whether Jesus ever lived, because there is a paucity of actual historical evidence written during the time of Jesus, then I would say to the doubter, “If you are able to believe in the revealed word of God, then why not read the Qur’an and read the numerous accounts of Jesus in it, together with references to other Judaic prophets such as Abraham and Moses?”

The fact that the Biblical story of Jesus equates so closely, it is said, to that of Krishna and Horus (and others) is to me neither here nor there. To me, the notion expressed by some that all these personages did not live and that they are simply representative of a perpetuating myth (though a myth with a good and fine purpose), is not reality. Tradition, the works of Jesus’ disciples, and books such as the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita (referring to Krishna), the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Collection, and the Qur’an (references to Jesus), seem to confirm without reasonable doubt that these persons did live. Whatever the similarity of the Bible stories to those of ancient texts (which may indicate that the Bible has a mythical – perhaps allegorical – content to confirm the teachings of Jesus as consistent to his predecessors), the actual life of Jesus seems not to be in real doubt.

There are other writings that claim that Jesus (Issa) eventually lived a full life and died in Srinigar, Khashmir, where it is claimed his tomb exists to this day.⁴³ Barbara Thiering in *‘Jesus The Man’* postulates supporting events and happenings concerning Jesus, including his marriage to Mary Magdelene, and the issue of his children. As noted earlier in this book, it is

⁴² The story of Jesus’ travels and mission in the east is stated also in *‘The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ’* by Levi Dowling (1844-1911) – as apparently given to him by revelation.

⁴³ Nur Richard Gale, who lived and worked in India for about three years and belonged to a small Sufi order in Kashmir, has said in 2001, “...for me, the most interesting Isa reference is found in the Kashmiri Hindu text *‘Bhavishya Maha Purana’* (circ. 2nd c., the name of a specific Sanskrit text of the ‘purana’ category) about King Shalivahana (last mentioned circ. AD 80) meeting a foreigner calling himself Ishvara Putaram (Son of God), Isha Masih (Isha = Isa in Arabic = Jesus; Masih = Messiah), and Kanya Garbam (Born of a Virgin)”. About the alleged tomb of Jesus in Srinigar, Nur Richard Gale says, “Fida Hassnain conducted the archeological research on the tomb (as much as the guardian family and Islamic law would permit). What he did discover was that the underlying older crypt above the newer north-south Muslim structure was similar to early Hebrew burial crypts, being east-west direction....”.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

also known that the apostle Thomas Didamus ('Doubting Thomas') travelled to India and was eventually martyred at Madras. To add to the mysteries concerning Jesus is the story of the visit to Britain of Joseph of Arimathea, but that is another story for another time!

To the question, "*what were the teachings of Jesus?*" I would refer to works such as those of Peter Phipps and Ahmad Thomson for a lucid explanation on why the New Testament should not be assumed to be a total report and explanation of what Jesus said. On the question of the Cross and the Resurrection, Angelus Silesius⁴⁴ wrote:

Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If he's not born in thee
Thy soul is still forlorn.
The Cross on Golgotha
Will never save thy soul,
The Cross in thine own heart
Alone can make thee whole.

The physical resurrection of Jesus is not the important thing but the resurrection of the Divine within man, resulting in a deeper understanding of reality and a greater love for God and his 'neighbour' – his fellow man. Such re-birth lifts human life to an awareness of its own Divine content and purpose. When the veil between the eternal and the temporal is lifted, man walks with God (in surrender) and as He directs. So when Jesus declared "*I am the Way*", there was special meaning in his statement. The following expands on this matter:

When Jesus tried to tell the password he said, "There is only one way you can enter the kingdom." He said, "I AM the way," but mankind didn't hear. They thought he was saying that Jesus, the man, was the way, but he was saying the password, "I."

That's it. That's all. Just "I." So simple, but so very, very complicated. For "I" cannot be spoken; it can be felt and experienced, but not thought. Any thought about "I" carries with it the seeds of ego, separation and defeat. "I" is the most sacred of all words because it can be comprehended only in silence, in an inner silence.

We have missed the secret of life because we have spoken it. In

⁴⁴ A German priest and mystic-poet. Perhaps a Gnostic. His real name was Johann Scheffler (1624-1677).

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

fact, we have spoken it more than any other word, and every time we have said "I" in a finite way we have desecrated the word. Whenever we have said, "I feel depressed" or "I feel sick," "I need this" or "I need that," we have closed the door on ourselves. We have misused the password.

Whenever we have called any man on Earth our father, any guru, any mate, any effect, we have shut the door on "I." Those who know I AM will never have to look to man whose breath is in his nostrils for anything. They can travel anywhere in the world without money or protection. Everything will be provided from the "I" within.

But we must not speak "I." We must hear it. "I" must enter the heart, it must be in the soul, it must be felt rather than reasoned or thought; only then do we dwell in the secret place of the most high. And it says to us, "Know ye not that I am God? 'Be still and know that I am God.' I in the midst of you is mighty, and I will never leave you, nor forsake you." ...

I is the invisible presence within you. I is the invisible presence that goes before you to make the way clear, is always with you as your protection if you call upon it and hear its voice. "Listen to ME, I, look unto ME, the I of your own being. Don't look to effects. Your body is only the temple of 'I'; I made it in my image and likeness, of my substance. I knew you before you were conceived in the womb. I formed your body.

"I am the way, live by Me. Do not live by the way of the world, do not live by form. I am your high tower. Put up your sword; don't live by the physical or the mental. Live by the recognition of I always with and as you. I in the midst of you is ordained. ..."

I, LOVE, and YOU are all the same word. Your capacity to love is your capacity to experience the I of another. Supreme love is when you see another as your own *I*, when you see yourself in another because you have gone beyond form and know I. When you love another and see your I as his I, you have become *total*: all is one.

Walter Starcke, *'The Gospel of Relativity'*

To appreciate this so important element in Jesus' teachings is therefore to put one in touch with the central issue of all other spiritual teachings:

"I am" is one of the Hebrew names of God, Yahweh. Derived from

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

the Hebrew YHWH, the unspeakable name of God, it is often translated as "I AM THAT I AM."

Similar claims appear in Eastern traditions. The great Indian sage Sri Ramana Maharshi said:

"I am" is the name of God... God is none other than the Self.

In the twelfth century, Ibn-Al-Arabi, one of the most revered Sufi mystics, wrote:

If thou knowest thine own self, thou knowest God.

Shankara, the eight-century Indian saint, whose insights revitalized Hindu teachings, said of his own enlightenment:

I am Brahman... I dwell within all beings as the soul, the pure consciousness, the ground of all phenomena... In the days of my ignorance, I used to think of these as being separate from myself. Now I know that I am All.

This sheds new light on the Biblical injunction "Be still, and know that I am God." I do not believe it means: "Stop fidgeting around and recognize that the person who is speaking to you is the almighty God of all creation." It makes much more sense as an encouragement to still the mind, and know, not as an intellectual understanding but as a direct realization, that the "I am" that is your essential self, the pure consciousness that lies behind all experience, is God.

This concept of God is not of a separate superior being, existing in some other realm, overlooking human affairs and loving or judging us according to our deeds. God is in each and every one of us, the most intimate and undeniable aspect of ourselves. God is the light of consciousness that shines in every mind.

Peter Russell, *"From Science to God"*

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The Legacy of Abu al-Qasim Muhammed

The subject of Islam and Prophet Muhammed has already occupied many annals, yet some description from a gnostic angle would appear to be necessary.⁴⁵ The following is a perspective of Islam according to my understanding after some ten years experiential and objective study. These comments are not in any way intended as a complete description of the religion and the belief.

This Prophet of Islam was not (according to my understanding) a spiritual replacement for Jesus. The Qur'an⁴⁶ is specific that Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus were all representatives (and great Prophets) of God to teach and lead according to the purpose and circumstances of the time.⁴⁷ Muhammed declared, however, that he came to re-establish the religion of Abraham – a relic and symbol of whom was and is the Ka'abah at Mecca. This was a different perspective to that of Jesus, who came (as I see it) to tell of a direct spirituality, *but whereas the message of Jesus was not understandable to all and was not taught as a religion, the message of Islam was open to so many, and provided doors to Jesus' teaching via gradual spiritual growth.* Prophet Muhammed was in this way indeed a 'Comforter' (the earlier-mentioned 'Paraclete' in the Gospel of John).

The general acceptability (at the time) of the genuine teaching of Muhammed is noticeable when, prior to his acceptance as Prophet by the Arabs in general, circumstances were so tough and the Muslims so few in number, Muhammed and his companions were forced to seek shelter by the King of Abyssinia – who was a Christian! According to history, this King was in no doubt as to the authenticity of Muhammed.

His teachings – as enshrined in the Qur'an and by his example – contain some of the highest principles as an aid to the creation of a fair and just society, and is why Islam is to-day still seen by Muslims as not a Mosque-religion, but a total way of life.

The Prophet Muhammed is known to have been extremely honest in his dealings before he received the message of Islam. To such an extent, Khadija, a business-woman herself, chose Muhammed as her husband, even though she was much older. This clearly demonstrates that the

⁴⁵ But a basic description of Islam is at the end of this chapter.

⁴⁶ The Holy Book of Islam.

⁴⁷ The great Sufi ibn al-Arabi wrote of the nature and purpose of each prophet in his *Fusus al-Hikam* ("The Wisdom of the Prophets").

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Islamic woman's rights were clear and bold, and that any notion of restricting a righteous woman is, in reality, anathema in Islam.

Part of Muhammed's great accomplishment in the eventual creation of Islam was the unification of hitherto disparate Arab tribes. But the Prophet's death brought fears as to who would be able to retain this unity – and those fears were well founded as three of the subsequent successors to Muhammed (the four *al-Rashidun Khalifat* – the Righteous Caliphs) were assassinated. Division became inevitable following the death of the last of these four – 'Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet – as so many believed it was he that should have been the Prophet's automatic successor. It is sad that a religion so strongly founded on the notion of peace was subject to so much violence, but the reasons for the violence should not be put on the religion itself.

It is important to realise that Islam is today seen to be consisting of two main threads, or groups. These are entitled *Sunnis* (relating to the practise of the religion based on the *sunnah*, or practises of the Prophet), and the *Shia*, whose name stems from the phrase *shia-atul 'Ali*, relating to that party of *Muslims* who followed the spiritual authority of 'Ali (the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet) on the death of the Prophet – even before 'Ali became Caliph. The Shia based their belief on the apparent authority of the Prophet himself, made just prior to his death, on the way from returning from his last pilgrimage (*hajj*).

The Shia believe that the divine wisdom of the Qur'an was most properly divulged by 'Ali, particularly after the death of the Prophet.⁴⁸ According to the Shia movement, 'Ali was vested with the power of *ta'wil* (inner teaching, or Gnostic wisdom), and, accordingly, was recognised as the first *Imam*⁴⁹ (spiritual leader of all Muslims) by the Shia. According to them, subsequent Imams must be of the progeny of 'Ali and appointed by the Imam of the time, prior to his death. This notion was (and is) anathema to the Sunnis.

The term 'Fatimid' relates to the spiritual line of Imams emanating from the marriage of the Prophet's daughter Fatima and 'Ali. The division between Sunnis and Shia became particularly manifest on the assassination of 'Ali, and also the martyrdom of 'Ali and Fatima's son (and successor to the Imamate) Hussein at Karbala. Their shrines at Najaf and Karbala in Iraq are to this day highly venerated by the Shia.

⁴⁸ A Shia tradition is that 'Ali was said to have a spiritual relationship to the Prophet "as Aaron was unto Moses".

⁴⁹ Note that the Sunnis use the word 'Imam' in a different sense – he is generally the leader of prayer at a mosque.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The teachings of the Shia are concerned with two major forms, or aspects of life; the outward (*zahir*), and inner (*batini*). A basic example of these two aspects is in the meaning of the word *jihad* (or sacrifice for God). The Western World may largely be unaware that the *greater* jihad is action against one's own base self, *not* (for example) action against others, and certainly not in the form of unwarranted terrorism.

One Shia Imam (the fifth or sixth, depending on Shia group), Jaffer-as-Saddiq, is also known to have had particular influence over the entire Muslim community (*Ummah*). He had the attention of many spiritual groups and individuals in Islam, both Sunni and Shia, and also (remarkably), the alchemist Gabir (Jabir). After Imam Jaffer, there was some confusion as to which son was to carry on the mantle as Imam, particularly as his eldest son (Isma'il) was thought to have died before his father. But Imam Jaffer is known only to have confirmed the passing of Imamatus to Isma'il, however, but as Isma'il was not present on the demise of Imam Jaffer (nor his whereabouts known), the younger son Musa assumed the Imamatus. Thereby began the first major division in the Shia Imamatus, as Musa's line became known as 'the Twelvers' (ending in a 12th Imam without progeny), today being the most orthodox branch and living mainly in Iran and Iraq, whilst the believers in Imam Isma'il later became known as Isma'ilis, and are still known by that name.

The main branch of Isma'ilis are to-day also known as Nizari Isma'ili Shia, or Agakhanis, as their present Imam is the current Aga Khan. His followers are scattered worldwide, and are thought to number about 20 millions. A number is difficult to determine, particularly as the habitat of many is in the midst of Russia and China, as well as the major countries of the Western World, and elsewhere. Whoever is the current Isma'ili Imam has the task of interpreting the Qur'an to his adherents, the Isma'ilis, according to time and place – how things are *now*.

Though the Isma'ili movement is numerically a fraction of the totality of Islam (and has been for many centuries), it has had a considerable affect on the whole of Islam – indeed, on the world in general. The eminent writer on Islam, Seyyed Hossain Nasr, states in his introduction to *Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Iran, 1977):

The study of Islamic civilization and culture would not be complete without a careful consideration of the role of Isma'ilism in Islamic history. There is hardly an aspect of the life of the Islamic community, especially in its earlier period, which was not touched in one way or another by the presence of Isma'ilism. The history of the Persian Gulf as well as of North Africa was altered

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

appreciably by Isma'ili activity in the ninth century. Then the founding of the Fatimid caliphate [based in Egypt in the city of al-Qahira (Cairo), founded by the Isma'ilis] changed the whole course of history in a region ranging from Tunisia to practically the gates of Baghdad itself. It also played an important role in Persia especially with the advent of the 'Resurrection of Alamut' which grew out of the earlier phase of Isma'ilism. Subsequently, Isma'ilism has had an important role in the historical development of the Yemen, the Indian sub-continent and more recently East Africa.

As far as various intellectual and artistic aspects of Islamic civilization and culture are concerned, the presence of Isma'ilism is even more evident. Early Islamic theology, both Sunni and Twelve-Imam Shi'ite, bears the imprint of its debates with Isma'ilism. Isma'ili philosophy, still not fully appreciated as a major element in the intellectual life of the Islamic community, stands as one of the richest schools of thought in early Islamic history. The esoteric doctrines of Isma'ilism were related to certain schools of Sufism, while the Isma'ili espousal of the intellectual sciences in general was instrumental in the development of the sciences. This is particularly evident in Fatimid Egypt which was witness to the activity of some of the greatest Islamic scientists. Likewise, members of this same dynasty became patrons of the arts and made possible one of the most creative periods of Islamic art. Even in juridical, social and political thought, Isma'ilism produced works of appreciable importance which had an impact upon the community as a whole.

Islam, especially during the Fatimid period, had a vitality which for hundreds of years was unequalled at the time of the so-called Dark Ages in Europe, and helped to inspire the European Renaissance. Muslims borrowed much learning from the Greeks, Persians, Jews and Hindus, and integrated learning from those sources with teachings from the Qur'an. Western culture has, in turn, taken much from Islamic culture, including our numerical system, and many words in our vocabulary, such as alkali, algebra, alcohol, nadir, etc. And (some say) cultural handovers such as Morris Dancing!

There are also other 'gnostic' (*batini*) traditions in Islam, generally called *sufi*-ism, and are most often attached to Islam. Most of these traditions are known to have stemmed from Imam 'Ali also, although some strands have emanated from other 'Companions of the Prophet', such as Abu Bakr (the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet). From this source, many strands of Sufi teaching (*tariqa*) have evolved in their own style ("according to

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

time and place”), each from a leader who is known to have passed on the inner spiritual message, such as Naqshband, Jami and Rumi. Rumi, who is also known for his poetic, but allegorical, writings, was greatly influenced by Shams-i-Tabriz, who is strongly suspected by some as having been an Isma’ili missionary (*da’i*), or even an Isma’ili Imam. Rumi was founder of the “Whirling Dervishes” movement in Turkey – the Mevlevi order of Sufis. But the ‘Whirling Dervish’ dance should not be confused as representing the teachings of all Sufis; there are a variety of styles in teaching according to the needs of the student.

Where Islam spread, the gnostic (*sufi*) element of the faith went also. It became most profoundly developed in Asia Minor, Persia (Iran), Afghanistan, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and India. Ibn al-’Arabi, born in Spain during the Omayyad Caliphate there, is a very major name in Sufi tradition. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith (an attempt at reconciling Hindu/Islamic disparities), was hugely influenced by Sufism, though born a Hindu. Isma’ilis and Sufis are now prevalent in Western countries, as are Muslims of all sects.

It is also noteworthy that at the height of its culture, Christians and Jews not only flourished within the Islamic state, but at one time were even allowed to practise their own laws within the Islamic state. The medieval *Knights Templar* (much to the chagrin of other crusaders) gained empathy with the Muslims, and the knights admitted both Muslims and Jews into their spiritual meetings.

An outstanding feature of Islam is that it is a total system – it permeates through every aspect and fabric of life. Whereas in Western societies religion is these days separate from politics, in Islamic nations the legal, economic and educational systems work *from* the religion (based on the *sharia*), though possibly less so than in ancient times. Sadly, Islam thus incurs criticism that it is a moribund system based on ancient values that have little relevance in to-day’s world.

The conscientious of those who follow that noble path seek to know what is the truth in their religion. What *does* the Qur’an say – they ask – about this or that important issue? How do we – they ask – relate our religion to modern circumstances? In many cases, these questioning Muslims look to *ijtihad* as a means of solving their queries. *Ijtihad* is an accepted intellectual method of questioning issues about Islam, but I fear that it is too intellectually orientated, and will not appeal to the masses. *Ijtihad* does, however, encourage examination of the truth – and any move in that direction must surely be beneficial.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

But my question remains: How can ijihad be applied successfully unless there is a truly wise guiding light who knows the Qur'an and can teach the meaning of the Qur'an according to the level of understanding of his/her listeners? Even the philosopher al-Ghazzali realized his limitations on that one (and became a Sufi).

My understanding of Islam, and of any major faith for that matter, is that its true teaching comes from within, and true understanding therefrom comes through the heart (qalb). Professor Montgomery Watt - a foremost western writer on Islam - said:

If Islam means submission to the ultimate truth, to God as the source of the truth, then you may call me a Muslim (in the essence). (*What is Islam?*, M. Watt)

Islam probably remains 'alive' as much it is as a result of the spiritual influence of the *gnostic/esoteric/batini* movements discussed earlier, and it is through the practises and teachings of these elements that Islam should be understood. It is to the living successors of Islamic wisdom that we must turn to find what Islam has been really trying to say all these centuries.

The following statement from an early dialogue (attributed to the *Ikhwan-al-Safa* – “brethren of purity” – possibly a branch of Isma'ilism) reveals the essence of what is hoped for whichever spiritual path we choose:

I think I have entered the grace of God. He is so generous with me that I do not succeed in repaying His generosity. I am contented with what God gives me, and I am patient at His orders. I do not hate any creature and hurt no one; my soul is at peace, my heart is free, no creature needs to fear anything from me. I commit my religion and my ideology to God alone. I am of the Religion of Abraham.⁵⁰

This is a message for Osama bin Laden to read, perhaps!

A few sayings of the Prophet⁵¹

He who is devoid of kindness is devoid of good. (*Reported by Jarir, transmitted by Muslim*)

⁵⁰ *Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Seyyed Hossain Nasr, Iran, 1977)

⁵¹ from *Submission (sayings of the Prophet)*, by Shems Friedlander (1977).

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

He who does not give up uttering lies and acting according to them, Allah has no need of his giving up food and drink. *(Reported by Abu Hurairah, transmitted by Bukhari)*

No one eats better food than that which he eats from the work of his own hands. *(Reported by al-Miqdam, transmitted by Bukhari)*

There are two blessings which most people misuse – health and leisure. *(Reported by Abu ‘Umar, transmitted by Bukhari)*

You will recognize the faithful, for they show mercy to one another, love one another and are kind to one another as if they all were of the same body. When one body ails, the entire body ails. *(Reported by Nu‘man, transmitted by Bukhari)*

The best Islam is that you feed the poor and offer salutations to those you know and those you do not know. *(Reported by Abdullah ibn ‘Amr, transmitted by Bukhari)*

When you observe four things there is nothing in the world that may cause your loss of bliss: guarding of trust, truthfulness in speech, good conduct and moderation in food. *(Reported by Abdullah ibn ‘Amr, transmitted by Bukhari)*

Islam as a Way of Life

The following (taken from *al-Islam*, by the Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din of Woking Mosque, Surrey – written in the 1930s⁵²) summarises five major aspects of Islam:

Islam, subjectively, is a disposition to obey Laws. It respects social order. To strengthen this disposition, Al-Qur’an prescribes a course of disciplinary measures, rightly called the FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM : The Formula of Faith - there is no object of adoration but Allah, and Muhammed is His Messenger; Prayers, Fasting, Poor Rate and Pilgrimage to Mecca. Their observance lies in our partially parting with that which we rightly possess. The Book says: "By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend out what you love,"⁵³ such as time, occupation, food, drink, connubial companionship, wealth, family, business, friends, clothes, personal comforts, and above all our various objects of adoration. These are our chief concerns, and cause the whole

⁵² A wonderful little book that I found (with other material) in an old second-hand bookshop in Wimbledon on arriving there in 1976. The bookshop has long gone.

⁵³ al-Qur’an, iii, 91.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

struggle in life. They move our criminal tendencies if we are not scrupulously honest. But could we commit wrong in order to have them, if we learn to give them up willingly? The formula demands from us that we give up every object of adoration before Allah. In Prayer we part with our occupations; in Fasting with food, drink, and connubial relations; in Poor Rate with a portion of our wealth. Then comes the Pilgrimage. We leave our family, friends, business and country; we part with our clothes and comfort, covering ourselves only with two sheets; and when we enter Hedjaz, we must abstain from disputes, quarrels and evil language; we observe strict fraternal relations with strangers, always proclaiming aloud our readiness to offer all that we possess to God.

The Khwaja also says:

Islam laid great stress on charity, because charity cultivates the sacrificial spirit. Sacrifice is the mainspring of all moral qualities. Al-Qur'an divides them under two headings. First, those that prevent us from injuring others' life, property and honour; and chief among these are CHASTITY, HONESTY, MEEKNESS and POLITENESS. Secondly, those that prompt us to do good to others. Among these are FORGIVENESS, GOODNESS, COURAGE, TRUTHFULNESS, PATIENCE, SYMPATHY and KINDNESS. [The Khwaja goes on to describe these qualities in detail] ...

Al-Qur'an came to uplift man from animality to Divinity ... The soul ... lies concealed in the animal consciousness of man; it comes to the surface at a later stage, after which further developments [may] make it perfect. Seven, too, are its evolutionary stages, as al-Qur'an describes:

<i>Ammarah</i>	The Commanding
<i>Lawwama</i>	The self-accusing
<i>Mulhima</i>	Inspired
<i>Mutma'inna</i>	At rest
<i>Radiyah</i>	Pleased with God
<i>Mardiyyah</i>	Pleasing to God
<i>Kamilah</i>	Perfected

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Further reading:

P.K. Hitti, *'The Arabs'*,

Karen Armstrong, *'Islam; A Short History'*;

Idries Shah, *'The Sufis'*;

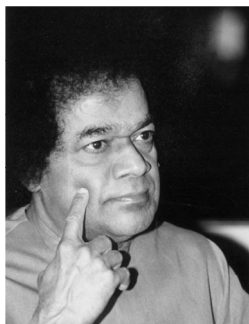
A.J. Arberry's part-translation of Attar's *Memorial of the Saints*,
published as *'Muslim Saints and Mystics'*,

Fahad Daftary, *'The Isma'ilis; their History and Doctrines'*,

Seyyed Hossain Nasr, *'Isma'ili Contributions to Islamic Culture'*.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Known variously as “Sai Baba”, “Sai”, “Baba”, “Swami” and “Bhagwan”, he was born in 1926, and is said to have commenced his ministry in 1940, starting with a mere handful of adherents. Today his ministry is famed worldwide and has many followers in practically all regions of the world. He, however, concentrates his personal centre of activities in the area of Bangalor in mid-East India, where he has performed wonders in respect of practical developments in education, medicine and water projects, principally for the benefit of the poor. In doing this, he attracts the voluntary help of many professional people (architects, doctors, etc.) from around the world in his various enterprises, and hospitals have been constructed in record time.

In Puttuparthi, Swami’s main *Ashram*, Prasanthi Nilayam (The Abode of Eternal Peace), has grown to an unbelievable size and is a thriving University township. Baba has not only built a new General Hospital in place of a previously small one but He has established a Super speciality Hospital a few miles from the Ashram. Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery are well established and thousands of operations have already been done. At the time of writing (1994) Urology and Ophthalmology have been established and Neurology and Neurosurgery will follow soon.

The hospital was designed by Professor Keith Critchlow from the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture in London. Mr Isaac Tigret, a Sai devotee, (who started the Hard Rock Cafes) sought Prof. Critchlow’s aid to design a hospital in an Ashram in Puttuparthi, India.

Critchlow had never heard of Baba at that point of time. In January 1994 I met him and two other architect friends of his in Prasanthi Nilayam. He has now become an ardent Sai devotee and has lectured on Sai as well as written about his experience.

The hospital has a large central building with a magnificent dome which is connected to four buildings on either side each with a dome. Critchlow was given three months to complete the design and the hospital was built in nine months. This according to Prof. Critchlow is a feat only Swami could perform. The central

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

building represents Swami's heart and the others with the connecting curved corridors represent Baba's two arms embracing humanity.

Though hundreds go to Baba for cures, He emphasises that Nature must take its normal course. The Hindu believes that a person's present life is determined by what he/she did in previous births: the Law of Recompense (*Karma*). Similarly there is no release from the cycle of births and deaths if one does not actively attempt by religious (spiritual) practices (*sadhanas*) to merge with the Spirit - attain *Mukti/Moksha/Nirvana*. Only for a special reason, which Baba will not discuss, will the Divine Physician heal someone.

V. K. Pillay (a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon),
in '*Quest for Divinity*'.

Sai Baba provides much insight into the teachings of the Hindu faith (*Sanathana Dharma*), and has written a great amount of material on the subject, in addition to speaking regularly to devotees. He receives visitors from many parts of the world.

He often refers to the importance of the words of teachers such as Krishna, Buddha and Jesus, and the meaning behind their words. He also refers to Islam, and importantly to Sufi teachings. Sai Baba has advised devotees to study the lives of spiritual saints.

Sai Baba has said:

"I do not insist that a person should have faith in God. I refuse to call any person an atheist. Beings exist as a result of His will, in accordance with His plan; so no one is beyond His Grace. Besides, every one has love towards some one thing or the other, and that love is a spark of the Divine. Everyone has ultimately to base his life on some Truth; that Truth is God. No life can be lived out in complete defiance of the Truth. One has to pay heed to truth and speak the Truth to some one in order to make life worth living. Now, that moment is God's Moment and at that moment when he utters the Truth, or loves, or serves or bends, he is a theist [a Believer in God]."

The nature of Truth – what it is and where to find it – has been a tantalising question amongst philosophers for millennia.

Some elements of Sai Baba's teaching:

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

- That despite appearances that may suggest otherwise, the basis of any religion is unity, devotion and fellow feelings. That these qualities foster our humanity, connect us with others and with Divinity.
- Sai Baba concentrates on the common goal of all religions, which is to attain Oneness through elevating our consciousness to that of the Omnipresent God. Oneness is the only genuine basis of social justice for all beings. We cannot attain this level of awareness by merely becoming well versed in the scriptures, but by cultivating a universal vision. This means that virtue and morality, good feelings, mutual regard, equal-mindedness and forbearance are above any sectional interest advanced on the basis of quotations from the scriptures.
- Of all the qualities we have to foster for our spiritual advancement, gratitude is the most important. Indeed devotion and dedication are merely expressions of gratitude to the Lord for His beneficence. Sai Baba emphasises that community prayers are preferable to individual prayers, and prayers from a multi-faith group joined in unison are especially effective in reaching God.
- God is called by a variety of names in different religions.

The notion that Faith and Love are fundamentally connected - we have to cultivate both of these. Without these all worship is useless. Everything grows out of love - it reveals to us our true nature, it confers bliss. Without love, wealth is of no avail, scholarship is of no value, and power is a burden.

It is *not* Sai Baba's intention to convert anyone from his or her existing religious faith, nor is he creating a new faith. Quite the reverse; he wants to help Christians to be better Christians, Muslims to be better Muslims, Hindus to be better Hindus...

All his teachings are based on five core human values of Love, Peace, Truth, Right Conduct and Non-Violence (*Prema, Shanti, Sathya, Dharma, Ahimsa*), and these tenets are intrinsic teachings of the SSEHV (Sathya Sai Education in Human Values) movement that is established world-wide to promulgate essential values amongst children and young people in particular.

Sai Baba has said:

“No materialistic attempt will ever succeed in equalising either man's desires or society. Only the practise of Sathya, Dharma,

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Prema and Ahimsa combined with duty, discipline and devotion will change individuals. If individuals reform, society will reform. If society reforms, the world will reform.”

Sai Baba poses a series of radical questions: How important is the organic life of eating only? What is the value of all the technological advances if we do not uplift our humanness? Is it an advance if we have not enhanced our peace?

Sai Baba then, is truly ecumenical in all his spiritual considerations and acceptance of former messengers of God. He does, however, strive to illustrate the meaning of the ancient texts of Sanathana Dharma, in particular the Vedas, and also the Bhagavad Gita, which scripture is a narrative (held on a battlefield) between Lord Krishna and his nephew Arjuna. The Gita, though comparatively small in size, is in fact a compendium of instruction on “The Way”, including instruction on the use of discrimination in the way of battle – illustrating how war is permissible when defence of Truth demands it; when another course is not possible. But “the battle” talked of is not always an external one – it is more commonly the battle of the mind versus the conscience in the individual, and that is the main focus of Krishna’ teaching, and is the real battleground that Sai Baba focuses on.

Over the years, Sathya Sai Baba has incurred not only much adulation but also much criticism and accusations for a number of reasons. His community of followers have at times been sorely tested in their faith. But what is clear is that much good and positive energy has been generated which has caused so many people to seek him and his words. I have been privileged to know a family whose child had severe physical afflictions from birth, and with no progress under medical treatment in Britain, the parents in desperation turned to Baba for help. They took their child to India and Baba worked his miracles on the child. Though the child did not entirely recover, the change in him was still monumental. The child’s capabilities were hugely improved and he became an enthusiastic singer of spiritual praises.

However Sai Baba is viewed, his accomplishments are breathtaking, and this account does not tell one iota of his accomplishments.

Only when we are able to develop the feeling that we are all the children of God, that we are all one brotherhood and that none really is apart and alien to us, the flower of forbearance will blossom in our heart.

Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Some Spiritual Essays

What is Truth?

by Nargis:

It is recorded in the Christian Scriptures that Pilate asked Jesus: "*What is Truth?*" but received no answer.

Many people in all ages and climes since Pilate's day have asked the same question, and some are bewildered because their questioning is unanswered. They say: "*Tell us the Truth about God, that we may believe.*" The reason why these questions are not answered is because they cannot be. No man can *tell* another the Truth about God; each man must seek and find for himself. He can never be *told*, and even if he could, the mere telling would not satisfy.

If God is everywhere He must be sought everywhere. What makes the search so difficult for many people is that, when they have found something which they think is *The Truth* and afterwards find it unsatisfying, they discard it and look elsewhere. This may happen several times; but, as all aspects of Truth are necessary before it can be seen as a whole, not one should be discarded as being useless or outlived; every one will be needed before the search is ended.

To try to resolve spiritual realities into material facts is not possible, and words are not very helpful; suggestions only can be offered. An analogy is sometimes of use if not taken too literally. Most people are fond of solving puzzles; there is one called a jigsaw puzzle. A picture is painted on a board which is afterwards cut out by a saw into numerous small pieces, all of different sizes and shapes; some are very odd looking and some appear to have no part of a picture on them, but every one is necessary to complete the puzzle, even the ugly dark pieces, also those which only form the background. When each piece has been fitted into its right place—and it can fit into no other—then once again the picture can be seen as a whole "*as it was in the beginning*" and the subject of it understood. The solver who has put each piece into its rightful place has had the joy of a completed work. This is a very crude illustration; it is also paradoxical because Truth must first be

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

seen within before it can be recognised without; but anything that will urge a man to think for himself may be useful if he is sincerely seeking God as a Spiritual Reality.

***The Truth cannot be spoken, and the spoken word is not necessarily true.
- Inayat Khan ('Bowl of Saki').***

Free Will

by Nargis:

Man proposes but God disposes: therefore free-will is absence of self-will.- Shams-i-Tabriz.

Man has free will, but within limits.

The limitation he has himself created by his thoughts and actions in the past; he must reap what he has sown. "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Gal. 6. 7). But by altering his thoughts, which he is always free to do, he can sow for a better reaping. If this were not so, all men would be puppets instead of actors in Life's Drama.

Complete freedom of will is attained only when man has voluntarily given up his personal will and is ready to do the Will of God at all times and in all circumstances.

When this can be done, then at the time of reaping there are no debts to be paid off and man can reap the full reward of his later sowing: the ability to be of further service and "*stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*" (Gal. 5. 1), "*and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*"—Romans 12. 2.

"*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (Prov. 23. 7).

by Sri Sathya Sai Baba:

Only the Divine has the free will. Man is endowed with a will but not a free will. When the Divine Free Will moves, the human will also operates. There are a myriad leaves in a tree but not a leaf will move in the absence of wind. The leaves have no free will, but they have a will that can be swayed when a breeze blows. In the tree of life, human beings are like leaves. When the Divine Will blows the human will begins to move. Thus there is need for

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

the coming together of Divine Will and the human will. Then, there will be blossoming of human nature. Man can never achieve anything by his own efforts. There is something which a man accomplishes without much effort on his part. There are other things which he is unable to accomplish even with his best efforts. What is the reason? It is on account of the play of Divine Will.

Love

by C. W. Leadbeater:

There is one [kind of affection], hardly worthy of so sublime a name, which thinks always of how much love it is receiving in return (for its investment of attachment, which is ever worrying as to the exact amount of affection which the other person is showing for it, and so is constantly entangled in the evil meshes of jealousy and suspicion. Such feeling, grasping and full of greed, will work out its results of doubt and misery upon the plane of desire, to which it so clearly belongs.

But there is another kind of love, which never stays to think how much it is loved, but has only the one object of pouring itself out unreservedly at the feet of the object of its affection, and considers only how best it can express in action the feeling which fills its heart so utterly. Here there is no limitation, because there is no grasping, no drawing towards the self, no thought of return, and just because of that there is a tremendous outpouring of force, which no astral matter could express, nor could the dimensions of the astral plane contain it. It needs the finer matter and the wider space of the higher level, and so the energy generated belongs to the mental world.

Just so, there is a religious devotion which thinks mainly of what it will get for its prayers, and lowers its worship into a species of bargaining; while there is also a genuine devotion, which forgets itself absolutely in the contemplation of its deity. We all know well that in our highest devotion there is something which has never yet been satisfied, that our grandest aspirations have never yet been realized, that when we really love unselfishly, our feeling is far beyond all power of expression on this physical plane, that the profound emotion stirred within our hearts by the noblest music or the most perfect art reaches to heights and depths unknown to this dull Earth. Yet all of this is a wondrous force of power beyond our calculation, and it must produce its result somewhere, somehow, for the law of the conservation of energy

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

holds good upon the higher planes of thought and aspiration just as surely as in ordinary mechanics. But since it must react upon him who set it in motion, and yet it cannot work upon the physical plane because of its narrowness and comparative grossness of matter, how and when can it produce its inevitable result? It simply waits for the man until it reaches its level; it remains as so much stored-up energy until its opportunity arrives. While his consciousness is focussed upon the physical and astral planes it cannot react upon him, but as soon as he transfers himself entirely to the mental it is ready for him, its floodgates are opened, and its action commences.

So perfect justice is done, and nothing is ever lost, even though to us in this lower world it seems to have missed its aim and come to nothing.

by Nargis:

Love is the greatest thing a human being can ever know.

But really to know Love means a long pilgrimage and much suffering. It cannot be felt, or experienced, except through a cover, or form. Humanity, knowing so little of Reality, associates Love with the form it uses for its expression; so when the form breaks and a loved companion is lost, it is difficult to understand that *only* the form has disappeared, not the Love; also, what is perhaps more difficult to realise is, that the same Love can use another form.

It is like electricity transmitted from a power plant to places prepared to receive it. A bulb is put into a lamp, the current turned on, and you have light. If in time the bulb breaks there is apparently no light; but if another bulb is put into the lamp, there is again light, the same light—the light that has always been available. It is the same with Love.

If you can accept this teaching and endeavour to understand that there is only one Love, which can reach you through many forms, you will not feel all is lost when the form breaks. The same manifestation of Love may return using another form for its expression, as the electric current uses another bulb to give light. You must believe this, or it cannot happen. Unless you believed you could get light from the same electric current by replacing a broken bulb with a fresh one, you would not do it, and consequently would remain in darkness. Faith is needed to realise

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

that the physical form, however dearly loved, is but a cover for Love given and received. Yes, it is a difficult teaching, but a true one nevertheless.

"Many waters cannot quench Love, Neither can the floods drown it."

by Peter Russell (in his *'From Science to God'*):

Love is another quality frequently ascribed to God. This love is not to be confused with what generally passes for love in our world, which, more often than not, has its origins in the same materialist mindset that runs many other areas of our lives. We believe that if only other people would think or behave as we want them to, we would be happy. When they don't, we may find ourselves feeling upset, angry, frustrated, or some other less-than-loving emotion. When we meet someone who we think will satisfy our deeper needs—someone, that is, who matches our image of the perfect person—our hearts are filled with warm feelings towards them. We say we love them.

Such love is conditional. We love a person for their appearance, their manner, their intellect, their body, their talents, their smell, their dress, their habits, their beliefs and values. We love someone whom we feel is special; someone who matches our expectations, someone who will satisfy our deeper needs, someone who will make our life complete.

Such love is also fragile. If the other person gains weight, develops some annoying habit, or does not care for us as we think they should, our judgments can flip from positive to negative, and the love vanish as quickly as it came.

The love of which the mystics speak is a very different form of love. It is an unconditional love, a love that does not depend on another's attributes or actions. It is not based on our wants, needs, hopes, fears, or any other manifestation of the ego's thought system. Unconditional love is the love that springs forth when the mind has fallen silent, and for once we are free from fear, evaluation and judgment.

Like the peace we seek, this unconditional love is always there at our core. It is not something we have to create; it is part of our inner essence. Pure consciousness—consciousness not conditioned by the needs and concerns of an individual self—is pure love. I, in

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

my true essence, am love.

by V. K. Pillay (in his '*Quest for Divinity*')

Love (*Prema*) is one of the five pillars of what is called Hinduism but which religion is more properly referred to as *Sanatana Dharma* - the eternal laws of righteous living; the other four pillars being Truth (*Sathya*), Righteousness (*Dharma*), Peace (*Shanti*) and Non-injury/non-violence (*Ahimsa*). *Ahimsa* extends to the whole animal kingdom and explains vegetarianism. Of all forms of attachment which is interpreted as Love, the attachment to the Divine (God) is considered supreme. Man is attached to wife (woman), children, material objects (wealth), kith and kin, power and pomp (position) etc. The way to spiritual evolution is detachment from the lower forms of attachment and the development of spiritual love.

It should be easy for the Hindu to "love his neighbour as himself." The fundamental concept of God in Hindu thought is that He/She is Spirit without name, form or attribute or *Brahman* - also called the Universal Self, the Over-Self etc. "Man" is considered to be the spark of the Divine: the individual Self or *Atman*. God is therefore transcendent and immanent (in 'man'). When a Hindu meets another Hindu he/she holds his palms together in a manner similar to prayer. This indicates: I worship the Divinity within you as you worship the same Divinity within me, i.e. you and I are one and we are one with the Father ("I and the Father are One"). Mankind is all one: though, because of ignorance and illusion (*Maya*), appearing as separate. The biblical exhortation makes good sense to the Hindu - Love Thy neighbour as Thy Self (the Divine in man).

Divine Love is portrayed in many ways. God though Supreme can be regarded as friend, husband, wife, child and so forth. Hence in addressing "Him" (It), He is brought down to human levels to show our affection for It (God to the Hindu is neither male, nor female - yet both - and is often referred to as "It"). The love Radha, a cowherdess, had for Krishna (one of the Hindu Incarnations of God [; an *avatar*]) is often depicted as sensuous love - the pining of a maiden for her lover. There is nothing sexual about this love as far as the Hindu is concerned.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

How to be 'wise'

A young man came to a sage one day and asked, "Sire, what must I do to become wise?" The sage vouchsafed no answer. The youth after repeating his question a number of times with a like result, at last left him, to return the next day with the same question. Again no answer was given and the youth returned on the third day, still repeating his question, "Sire what must I do to become wise?"

Finally the sage turned and went down to a near-by river. He entered the water, bidding the youth follow him. Upon arriving at a sufficient depth the sage took the young man by the shoulders and held him under the water, despite his struggles to free himself. At last, however, he released him and when the youth had regained his breath the sage questioned him:

"Son, when you were under the water what did you most desire?"

The youth answered without hesitation, "Air, air! I wanted air!"

"Would you not rather have had riches, pleasure, power or love, my son? Did you not think of any of these?" queried the sage.

"No, sire! I wanted air and thought only of air," came the instant response.

"Then," said the sage, "to become wise you must desire wisdom with as great intensity as you just now desired air. You must struggle for it, to the exclusion of every other aim in life. It must be your one and only aspiration, by day and by night. If you seek wisdom with that fervour, my son, you will surely become wise."

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

What Next?

It has been said that “A man decides for himself both the length and character of his heaven-life by the causes which he himself generates during his Earth-life”. If true, then this statement reveals what we’re on Earth for – to prepare ourselves. Nay, better than that, but to spiritually **evolve**. The Universe is in a state of expansion; God’s plan is to expand, and that is what is intended we should do as part of God’s plan.

‘God’ – the creator and maintainer of the universe – has provided us with the physical and spiritual means by which to achieve that evolution, and surely, the round of re-births will ultimately bring us to our true destiny when we wake up to our spiritual reality.

All religions aim at the unity and well being of society. They show that our way of self-realization is through social involvement. All religions preach purity and adherence to Truth. They proclaim that good qualities are essential for us. They all teach oneness and equality. They have all the same goal – but the paths are different. Rules and regulations differ in different religions because the specific needs of the times and circumstances when the founders of the religions came with their missions were different; but this does not mean that one religion is superior or inferior to the other. However, over the years, the interpretation of teachings has become narrow and this has tended to promote strife and discord between followers of different religions, and even within the same religion.

It could be said that man has been at a real crisis point for some time now. In fact, it was not that long ago that very serious predictions were made about world shortages of foodstuffs and oil. But those predictions have hardly come to pass, and do not appear to show real signs of doing so despite the sometimes serious difficulties and sufferings that occur from time to time. In the past sixty years we also have had the further implied threat of a nuclear holocaust, but that horror has not manifested itself since 1945.

Perhaps we might ask, “Is the invisible ‘Helping Hand’ at work? Has that ‘Helping Hand’ been further at work elevating man’s consciousness towards its proper destiny?” I believe it has. I cannot believe that man would be left to destroy himself, despite what evils he has committed. Man has been created for a purpose. Rather than thinking of the worst outcome, perhaps we should consider that there has probably been more than an

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

equal amount of good done, particularly through the unselfish love of evolved human beings. They have done this by their seeking help from God for their fellow man and mankind in general. Also by action from the starting point of seeing others as being an extension of one's self.

But we must not stay in our state of malaise and just assume that "all will be okay"! There are issues out there that we have to face and deal with, but, I submit, the only successful solution will come with the cooperation of all and the leadership of inspired people. But before we get to that time, we should address ourselves to determine 'Who we are'.

We pursue all sorts of wealth - of scholarship, recognition, money, power, physical health, but do we seek the wealth of God's love? Jesus taught a new way of life based on faith in God and redemption - not through repentance, but through service and love.

If we want true happiness (or bliss) we have to give up our pre-occupation with "mine" and "thine". We are all children of one God. One who has love of God fears sin and leads a moral life. This triune principle promotes purity (and unity) of thought, word and deed. It is imperative we cultivate universal love - no religion has spoken against love.

A Theosophist⁵⁴ has written:

One is reminded of a passage in the Bhagavad-Gita (iii.28) where the true sage is represented as holding that "the *gunas* move among the *gunas*". That is to say, the one who truly sees recognizes that in all that happens, whether in a distant place or in the heart of another person or in his own thoughts and feeling, the forces of one vast creative process are at work. Thus beholding a unity and purpose in all that happens, he is increasingly open to an intuitive realization of the one Actor within and behind the whole great work, or of the one living Purpose which is ever fulfilling Itself through the minutest as well as through the greatest events. This transforming experience enables him to see the picture in successively new and different ways which would previously have been unthinkable to him and thereby to uncover layers of subjective reality hitherto unconscious within him.

It has been said that if a man were to move one step towards God, God would move ten (even one hundred) steps towards the man.

The 'how' is already defined:

⁵⁴ Hugh Shearman, *The Theosophist*, 1964

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

“Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the final commandment. And a second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self. On these two commandments hang all the law.”

– Matt. 22:37-40

Concerning this statement, Walter Starcke, in ‘*The Gospel of Relativity*’, states:

I was surprised to be given this clue in terms of Christian scriptures because up until this time the Bible made no sense to me. But when I saw that whenever Jesus talked about "righteous judgment" he was talking about right identification, that whenever he talked about love he was talking about seeing true identity, the Bible opened up. I saw that the entire Bible was nothing more than an explanation of the identity dilemma which creates the entire human scene, and that every principle Jesus gave was about how to solve the dilemma so that we could be free.

Whenever you read the Bible see if everything, in one way or another, doesn't relate to either the cause or the solution of the identity crisis.

I know it sounds too simple to believe, but total freedom, eternal life, complete fulfilment, and actual transcendence over material limitations are attained by one thing and one thing alone—by resolving the identity crisis. When you really know who or what your human identity is, and who or what your God identity is, you are free. This is done when you consciously realize how to comprehend the *relative* nature of the two commandments. [...]

Certainly absolutes exist; no one is denying that nor denying that it is necessary to comprehend them in order eventually to experience them. But it is a stumbling block when one expects to find absolutes at the finite, or less than absolute, level. By knowing the absolutes, and then by knowing the finite, it is possible to see how they relate. It is possible to see how the finite expresses the absolute in less than absolute terms, and in that double-thread way lies the answer.

Keep in mind, however, that when I talk about the double thread I am *not* talking about two threads. I am talking about one truth, one

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

thread, made up of two strands. One strand is the absolute spiritual identity, and one is the less-than-absolute human identity. The answer lies in not rejecting either of these strands, but in combining them through right identification until freedom is attained.

You might wonder why man hasn't done this in the past if it is so simple. But there's a reason. It takes the ability to 'double think,' and man has only now evolved to the point where he can consciously do that.

Up until now man hasn't been able to think of two things at once, not really. If he sees the front of a house, he can't see the back. When he goes around to the back, he loses sight of the front. But now we are *developing* a new sense — the ability to sense or hold the picture of the front in our consciousness while we actually look at the back in such a way that we retain a whole picture. It's sort of like having the ability to superimpose one on the other without confusing either. And it's the key to thinking relatively.

Finally, Nargis states:

Life goes on and on like a wheel, from birth to death and from death to birth. The things men feel so serious are as nothing to the Great Ones. When man has the outer crust of his soul broken, the fine things can reach the centre of his heart, then life becomes joyous and all life is beautiful, but the Path is an upward Path until the gate is found and then many moons ere the latch is lifted. Having entered the Path you begin the Way of Return. Many troubles and tribulations beset, but courage will be your watchword; hold the head high, you will find your teacher — call him Master, Murshid, Guru, what you will — waiting at every difficult corner, he will give you to drink of the waters of life and ambrosia fruits to ease your hunger. The journey will not weary you because you will have found your Nirvana [or Moksha, or Ma'rafat] in the all-seeing Light, in the all-protecting Arms.

Verily the reward is great for those who care enough to press on. Love finds the way always, true spiritual love in a world of cares and darkened by war clouds. The Voice shall say: "*Fear not.*" It will sound as a silver trumpet. Press on and do thy work and give a cheering word to thy neighbours; happiness and true brotherhood are coming for the nations of the world, all that has been written will be fulfilled and men shall work peacefully as it is said in the Christian Scriptures: "*Dwell safely every man under his vine and*

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

under his fig-tree," and we shall see it fulfilled. There can be work for all according to ability. More land cultivation will give work to many and, in time, places to train the unemployable will be arranged, for joy and love must be brought to all men whatever their condition.

Life is a strange game — how to play it with a smile? Each day a new beginning, an open and kindly heart and willing service must be brought.

Lift your eyes up to the Hills. You will find spiritual things and the answer to your questions. There also the Peace of the flowing air, the Peace of the running wave, and the deep Peace that passeth all understanding.

Yes, I have experienced many personal challenges and I have sometimes ‘lifted my eyes up to the Hills’. The rewards are not always what would be classified as ‘good’ according to the materialist, but whatever is received will have meaning when observed by the inner ‘eye’.

Pleasure and pain, love and hate, joy and sorrow, are feelings of expression of the self-conscious immortal spirit, and the brain is only the keyboard of the wonderful instrument upon which the human spirit plays its symphony of life.

(Source unknown).

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you.
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting.
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream — and not make dreams your master
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken.
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run.
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And — which is more — you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Postscript

We are not doings – we are beings!

Neale Donald Walsch's "Conversations With God"

In the mid-80s, I deliberately walked away from most of what I had learnt over the preceding ten years, feeling then that something was wrong between me and God. In those ten preceding years I had seemed in the most part (in retrospect) to have 'walked with God' as a student, but at that moment I could not see it like that. Another marriage had failed, and it seemed that I was becoming an outsider to the religion of my adoption. As had happened in 1974 and exactly ten years later, another cycle seemed to end.

And then, owing to my (apparent) business development needs, I allowed someone to put up a mirage of the availability of Eldorado! I found myself going down a very long and impoverishing road to discover it was all illusion. I seemed to be going backwards!

Before that illusion finally disintegrated, I and Anasuya went on holiday for that tour of North Italy that I described before – and when I found St. Francis of Assisi's own chapel within the basilica, and the shock of the sight of the humungous containing the miniscule!

Within nine months of that, I was in a far-eastern country - still on the impoverishing road to illusion and in that place to reap my illusive rewards (but which remained illusive – my four months in the Far East is a story in itself!) – when I began reading the Bhagavad Gita for the first time. It was the time when I was asked – as previously related - "...which is the right religion?".

The immediately following years brought some sharp spiritual perspectives - and materialistic poverty. That illusive bubble finally burst, revealing just illusion; then – in fairly quick succession - my mother's death, bankruptcy, a close cousin's death, heart-failure, unemployment, Anasuya's own ill-health – and other distractions.

Losing virtually every significant material belonging (and two of the closest people in my life in quick succession) in this manner is not just sobering, it is almost devastating – and such loss of control over one's

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

circumstances can cause a person to be suicidal, homicidal, psychotic or just highly depressed. All these states went through my mind. But I had my spiritual experiences from the previous twenty years to fall back on. This was the biggest test in which to apply those lessons from before.

In the middle of all this, one of our cats had ‘gone into its shell’ after moving house, and slept upstairs nearly all of the time. One day, whilst I was mulling over the situation for the umpteenth time, that cat suddenly ran into the room from upstairs, with a sliver of vibhuti (sacred ash) on her back! She suddenly became incredibly close to me, and effectively brought me out of my doldrums...⁵⁵

Shortly after, I was brought into closer contact with the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba, and not very long after I started writing this book.

But when that bubble of illusion had burst, my thoughts for some time were “HOW could he do this to us!” (“he” being the ‘businessman’ in whom I had put my trust). Gradually – and it was a gradual process! – I somehow remembered that all things are not without purpose, and that perhaps I was supposed to learn or remember something from this process. I looked at God with fresh eyes, and began to accept my lot, and let go. When I did that, and also re-built some regular spiritual reflection into my life, the chains that seemed to be shackling my arms and legs slackened considerably. I was learning (again) to ‘be’... and am still learning.

After all – so many in this world have so little to even live on or live in.

So out of this circumstance grew hope. And with needing little of the material to want to hold onto, there was less fear. Because how you could fear anything when there is only God that is left?

Out of complete disorder, slowly there came to be order – of a kind. There was enough, and enough is enough.

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Spirituality, if there’s any doubt about it, is *not* simply a question of meditation and/or prayers. It is the business about loving ourselves and ALL others (including the environment) as though we are one. If we were to truly see ourselves in that light, then the kind of dangers, the kind of economics, the kind of politics and the kind of inhumanity to man and beast that today exists simply would not last. That way simply could not subsist. There *has* to be another way!

⁵⁵ But she very sadly died in November 2005.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Jim Wallis (in *The Soul of Politics* (1994), Ch. 2 – Can Politics be Moral?) said:

Our public life reflects our moral values, one way or the other. We've all seen how politics can reflect our worst values of selfishness, greed, divisiveness, fear and power. Yet we long to see how politics could reflect our best values of compassion, community, diversity, hope and service. Reconnecting politics to our best values is now the most important task of political life. The old political morality has left us paralysed. Our times cry out for a new political morality, one that will provide the ground for new possibilities.

But reawakening to a politics of renewed moral conscience will shake us to our very foundations. The alternative to the passive politics of the status quo is a prophetic politics of personal and social transformation. However, the movement from one to the other will change our very understanding of politics.

I am convinced that there are great forces of change that have been starting to prevail for a few years now, but I also now feel confident that it is up to us (each one of us!) to promote that sea-change even further!

I have read somewhere that as little as five (5!) per centum of the population can invoke 'critical mass'. That is by that number of people moving in the same direction, change can begin to be effected. The ways and means of moving in that direction are various, for all paths lead to God, but in my experience it all starts with a willingness to open oneself up to the possibilities – instead of asking "why", ask "why not?!" Let us have the common interest in view – not selfishness in the guise of real self-interest!

We live on one planet; we are one people; we are one world. Nothing and no-one is separate from us in reality. Let us concentrate on those simple spiritual truths, for unless we do our technology can be let loose in even more dangerous ways, and we shall lose opportunities to save the ecology and the sustainability of our planet. Even our science may not save us, and we may even lack the proper wherewithall to be able to make appropriate value decisions on how science may be best utilised.

In '*The New Revelations*'⁵⁶ by Neale Donald Walsch, it is stated:

Spirituality has been telling you that you create your own reality, that you have all the secrets and power of life within you. Science

⁵⁶ Chapter 25, pub'd 2000.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

is now about to show you that—and to show you ways that you may use that power and those secrets.

Spirituality has been telling you that you are God. Not only that you are a *part of God*, but that you are gods, in *human form*. ("Have I not said, ye are gods?") Science is now about to show you that—and to show you ways that you may impact life with the power of the gods.

When you begin to be able to do this—and this is coming now not in a matter of decades, but years, and even months—you will be faced with many, many decisions. "Are we to play God?" you will be asking yourself.

This will be the central question of the 21st Century.

To what extent are you to "interfere" in matters that you used to think were supposed to be "left up to God," and to what extent is God calling upon you to use the tools you have been given by God with which to perform miracles?

These are the kinds of ethical decisions that religions are hoping to prepare you to make in the future, just as they have been trying to help you in the past to make social, political, and economic decisions. Yet unless they expand their own belief systems, religions — well-meaning as they are — will be no more successful than they were yesterday.

Organised religion is going to have to vastly expand and deepen its understanding of Life and God before it can tackle to-day's problems, much less to-morrow's.

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Again referring to Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations With God*, the ways and methods by which we could go about healing ourselves and our attitudes towards one another worldwide are discussed in great detail.

It is suggested that if each of us were to take to heart a certain "Five Steps to Peace", then progress along the desired lines would be attainable, for it is only by creating ourselves as our own policemen can we hope to influence the world around us; "to be in the world but not of it".

The 'steps' as published in the CWG books are as follows:

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

The Five Steps To Peace

1. I acknowledge that some of my old beliefs about God and about Life are no longer working.
2. I acknowledge that there is something I do not understand about God and about life, the understanding of which could change everything.
3. I am willing for new understandings of God and life to now be brought forth, understandings that could produce a new way of life on this planet.
4. I am willing to explore and examine these new understandings and, if they align with my inner truth and knowing to enlarge my belief systems to include them.
5. I am willing to live my life as a demonstration of my highest and grandest beliefs, rather than as a denial of them.

The best way forward is therefore to transcend conventional religious or political belief, for without doing that these 'five steps' cannot be honestly attempted. But, old traditions and structures should not simply be discarded. As stated in Walsch's *The New Revelations*:

It is now time to present the world with new theological thoughts and ideas, a new spiritual model. The world must have something new to hold on to if it is to release its grip on the old. If you were in the middle of a raging stream, would you let go of a log?

Build, therefore, a bridge.

Become that bridge.

Live the beliefs of a New Spirituality. Walk the path of a New Revelation. Do not merely speak of this revelation, but demonstrate the truth of it with your life, lived.

Show the way.

Be a bringer of the light.

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

***Harold Pinter said (in his 2005 Nobel Prize speech):
I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching,
unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the
real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which
devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory.***

May the force be with you!

***You never can tell what your thoughts will do in bringing you hate or
love;
For thoughts are things, and their airy wings are swifter than carrier
dove.
They follow the law of the universe - Each thing must create its kind;
And they speed o'er the track to bring you back whatever went out from
your mind.***

(Source unknown).

***To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your
private heart is true for all...that is genius...
A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes
across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament
of bards and sages.
Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every
work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back
to us with a certain alienated majesty.***

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Unithosophy: A Timely Socialism

Appendix: A Selected Bibliography

The following selected publications reflect recent key research and ideas in the realm of spirituality:

(The) Bible, Qur'an and Science, Dr Maurice Bucaille. 2002 (original 1976), ISBN 1930637217

Conversations With God (books 1,2 and 3) and subsequent publications, Neale Donald Walsch.

From Science to God, Peter Russell, 2003, ISBN 1577314093

(The) Gnostics, Tobias Churton, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited 1987, ISBN 0297791060

(The) Gnostic Gospels, Elaine Pagels, Vintage Books, 1989 (original 1979), ISBN 0679724532

(The) Gospel of Relativity, Walter Starcke, Turnstone Books 1974, ISBN 0855000376

Greater Than You Know, Peter Phipps, Sathya Sai Publications of New Zealand 1997, ISBN 095833384X

Hermetica, edited and translated by Walter Scott, with a Foreword by Adrian G. Gilbert, Solos Press 1997, ISBN 1873616147.

Jesus and The Goddess, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Harper Collins 2001, ISBN 000710071X

Jesus the Man, Barbara Thiering, Corgi Books 1993 and 1996, ISBN 0552139505

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Jesus Prophet of Islam, Ahmad Thomson and another, Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd 1996, ISBN 189794053X

Magi, The Quest for a Secret Tradition, Adrian G. Gilbert, 1996.

Marriage of East and West (The), Bede Griffiths, Fount Paperbacks 1983 and 1985, ISBN 0872431053

(The) Message That Comes From Everywhere, Gary L. Beckwith, The Harmony Institute 2001, ISBN 0970112564

(The) Sufis, Idries Shah, Anchor 1971, ISBN 0385079664