

SALVATION Vs. ENLIGHTENMENT₁—A Hypothesis.

By Michael Graham

As a man formerly persuaded by the Far Eastern spiritual tradition out of India, with 28 years of disciplined practice, thousands of hours of meditation, and multiple charismatic experiences behind me, I feel qualified to comment on the subject of “Salvation Vs Enlightenment₁”

Drawing from over forty-five years of experience in spirituality, Far Eastern and “New Age” and finally Christian, I continue to speculate on spiritual themes, seeking to unravel many elements of the Mystery.

In approaching conclusions, I value the distinction between the concepts of improbable, possible, probable and certain. Though I believe that absolute certainties, (within the confines of reason) are dodgy to proclaim, I do hold that matters can be established as true beyond reasonable doubt.

It is in this spirit that I offer the following reflections as a hypothesis, though I have had serious doubts about mentioning it at all, since credibility can be unnecessarily damaged by saying too little rather than nothing at all about a topic that requires more explanation than can be given here.

I am aware that those heavily invested in a romantic relationship with Far Eastern spiritual systems and gurus may recoil from my conclusions. If the reader does so, I respectfully invite you to relax and consider the following thought coined for my book, *From Guru to God—An Experience of Ultimate Truth*: “**A *thinker* is someone with whom you can raise any subject and receive a *reflective* rather than a reflexive response.**”

I have had my own experiences of Enlightenment in three forms variously named. The first occurred at age nineteen, described as follows:

At nineteen years of age, before going to India for the first time, I considered this first spiritual experience as an experience of Ultimate Truth. It was winter. I’d walked onto the back verandah of my father’s home and watched a seagull passing across the sky through the silhouette of a leafless tree. It was a moment of beauty. What followed was beyond words and beyond experience.

I. “Enlightenment” used in this hypothesis, is one of the several words used in both Hindu or Buddhists scriptural texts to denote an aspirant’s direct spiritual experience of “Ultimate Reality or Truth.” Here the Eastern word for “Enlightenment” is not to be confused with “The European Enlightenment” also known as the Age of Reason, from the 1700’s, which was a transformative intellectual and cultural movement that reshaped Western society. “Salvation,” as referred to in this hypothesis, is the path coming by grace alone, through Faith alone, being the work of Jesus Christ Alone, beginning here and ending in union with Ultimate Reality, God, the Creator of all existence. One life, freed eternally, once for all who believe.

In that moment there came a total annihilation of self and an ineffable ecstasy. The moment I realized what had happened, the experience disappeared. The experience could not co-exist with the recognition of its being had. Its most distinctive feature was an absolute dissolution of self. Very strictly speaking what took place could not be even described as an experience. An experience consists of someone [a self] experiencing something. No one was left to experience anything, yet...? In this there was no union or oneness, only dissolution absolute (and having nothing to do with the “ego” notion). And somehow this was accompanied by unalloyed ecstasy. This experience was the end of the road. There was no question of a beyond. The concept of beyond or more is always attendant to a notion of self or a “than” or a point. When the whole dichotomy of self and other disappears, when there exists not even the oneness or union, then nothing can be said, yet...this was the essence of Godhead before all forms and labels. This apperception was non-conceivable—beyond self, thought, space, time and all existences. To the enquirer, bound by reason alone, this is absurd, but to “me” more real than reality itself. It remained for me the Ultimate and Absolute Reality at the time.

Years later, concerning this experience, I found the Sufi term, “Fana,” which means “annihilation in God.” This was close, but annihilation...with no notion to follow, was closer, since we are talking about God before “He” is named as such. Upon reflection it seemed to me that the Hindu term sat-chit-ananda (meaning “existence,” “consciousness,” “bliss”) indicating the highest reality in that tradition, would be best translated as a double negative: not-not existent, not-not conscious, bliss. There was also the term Nirvakalpa, a term for a form of Samadhi designating the highest state in some schools of Hinduism. Not so far from the “nirva” in nirvana in Buddhism designating the “blowout of self” as Enlightenment. Then there was the yogic concept—as in Laya Yoga, one of about fourteen different schools of yoga, the word “laya” meaning “dissolution.” However, this word is used to denote different things. Like many other Sanskrit terms, meanings depends on the context of use. The meaning of “laya” varies according to the different scriptures in which it’s found, making it difficult to pin down the true meaning. So those scriptural terms within the context of those traditions most aptly fit my experience.

Then there was a second experience with a main part in common with the first. It occurred some ten years later while sitting close to my Indian Guru, Swami Muktananda, under whom I practiced for thirteen years. In his close proximity, over a week, I disappeared in this absolute sense about five times but without the attendant bliss. It happened most distinctly over but a second - a moment of *cosmic relief* in the annihilation of a self. As soon as ‘self’ returns to recognize its absence, the “experience” could no longer exist.

Despite having these marvelous “experiences,” I was intrigued by them having zero impact on my life. None. All that remained was a memory of an experiential access to the “highest reality.” Okay, I was grateful for that. It was thrilling to have been gifted it, experienced it, known it, but it did not add one jot to the quality, texture or function of my conventional life or spiritual activities. This was also true concerning the following:

The third experience occurred around 1987 in Elmira, upstate New York. It happened one day while doing a spiritual exercise. Suddenly the width of my visual perception began to increase. Intrigued, I got up and walked out into a foyer and stood there for about thirty minutes watching two men chatting. One was sitting on the ground with his back against the wall, the other was standing. They were talking in earnest. As I looked at them, the whole scene appeared as an illusion. They were no more real than puppets in a puppet show. It was a fascinating perception, a full-blown experience, yet with no change in the appearance of objects. It wasn't merely a thought or philosophical overlay; it was a direct perception. Life and what I was witnessing seemed an illusion—ordinary perception while giving a false impression of reality. It wasn't as though common perception was worthy of derision, rather it was a muted joke. Every trace of the weight and sting of life had vanished. Even as I watched I knew I was enjoying the classic Vedantic realization that all life is an illusion - a dream - a mere seeming. It's called the Turiya state in the Hindu scriptures. It is what one branch of the spiritual Indian tradition promulgated as a key truth and a mark of Enlightenment. Here I was in the middle of it experientially. Seeing from this perspective, nothing really mattered as I had assumed it did. This perception shut down after about thirty minutes. It was a serious eye-opener. It was many years later that, on this point, I had a clue to the basis of the whole Far Eastern tradition of spirituality and how it contrasted to the Christ-centered one—Christianity. In a purposive sense, Buddhism and Hinduism were about escape and transcendence, leaving an unreal world—life-negative; (no matter what the shuffle in that area). Christianity rather, was about engagement and fulfillment through Christ—life-positive.

Further reflecting on this: to Buddhist doctrine, life is suffering; to the Hindus, an illusion or at best a play of consciousness. Squarely faced, both these viewpoints in no way affirm the creation as it's plainly experienced. It seemed to me that both viewpoints are a dodge and a highly sophisticated one at that. A whole metaphysical, philosophical system is built around this dodge, including a way of life, sets of values, and for those in earnest, a system of spiritual techniques.

Reflections upon the perception described above can understandably lead to conclusions, but ones that I believe are flawed. The experiencer may easily assume that

the Turiya experience, because of its “loveliness or superiority,” is true reality, or at least a truer reality, and therefore something to be run after. Yes, a filter was pulled off in my case and a new dimension of reality opened up. It was immensely encouraging to me at the time, “Wow, this is what they are talking about.” But much later I realized, that historically, teachers and practitioners who’d had this experience had run off saying, “Look what I have found; devote your life to its discovery.” The champions of such quests may have experienced this state for a second, a minute or a day. Through Providence’s gift some can know it for maybe a week. Perhaps in the history of mankind there are those to whom it has fallen for half a lifetime. But how significant is it really? It’s all an understandable miss-take on the true purpose of life when seen in contrast to the teachings of Christ and His apostles.

Such experiences lead to a reach for unsustainable pathways of spirituality. Perhaps these Far Eastern systems of spirituality do not conform to the real reality for which, by design, we were created to enjoy. This is what I was beginning to suspect.

Yes, it can be reasonably affirmed that these generic mystic states or classical forms of Far Eastern classical Enlightenment are real. They are valid states of consciousness, but states rarely attained and if experienced, rarely if ever, sustainably. Further, reckonings from years of personal experience, among thousands of aspirants I’ve known and books I’ve read, lead me to believe that Enlightenment is very much a brain-chemical or synapse-altering phenomenon inextricably linked to the physical body and a phenomenon that ends with the death of the physical body (while not claiming that near-death experiences, in my opinion, are similarly linked).

Mystic states can precipitate spontaneously or can be induced by rigors of spiritual or mental disciplines, just as athletic rigors can induce muscular enhancement and control leading to amazing athletic prowess. And very particularly, classical mystic states can be induced by pranayama or “scientific” manipulation of breath or by drugs like LSD or psilocybin in magic mushrooms. The latter point supports the idea that it all begins and ends with chemical changes in the brain. Further, I know from experience that mystical phenomena arise from stirring the Kundalini energy, as in my own case. This is a spiritual power spoken about mostly by the Hindus. Kundalini also has its roots in the body but can induce experiences reaching beyond bodily boundaries as well. My guru, Muktananda, would say, “The entire universe dwells within the body.” (Ok that’s a big one; we won’t go into it here.) However, I believe that Kundalini too dies with the body. And whatever *post death* state a Vedantin, Shaivite, yogi or Buddhist finds him or herself in has little or nothing to do with psycho-physical phenomena, disciplines or manipulations (from whatever source) during physical life, which these people think leads to Salvation or an eternal liberation.

Since we are postulating that all these so-called states of “liberation”—Moksa, Satori, Nirvana, Sahaja Samadhi, Nirvakalpa Samadhi, Fana (Sufism) and so on, are actual realities, I maintain that they are part of God’s creation. But as such they are only sub-realities and part of nature, being on the top of a natural vertical continuum. They may only be referred to as being beyond nature or “super-natural” because they are so uncommonly glimpsed or experienced. But, being of nature, they lie within the potential of a human being to experience and exist within that loop.

Here I have stressed the importance of understanding the difference between genuinely Divine Realities and the natural potentials of mystic states—Nirvana, Nirvakalpa or Sahaja Samadhi, Fana and so on—the different implications of Salvation versus Enlightenment. The two realities are never synonymous. The Creator and the creation are never identical. Only by the Grace of the Creator God can a union of a created being with God be possible. This condition is not Nirvana, moksha or Satori. Being Enlightened or being one with pure consciousness, Paramashiva or Brahman and the like, are all natural phenomena, appearing sometimes as noumena. Being part of nature, it all perishes along with the body or bodies of natural man and finally along with nature herself. The states die.

I speculate that what the “Enlightened” guru experiences is not God Himself, but the image of God within. Not even that experience is sustainable. According to biblical revelation all humans are made in image and likeness of God. Thus, within one’s own nature the image of God is cast. Perhaps that image can be directly apprehended. So? What’s in an image? Only that. It’s not the same as staring directly into the face of the real Person or being yoked or united to that Real Being, that is the Creator.

Further, on the question of being united to God, we become as one with God according to the teachings of Christ, but not identical with Him, an identity that many Far Easterners claim as the ultimate reality, especially Advaitins who declare in their mantras, “Ahambrahmasmi” (I am Brahman) or, “Soham” (He, I am, i.e. God) (though not maintained as true by Dvaitins like Ramanuja and Madhva). We may unite with a marriage partner as one in sexual intimacy, but obviously in the strictest sense of that concept we remain separate.

It is this Eastern Monistic idea that postulates Identity with “God” as the ultimate truth. I believe it is a flawed idea. At best it’s an understandable error; at worst it’s an ultimate form of cosmic narcissism, or even worse; it may have its roots in the Garden, when Eve was tempted with the words, “*you can be like God.*” She and her man succumbed to that temptation and look what happened, not only to her, but to all of us humans by inheritance.

The radically elastic ethics of the most famous monist Far Eastern God-men of the twentieth Century, coupled as they are with the claim to “Soham,” (He, I am) reflects a corruption. Worldviews have consequences—Mary Poppins movies, the holocaust, good and evil, sin and righteousness, a plastic bucket, a pin and a Ferrari are all One—God manifested. According to this rationale, ultimately, nothing can be impugned because it is all God. And much of the culture of India and their gurus are a reflection of this. (However, going into this subject is beyond the scope of this essay.) I don’t mean to be un-gentlemanly in my speaking, but I speak from considerable personal *experience* across the wide spectrum of spiritual involvement.

All created worlds and states lie beneath the Heaven of which Christ spoke, including all conditions that the oriental spiritualists reach for.

The one who seeks Enlightenment and the one who asks for Salvation are looking to the tops of different mountains. In my view, one aspires to the top of a mole hill, the other to the top of Everest. One predicated on self or Self, or even the “no-self” of the Buddhists; the other predicated on the Creator God alone and His free gift of grace, and this, from the bottom to top of the matter. Aspiring to Enlightenment and Salvation are different forms of reach, different realities, different states. One is of natural man, the other of God alone. (And this reality can’t accommodate some Shaivite or Dvaitin ideas that one can scramble by self-effort to within ten feet of the summit but only by grace can one cross the last ten feet.)

Let’s look more at points related to the difference between Salvation and Enlightenment. Again, in my opinion the source of Enlightenment lies in the physical brain only: A friend of mine, Professor John Wren-Lewis, was poisoned on a bus in Thailand, causing a permanent loss of a sense of “self.” Well-read and well informed on higher spiritual subjects, John believes that this is the state of Enlightenment. Last I heard, he was writing a book called, “The Nine Fifteen to Nirvana,” a title referring to the eventful hour the bus departed. Take the case of another, Ramana Maharishi, the famous South Indian saint who died in 1950. He was a simple village boy, when at the age of 18 he had “death” experience, rendering him dysfunctional over a period of days. He woke up from this condition in altered state of consciousness. As time went on, wanting to know what happened to him, he searched the scriptures and found something resembling his condition. He then started teaching a volitional doctrine seeking to induce volitionally in others what happened to him non-volitionally, that is, spontaneously. A similar case exists with contemporary American spiritual teacher, Byron Katie. I knew her personally. She came to a state of consciousness, organically. It happened over time and was not induced by volitional practices at all. She then says

do this and do that to attain the same realization as she. Futile, and I think even a little not straight, though motives may be well intended. The Christian mother of another friend of mine became a virtual saint for months following a stroke, until she recovered and returned to normal—alas. Then there was Douglas Harding in whose home I stayed with him in the 1970s. He was a charming English architect. One day, while walking in the Himalayas, his “self” disappeared, never to return. It happened naturally—spontaneously. In vain, he devised all sorts of ingenious tools to get people to apperceive that all notions of having a self are illusory. He wrote the book, “On Having No Head.” His tool kit was called “A Tool Kit for Testing the Incredible Hypothesis.” Now let me mention the remarkable Catholic Christian mystic, Bernadette Roberts. We lunched together twice and otherwise spent time on a five-day retreat. She gave accounts of her spiritual life in the books, “The Experience of No Self” and the “Path to No Self,” both most compelling and beautifully written. Another one: U.G. Krishnamurti (not to be confused with J. Krishnamurti) was also personally known to me in Mumbai from the early 70’s. His was a remarkable story, Enlightened, and a man whose “self” had permanently dissolved. He wrote the book, “The Mystique of Enlightenment.” He vociferously insists that Enlightenment is entirely and only biological in nature. He is most quoted in the book edited by Mukunda Rao, “The Biology of Enlightenment.” If this and my “Enlightenment” hypothesis are true, well? What are its implications for the reader or spiritual seekers who look to Far Eastern gurus for Salvation or a supernal existence beyond physical death?

As to whether or not these high mystic revelations or Enlightenments are described as realization of the “Self”—Hinduism, or as the Buddhist “no-self,” “blow out” of the self - and so on, is somewhat moot. Both conditions are monistic, eliminating the distinction between the seer and the seen - realizations that are non-dual in nature. In contrast, shown by the teachings of Jesus, the relationship between Creator and creature remains eternally dual while Creator and creature, however, become perfectly united while remaining distinct. This gift of union comes only to those who have been given new life in Christ, according to Christ Himself.

In my view, Jesus did not come to bring Enlightenment in the Far Eastern classical sense at all. Rather, he came to give Salvation far beyond the reach of the descriptions of Far Eastern conditions or states. Salvation is given independently of our own genes, intentionality, cleverness, moral piety, techniques or disciplines. Salvation is available to everyone, Enlightenment only to elite practitioners. This is the very reason why God, in, as and through the person of Jesus Christ came to provide a way for *everyone* to have access to immediate eternal security and Salvation. He did not come as someone to promote a pathway for spiritual “success” accessible to a the rare few, a pathway only accomplishable over eons of painful lifetimes to reach the end.

Making Salvation attainable through grace alone, through faith alone, and as a *free* gift to those alone who believe in Jesus, makes this way of God through Christ the only religion of true access and compassion.

How compassionate would it be to tell the populace of the whole world: Ok, everyone, this is the True Way: go out and train to represent your country in the 100 meters sprint in the next Olympic games. Little chance of success, right? That's not dissimilar to exhort people to reach for Enlightenment.

Thus, a significant distinction is being made here again, between the two real realities of Enlightenment and Salvation.

On the periphery of their teachings, all of the Five Great Traditions are similar. They preach morality, kindness, helpfulness and love and so on—sin free as far as possible. But at their core they are not marginally different but radically so. However, going deeply into the worldviews and teachings they promote is a subject beyond the scope of our main issue here.

Briefly: to take the authentic Christian example, Christianity is the way of Grace alone, through faith alone, because of the work of Jesus Christ alone. What work? The work of His consuming our sin debt or “karmic” debt—everything that separates us from God—upon Himself on the cross, this being done in our stead and on our behalf. Believing this and placing one's entire trust in Him alone for Salvation, our entire debt is paid. That's grace and a long way from having to balance or pay off one's karmic debt over eons.

Another significant difference between the way of Jesus Christ and the way of others is that Christ saves us by *fiat*, not by a graduated or graduating process, that is, through reincarnation. Being co-eternal, co-equal and of one will and substance with the Father and Holy Spirit (in contrast to Avatars, yogis or Buddhas who belong to another reality), Christ's salvaging power operates at the same level from which the universe was created. Paul, under the inspiration of the ascended Christ through the Holy Spirit, states in Colossians 1:15-17 that *He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by Him were all things created, in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

To point up another difference between the path of Gautama Buddha, as stated in the original Pali Canon, where Buddha declared; “I can do nothing for you; here is the dharma, go work out your own Enlightenment.” Jesus Christ declared the *opposite*, “*I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in Me and I will abide in you and you will bear much fruit; of yourself you can do nothing!*” (John 15:5) Nothing means nothing. “Nothing” is an absolute word. What’s added to nothing is grace alone, and that not of ourselves. And that grace is appropriated by the seeker through faith. “*Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...*” (Hebrews 12:2). “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not of your own doing; It is the gift of God, not a result of works* (meaning, practices, disciplines, behaviours etc) *so that no one may boast.*” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Then there are the systems that propound the need of grace and prescribed disciplines working together for “salvation” as in some forms of high Hinduism and Buddhism. Within the Christian doctrines (teachings), this admixture of works and grace [works being self-effort, practices, rituals] as a means to reach Salvation is called Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism and is considered error. Then, most typically in the original form of Buddhism (Theravada), it was all about self-effort alone. This brings us to a few other thoughts:

If it’s true, by their own admission, that no yogi, Hindu or Buddhist can attain liberation (moksha) without breaking the bonds of karma; if it’s true that Jesus Christ accomplished the breaking of every bond or debt that binds us away from Ultimate Reality, by His death on the cross and resurrection in victory over all those things, may it not also follow that Jesus Christ is the “doable” answer to every question of renewal in this life and eternal Salvation—the ultimate fulfillment of every human need? Millions have resorted to him to be free from the groaning momentum of everlasting entrapment—an eternal separation from God, called by many names, “hell” being chief among them.

Again, in my view, Jesus did not come to bring Enlightenment in the Eastern sense or anything like it. He came to bring Salvation. Salvation begins in this life, progressively leading to psychological integration—a movement towards health, wholeness, holiness, and it secures eternal and immediate release at the point of death into the Supreme company and Reality of God proper—no coming back into one form of rot or another.

Salvation and Enlightenment are not synonymous terms. Christ came to salvage those who otherwise would have been separated from the Supreme Reality eternally. Eastern Enlightenment is ephemeral, Christ’s Salvation eternal. They differ radically from one another both in meaning, significance and implication.

The line that separates all states of consciousness from the Heaven of which Jesus Christ spoke cannot be crossed, except by His grace. This special grace gives “birth again from above” as described by Jesus in John’s Gospel 3:1-13: Here is as a brief paraphrase of the scene described in the Bible concerning this:

In Jesus’ day, among the Israelite people, there were men called Pharisees. They were the learned ones who taught the Jewish people the ways and laws of their religion. One day, under the cloak of night, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to see Jesus and started complementing Him, saying, Jesus you must be from God because of all the miracles you’ve performed (like healing the blind from birth, and the lame, and raising the dead and so on). Jesus cut him off and said, “Nicodemus, you must be born again from above.” Nicodemus was confused. “How can I enter my mother’s womb again,” he replied.... Then Jesus said, “Not even you, Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, know what I am talking about.” You see, Jesus was talking about a new phenomenon He was to bring to earth as a gift of free grace to all those who would believe in Him. This new beginning, this new birth of the spirit, assures Salvation on the spot, and begins the process of Sanctification, a *sealing* of one’s relationship with God, and the process of growing spiritual maturity in this life, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, slow or fast, as the individual case may be.

What we are given through the Creator’s grace and power, is a new Spirit, or Re-vivified Spirit. We don’t remain an old creature restored. This is what is meant by Jesus telling Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, that he must be “born again from above.” Not from a physical mother or father but from the Holy Spirit. (Gospel of John) A God-fired spirit is to be birthed. We have become through the Creator’s hand, a New Creation. No human can birth themselves.

Interestingly: In Buddhist scriptures and teachings there are six heavens and eighteen hells vividly described in and thoroughly endorsed as true by the popular current 14th Dalai Lama. His endorsement is affirmed in the book, *The Words of My Most Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche, naming hells galore—the “Great Howling Hell,” “The Hell of Ultimate Torment,” “The Rounding-up and Crushing Hell,” “The Intense Heating Hell” and so on, each one being vividly described. The Hindu scriptures speak of multiple heavens and hells in the similar way. Even my former Hindu guru, Muktananda, claimed to have visited a hell.

So, the concept of heavens and hells are inextricably linked to belief in the reincarnation cycle propelled by good and bad merits and demerits of karma, extending between the agony and the ecstasy *and everything in between* for *eons* of time. Finally, Liberation/Enlightenment is attained only through a physical incarnation. And this, not after only a couple of hours meditation per day but only following a *lifetime* of dedicated *rigorously* disciplined spiritual practice while simultaneously being *totally FREE from all worldly attachments*. These are non-negotiable truths from the classical Eastern Enlightenment quest.

Let's assume for the sake of this hypothesis that the phenomenon is true:

It may be interesting and unbeknown to the reader, that reincarnation in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions is an anathema to be escaped from at all costs. In fact, the entire *ultimate* spiritual quest of the Hindu and Buddhist is to escape from the diabolical trammels or entanglements of reincarnation. Lord Gautama Buddha, and Hindu masters like Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Madhva and Chaitanya, respectively. 8th century, 10th century, 12th century 14th century *all agreed* on this point. Buddhists and Hindus agree that reincarnation is anathema, extending them into a long existential crisis from which it is imperative to escape. To contemporary "New-Age" spiritual folk, reincarnation is a relatively cute thing or even a great adventure, and not at all diabolical. That new idea has only been around for a couple of hundred years, with zero roots in history. To well informed Buddhists and Hindu's this false new idea is facile and idiotic and a serious distraction from the essentials of relentless and determined spiritual practice to attain classical Eastern Enlightenment. To the Buddhist and Hindu masters, the whole matter of reincarnation *is hell enough*, to be escaped from at all costs - the cycles of agonies and ecstasies with everything in between - the heavens and the hells cycling interminably for eons, as though in a cosmic squirrel's cage.

These heavens (and hells) of Buddhism and Hinduism, linked to reincarnation, have nothing remotely to do with Christ's heaven, the realm of Ultimate Reality from which everything in existence comes, the seen and unseen. This is the place of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - the Creator, this being the heaven pointed to by Jesus Christ, the place from which Christ descended (the only one to ever do so) as described in John 3:13, as the place of eternal Salvation, saying "*no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven.*" (John 13:13) Further, we can safely understand that Jesus didn't descend to earth from some regular cosmic nice spot, for John also tells us (John 6:38-40) that Jesus says,

"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Unlike Christ's realities, Hindu and Buddhist heavens and hells, according to their own doctrines, are impermanent abodes, sub-realities to which people come and go as their karmic behavioral merits and demerits dictate.

Therefore, the semantic confusion over the word "heaven" in relation to Jesus' teachings can be misleading. It is misleading particularly for those who have no depth of knowledge of the Far Eastern traditions and have but scant knowledge of authentic Christianity. Unfortunately, many such people erroneously believe that the Christian "heaven" is only a cute idea or a reality of a lower order than highest states of Nirvana in Buddhism or Nirvakalpa Samadhi in Hinduism.

All states attained by mystics under whatever flag, fall short of the reality of the Supreme Being through whom all other realities come into existence, including Nirvana, forms of Samadhi and mystic rapture. Even the Christian mystics—and I strongly believe this—are not eternally salvaged by these states or their experiential "union" with God at all, but through their implacable faith in the power of Jesus Christ to Save them independently of their own efforts and reveries. Without this faith in Christ, heaven illudes them. In fact, those of any stripe, who volitionally set out on the path of mysticism, are bound for another destination than the ultimate reality of Christ's heaven. Their reach is for classical Eastern Enlightenment, their faith or trust is in the reality of it, and their walkway a destination involving an eternal separation from the very one who created them, the one without whom they would not even exist, let alone seek.

An interesting story:

In the Himalayan mountains one day, I came across a young American girl who had come in search of a Buddhist master from whom she hoped to receive the shaktipat transmission or initiation (this being transmission of a kundalini awakening by the guru's physical touch) As we talked, she shared that she wished she had been around when the well-renowned Swami Muktananda was alive, since he was the one most famous for transmitting the shaktipat initiation. She nearly fell off her stool when I told her that I had been with him for thirteen years and with his group for a further three and had been his first Australian devotee and was also one who had a mighty awakening of the kundalini. I then shared a brief account of my fuller story.

It turned out that she had flirted with the healer type, Benny-Hinn-oriented style of Christianity, but had fallen away. By the end of our discussion and the telling of my

story, I felt I had dealt my full deck of cards with little more I could say. Though she seemed attentive and mildly impressed, I had the feeling she was still committed to searching out a Buddhist master. Thinking that her interest may have been a tiny bit kindled by our conversation, I felt obliged to end our brief connection with what I must. The time was short. And what I recommended surprised me. I asked her that that night she pray. She was to take pause, find a sincere spot within herself, then make a fervent and most determined request of Jesus, for his touch, help or direction, and expect Him to deliver by first light next morning. Surprisingly, she agreed to do so. I left her, thinking “O well, that’s it, what else could I have done,” given the short time and circumstances. I’d hope to save her from going on a wild goose chase.” I thought that would be the last I’d hear of her.

Next day a friend told me that she had been desperately looking for me. Hours later I bumped into her on the street, and she told me something amazing. Jesus Christ had appeared to her early the next morning in a vivid vision. He clearly told her, “What you are looking for doesn’t exist!” (I was a bit puzzled by that, but it made sense by what was further said to her, now regrettably forgotten by me). Following her encounter with the Eternal Guru, Jesus Christ, the girl felt it imperative to leave India by air. Next morning, she was on a plane back to California via Japan. I wonder what became of her? I wished I knew.

I’m not going to go into the differences between the Hindu and Buddhist goals, characterized by the realization of Self (capital “S”) and the no-self of the Buddhists, Sufis and “secular” mystics and so on, because those points of difference are not salient to the distinction between Salvation and Enlightenment.

(A point I would like to affirm again, for some readers—particularly Christian ones—is that these states are real and not merely delusional. They exist under heaven. For example, to get the gist of what is being pointed to, one has to know that these generic mystic states are supra-rational. Some of them exist beyond conceptual grasp and are therefore not able to be adequately described. Descriptively, one can do no better than saying “fingers pointing towards the moon.” In my own case [and there are other variations of the no-self state], the “experience” existed beyond space and time, its proper description non-conceivable. See what I mean; completely confounding to the intellect. The point: It is not legitimate to dismiss these realities just because their description confounds ratiocination or logical reasoning.)

What then might be the practical implications of this hypothesis, if it turns out to reflect the truth? Here is another supporting illustration that may help. Take the current 14th Dalai Lama. Perhaps there has not been an aspirant more thoroughly and rigorously spiritually trained from the earliest age. Yet despite the rigors of his training, he admits that he has attained little or nothing spiritually save the comfort of hope. In his book, *Spiritual Advice to Buddhists and Christians*, he displays extreme honesty, an honesty which is profoundly admirable, and one, from my own experience, that would be rarely found among Hindu Gurus (or their derivatives). I applaud his open confession. In this book on page 42, he describes his typical day. He shares the following:

“...I must say that I am a very poor practitioner. Usually, I get up at 3:30 in the morning. Then I immediately do some recitations and some chanting. Following this until breakfast, I do meditation, analytical meditation mainly. Then after each analytical meditation, I do one-pointed meditation. The object of my meditation is mainly dependent arising. Because of dependent arising things are empty. This is according to the Madhyamika philosophy of Nagarjuna and the interpretation of Chandrakirti. So, meditation on this gives me a kind of firm conviction of the possibility [emphasis added] of cessation of afflictive emotions.... If you ask me about experience in my practice, I think it is better than zero.... Transformation is always possible. So therefore, you see, there is always hope.”

Then he goes on to describe how he meditates on reincarnation and the process of death, and on higher beings that he calls, deity yoga. He says, “So from around 3:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. I am fully occupied with meditation and prayer, (and some prostrations, he adds later) and things like that.” He finally concludes with “Whether these practices of preparation are really going to benefit me at the time of death, I do not know at this moment. I suppose with all this preparation for death, I may still be a complete failure! That is also possible.”

My point is not to deride the honest Dalai Lama, a man of fine character, or deride anyone else for that matter. My point is to be suggestive of the relative futility of Far Eastern spiritual quests. After all, the Dalai Lama is now 76 years old and has been trained and practicing assiduously for over 70 years, but to what effect?

Having lived in Dharamsala, India, for three years by the Dalai Lama and amidst hundreds of Mahayana Tibetan Buddhist monks, I have a Tibetan Buddhist monk friend who had just returned from a one-year monastic meditation in Nepal. There, he meditated for six hours per day. I asked him, “What did you experience?” “Nothing,” he said (no, he wasn’t referring to the “no-thing” of nirvana). Then I asked, “What was the point?” He answered, “Well, I gained merit for my next life.” Wow, I thought to

myself, what if there isn't a next life in the Hindu and Buddhist sense, or what about even coping with the more dreaded karma?

This brings us to another big problem with Far Eastern spiritual Tradition - the belief in reincarnation. I have personal experience in this area. These are my comments included from my book "From Guru to God—An Experience of Ultimate Truth" It is a published account of a 28-year spiritual odyssey leading to new life in Christ and the years with Christ thereafter. It is in this book you'll read of my personal visionary encounter with Jesus Christ, real, wondrous and dramatic, so compelling that it led me off the Eastern Tradition into a remarkable new life and world with Christ. It was from this encounter that I knew that Jesus Christ was alive and active in the world today.

Among my experiences was the process of past-life regressions. The religious theory of past lives never interested me much. Thought about carefully by me, it seemed implausible and facile since it is linked to the notion of pay-back *for good or bad karma* throughout lifetimes, with no consistently knowable person or "who" who was supposed to learn from and to suffer or to enjoy the good or bad karmic pay-back. Though reincarnation was believed in Muktananda's Siddha Yoga, the doctrine was never emphasized. However, the primary purpose of this excursion was to be free from unwanted attitudes or feelings, which according to this theory, had their origins deep in the past, most likely in past lives. I had about thirty hours of this non-hypnotic processing. In response to a trained questioner hundreds of images came up in my mind, most of which could have been attributed to mere fantasy. A few of the experiences were compelling enough to get my attention, however. There was an incident pictured of being trampled to death by a formation of Roman troops on the run. Feelings and flinching accompanied the mental image. Some images were particularly vivid. It was enough for me to think, "Maybe this stuff is true." However, profound doubt still lurked. There were more than one of Julius Caesar and Mary Magdalene which didn't help among the few I knew claiming to have gone through similar processes. Along with my own experience came a confirmation of doubt from a discerning friend of mine, Paul Rogers, not a Christian. Paul had been a facilitator of thousands of hours of this specific process, yet now surprisingly, no longer believes in past lives at all), I finally concluded that the whole notion of past lives was a fanciful delusion, but an understandable one. Let me suggest more.

Interestingly, there is no sure reference to reincarnation in any Indian scriptures before 700 BC. It's a relatively recent doctrine. Certainly, it has been shown by valid or spurious research, I don't know which, that deep within a person's memory bank are images not attributable to this lifetime. The best explanation for this phenomenon, I believe, is that imbedded in the DNA of every human being is a comprehensive record of the experiences along the ancestral genetic lines right back to the first humans. By a

marvel of consciousness this genetically stored information can be accessed and decoded to appear sensibly to the human mind under certain conditions. This memory of the historical body lineage, containing all stored sense impressions, has nothing to do with the person, soul or spirit who believes they were that person in another life. *It's just bloodline memory.* Those lives were not mine at all. Metempsychosis or reincarnation was not a fact as commonly believed. This is about as close as I could get to an explanation without being irresponsibly dismissive of a strange phenomenon that, has, I believe, been misinterpreted.

According to my reckoning, the fallacy of reincarnation is another problem that distorts the picture believed about real Reality which leads people far astray.

To add weight to my general hypotheses, I found something; an article recorded in the Times of India, 13 Feb. 2010, sitting on a friend's desk.
It read:

BRAIN DAMAGE LEADS TO HIGHTENED SPIRITUALITY?

“The roots of spiritual and religious attitudes may lie in areas of the brain that, when damaged, lead to greater spirituality, suggests new research.

The study involves personality traits called self-transcendence, a vague measure of spiritual feelings, thinking, and behaviors. ‘Self-transcendence reflects a decreased sense of self and an ability to identify oneself as an integral part of the universe as a whole,’ the researchers said.

Before and after surgery, scientists surveyed patients who had brain tumors removed. The surveys generate self-transcendence scores. Selective damage to the left and right posterior parietal regions of the brain induced a specific increase in self-transcendence, or ST, Live Science reported. Our study is the first demonstration of a causative link between brain function and the ST,” said the lead author Cosimo Urgesi from the University of Udine, Italy.

Damage to Posterior Parietal areas induced fast changes of a stable personality dimension related to transcendental self-referential awareness. Thus, dysfunctional parietal neural activity may underpin altered spiritual and religious attitudes and behavior,” he added.

Previous neuroimaging studies had a linked activity within a large network in the brain that connects the frontal, parietal, and temporal cortexes with spiritual experiences, “but information on the causative link between such network and spirituality is lacking,” Urgesi said.

One study reported in 2008, suggested that the brain’s right parietal lobe defines ‘Me’ and people with less active Me-Definers are more likely to lead spiritual lives.

The finding could lead to new strategies for treating mental illness. If a stable trait like ST can undergo swift changes due to brain lesions, it indicates that some personality dimensions may be modified by influencing neural activity in specific areas,” said Professor Salvatore Aglioti from Sapienza University in Rome.”

In conclusion: the Bible tells us, by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:20) I tracked this whole game for 28 years among thousands of Far Eastern-persuaded Western devotees. By and large, with a small number of exceptions, I found that the moment people got involved in the beliefs and practices associated with the gurus, cleaved to as God-men, the devotee’s lives went into slow inexorable downward spiral, their marital relationships, finances, even their general life functionality - disintegration.

In my view, what makes pursuing grand Far Eastern spiritual goals regrettable is that Enlightenment states are ephemeral or unsustainable. Is it not a waste of time to pursue unsustainable ends? If a disciplined practitioner of the quality of the Dalai Lama and many others, including myself, can’t make it, save for the rare glimpse, by means of the Far Eastern traditions, what hope do you, the reader have?

According to the Gospel teaching of Jesus Christ, (“Gospel,” Greek., meaning “good news”), we are eternally Salvaged by the free gift of grace. Again, the Bible declares in Ephesians 2:8,9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works (practices, discipline or any particular human behaviours, moral or otherwise), so that no one may boast.”* And this comes, through genuine belief and faith alone, in the person of Jesus Christ alone. How and why? By Christ having taken everything that separates us from God upon himself by his death on the cross, we become free of the consequences of our sin-debt and “karmic”-debt, which He took upon Himself on our behalf. By truly *believing* in Jesus Christ, He saves us at death by *fiat*, entirely independent of our merit or demerit as reincarnation incorporates. Gaining Eternal Salvation does not lie within bounds of the creature or natural man or woman to accomplish. Salvation rests in the hands of the

Creator alone! The Bible teaches that precisely. By no self-effort can a man bridge the gap between the natural and the genuinely supernatural, the latter being the experience of, and habitation in the domain of Ultimate or Supreme Reality – heaven the abode of the Creator. That place of eternity is named Heaven by Jesus Christ. It is the “abode” of God the Father Almighty, the Creator of All, where a perfect relationship in intimate union with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is everlastingly enjoyed. *“But as it is written: What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love Him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:9) - and this, for those who have placed their full faith, trust and confidence in Christ alone for their Salvation. In the eternity of Christ’s heaven, God and the believer remain separate beings, yet perfectly yoked or united in one Spirit being in unalloyed bliss]

In contrast to Enlightenment, Jesus Christ offers eternal Salvation. Salvation through Jesus Christ is immediately available to anyone who reaches for it with a humble spirit. He offers Existential Rest and Truth through Grace alone, received through Faith alone in His person. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8,9) A change of heart ensues, “repentance” meaning “to change of mind” (“metanoia” in Gk.) then given an eternal union with the Creator. Millions can attest to this rest from the “works of man” and reliance on the works of Christ in loving trust of the one *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom.”* (Colossians 2:3). And this Jesus Christ, alive and active in the lives of millions today.

I could find nothing better after 28 years of intense search and discovery.

The reader needs to bear in mind that I have placed my life’s wager on Jesus Christ and his Gospel as being the Truth.

Therefore, I cannot reconcile as equally true, the radical differences between the views of Jesus Christ and Far Eastern gurus. Most Far Eastern spiritual positions are not marginally but radically at variance with Christ’s teaching and his Way, and this on all the core issues of their faiths.

In whom or in what is one going to place one’s trust? What do you believe, how willing to believe or would like to believe? Believing is a choice. You have obviously chosen to believe something or someone; what or whom? Beliefs have consequences.

Think, feel, then decide.
In the love of Christ,
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P.S. You can read my full story in the published book, *Guru to God: An Experience of the Ultimate Truth*, or a synopsis version of this story in the booklet, “Encountering the Eternal Guru.”