

Sometimes we are shaken from our normal, everyday condition of what could best be described as ‘waking sleep’ to a state in which our eyes truly become open and we perceive the world in an entirely different way. The process by which this happens, however, usually takes one of two extremes– it is either deeply blissful or absolutely horrible. There exists no middle ground whereby any perceptual shift can occur because the human condition is such that we respond and make life-altering changes only in the presence of emotional extremities. For some, this awakening may never take place even in circumstances where it probably should; lack of cognitive wherewithal or emotional depth simply prevent some from seeing the bigger picture. For others, myself included, the change is so poignant that you can never revert back to witnessing things as you once did, and admittedly... you wouldn’t want to.

In my youth and through high school, I had the luxury (or curse) of attending private, Christian schools. Just as it was with every other class, religion was something you were expected to learn and understand without questioning the authority of the instructor or the ‘textbook’ we used. Intelligent, arguable conversation was considered blasphemous, so much to the point where an individual could potentially be expelled for his or her beliefs, or lack of them. Thus, to keep peace within my family and also to not be labeled as a ‘non-member,’ I ate what was forced-fed to me for many years only to find out later on, I was eating shit.

It wasn’t until I began college that I truly had the opportunity to think on my own. I wanted to know what Christianity was all about from people and authors who gave an objective, historical account, and perhaps even some criticism. In high school, I always thought to myself, “If an individual existed who was walking the earth turning water into wine, making one loaf of bread and a fish materialize into a feast for thousands of people, giving sight to blind men, curing

lepers, walking on water and raising the dead... why wasn't there more written about him while he was actually alive?" I was shocked to learn that only two written records of Jesus existed during his lifetime— one from a Jewish historian, Josephus, and one that was a Roman record of his death. Digging further, I discovered that the Bible was written over a period of about two thousand years by over four hundred different people, and that many other texts exist which the Catholic Church has chosen not to include. Slowly I realized that what millions of people worldwide hold in the air and claim to be the word and will of God may be nothing more than a collection of stories that have been exaggerated little by little over many years— perhaps some even written by what we would now call schizophrenics.

This information was initially not received well with me because in retrospect, I believed that by questioning what I had always been told not to question, I was betraying God. However, ultimately I came to the conclusion that I was betraying myself by allowing myself to become brainwashed. The Christian Church doesn't want you to think, they want you to adhere. Their whole doctrine might work if it was formulated as a guide and not a rule. Do I believe that Jesus Christ existed? Yes, absolutely. Do I think that it is a little strange that He was performing miraculous works and no one chose to write about it during his lifetime? Yes. Do I think that the Bible should be a guide to live in today's world? Yes and no. Yes on the premise that individuals should exercise compassion and care for one another, not kill, and live a life in accordance with what should be common sense moral and ethical virtues. But no on the premise of so, so much.

An anonymous letter to Dr. Laura Schlesinger highlights many fallacies in a particular anti-homosexual argument, but is also pertinent to the misuse of Biblical verse.

It writes:

“Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God’s Law. I have learned a great deal from your show and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some specific laws and how to best follow them.

A) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

B) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

C) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

D) Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims this applies to Mexicans but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can’t I own Canadians?

E) I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

F) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don’t agree. Can you settle this?

G) Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I

have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

H) Most of my friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

I) I know from Lev 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

J) My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev 19:19 by planting two different crops on the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev 24:10-16). Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14). I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

-Your devoted disciple and adoring fan."

Although this letter gives a humorous account of taking Biblical passages literally, the reality, and terrifying thing about our society is that people *do* in fact take it literally and even partial dis-belief on the part of members is thought of as profane. The relationship between priest and congregation very closely resembles the tautological conversation between master and child on page 202 of *Habits of Mind*. And truly, "The chief harm which results from the monstrous ideas of God which are instilled into the minds of children is that they last all their life long, and as men they understand no more of God than they did as children (236)." In my case, I understand even *less* now than when I did as a child. The whole foundation on which Christianity is based

is so feeble and elusive, and it used to baffle me as to how people could buy into it, ‘hook, line and sinker.’ But eventually I began to understand. Part of it can be reduced to nothing more than sheer stupidity.

Within plus and minus one standard deviation of the mean IQ of the nation lie 68% of the population- a little over two-thirds. However, as a whole, general intelligence is clustered right around the mean of 100. When you take into consideration that only a little over 25% of the population have a four-year college degree, 5% have a Master’s degree and only 1% have doctoral degrees, *and* the fact that Christians proudly celebrate the fact that their religion compromises not only the national, but world majority, what you wind up with is a whole lot of idiots being told what to do between the hours of 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. every Sunday morning. The true morons attend Bible study on Wednesday nights as well. But the point is that they need to be *told* what to believe because they can’t think for themselves, and furthermore, they need the support of other non-thinkers to ensure their spiritual security. The blind are leading the blind.

The other part involves laziness. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), nearly two-thirds of adults are overweight (BMI >25, which includes those who are obese), and nearly one-third of U.S. adults are obese (BMI .30). In a country where fast food, overnight delivery and ‘get into shape in ten days’ gimmicks are cultural norms, patience has become a lost virtue. People aren’t willing to work. While the cost of living in America may be greater than those of other countries, it certainly does not differ significantly from the cost of living in other ‘industrialized’ nations– all of whom have nowhere near the problems of obesity, depression and crime that we have here. Thus, why not expect the laziness trend to extend into the realm of spirituality? It does, and it accomplishes it through a

scapegoat- Jesus. What is easier– to consistently and strenuously work on oneself every day in order to understand what motivations and drives compels one to become a better person, or to sleepwalk through life, hurting other individuals whenever you feel like it, doing whatever is pleasing to you and then knowing that all you have to do is ask forgiveness from a Savior and be completely absolved? The answer for most, is a no-brainer.

The tragic reality of the world we live in (the foundation of this course), is that people have lost the ability to make decisions. And to a large degree, it's not even that the decision making capacity has been lost– it has been stolen from people through the Christian church by using fear as a control tactic. Free will presupposes the notion that individuals actually *are* free, and how can one be free if they don't even possess the capacity to think for themselves? People live in the illusion that they actually *do* control their lives. Argue this point with most individuals and they will tell you that you are out of your mind. But there is no 'unchanging essence,' no base from which most individuals can claim to operate. Meditation, or even conscious awareness both serve as good examples.

You can consciously observe yourself in each of your daily actions. You can watch yourself as you walk, talk, eat, and do the countless other things that we as Westerners do on a daily basis. You can become aware of these things and if you so desire, you can separate yourself from them. In a similar respect, you can sit quietly and observe your thoughts. You may focus on and entertain one thought, many thoughts, or let your thoughts flow like a river– one coming right after the other in a continuous fashion. And, just as you can do with your body, you can separate yourself from your mind. What you *cannot* separate yourself from is your witnessing energy, because no matter what action you perform (walking, thinking, etc.), you will be

witnessing.

It is this witness that is the unchanging essence, or as I like to call it 'base 1' of the individual. From, and only from, this perspective can a person ever have any hope of attaining self mastery or exercising direct control over their lives. Unless one engages in the process of examining one's actions and behaviors, *and* the motivations behind those actions and behaviors, the individual will remain a slave (aware of it or not) to the countless external forces that pervade his or her environment. The witness is not a mask– it is *from* the witness that all other masks are consequently formed. Most would agree that we need to act differently in different situations, but for one who operates from the standpoint of pure, unchanging essence, 'acting' is not an option. The highly respected and compassionate leaders of history have exercised this degree of consistency because they knew who were as individuals and they realized that speech and actions have the rippling effect of throwing a pebble into a pond. Thus, they chose (they made decisions) very carefully and lived, for lack of a better expression, "in the moment," rather than dwelling on the past or future events. And indeed, a great deal of the capacity to perform this function lies in the ability to use one's frontal lobes. Elkhonon Goldberg, in his book, *The Executive Brain* helps to clarify:

"Of all the mental processes, goal formation is the most actor centered activity. Goal formation is about "I need" and not about "it is." So the emergence of the ability to formulate goals must have been inexorably linked to the emergence of the mental representation of the self. It should come as no surprise that the emergence of self consciousness is also intricately linked to the evolution of the frontal lobes. (26)."

Through science, we now know that the frontal lobes hold responsibility for various motor functions, planning, reasoning, judgement, impulse control, memory and other higher

order functions. But, as mentioned earlier, the mean IQ of the nation is clustered around 100 and this begs the question, how “open” are peoples’ frontal lobes? Sure, the frontal lobes may most definitely be linked to the emergence of self-consciousness, but just as there are different degrees of intelligence, there also exist different degrees of openness in the brains of each individual person. “Judgement” exists at many different levels and most people do not possess the tools necessary to make sound decisions to direct their lives. From the essay *Neurobiology and Yoga*, it is stated, “These biocultural types are invariant in the sense that they represent individual and not social possibilities of human realities and development, but unless these brains are exercised they do not develop in full, or if one is socially sanctioned over the others, then cultural imperialism and individual loss may follow. Thus, we might find ourselves as individuals or cultures to be using one brain only, say the left brain mimetic one, and thereby giving to that brain the powers of a dictator or the arbitrariness of an emperor– king.”

However, even if society was given the instructional tools necessary to effectively operate each brain, would most people use it? Probably not. There must exist a desire to know what is unknown, both internal and external, and while we believe science to be capable of validating the outer world through empirical proof, the internal world (spiritually speaking) remains a mystery. The Eastern religions have developed a system by which the individual can not only become capable of making responsible choices but also live a life that is certainly more free of desire than the lives we lead here. This is specifically embodied in the Rg Veda.

Every painter begins with a blank canvas which holds infinite possibilities and potentialities for his mental creation. The artist can create something breathtakingly beautiful or horrifically ugly. This is *Asat*.

*Whoever works against me with lies  
that are counter to rta*

*As I follow my path with honest heart;  
Let him go to non-existence  
Like the waters held in the fist  
As he pronounces non-existence, O Indra.*

*Asat* holds not only every potentiality, but every non-potentiality as well. There is nothing it cannot encompass. “Like the waters held in the fist,” proves it cannot be grasped or obtained, and this is point from which every individual who wants to be able to examine a choice from every angle should start. We have so thoroughly conditioned our minds to think of everything in terms of some measurable quantity, that the concept of a state of complete nothingness is rejected immediately as counter-intuitive. Rationally, we may argue “If **some**-thing exists, then it stands to reason that **no**-thing exists as well, “ but *Asat* is not simply nothing. It is non-existence: a concept immune to logic and rationality.

Only from here can anything be accomplished. Using the example of the artist again, the canvas will sit there staring the artist in the face until he or she is filled with the desire or inspiration to do something. *Sat* begins this way.

*In the beginning was desire  
Which was the primal germ of the mind;  
The sages searching in their own hearts with wisdom  
Found in non-existence the kin of existence.*

From the heart of the painter (not the logical brain) creation begins. “In the beginning, Existence was of Non-Existence born.” Out of the heart comes the image of what the artist has formed in his mind.

Personally, I have always been very musically inclined and have written and produced many songs. It never occurred to me why so many individuals literally worship musicians and artists. Artists are in touch with a part of their brains/hearts that most people have absolutely no

idea how to access, and it comes as a shock to someone who has been conditioned entirely through their left brain to see or hear something that has the ability to “move” them.

For Westerners, the real conflict begins when the artist completes the painting. Most of us would assume that the artist is going to sell the painting, keep it and hang it on a wall, or give it to someone. For most individuals living in the United States, there exists no logic to putting countless hours of work into creating something and then destroying it. Why on earth would someone do that? We are dumfounded at the fact that Tibetan monks spend weeks creating a mandala with so many different colors of sand, and in such great detail, only to destroy it in a matter of seconds. Of course they do it for a reason. What matters is the care, imagination, precision and love that went into creating the image in the first place. For the Tibetan monks, to keep the mandala would be to idolize it, or at the very least, place it on a level higher than it really is. But each day, we make decisions without care and precision. If we did— I mean really, truly made an effort to examine the decision from every angle and come to the most responsible choice, unaffected by societal beliefs or negative emotion, we wouldn't dwell on the outcome. Once the choice has been made, worry, doubt and second-guessing are wasted thoughts.

*Yajna* is described as follows:

*We have also entered the path of the gods  
To prolong our lives as long as we are capable.  
Let Agni, who knows, show us the way to offer the  
Sacrifice. He is the Sacrificer: the doer of sacrifices.  
The builder of the sacrificial moments.*

The moment we cling to an object or decision, our motion stagnates. By throwing the painting in the fire upon completion, the artist truly knows that it is not his work which defines him— rather

he defines his work, and more importantly, he is not bound by it.

Ultimately, it is this movement (rta) this embodied vision, that the artist desires (or at least this is what he or she *should* desire). In destroying the painting, the artist also dismembers his or her body and mind. The creation begins in the mind, was inspired to produce by the heart, and was consequently destroyed by the creator.

*Protected by Vayu, both men and gods increase in  
Faith by sacrificing.  
Men gain faith through the instilled desires of  
The heart and become richer through Faith.*

Truly, those who obtain the embodied vision are no longer encumbered by the desires and constraints of everyday man:

*Let those possessed by Rta  
Let down the norm for universal ruling.  
Let those who flow with the Rta, who uphold the  
Norm, the leaders, overcome all opposing force.*

Referring back to the concept of the witness— while the witness does not change, the human condition, the external world and the cosmos is constantly changing. The witness merely floats along like a piece of driftwood in the ocean as circumstances evolve around him. What is important is that he *knows* this. The only thing constant *is* change, and any attempt to cling to objects, desires or people is ultimately fruitless.

There are so many variables which affect our decisions- religion, culture, society, peer pressure... the list is endless. But the one variable that is within the realm of our control- ourselves- many have chosen to neglect because they submit their will to the “divine will” and I have to ask: What mortal understands the divine will?! Please point me directly to this person because I am dying to know what it is. And while it may appear that I am anti-Christian, I am

merely skeptical of individuals who claim to know the will of God *and* who choose to literally force that will upon others. I simply believe that while the Bible serves as a guide for how to live, too many treat it like a textbook that explicitly states how to live, and that there exists no room for interpretation. Seriously, in today's society, if three to five people were to produce a book over a ten year period and all of them died, would we as a collective society question the interpretation of the subject matter of the book? Unquestionably, yes. So why would we not question a book written thousands of years ago, by an unknown number of people? We should, but at the same time it would be inappropriate to throw the baby out with the bath-water.

To be a responsible individual, it is necessary to have the capacity to view a choice in the same manner as one could view a stone in their hand. Turn in on it's side. Examine it from every angle. Imagine what effect it would have on other people, the environment and yourself. Don't settle for the one-sided view that the church wants you to believe and always be weary of those who claim to know the will of God. If the desire to be an individual is there, if the will exists to make sound decisions, and if there exists in the individual enough common sense to know what is right from what is wrong, then that person is already halfway to becoming whole. For me, it to a series of disastrous life events to "wake up," but I finally did. And I know that if I only suffered a *little bit* or went through *some* pain, I wouldn't be the same person I am today. Each day we are confronted with numerous choices— some big, some small, but the ones who stand before the "fork in the road," clear their minds, examine closely and *then* choose are the ones who direct their lives. All others are pushed unknowingly by the voices who claim to know what is right, when they don't even know the basis or history behind which they are basing their entire argument. All those who truly *know* can do is sit back and watch with a pitying smile.