

emotions. You can have an insight into reality and that changes your point of view, your emotions, and your thoughts. It's beautiful. This transcendence is why so many people in a group are carried further than they thought possible. "Wow," they say. "After the service, after we held hands, after we prayed together, I saw things differently."

Even after you've experienced the gifts of fellowship, you need to develop a strategy for staying focused and available. You must remember that your solo work is equally important. Joining a group by itself can sometimes become a form of addiction, if you're not also doing your own work. If you're riding the coattails of someone else's spiritual leadership, but you're not doing your own spiritual work, then you become a groupie rather than someone empowered by the energy of God.

To me, the key to spiritual growth and God consciousness is understanding that we're not in the world to look for a new belief system. Instead, we're looking for ways to awaken to our real self. We are each to become the best person we can be. The quest is not about this or that religion, this or that teacher, this or that belief. It's what we can do to know who we are, and then to express our authentic spiritual identity in our human incarnation. With that perspective, we open ourselves to a greater level of empowerment and move ourselves from being victims of external forces to being expressions of God's great love and wisdom.

God is Spirit, an ineffable, all-knowing Presence that is everywhere in its fullness. Where you see words like "Him," please be aware that God is beyond gender. God is.

## God as Essence

by A. H. ALMAAS



*"To truly find God, truth needs to be found independently from the opinions of others.*

*The truth has to be found in our hearts."*

I WAS BROUGHT UP IN A MUSLIM COMMUNITY, with a belief in God. There was a strong emphasis on the teachings of God, but I remember that I could not accept at face value what was taught to me. I felt that I needed to find out for myself what the nature of reality was, whether it was God, and what the true nature of God was.

At the beginning of my spiritual journey I became aware of the experience of what I now refer to as the "essence" of the human being. There was an arising within, experienced intimately and directly, of a living presence, a palpable feeling of a living, self-aware truth. For many years now, this presence has revealed itself within me as pure spiritual qualities, first the differentiated qualities of its presence, which include truth, awareness,

spaciousness, love, compassion, joy, and contentment; then its undifferentiated pure presence of Being, which revealed the various subtleties inherent in its experience, both within and beyond concepts.

Soon after the beginning of my spiritual journey, I recognized that this presence exists, and is true, for every human being; that it is the essential nature of everyone, and, hence, it is independent from any one person's history or life circumstance. Essence is something we are born with — our birthright. Essence is not something we have to work toward, for it is what we truly are. Therefore, a spiritual path is really one of removing the obstructions that disguise this essence.

This presence is a practical, day-to-day kind of experience, not something abstract or otherworldly. It has an innate intelligence that is beyond anyone's mind. At first I didn't exactly think of it as God, although I may have thought of it as the God within. Eventually, this presence revealed itself to be the inner nature of everything, and I began feeling more and more that this living consciousness, this pure essence of being, was God. I called it Truth, Reality, Being, or God.

In my experience, as I open myself to seeing the truth of who and what I am, God is a truth that reveals itself on its own. It is independent from anyone's mind or preferences, and has always existed and always will exist inside each of us. God, for me, means experiencing the totality of all existence in its true nature and condition. This means perceiving the unity of all that can be perceived, all that can be seen, at all levels of reality,

including all beings and everything that appears in experience. With God, nothing is separate from anything else. By this I don't mean a scientific interconnectedness, but rather only one and single presence. This unity has perfection and beauty to it.

My experience is that we are all "one being." There is no separate individual experiencing God. This conception of God means that my experience of myself as a separate individual does not truly exist. This does not mean that I am God, but instead, I, like everyone else, am part of the presence that is alive and conscious.

God can be seen in His beingness and God can be seen in His essence. They are slightly different, although they are inseparable. Beingness means actual nature, physical actuality of existence, perceived existence of God or the God presence. This is the totality of all that exists, all the universe including my physical body, your physical body, the telephone, the room, the air, the light, the sound — all as one reality, one presence, one body that is pure consciousness, intelligence, and love. But that one reality has an essence, an inner nature. I call it the essence of God. This is the absolute mystery, the dazzling beauty that is beyond existence and nonexistence, the timeless source of everything.

To truly find God, truth needs to be found independently from the opinions of others. The truth has to be found in our hearts; it has to be totally personal, totally in our inner aloneness. God is our inner core and is the core of everything. It is also the true guidance, which is always guiding us. If we are really interested in the truth

we will find our own answers, because the truth reveals itself to the sincere heart as the guided unfolding of one's essence.

Usually, what I teach is an earnest personal inquiry into the truth of one's experiences, the truth of one's mind, the truth of one's consciousness, and the truth of reality. My experience is that reality is self-revealing. If we open ourselves to it, it will reveal its secrets to us. By sincerely inquiring about our experiences of ourselves and of the world, the resulting understanding itself will be the ever-expanding self-revelation of the mystery of existence.

The process of opening up to the God presence is a continuing one. I don't think of myself as having arrived at the final, ultimate truth. I feel that my experience is still limited and probably always will be, but will continue to grow and change. I do not see my experience of what God is or how to reach God as necessarily the final or the only way. I don't claim that kind of knowledge, nor do I know if anyone can. To me, that kind of knowledge is something that reveals itself over time. I do know that the moment essence is recognized as one's being, one's essential nature, and experienced as such, a radical transformation occurs. One's life and experiences of God will never be the same. No longer will God be experienced as something we were taught to believe in, but rather as something we can truly experience each moment of our lives.

## An Invitation to God

by BARBARA DE ANGELIS, PH.D.



*“Ultimately, to me, an intimate relationship is one of the most powerful pathways to God because it’s the path of the heart. . . . Following the path of the heart requires surrender. Surrender doesn’t mean giving up, but yielding to something much greater.”*

I HAVE ONLY ONE RELATIONSHIP – WITH GOD. God may be disguised as my husband, my dog, the person driving me crazy. Or God can come to me as the wind and the weather. Truthfully, everything and everyone is a manifestation of God in different forms. My goal is to always be in a relationship with God through everything I do.

When I was eighteen, I started on a conscious spiritual path. I studied with many teachers, and tried many different practices, hoping to discover one that would ultimately lead me to liberation. Finally, after more than twenty-five years of earnest searching, I found a consistent means of invoking and maintaining that inner awakening. I learned to meditate in a way that fosters my relationship with God, that allows me to know God within