

miracles of Jesus Christ. Baba led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of many aspects of Christianity. For example, he said that the death of Jesus on the cross was a symbol of the crossing out of lower ego, and that we all must in the same way allow our egos to be crucified so that our higher, true selves may rise. I find this a good, satisfactory explanation of why Jesus died for us — to show us the way.

My wife and I have been led to a new way of life through the influence and teachings of our teacher. Our values and aims in life are now different. We know why we're here and where we are going and how we should get there. Those who would come to God and this deeper understanding of the meaning of life may do so if their yearning, if their divine discontent, if their hunger for spiritual sustenance is strong enough. Then there is no doubt they will be led to the right guide.

And the highest and most glorious destination of humanity is not the lower heavens or paradises but the Godhead itself. There, we will feel and we will know that we are what we have always been — one with the divine. This high destination, this liberation from the bondage of suffering and sorrow, can be reached in this life.

## What Personal Life?

by REV. MICHAEL BECKWITH



*“Gathering with other seekers creates a field of receptivity that we can all tap into. As we come together to pray and celebrate and worship — bringing the focus of our attention on God, good, love, service, and beauty — we delve deeper into that awareness.”*

**W**E DON'T REALLY HAVE A PERSONAL LIFE apart from God. What we call our life is actually the presence of God personified as us. The illusion of a separate life causes a tremendous amount of pain, frustration, discomfort, and disease in our life. The belief that a personal life exists apart from God creates experience disconnected from God. This is painful and frustrating. Our spiritual work is to break down the illusion that we have a life here and that a life of God is somewhere else. All of our prayer work, our meditation work, our affirmation work — the path individuals take to grow spiritually

— is primarily to break down that sense of separation from God.

It's extremely important that we do the work because without an awareness of what we are, the unique pattern of God within each individual won't be expressed. Every human being, like every flower, has a unique pattern of expression. We all have a kaleidoscope of good in us — a deeper dimension accessed through our awareness that God is expressed through us and as us. So, it's not only important, it's the only game in town. It's the reason we're here.

A rose's purpose is to grow and become strong enough to bloom. When you have matured spiritually, you bloom into an awareness of your oneness with God. Without that awareness, you are immature, regardless of how much you have attained in the world materialistically, intellectually, or emotionally.

The process can be difficult. I believe the appearance that we're separate from God leads us to think that we can control our life. In truth, because our life is the life of God, It can manage itself. But we resist letting God manifest through us because some part of us wants to stay the same. Rather than change ourselves, we want to change the world and other people. But spiritual growth is just the opposite. It's about letting go of opinion, false thought, and erroneous perceptions so this other dimension can emerge. It is about totally shifting our identity. The pain comes because the ego doesn't know the difference between annihilation and transformation. So when your point of view shifts, it feels like dying. But of course

you aren't dying; for the first time you are becoming fully alive.

Jesus said something I've always loved: "I have come bearing not peace but a sword to set mother at variance against her daughter, father at variance against his son..." I've always interpreted that to mean, "I have come to cut away your lesser identities. Before you thought of yourself simply as your mother and father's child. I have come to open you to a greater identity, to bring you to understand that there is only one father, which is God."

So the lesser part of us identifies with being the son or daughter of our human heritage, but the greater part of us is eternal. Our work is to tap into that deeper dimension and learn how to let It take over, so that Its thoughts are our thoughts, Its perception is our perception, and Its perspective is our perspective. When we do this, our thoughts, words, and actions become expressions of God's love and wisdom.

Some time ago, I coauthored a song about how people are actually asleep, dreaming they're awake. I believe the average person is sleepwalking. In their dream state they try to control their world and be comfortable. Then, when they wake up, they discover that they're literally surrounded by God's presence. They're in God's grace, and God's grace is in them. They become fully alive and vitalized — and they wonder what they were doing before.

My passion for God is a deep and abiding love in the presence of God. God is everything to me. The lights

went on for me well over twenty years ago, and I've never looked back. This level of passion or, as athletes would say, "staying hungry," or "being on the edge," has not diminished over the years. In fact, it's intensified. My level of commitment and discipline is even higher now than when I started. I wake up in the morning still hungry and thirsty for truth and righteousness. I'm constantly checking that I'm available for the presence of God. Being captured by a vision for your life fuels you; it gives you a passion and energy you can't get from the world.

People often ask about my meditation and prayer time. I tell them how I meditate in the morning, in the evening and throughout the day. They think, it would take a superman to do that. And I say, "No, people who *don't* practice daily are supermen. It takes a superman to be in the world, with all its powerful antispiritual influences." I've lived both ways, and I'd rather take the course of daily prayer and meditation. As I constantly recommit to God's vision, something else within me does the work. I don't have to make it through life on my own limited intelligence and power. To me, it's easier to yield to the Presence, yield to God, yield to love. I just have to get out of the way. I have to submit myself. I have to be available.

Everyone can find a personal relationship with God. It does take earnestness, discipline, and commitment. But if a person truly wants to wake up, that earnestness will yield fruit. When the scriptures say, as they do in so many different ways, that those who hunger and thirst after truth and righteousness shall be fed, I believe

they're talking about how that sense of earnestness makes God real to us.

It's important to know the difference between being an aspirant and a disciple. To me, an aspirant wants the results of spiritual living without paying the price. Disciples, on the other hand, completely surrender to the earnest desire within themselves to wake up. And when people really become disciples, nothing stops them until they wake up, whether it's going to churches, synagogues, or spiritual centers; finding the right book; or seeking inspiring ideas in the media. Earnestness itself creates an atmosphere where insight will happen. Their inner voice will speak to them.

Some people choose the path of keeping themselves available to God from the beginning. Others may need it pushed on them. If they live in laziness and hope the rewards of spirituality are just going to happen, then they're enrolling in the school of pain. The prisons they create will cause anguish, which, in turn, creates the need for an earnest search. The pain will push them until their vision appears, and then the vision takes over. Even so, they have to choose to embrace the vision and leave the pain behind.

Either way, if you take your heart's earnest desire to know God, and sit down every day with that and with your favorite book, your favorite author, or your favorite tape, you will be rewarded. Your spiritual realization will become more real to you than the experience of the world. When that happens, when God becomes more real to you, you will learn to exercise the commitment and



discipline to stay in God consciousness, to keep yourself truly awake. It doesn't matter who you are: the worst criminal or the best do-gooder both have the same opportunity to create a personal relationship with the spirit of the living God.

As we grow, our perception and awareness of God changes. We may begin with an elementary view of God as an individual outside ourselves who controls us and the universe. There's an old saying that God made us in His image, and we've been trying to return the favor ever since. People often view God in a human image. This God changes His mind, gets upset, answers some prayers but not others, loves some people but not others. But even with that limited image, if we pray sincerely, we'll eventually realize that God is changeless. He's the same all the time because He's not in time — time is in Him.

Beginning seekers, especially, need to find time for God in their life, to find the discipline to make themselves available to God. If you do this at the same time every day, it will grow into a habit, and then into a way of life. When I was a beginner, I got up every morning at seven to meditate and pray; every night before bed I meditated, prayed, and read spiritual material. Eventually, the boundaries between my practice and the rest of my life broke down. I discovered that while my official meditation and prayer time ended at eight, I was still praying. When I'd meet somebody at work, the prayer was still within me. If I was about to say something that wouldn't foster friendship or love, the prayer would quiet me. After a while I realized that my life was the prayer. Instead of

fitting meditation and prayer into my life, I built my life around celebrating the presence of God.

Now I perform formal prayers to augment my way of life. When I wake up, the first thing I do is say, "Thank you, God — for my life, my breath. Thank you for everything." I say, "Yes, I'm here for You. Yes, I'm available. Yes, I'm ready." Even if I don't feel like it emotionally or physically, I try to engage my yes. So, I may say yes out loud: "Yes. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to God. Yes to beauty. Yes to creativity, excellence, integrity. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes."

I also do physical exercise, Hatha Yoga, jogging, and light weight-training. And I formally meditate and pray. I never spend less than a half hour, but more often than not, I take an hour or more to commune with God. Then I'm into my day. I also try to do a spiritual retreat a couple of times a year where I sit in silence for three to seven days at a time.

There are many ways people experience God. Sometimes, God flows through us despite our feelings that God is separate. We sometimes feel we're not ready or worthy, so we open ourselves and God pours through us despite our foibles. In other moments, the lights are dim and we don't see as clearly. We may still intellectually know our connection with God, but God seems outside of us. Finally, in other moments we cannot tell where we begin and God ends or God's life begins and our life ends. We feel completely at one with God.

There are appropriate prayers for each level. If you feel absolutely separate from God, you may find that your

prayer is one of beseeching. At another level, you may evoke a law or decree to set the flow of God in motion through you. At another point, you may feel so connected and in prayer that the *prayer* is praying *you*. You may find yourself proclaiming that God is everywhere, love is everywhere. All these prayers are appropriate.

However, prayers of beseeching generally are successful because people become so exhausted that they let go and let God in. Remember, it's essential to know that all prayer is about having a shift in perception — moving from the illusion of separation to an awareness of our Oneness with the Presence. It's about moving from three-dimensional thinking to full-dimensional awareness.

Those of us trying to live a life we are proud of still make mistakes. It's natural and human. And we have to learn how to forgive ourselves. Often, we hang onto the guilt. That's really focusing on our ego, another way of trying to control our life. We feel that God will judge us, so we say to ourselves, "I might as well do the job myself. God will see how much I'm hating myself already and will lighten up on me."

In fact, self-abuse only prevents you from opening to the grace of God that's always there. God knows and loves you completely. God is not waiting for you to get your act right before He can forgive you. The nature of God is love; knowing that will make it easier for you to return to God's grace. When you realize you made a mistake and sincerely regret it, your regret means you're willing to change your actions or your perspective so it

doesn't happen again. You can embrace yourself. You become available again to God, because God is still there. You had cut off the relationship by hanging onto guilt and by thinking that God was going to punish you.

Self-forgiveness is a discipline. So often people don't feel alive unless they're experiencing emotional drama. They get caught up in feeling they are a bad person and thinking that God will punish them. At some point, as you begin to mature spiritually, it's the connection with God that lets you know you're alive.

Another important part of our spiritual journey is fellowship and group worship. Gathering with other seekers creates a field of receptivity that we can all tap into. As we come together to pray and celebrate and worship — bringing the focus of our attention on God, good, love, service, and beauty — we delve deeper into that awareness. The group energy amplifies the work.

Fellowship is very important because in our industrialized Western society, our values focus on acquiring, hoarding, greed, and competition. You begin to think that's normal because you receive recognition and status for excelling in this world. When you join with others who are trying to grow spiritually, you practice a different set of values: compassion, giving, generosity of heart, time, and support rather than competition. Joining in a group is very, very dynamic, and very important for spiritual growth.

In the materialistic world, you often drop to the lowest common denominator of the emotions, but in the spiritual community, you can often transcend your

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,