

It Explains Everything

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Knowledge is context dependent. Those who don't understand probably shouldn't try to explain! I was no more than six-years old when I first discovered that not all adult explanations are equally useful. Adults who had had something explained to them, which they accepted as true but didn't really understand, and couldn't connect to their life experiences, often explained things which made no sense. Adults who had lived experiences for which they had sought deeper meaning often offered that meaning with depth and resonance. Thus at six I already knew those who understand from their own deepest experiences should teach, and those who have only been taught should simply ponder. At first I didn't really understand, adults seemed to know, but now I know that this explains everything!

I was 16 when I was introduced to Einstein's theory of relativity by my Physics teacher: the most famous being $E = MC^2$, which demonstrates mass/energy equivalence. And his subsequent work demonstrates space/time equivalence leading everything in the universe to be interdependent and deeply interrelated. My physics teacher ended his rather long explanation by saying: "I don't really understand it but it explains everything!" It took me almost another decade to develop the intellectual context to truly and viscerally understand that energy and matter are two sides of the same phenomenon, and that the same is true for space and time, and that all reality exists in those places where energy/matter intersects with space/time. Even if it explains everything, it doesn't mean everything is explicable. Ponder these things! For therein lies the secret to all of this.

You may initially have the same confusion that I did, the desire to shut your mind down and think about other things, assuming that the metaphysics of Einstein are just too complicated for ordinary mortals to comprehend. But I encourage you to stick with it, to develop the intellectual context to make sense of these fundamental descriptions of the nature of lived reality. **My** next big step forward **came** when I was introduced to the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead, who for 30 years taught mathematics at Trinity College (Cambridge), co-authored *Principia Mathematica* with Bertrand Russell, then for another 14 years taught physics at Imperial College (London), and devoted the last 13 years of his teaching career (63 to 76) teaching metaphysics at Harvard, mostly translating Einstein's formulas of the physical world into a metaphysics of meaning. He spoke of "occasions of experience," as relationships and process being more important than objects or solitary beings. We are born to be interdependent and what we experience in each moment of our lives is far more important than what we might accomplish. For someone like me, who studied history at Yale and has an MBA from Harvard Business School, this is not inherently intuitive. **Being** more important than **doing**? How would the world

get its work done if this was so? Yet I found those who described Whitehead's ideas, John Cobb for instance, seemed to make him hopelessly opaque, at least until I had absorbed enough to be able to read Whitehead and his followers within the context of Einstein's formulas that they were trying to explicate. If you had asked me what I thought along the way I would probably have said this was fascinating, confounding, if true largely irrelevant to your life and mine. But again it was largely a lack of intellectual context for me to make sense of this conception of reality. It now undergirds much of post-modern thought, and explains much that had been dense.

Then my mid-forties brought me to seminary and metaphysics, where I discovered process theologians (heirs of Einstein, Whitehead, Hartshorne, H. N. Wieman, and J. L. Adams) had been exploring meaning within the context of this conception of reality. I also discovered that the world's mystics, whether Jewish, Christian, Sufi, or Zen Buddhist, had also discovered the unity, love, and ubiquity of God. They had transcended the soul/body dichotomy by speaking of the unity of body and soul. They often resolved the God/spirit split similarly by speaking metaphorically of God/spirit. And like the metaphysicians before them, they discovered that deepest meaning exists within the nodes where soul/body intersects with God/spirit. As Reb Moshe Waldok of Temple Beth Zion here in Brookline recently said, "Jewish spiritual life lives in this creative tension of what is within [what I call here body/soul] and without us [which he calls transcendent God]. Jewish contemplative practice shares a great deal with the meditative practices of all the ancient wisdom traditions." The process theologians would say that the mystics perceived from direct experience what the mathematicians and physicists would only come to understand due to quantum theory. We are living waves of energy, chaotically passing through space/time, with our deepest meaning resulting from our soul/body intersecting with God/spirit. It is not complicated, but it does require a certain intellectual context to conceive it.

So as part of this sermon, as illustrations along the path, I offer some poems from the great Sufi master Hafiz to illustrate. Beginning with God speaking in Hafiz's poem *I Rain*: "I rain because your meadows call for God. I weave light into words so that when your mind holds them, your eyes will relinquish their sadness, turn bright, a little brighter, giving to us the way a candle does to the dark. I have wrapped my laughter like a birthday gift and left it beside your bed. I have planted the wisdom in my heart next to every signpost in the sky... A divine soul is transformed into infinite generosity, tying gold sacks of gratuity to the dangling feet of moons, planets, ecstatic dervishes, and singing birds. I speak because every cell in your body is reaching out for God." Our being is interwoven with God, our soul/bodies cry out for connection, and so we sing.

So when we sang in our opening hymn about people down the ages treading many paths in search of God, seeking to define the eternal and Divine, in comprehensible symbol systems, such as parenthood, lordship, nature, humanity, compassion, and truth, we are speaking of the nature of God/spirit. If you have never consciously experienced God/spirit, you may not believe in

God. But Hafiz tries to capture the playful nature of dwelling in God with his poem *You're It*: "God disguised as a myriad of things and playing a game of tag has kissed you and said, You're it – I mean, you're really IT! Now it does not matter what you believe or feel, for something wonderful, major league wonderful, is someday going to happen!"

If when you were young someone insisted that you believe in a nonsensical description of God that bore no relationship to your own lived experiences, you may now be hostile to the concept of God. This is both human nature and natural given the nature of knowledge. But your rejection doesn't make God/spirit any less real for those who have experienced it. You may have been told that God is all powerful, and has his eye on every single being, and so you must reject a God who would allow all these horrible things to happen in this world. You may have been told that everything that happens is God's will, and you have rightly rejected the mean and insane God that would will so much suffering and pain for his children. You may have been taught by grown-ups who confused God with Santa Claus, and said to you this all knowing, ground of ultimate being... sees you when you're sleeping, knows when you're awake, knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake! Hah! God/spirit bears little resemblance to Santa Claus or the Easter bunny, which means that some of you ought to rethink about how you approach God/spirit in your prayers.

Some approach God like an "Answer Mountain". There are those who hear only "No": no card playing, no tobacco, no alcohol, no sex, no same gender love, nothing which might make your heart sing because God is about duty not joy. Then there are those who hear only "Yes": yes God shares all of your biases and hatreds, yes your group is God's special people, yes God joins you in condemning anyone who is different than you. But the spiritually more mature, like the people in Anne's story, discover that the answer is sometimes yes, and sometimes no, and sometimes wait and see, and sometimes I just don't know. For those dwelling within the **infinite now** which is the divine presence the answer can only be to faithfully follow your heart. As Hafiz wrote, "Now is the time to know that all that you do is sacred... why not consider a lasting truce with yourself and God. Now is the time to understand that all your ideas of right and wrong were just a child's training wheels to be laid aside when you can finally live with veracity and love... My dear, please tell me, why do you throw sticks at your heart and God? What is it in that sweet voice inside that incites you to fear? Now is the time for the world to know every thought and action is sacred. This is the time for you to deeply [consider] the **impossibility** that there is anything but grace. Now is the season to know everything you do is sacred."

You may have been taught that this life is but a transitory way station, and all that is important when you die is whether you will spend all eternity in a heaven or hell hereafter. Please consider that whatever heaven or hell you experience is most relevant in the **eternal now** that you are inhabiting in this very moment, and that forfeiting your sweet life in preparation for some mythical state of being following your death is to me a crime against your humanity. As Hafiz

says in his *Stairway of Existence*, “We are not in pursuit of formalities or fake religious laws, for through the stairway of existence we have come to God’s Door. We are people who need to love, because love is the soul’s life, love is simply creation’s greatest joy. Through the stairway of existence... have you now come, have we all now come to the Beloved’s Door.” And I would ask you now: will you knock on the door and enter in?

So how can you discern those teachers who are speaking about their own lived experience with the divine versus those only teaching that which they have themselves been taught? I will give you a simple rule: those who rely upon and foster fears and shame are false teachers, they can do you great harm. Those who rely upon and foster love and compassion are generally speaking from their heart and can do you great good! Learn to distinguish one from the other for your soul’s sake. Quoting Hafiz again, he wrote “no one in need of love can sit with my verse for an hour and then walk away without... feeling that God just came near.” Sometimes this talk of believing in God, or not believing in God, sounds to me like arguing about a shadow. For me God is as near to me as my shadow, which I see most easily in bright morning light or the late afternoon sun, when I of course can cast a very long shadow. However if you ask me to show you my shadow in the dark of night, or in the direct sunlight of noon, then I look around and I am bereft, my shadow has abandoned me entirely. So it is also with God.

There are times the divine envelops me in ways that are both obvious and indisputable. Yet there are equally times when God seems no more than a figment of our imagination, or a residue of our hopeful thought. Yet Hafiz writes: “Every child has known God, not the God of names, not the God of don’ts, not the God who ever does anything weird, but the God who only knows four words, and keeps repeating them, saying: ‘Come dance with me.’ Come dance!” Hafiz asks, “If God invited you to a party and said, ‘Everyone in the ballroom tonight will be my special guest,’ how would you treat them when you arrived? Indeed, indeed! Hafiz knows there is no one in the world who is not upon God’s Jeweled Dance Floor!”

This metaphor of chasing your shadow, and being invited into living your own life more fully, reminds me of a scene from J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, where the lost boy Peter first meets the sleeping Wendy when he sneaks into her bedroom one night chasing and trying to catch his shadow. Disney made much of this scene, where his playful shadow always seemed just out of reach, and where he recovers his soul when Wendy helpfully sews his shadow back onto him. Thus begins a wonderful adventure in which Wendy becomes fully herself while helping Peter to finally recover from being a lost boy so that he can re-enter his life and return to one full of meaning, joy, and sorrow. Hafiz, in speaking about the Sufi path to this connection of our body/soul with God/spirit writes: “Independent of this body is my mind, when the call from the golden nightingale lifts and pours my being throughout the sky. Independent of this mind is my heart, when God unfurls even a shadow of his [being] upon my bare shoulder. Sovereign of my illumined heart is the indivisible knowledge in the gaze of my spirit’s wings climbing to such a

sublime height that they each become the sun itself. And reside perched beyond every throne known to man. Hafiz, this Sufi path of love is astoundingly glorious, that one day each wayfarer upon it will become the inconceivable, the creator of God himself.” Or as Peter Pan would say, “Up in the air we can fly, all we have to do is try,... we can fly, we can fly, we can fly!”

All knowledge is context dependent, but we must each go with that which resonates most deeply with our lived experience. Preference your own experience of a living relationship with the Divine, however you may experience it, over any second-hand symbol system from those who are fearfully pondering the God of their fathers. If it does not resonate with your lived experience, I cannot explain it so that it will; however if I can **shine a light** upon your experience, such that divinity working in your life casts a shadow, then you will see what I speak of for yourself. As Hafiz concludes, “I have learned so much from God that I can no longer call myself a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist or Jew. The truth has shared so much of itself with me that I can no longer call myself a man, a woman, an angel, or even pure soul. Love has befriended Hafiz so completely it has turned to ash and freed me of every concept and image my mind has ever known.” Of course, I can’t really explain it any better than that, except that it really does explain everything! Amen and blessed be.